Apoema: Exploring a communally constituted conception of selfhood approach to child welfare through an Indigenous Family Group Conferencing program

by

Maria Elisa Lacerda-Vandenborn

M.A., Simon Fraser University, 2014

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2009

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
Educational Psychology Program
Faculty of Education

© Elisa Vandenborn 2020

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2020

Copyright in this work rests with the author. Please ensure that any reproduction
or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Approval

Name:	**Maria Elisa Lacerda-Vandenborn**
Degree:	**Doctor of Philosophy (Education)**
Title:	**Apoema: Exploring a communally constituted conception of selfhood approach to child welfare through an Indigenous Family Group Conferencing program**
Examining Committee:	**Chair: Margaret MacDonald** Associate Professor
	Lucy Le Mare Senior Supervisor Professor
	Jeff Sugarman Supervisor Professor
	Robert Harding Supervisor Professor School of Social Work and Human Services University of the Fraser Valley
	Alanaise Goodwill Internal Examiner Assistant Professor
	Sandrina de Finney External Examiner Associate Professor School of Child and Youth Care University of Victoria
Date Defended/Approved:	July 16, 2020

Ethics Statement

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

a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016

Abstract

Canadian child welfare systems can be neatly mapped onto individualistic conceptions of selfhood. This individualistic stance is ingrained in child welfare's framing of child maltreatment, language, and interventions as connected to parents' unwillingness or inability to make proper and responsible choices. What follows is a series of adversarial and punitive attitudes and practices that normalize defamilialization and emancipation of children and youth from their families, without taking into account circumstances that precipitate the involvement of child welfare systems in families' lives and the narrow and/or non-existent avenues for self and social improvement available to them prior to involvement. Based on a previously articulated critique of selfhood, this dissertation reaffirms the need for ontological reformulation concerning the nature of selves, offering the *communal self* as an alternative. This communally constituted, relational, and historical and socio-culturally situated concept of self, acknowledges the interplay of agency and context from a critical lens. It aligns with Indigenous notions of self-in-relation and Indigenist scholarship and advocacy that for decades have urged child welfare stakeholders for more broadly defined notions of selfhood and family. The communal self also grants a space wherein non-Indigenous child welfare stakeholders can ethically position themselves and engage in ally-ship without disingenuously trying to occupy Indigenous perspectives. Through an exploratory qualitative study of the experiences of families and mentors involved with an Indigenous, community-led and based Family Group Conferencing child welfare program in Winnipeg, Manitoba (MB), this dissertation goes beyond theorical considerations, providing a concrete example of the promise of child welfare interventions offered from a communal perspective of selfhood. Mentors, parents, and community members voices' enliven the *Tupi* term that precedes the title of this dissertation, *apoema*, or "the one who sees far", compelling us to see beyond the immediacy of what surrounds us, to conceive of ways to recast a more harmonious future, not only for Indigenous but for all peoples.

Keywords: selfhood; Indigenous child welfare; Family Group Conferencing; families of origin; community-based research; Indigenous ally-ship

Dedication

Dear Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Family—mentors, staff, families, and volunteers: This dissertation is dedicated to you. Being invited into the circle was a life-defining moment, a gift I will continue to honour and respect with all of my being. Each and every story you shared with me through this research has taught me there is great strength in vulnerability, power in responding with hope instead of helplessness, and wholeness in kindness and support. I am grateful and humbled for the trust and care you have shown me. Our stories are forever braided as one, and with this sensibility of interconnection I shall trail ahead.

Dear Jackie, Diane, and Wally: My most sincere gratitude for the opportunity of travelling with you for the past few years. Your fierce advocacy, kind leadership, and unwavering commitment to returning Indigenous children and youth to their families and communities now inhabit my spirit, my thoughts, my everyday actions. With you I learned the true meaning of communal care, wellness and healing. Hand to heart. Miigwech.

Querida Família: Obrigada. Meu trabalho aborda a família e a importância central que ela ocupa em quem somos, como nos vemos, e como interpretamos nosso lugar do mundo. Todo trabalho que faço é uma homenagem à vocês, inspirado em vocês, uma reflexão sobre vocês e de onde vim. O mundo me foi oferecido como um lugar de imaginação, de ações comunitárias, e responsibiladade com o bem-estar do próximo, honro essas refências em seu nome. Águas internacionais nos separam fisicamente mas estamos sempre conectados em espírito, pensamento, e sentimento. Em tempos tempos difíceis, o seu amor me envolveu com um manto de esperança, abriu o caminho de volta para quem sou, e para vida que me espera, que nos espera.

Amada Filhota: meu presente da vida. Esse trabalho só é possível pois sou sua mãe. O amor que sinto por você revela a energia e o significado da vida. No seu amor me encontro, no seu sorriso me defino, e no seu carinho descanso.

Dearest Friends: You are the family I choose. All of you, near and far, walk with me, live in my stories, bring out smiles, carry part of me wherever you go.

Pink Sisters: The kinship we found in each other has made life manageable during our most trying times. Together we stand, healthy and in memory of those who now join us from the spiritual world.

Acknowledgements

Dear Supervisory committee: I am thankful for the confidence you have deposited in me during this doctoral journey. From the first meeting amid SFU renovations, to unforeseen bureaucratic and health interruptions, to a Zoom defence amid a pandemic, there was never a dull moment. I shall take these as expressions of “creative chaos” as heralds of new perspectives of being in and seeing the world. From your own fields, areas of interest, and mentoring approaches, each of you has enriched my studies, what I could accomplish, and how I can be of service to community and society. Dr. Lucy Le Mare, your leading attachment research reminds us of the meaning of familial bonds and the implications of their absence. You inspire me to always operate from a place of hope and possibility. Your generous academic support and guidance are things I will never forget and shall enact with my own students as I move forward. Thank you for supporting my many, many unconventional ideas, for always seeing the best in me, and for being a warm and caring friend. Dr. Jeff Sugarman, thank you for introducing me to selfhood. More than a concept, it is a lens, and my way into the beautiful and rewarding work I get to wake up to everyday. The solid theoretical foundation of your work is a reference point to the change we require towards more responsive and equitable societies. Your encouraging and kind words motivated me to get to where I am. Dr. Robert Harding, I am thankful our paths were brought together by Dr. Yellowhorn. Your broad field of expertise from child welfare, to Indigenous representation allowed me to consider ways I could position myself in this work and fulfill my responsibility to help re-envision Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations. You call us to reconsider the Canadian narrative and invite us to re-write it along strong decolonial lines. Your thoughtfulness and gentleness were the nourishment I needed on the final stretch, thank you.

Dear Dr. Sandrina de Finney and Dr. Analaise Goodwill. I sincerely appreciate the careful consideration of my work alongside yours. Your assessment strengthens my commitment to decolonization and allyship where needed. It was an absolute honour to have you as reviewers.

I also extend my most heartfelt gratitude to a few others. Dr. Susan O’Neill, the greatest quality of a mentor is imparting knowledge and skills mentees cannot yet fully appreciate they will need. Thanks to you, I stand strongly as an academic. Your gentle and visionary leadership are awe-inspiring and encourage me to colour beyond the traced lines. Your loving gestures were rays of sunshine during the darkest of times. To my sisters in academia, Dr. Seanna Takacs, Dr. Danielle Vezina, Dr. Rita Helena Gomes, Dr. Sandy Gillis, and Dr. Sarah Hickinbottom. You are life and creative forces that inspire me to be better and act responsibly and lovingly as we move through the world. Dr. Michael Hart, your scholarship, courage, and dedication to Indigenous Peoples and communities is an example to us all. Few dare to take the stand, dedicate themselves wholeheartedly, and make the sacrifices you do. Your support, encouragement, and care have carried me through this wonderful journey.

Table of Contents

Approval ... ii
Ethics Statement ... iii
Abstract ... iv
Dedication ... v
Acknowledgements ... vi
Table of Contents ... vii
List of Tables ... ix
List of Figures ... x
List of Acronyms ... xi
Apoema ... xii

Introduction ... 1
My relations ... 1
My academic work ... 6

Chapter 1. Theoretical Background and Context ... 11
1.1. Child welfare context in select provinces ... 11
1.2. Child welfare system orientations ... 16
1.3. The Individualistic Self in Canadian child welfare systems ... 20

Chapter 2. Advancing a Communal Conception of Selfhood ... 29
2.1. Recapitulating the Communal Self ... 29
2.2. The Self-in-relation ... 33
2.3. The Meeting of the Selves ... 37

Chapter 3. Envisioning a Communally-constituted Approach to Child Welfare ... 42
3.1. Origins of Family Group Conferencing as an Interventional Approach to Child Welfare ... 44
3.2. Family Group Conferencing at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre ... 48
3.2.1. Stage One: Assessment ... 49
3.2.2. Stage Two: Preparation ... 50
3.2.3. Stage Three: Family Group Conference ... 51
Part 1: Information Presentation ... 52
Part 2: Private Family Time ... 53
Part 3. Mentor Review ... 53
Part 4. Family Plan Presentation ... 53
3.2.4. Stage Four: Monitoring and Review ... 54
Part 1. Formal Agreement ... 54
Part 2: Transition ... 54
Part 3. Welcome Home Ceremony ... 54
Part 4. Support and Review Meetings ... 55

Chapter 4. Methods **56**
4.1. Forging the Research Partnership to Learn About Ma Mawi Ichi Itata Centre's FGC Program 56
4.1.1. Research Orientation 57
4.1.2. Starting in a Good Way 59
4.1.3. Doing Community-based research 61
4.1.4. Challenges of doing community-engaged Indigenous research 65
4.2. Participants 70
4.3. Measures & Design 75
4.4. Procedures 76
Recruitment 76
Interviews 79
4.5. Analysis 80
4.5.1. Phase One Analysis 80
4.5.2. Phase Two Analysis 81

Chapter 5. Findings and Discussion: Mentors' Perspectives on Family Group Conferencing **84**
5.1.1. Enrolment into the FGC Program 85
5.1.2. Relationships: Families, CFS case workers, and FGC mentors 92
5.1.3. Challenges 99
5.1.4. Re(connection) to Family, Community, and Traditional Culture 108

Chapter 6. Findings and Discussion: Parents Perspective on Family Group Conferencing at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata **114**
6.1. We are family 116
6.1.1. Mothers 120
6.1.2. Finding a Larger Family 124
6.1.3. Loving Families Back to Health 127
6.2. The CFS shadow 129
6.2.1. Injustice and Insensitivity 129
6.2.2. Ripple Intergenerational Effects 137
6.3. Hope 142

Conclusion **146**

References **153**

Appendix A. Mentor Interview Protocol **165**

Appendix B. Parent Interview **167**

Appendix C. Phase One Analysis **169**

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of the three orientations of child welfare identified in Gilbert's follow up study ... 18

Table 2. Manitoba's Child and Family Services is divided into four child and family services authorities, all of which are governed by The Child and Family Services Authorities Act. ... 86

List of Figures

Figure 1. Lacerda, J. R. (2016). Apoema (Tupi) “the one who sees far”. Personal gift. xii
Figure 2. Aerial View of Miradouro 4
Figure 3. Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin (Plains Cree Model) conceptual framework of tribal research 58
Figure 4. Summary of the FGC process 85
Figure 5. Diagram comparing and contrasting approaches between FGC and CFS toward parents involved in child welfare. 95
Figure 6. Partial view of the Bear Den: Family Group Conferencing’s “living room”, where families have visits with their mentors, children, other families, Elder and Knowledge Keepers, and case workers. 109
Figure 7. Detail of the medicine pouches and bundles in the Round Room 112
Figure 8. Lay out of the room in preparation for the Family Group Conference (FGC) family meeting in the Round Room. 112
Figure 9. Bear Den mural 114
Figure 10. Gifts presented to me at the conclusion of the research by the FGC community. 152

List of Acronyms

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AMC	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
BC	British Columbia
CFS	Child and Family Services
FDR	Family Differential Response
FGC	Family Group Conferencing
LAM	Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
MB	Manitoba
MCFD	Ministry of Children and Family Development
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations

Figure 1. Lacerda, J. R. (2016). Apoema (Tupi) "the one who sees far". Personal gift.

"The terrible fire raged and burned. All of the animals were afraid, and fled their homes

The elephant and the tiger, the beaver and the bear all ran, and above them the birds flew in a panic.

They huddled at the edge of the forest and watched. All of the creatures gathered, except one.

Only the Dudkdukdya, the little hummingbird, would not abandon the forest. Dudkdukdya flew quickly to the stream. She picked up a single drop of water in her beak.

Dudkdukdya flew back and dropped the water on the fire. Again she flew to the stream and brought back another drop and so she continued- back and for the, back and forth.

[The other animals] called out to the little hummingbird, warning her of the dangers of the smoke and the heat.

"What can I do?" sobbed the rabbit. "This fire is much too hot."

"There is too much smoke" howled the wolf.

"My wings will burn, my beak is too small" cried the owl.

But the little hummingbird persisted. She flew to and fro, picking up more water and dropping it, bead by bead, onto the burning forest.

Finally, the big bear said: "Little Dudkdukdya, what are you doing?"

"Without stopping, she looked down at all the animals and said: "I am doing what I can."

(Yahgulanaas, 2008, pp.16-30)

Introduction

My relations

Embracing the teachings I learned during this doctoral project and in line with the relational spirit intended with this dissertation, it would be in bad form to introduce this work in typical Western fashion. From the Māori people of the Waitomo Papakainga organization, who gifted the Family Group Conferencing model to Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Ma Mawi herein), the Indigenous organization with whom I partnered to conduct this study, I learned that any initial address must be preceded by a *pepeha*. A pepeha is a statement of who we are in relation to what constitutes us; our *whakapapa* (ancestors), *whanau* (family), *hapū* and *iwi* (tribal and subtribal identity), *nō hea koe* (land of origin), *manga* (mountain), *awa roto moana* (water), and *ingoa* (name). A pepeha serves to situate the speaker in a particular position, allowing the listener to consider what will be shared as coming from that perspective, with the understanding that there are multiple others that exist when located elsewhere (Love, 200; Pihana et al., 2019). The recognition that where one stands in all their relations, shapes what they can see and understand about the world, and the spirit of interdependence inherent in this tradition, is one of the many points of affinity between Indigenous ways of being and knowing and the situated communal perspective of selfhood this dissertation will present.

Therefore, this dissertation is my perspective, as a white settler in two countries; my country of origin, Brazil, and Canada, which I have called home for the last 16 years. My self-identification as a settler, comes from tracing my genealogy back to my Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, and French ancestors who migrated to Brazil starting in the late 1700’s. My ancestors settled in a small village that would later be known as Miradouro, in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais (‘*General Mines’*) where gold, silver, and diamonds abounded. Given the mineral resources and fertility of the land for coffee and sugar cane crops, Minas Gerais became one of the centres of colonization and slavery in Brazil between the 17th and 19th centuries. African and Indigenous Peoples were enslaved and assimilated to maintain the Portuguese colonial economy and imperial family (Marquese, 2006). The municipality of Miradouro, now inhabited by 10,000 citizens, occupies the ancestral lands of the *Puri* and later of the *Guaru* Peoples (Prefeitura de Miradouro, 2019). The Puri were a small coastal nomadic Indigenous

group, known for carrying only what was absolutely necessary to survive in their dense vegetation environment (Oliveira, 2012). Records show that during the 17th century, contact caused the Puri and Guaru to travel south and to the interior to escape colonizing efforts led by the so-called Bandeirantes—17th-century first and second-generation Portuguese settlers and fortune hunters who ventured into the southern and western interior to "discover" land and peoples (Prefeitura de Miradouro [PM], 2019). These colonizing expeditions, known as *Bandeiras,* were similar to the ones happening in North America and other countries, where the main intent was to enslave Indigenous peoples, map the path for the catechizing Christian expeditions of the Jesuits, and survey and exploit the lands for local knowledge and natural resources. These expeditions left behind a trail of physical and cultural genocide and assimilation into the Catholic faith (Globo, 2019). By the 19th century, the Puri were considered virtually extinct. Those not killed for defying colonizing efforts, from European disease, or slave labour, were assimilated into Brazilian society over time, through forced labour in farms, domestic work, and lumberjacking (D'Alessandri, 2013). Today, two dozen families descendants of the Puri, remain in Minas Gerais in a small village called *Padre Brito* (Father Brito). Although much of the Puri language, culture, ceremonies, and teachings have been fractured and lost, the remaining group are attempting to revitalize their cultural roots and identity and to be formally recognized by the federal government's Indigenous agency[1] (i.e., Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) (Globo, 2019). I take note of the history of the Puri because the colonizer-colonized relationship of the Portuguese and the Puri gained an added and personal dimension, when I learned, toward the conclusion of this dissertation, that my maternal great-grandmother five generations removed, Simpliciana ('with simplicity'), was the daughter of a Puri woman who married a Portuguese Bandeirante. Learning this particular about my family history was momentous. Spiritually perhaps, a part of me that always searched for a reason for my strong feelings and interest in Indigenous culture and issues, seems to have found a close figure and a physical, historical, and emotional place to continue my learning journey. More critically, I wonder about Simpliciana's marriage, the colonizer-colonized relationship she may have had to tread, whether she had to conceal her Indigenous ancestry, whether she was able to uphold her traditions and ceremonies, and my

---

[1] Formal recognition of Indigenous identity and status can only be granted by FUNAI, the Brazilian government body that establishes the criteria for Indigeneity and carries out policies relating to indigenous peoples.

ancestors' and my own complicity in the decimation, colonization, and oppression of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil and Canada, and our responsibility to decolonization.

My family is my source of joy and strength. My parents, Maria da Graça and José Rodolfo, were born in Miradouro, where my maternal grandparents were a coffee farmer and a lawyer, and my paternal grandparents were a tailor and a homemaker. My parents met, got married and moved south, to the state of Paraná, where I was born and raised with my three siblings, Cristiane, José Rodolfo Filho, and Francisco Luiz—or *Cris*, *Petal*, and *Kiko*. Growing up, I was '*Maria Elisa*' when I was in trouble, *Marelisa* on a regular basis, *Mary-Liza* when my dad was in a cheery mood, *Biringula* to my mom, *Biiza* to my maternal side of the family, *Didisa* to my paternal side of the family, and *Má* to my siblings. Since I was a little girl, I had a special connection with my maternal grandfather, *Vô Geraldo*. Every time we saw each other, I felt full. His calm, sensibility, warm laugh, silky smooth singing voice and playing of his *viola caipira*—a five-string acoustic guitar that is typical in Brazilian folk and country music—were like a magnet to me. He called me his 'wood tick' as I would never leave his side and to tease me about my talkativeness, he would also call me 'matraca'—a Latin-American type of wood rattle that makes a lot of noise. My connection to my grandad continued through my youth and adulthood. At the first anniversary of his departure to the spiritual world, I received an old newspaper article of the last interview he had given about the naming of Miradouro, during his term as the town mayor. In it, he details his unsuccessful campaign to name the municipality after the Indigenous peoples whose unceded territory it occupies. Although, we never talked about the topic when he was alive and I cannot tell how deep his understanding of decolonization was, learning about his proposal while doing this doctoral research, meant a lot to me. I took it as a sign of his encouragement and support for this work.

Figure 2. Aerial View of Miradouro
(Cidades do Meu Brasil, 2020)

Despite being distant from their hometown, my parents' connection to the land was always present in our upbringing, through storytelling, music, and food. In the summertime, we witnessed and experienced it firsthand during our holidays to my grandfather's farm. Travelling through the dirt roads through the rolling hills, exploring pockets of lush and thick green forests, climbing mango trees, and playing in the waterfall—until the fruit bats would join us and we would run away in fear of turning into vampires—and swimming in large concrete tanks where coffee beans were soaked, are memories I, my siblings, parents, cousins and aunts carry to this day. On my dad's side of the family, the light-hearted running joke is that the Muriaé River that cuts through their town, is the centre of the universe, a river so remarkable that even "whales come to swim in it".

My siblings and I were born in Curitiba[2], in unceded and unsurrendered territory of the *Guarani, Xetá and Kaingang* (Helm, 1995). Curitiba nears the coastal mountains

[2] Name given by the Tupi Indigenous people of Brazil that translates to 'pine nut land'.

of the Serra do Mar and is on the course of the Iguaçu River[3] that leads to the majestic Foz do Iguaçu (or Iguazu Falls), one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. My family talks about my birth day as memorable on two accounts, my arrival and the day 'it snowed in Curitiba'—perhaps a herald of the winters I would experience 30 years later in Canada. Although marriage has changed how I am called, my name is Maria Elisa Bicalho de Lacerda. My name was chosen by my father, amusingly, after our family dentist's mother-in-law; a lady who by all accounts was kind, generous, and cheerful. I am fortunate to have grown up in a tight-knit family, surrounded by love, happiness, and endless adventures with my siblings, 32 direct cousins, and dozens of friends. My upbringing was privileged. Although my parents were never wealthy and often lived from paycheque to paycheque, we benefited from a host of privileges most in Brazil do not. We lived in an affluent neighborhood, never experienced prejudice and discrimination, had access to private education and healthcare[4], and grew up in a highly educated household, having both parents steadily employed as professors. We were brought up to be appreciative and kind, considerate of others, and have a sound work ethic. These lessons continue to be modelled to us to this day.

In 1994, my life gained new perspective, meaning, and purpose, with the arrival of my daughter, Georgia. Being her mom at 19, has been the greatest gift and teaching of life, and one I plan to keep honouring, as my parents continue to do. Sixteen years ago, Georgia and I embarked on our biggest adventure, moving to Canada. We were introduced to Turtle Island with the beauty of the traditional Coast Salish territory of the Squamish, Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie and Kwikwetlem peoples. In Vancouver, we discovered the experience of a new culture and ways of seeing the world, built memories, created ties to this land, and came to identify ourselves as Canadians. Four years ago, I moved to Winnipeg to start this doctoral research partnership with Ma Mawi. As a guest in Treaty 1 territory, on the ancestral lands of the Anishinabek and Swampy Cree, I was greeted with grand pink and purple skies, sundogs, and a great deal of Winnipegger warmth and support during one of the most trying times of my life, after receiving a cancer diagnosis. Sixteen months of treatment later and with a clean bill of health, I concluded the research and set out on a new journey, to start my academic

[3] Name given by Indigenous Tupi-Guarani name that translates to 'big water'.

[4] Brazil is a severely stratified society. Public education and health care are systematically underfunded and poorly maintained.

career at the University of Calgary, where I've been warmly embraced and brought into the fold seamlessly. Calgary—which rests on the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta, in the ancestral lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley) First Nations, and the homeland of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III—feels like the geographic balance point of my history in Canada and the place of a new beginning.

My academic work

For a decade, my research interests have revolved around philosophical and theoretical issues concerning the nature of selves in the discipline of psychology, and how these concepts are interpreted and translated into social institutional practices and legislation, particularly in child welfare and education. As someone who favours and requires understanding of 'the big picture' to make sense of the world, I gravitate strongly to theoretical explorations. But the interests that resulted in my scholarship were ignited by a combination of academic, empirical, and personal factors. Academically, my interests followed a period of discomfort between the decidedly cognitive orientation of my undergraduate psychology degree and my increasingly relational and socio-cultural leanings about individuals as psychological beings. In my last undergraduate semester, a course with Dr. Jeff Sugarman, entitled Self, Psychology and Education, introduced me to the central concept of this doctoral project: 'selfhood'. That class was so transformative, that I decided to pursue graduate school and Dr. Sugarman became the senior supervisor for my master's studies. Now my doctoral co-supervisor, Dr. Sugarman's scholarship on ontological matters continues to provide me with a solid philosophical foundation from which to examine and articulate theoretical matters in respect to institutional practices. Like his, my work hopes to divulge the beliefs, theories, and methodologies that undergird what we teach and practice in disciplinary psychology and related disciplines (i.e., education, social work, public policy). My work then extends to consider the social, cultural, political and psychological consequences of such presuppositions. My research pursuits were made possible by the close relationship I forged with my doctoral senior supervisor, Dr. Lucy Le Mare. During graduate school, research projects brought us together and over the course of my master's work, which she co-supervised, her 25-year longitudinal research on attachment and the serious

psychosocial outcomes of orphans who experienced deprivation as infants and toddlers under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, became deeply formative in attuning my work to how relational fragmentations between children and families are associated with developmental and psycho-social and emotional challenges later in life. Her work creates a strong parallel between Romania and Canada on the institutionalization of children, in that the developmental and well-being trajectories and outcomes of children who experienced early deprivation in Romanian "orphanages", are eerily similar to those of children who experience multiple foster care placements in Canada, suggesting the centrality of close, stable relationships with caregivers for a thriving childhood, youth, and adulthood.

My studies gained a sharper focus when half-way through graduate school, I became acquainted with a 7-year old boy under the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in British Columbia (BC). At the age of seven, this boy found himself in his 17th foster care placement, diagnosed with multiple disorders—Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder—and taking a collection of (adult) psychotropic medications to manage his behaviour. The profound instability in his care and medicalized approach to this boy's challenges were perplexing to me. I wondered about the whereabouts of his family of origin and how they were involved in his life; the relationship between the instability he had experienced and the diagnoses and medications he was receiving; and the (un)likelihood that he would flourish emotionally, psychologically, physically and socially in an environment marked by uncertainly, broken relationships with caregivers and friends, and an institution for a "parent". Coming from a loving family and a culture where families typically care for each other in times of difficulty without the need for legal arrangements (for the most part), the notion of the state for a parent, with the power to intervene, separate, and replace the family of a child, not only once but multiple times, was puzzling and disconcerting. This boy's life and experiences in care compelled me to look deeper, and I found that stories like his are unfortunately often the norm, and not the exception in child welfare in Canada, particularly for Indigenous children (Trocmé et al., 2010). In my master's studies, I explored the line of justification for practices of multiple placements for children in care, low family reunification objectives, and the disappearance of the family of origin from children's lives.

In my master's thesis I argued that in order to reunify families involved in child welfare cases, adequately prevent future involvement, generate meaningful change in child protection practices, and achieve favourable legislative reform in child welfare in Canada, a theoretical repositioning concerning the nature of selves must take place. More specifically, I advanced that the individualistic conception of selfhood currently presupposed in Canadian (and other) child welfare systems tends to view individuals as independent from their families and communities, which explains the liberal attitudes toward multiple placements in care. This individualistic view is also acontextual and tends to attribute social problems to individuals. It tends to deflect attention from the often disadvantaged, historical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts of families involved in child protection. It holds parents responsible for their challenges, therefore disfavouring reunifications. I supported these arguments with evidence connecting social disadvantage with groups that British Columbia's child protection system overrepresent. I argued for a reformulation whereby individuals are to be understood as communally-constituted, fostered in relationality and interdependence, and situated in their historical, socio-cultural, and political setting (Vandenborn, 2014).

In this doctoral dissertation —an exploratory qualitative study of the experiences of parents and mentors involved with Ma Mawi's Family Group Conferencing (FGC) program, an Indigenous community-led and based intervention to child welfare in Winnipeg, Manitoba (MB)—I reaffirm this theoretical stance and further support it by adding real-life accounts to my critique of founding child protection on a highly individualistic view of selves. Participants of this research shared compelling perspectives that highlight the severe limitations of mainstream systems predicated on individualistic understandings and pointed to the promise of child protection intervention based on broader and communal notions. Additionally, with this dissertation I hope to answer to the sentiment and content of the Calls for Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and the United Nations Report on the needs of Indigenous peoples in Canada, for research and solutions that explore profoundly different ways of conceptualizing and responding to child welfare in this country (United Nations [UN], 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015).

The title of this dissertation begins with a Tupi—Indigenous Brazilian language group—term, *apoema*, which means "the one who sees far" (LeBooks, 2009). Starting with this term seemed fitting in that it captures the sensibility of my work, in trying to see

beyond the immediacy of what surrounds us. Hopefully this dissertation will make a cogent argument to compel us to look past the narrow conceptions of selfhood furnished to us by mainstream systems, institutions, and their associated ideologies. It is the hope that the voices of parents and community members that participated in this research will touch the readers and evidence to the new wave of academics, practitioners, and policy makers the cruciality of communal perspectives as the way forward in child welfare system and beyond. In addition, the term *apoema* speaks to the strength of Indigenous families, communities, and peoples. In the process of this research, much like the hummingbird or Dudkdukdya (p. xii) who persistently carries on putting out the fire a drop at a time, I was gifted with a way of seeing beyond adversity and pain toward hope. The relationships I formed at Ma Mawi with mentors, parents, and community members, and the lessons I learned in meetings, gatherings, and ceremonies with Indigenous community members in Canada and Brazil have impressed upon me the spirit of resistance and resurgence of Indigenous peoples worldwide and their generosity and unwavering commitment to continue to model to us more harmonious relationships to all life and all peoples.

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, I provide the reader with an overview of select (i.e., BC and MB) Canadian child welfare systems and practices, particularly in relation to Indigenous children and families. I also provide a succinct summary of the theoretical base and presuppositions from which this doctoral dissertation is operating, describing the so-called 'individualistic self' and how this conception of self is presupposed by mainstream child welfare systems. In Chapter 2, I articulate the notion of a communally constituted-self, the 'Communal Self', as a replacement to individualistic perspectives and explain the alignment between the Communal Self with Indigenous conceptions of the 'Self-in-Relation'. Chapter 2 is concluded with an analysis of the promising ethical space the communal self may offer to non-Indigenous scholars concerned with decolonization and reconciliation. In Chapter 3, I introduce the reader to the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) model, its origins, and what it looks like at Ma Mawi. Chapter 4 offers the reader insights into the relationship building process I engaged in with the Ma Mawi community, the considerations, and preparation undertaken to do this research, as well as the tensions and challenges of doing community and decolonizing research within a Western institution. In Chapter 4, I also present the methodology utilized in the study, information about the participants, the study design and procedures. In Chapter 5, I consider the perspectives of mentors to

further describe the FGC program; how parents access the program, the way the program works, and the relational and traditional basis of the program. In Chapter 6, I present the experience of parents in the child welfare system and in the FGC program; the strengths, challenges, and larger context of child welfare systems involvement in their lives, and how FGC supports families stay together and break intergenerational cycles of separation. I conclude with some final reflections and future directions for child welfare stakeholders and academics.

Chapter 1.

Theoretical Background and Context

This dissertation builds upon a theoretical critique of the Western, so-called individualistic conceptions of selfhood, I articulated elsewhere (Vandenborn, 2014). Although a comprehensive restatement of that critique is beyond the scope of this project, a recapitulation of its main points and context is necessary to provide the background of significance and presuppositions for the chapters that will follow. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the original critique was inspired by three main interrelated phenomena observed in the child welfare system in BC: 1) the high prevalence of multiple placements for children in care, 2) the low rate of reunification of children in care with their family of origin, and 3) the disappearance of the family of origin from children's lives once they are admitted into care. Although that analysis focused on British Columbia (BC), it can be accurately extended to all Canadian provinces, and other countries that follow similar child welfare philosophies and practices. In that this doctoral research was conducted in Manitoba (MB), this chapter also offers an overview of the Manitoban child welfare context.

1.1. Child welfare context in select provinces

Canadian child protection systems fall under provincial ministries and service agencies entrusted with the task of supporting and safeguarding the well-being of children and families. When child maltreatment concerns arise, mandates stipulate that the apprehension of children from their families and their placement outside the home be a last resort (British Columbia Laws, 2019; Legislative Assembly of Manitoba [LAM], 2019). Despite these specifications, child protection agencies, such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in BC and Children and Family Services (CFS) in MB, have systematically failed to fulfill commitments to operate under a "least-intrusive model", of only removing children from families when all alternatives for keeping the family together and safe have been exhausted (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs [AMC], 2014; Bennett, 2008; Bernard, 2017; Hughes, 2006; John, 2016; Penrose 2019). In BC, this is evidenced by the ministry's own data, which shows that nearly three-quarters (73%) of children in care are placed in housing arrangements (e.g., foster and group-

homes) with no familial connection to them. Provincial data also show that in about half of the cases, MCFD care plans hold concurrent plans with objectives that often conflict with family reconnection goals. Statistics show that once children are placed in long-term care, reunification with family is unlikely. Adoption and independent living goals comprise respectively, 30% and 17% of the objectives of care for children under a Continuing Custody Order, whereas reunification represents only 13% (MCFD, 2012). Given the provincial jurisdictional nature of child welfare in Canada and disparities in definitions, record keeping, and interventional models across the country, comparable statistics regarding living arrangements and objectives of care in MB cannot be easily obtained and/or aligned with those of BC. Nevertheless, the fact that over 60% of children in care in MB are under permanent ward orders that revoke parental rights and cease reunification plans and the 85% rise in numbers of children in care over the past decade (Legislative Review Committee [LRC], 2018), suggests reunifications between children in care and their family of origin is equally scarce in MB.

Qualitative research and child and youth advocate data in both provinces suggest that upon apprehension, children will most likely experience the disappearance of their family of origin (AMC, 2019; Bennett, 2008; Jones & Kruk, 2005; Penrose, 2019; Turpel-Lafond, 2015a). Similarly, parental accounts provide a grim perspective of the barriers standing in the way of family reunification (e.g., lacking, inconsistent, haphazard, and/or untimely supportive services; inflexibility, lack of transparency, and mistrust; lack of support navigating complex, time-consuming and highly adversarial legal proceedings; narrow or unreliable support systems; unavailable and/or unsupportive case workers) that lead to prolonged or permanent separation. A portion of a BC mother's testimonial posted on a web-forum, originally offered in my master's thesis, helps to convey this point:

> I was devastated there was nothing more I could do [...]. I was told that the next visit would be my last. And also that no one had told my kid's they would not see me anymore. I got everything together I wanted my kid's to have, I felt like a lamb being led to the slaughter [...]. I since have been a basket case, seeing families together makes me cry, and everyday has been an emotional struggle. I was told by the ministry before our last visit to give myself time to grieve. I do not understand how this was better than to just help me get on my feet. If I had money, a car, and family support this would not have happened. They payed the foster parent's around $803 from my research for each kid my oldest being over a $1100 for being special needs. If even half of this had been given to me the parent to help

me get on my feet this would not of happened. (Heather H, 2013; Parents Injustice)

A mother from MB whose children were apprehended into CFS, speaks of the similar barriers (Bennet, 2008):

> I have never, ever once had a good experience with Child and Family, never with anything. If the kids are taken it takes so much to even try to get to see them and put it this way ... you've got to jump through hoops to even try and get a visit with your kids. It's just one frustration after another. It's like you have to jump through hoops ... they don't tell you exactly what it is that they want. And I asked what I have to do so he could be returned to me right ... this is where they had me go through loopholes. So anyways, I just followed through what they wanted me to do and I did. And ah, I can't really remember much ... so anyways, I did all these programs they told me to do and found out that I wasn't going nowhere with them. I wasn't getting any answers.
>
> I jumped through more hoops than I even was supposed to. There was only one thing on the paper that I was supposed to do and I did 10 times more than I was supposed to do. […]
>
> You cannot redeem yourself in any way ... like a criminal goes to jail ... and can be reintegrated back into society but mothers ... they just seem have to go through these hoops over and over.
>
> Because [CFS] hold the cards, [they] have the care of my children and I have to jump through [their] hoops.
>
> CFS still has my children. I still have to jump through their hoops. (pp. 63-64)

All Canadian child welfare systems overrepresent Indigenous children and youth[5]. In 2018, former Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott declared at the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs that the situation [of the high percentage of Indigenous children in care] is a "humanitarian crisis" (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). In BC, Indigenous children comprise 62% of children in care, despite constituting only 8% of the child population in the province (Bernard, 2017). Indigenous children are 15 times more likely to be placed in care than their non-Indigenous counterparts (John, 2016). In MB,

---

[5] Shawn Wilson stresses that the language of overrepresentation ought to be corrected from *Indigenous peoples being overrepresented* in systems to *systems overrepresenting Indigenous peoples*. The former implies colonizing views that Indigenous peoples have placed themselves in the condition of overrepresentation while the latter acknowledges systems are the contemporary structures that advance the colonization of Indigenous peoples around the world. The latter also conveys resistance to Western ways that respond with punishment and marginalization through systemic standards, measures, and practices (S. Wilson, personal communication, 2018).

where this doctoral study took place, the situation is even graver; 90% of children in care are Indigenous, despite representing under a quarter (26%) of the child population (LRC, 2018). Indigenous children in care lose more than just their parents; they become disconnected from their extended families, communities, and the rich cultural world that includes their language, traditions and spirituality. Furthermore, they experience racism and discrimination in life-altering ways and struggles with cultural identity and belonging (John, 2016; Mandell et al., 2006; TRC, 2015).

In addition to challenges in providing culturally safe, appropriate, and responsive services, the very reasons child welfare systems offer for existing—safeguarding children—have been put in question and found to be flawed. In BC, characterizations of the MCFD as "broken" (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008, p. 20), "dishearten[ing]" (Hughes, 2006, p. 16), and "preoccupied with crisis-management" (Turpel-Lafond, 2013a, p. 3) are plentiful, mostly due to the ministry's inability to provide stability for children under their care. Across the country, child welfare social workers have been placed in the impossible position of having to provide services to children and families with fewer resources and funding and grossly unmanageable and ever-increasing caseloads. As I discussed elsewhere (Vandenborn, 2014), this combination contributes to an endless cycle of mostly reactive practices that address issues only after they reached a concerning status as opposed to pre-emptively supporting families and working to elevate their strengths (Swift, 2011). More than half (51%*)* of children under a Continuing Custody Order experience between four and 19 placements (MCFD, 2012), and in some extreme, albeit not isolated cases, upwards of 50 placements (Turpel-Lafond, 2015a). In MB, the Legislative Review Committee (2018) on child welfare practices registered statements that express similar difficulties as expressed by a respondent when they say: "The legislation as it stands is broken and geared to removing children from their homes. This causes unnecessary trauma for the children, youth and the family. It needs to be revamped to better serve families" (p.3). A special report on high rates of suicide and suicidal ideation of youth in care in MB, found that 79% of youth average 8 placements, within a range of 1-54 changes of residence while in care (Office of Children's Advocate, 2016, p. 5). The report is introduced by a crushing and descriptive poem written by an anonymous youth in care, entitled "*You Try*":

being depressed
having no place to call home
being in care of CFS
wondering how many days you'll actually survive...

...getting your hopes up and then the world feels like it's gonna end

being promised something
by someone

you thought you could trust

but it was all lies.

being moved all over
having to live with strangers everywhere you go

even at home

you don't know this pain unless you've been through it. (p.5)

This youth's sorrowful words express the profound sense of confusion and abandonment children in care experience and the interrelated challenges that follow from it. Decades of research, government, and advocate data indicate that more often than not, youth leave care struggling with mental and physical health issues, low educational achievement and opportunities, narrow or non-existent supportive relationships, entrapment in cycles of poverty, homelessness and reliance on social assistance, high involvement with the criminal justice system, and involvement with child protection systems when they become parents themselves (Bennett, 2008; Bernard, 2017; Turpel-Lafond, 2009, 2015b; Penrose, 2019). The resounding messages of the serious, compounding, and enduring implications of the instability of life in care by advocates and provincial, national, and international bodies seem to go ignored (Anaya, 2014; Bernard 2017; Blackstock, 2010; John, 2016; TRC, 2015; UN, 2008). Changes to the system remain superficial and slow to take effect. The ability to make profound changes in child protection systems are made difficult by a series of factors, including economic limitations (e.g., budget cuts, constraints, and underfunding), lack of political will and representation, and inadequate training and education (AMC, 2019; Bennet, 2008; Bennett & Sandrehashemi, 2008; Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; Turpel-Lafond, 2013a). While these are certainly chief and complex challenges, philosophical impediments are hardly considered. I advance that insofar as state orientations to child welfare continue

to treat child well-being as separate and/or secondary from that of their families and communities, little can be expected to change.

1.2. Child welfare system orientations

Child welfare is defined as the combination of government and private services put in place by the state to protect children from maltreatment and encourage family stability (Trocmé et al., 2010). Child welfare systems—and agencies and workers who operate within them—function under sociopolitical discourses of authority and responsibility, which are enacted through practical interventions arbitrated through legislative powers. These systems' operations are hardly uncontentious. They raise a number of issues, including individuals' civil rights and liberties, the degree of over and under-intervention the state is allowed to have into families, social norms of what constitutes expressions of parental competency and incompetency, social workers' dual roles as support providers and protection agents, and the extent to which families and children are allowed to participate in decision-making when concerns for the child's safety arise (Gilbert, 2011; Wharf, 2007). Child welfare agencies' mandates comprise child protection investigations when the safety of children is believed to be at risk, supervision of foster care placements, adoption arrangements, and supportive services aimed at preserving families. In the mid-90's, Neil Gilbert (2011) conducted a large comparative international study to learn how nine Western countries responded to child welfare. He found that countries tended to have one of two discrete orientations: A *Child Protection Orientation* or a *Family Service Orientation.* Anglo-American countries, such as the U.S., Canada, and England were found to have a *child protection orientation*. This orientation attributes maltreatment—i.e., neglect, sexual, physical, and psycho-emotional abuse—to parents' deviant malevolent behaviour and personality traits and dysfunctional parenting. In interpreting parents as morally corrupt, the state assumes an adversarial stance towards parents, responding with investigative and legalistic interventions. These interventions consist of making use of coercive powers to involuntarily remove children from parental care, limit or terminate parental rights, and place children in alternative care, outside the home. In contrast, Continental and Nordic countries such as Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden adopted a *family service orientation*. In this orientation maltreatment is seen as a manifestation of psycho-social distress that can be mitigated with support. This interpretation positions the state on a more cooperative

ground; families' needs are assessed and supportive services, ranging from self-improvement to social services benefits, are put in place. Support is intended to build on parental strengths, rebuild family relationships, and preserve the family structure. In this orientation state interventions also involve out-of-home placements. However, these are mostly voluntary and short-termed, with children returning to their family of origin (Gilbert, et al., 2011).

These two orientations are often seen as sitting at opposing ends of a spectrum, and tensions over their approaches, shortcomings, and implications are ongoing. Some common areas of contention include the favouring or disfavouring of third-party care (e.g., foster home), professional foster care (e.g., group homes), youth individual independent living, parental and kin care; parental and children's rights; foster care parents and family of origin's rights; apprehension and support; keeping children in care and returning children home; and child and family participation in decision-making (Alpert & Britner, 2009; Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; Hetherington, 2006; Hughes, 2006; McKinnon, 2006; Sohki Aski Esquao & Strega, 2015). Tensions within these areas cause protection systems' orientations to sway from time to time. The pendulum often moves as a result of highly publicized cases of children who are hurt, experience abuse, die, or commit suicide while either in foster care or after being returned to the care of their parents after foster care. These cases influence public and political perceptions and, as a consequence, policies and practices shift and change (Cameron & Freymond, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Turpel-Lafond, 2015a; Wharf, 2007).

Twenty years after Gilbert's 1997 research, a follow-up study of the same nine countries revealed that the once polarized orientations had converged closer to the centre—with Nordic systems incorporating more child protection practices and Anglo-American countries inching closer to family supportive approaches (Gilbert, 2011). The study also found that the two orientations had become emmeshed with a third orientation to child welfare, a *child development orientation* (see Table 1 for summary of Gilbert's follow-up study of orientations to child welfare) (Gilbert, 2011). This new category focuses squarely on the needs of children. Parents, as providers, are only considered in the context of either being able or unable to fulfill the socioemotional and developmental needs of their children. In this orientation, the state steps in to absorb full parental responsibility if maltreatment is identified or believed to be a possibility. Concern with identifying parental deficit before maltreatment happens is a central feature of this

approach. To that end, the state installs a number of health, psychological, and socio-economic screenings to gauge parental capacity and skill to meet children's physical, developmental, emotional, and material needs. These assessments include scales, calculations, testing, and in some cases, surveillance carried out formally and informally by social workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, and members of society. When parental deficit is detected, involuntary and long-term placements outside the home are favoured (Gilbert, 2011). Gilbert attributed the emergence of this third category to the climate of social welfare captured within the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, which highlighted children's social, political, and legal rights, and modern social welfare. Modern social welfare sees investment in human capital as a way to enhance national competitiveness and promoting a healthy childhood as a means to achieve it. This orientation legitimizes *defamilialization*, or the process by which notions of individual potential are elevated, and policy support is enacted to reduce dependence on family, and kin. This approach implies children are assets of the state who ought to be protected to secure return on social investment (Gilbert et al., 2011).

Table 1. Summary of the three orientations of child welfare identified in Gilbert's follow up study

(Gilbert, 2011).

Countries	Anglo-American	→ ←	Continental & Nordic
Orientation	Child Protection	Child	Family Services
Maltreatment attribution	parental malevolence	failure to meet rights & needs	marital/familial, socio-economic stress
State stance	adversarial	paternalistic	collaborative
Intervention	individual	early intervention & *Defamilialization*	individual, familial, & societal
Placements	involuntary long-term	involuntary longer-term	voluntary short-term

The mix of orientations identified by Gilbert is often approached by child welfare stakeholders 'pragmatically', with the assumption that it is possible to adopt what is good and eliminate what is bad from each orientation, allowing multiple objectives to be accomplished. However, careful examination reveals that the three orientations to child welfare are predicated on different sets of theoretical and philosophical commitments, which, at times, are entirely antithetical. As such, combining elements from multiple orientations does not produce a viable blueprint for support, action, and change (Vandenborn, 2014).

This pragmatic approach is not only conceptually misguided, but is also potentially damaging, in that it allows superficial approaches that fall short of addressing families' real issues and needs to be defined as "family supportive". The increasing rates of Canadian children in care, especially Indigenous children, attests to the undermining of family-supportive approaches in favour of child-focused (i.e., child protection and child development) approaches that tend to consider family support ancillary interventions in child welfare and families' contexts as unimportant. It also conveys a false sense of progress that permits old social problems associated with child protection system involvement to remain unchallenged and negative outcomes of the systems to persist. BC's Differential Response, a self-described family-supportive intervention is an example. Differential Response is presented as an interventional approach that moves away from a child-protection orientation to favour family preservation (Ji, 2014). However, close inspection exposes that child-protection principles persist in decisive ways. Parental deservingness, measured through collaboration with social workers' plans, is a pre-condition to parental eligibility for support. Notions of deservingness allude to individual characteristics of malevolence and benevolence, which are deeply tied to the child-protection system's attributions of maltreatment and accompanying adversarial stance toward parents. The simultaneous planning for a traditional investigative response alongside the supportive intervention adds to the problematics of this approach. The correctional-oriented language that ensures taxpayers Family Differential Response (FDR) is not a soft response to children at risk of abuse and neglect, and the underscoring that unfavourable response to this intervention will be followed by investigation reinforces ambivalence in the state's orientation and the belief that child maltreatment lies with parents and their ability (or inability) to correct their behaviours. In a social work study about FDR in BC, Ji (2015) observed that

> [D]ifferential response did not sit favorably with all [MCFD] workers and I had heard criticisms from colleagues including how the approach was 'too soft', that it was not adequate to keep children safe from harm or abuse, or that workers who provided it did not focus primarily on the child's needs. (p. 20)

Ji's observations of resistance to FDR in the MCFD alludes to the fact that lacking a strong family-supportive philosophical perspective engenders half-hearted meaningfully supportive relationships between social workers and parents. Likely, workers struggle to recognize that parents can do well for their children with the proper support because they are trapped in binary views that intervention is to either protect the child(ren) or protect the family. Oppositional stances to family are inconsistent with family-supportive approaches that see that all families ought to receive broad access to support, and that parental collaboration is to be forged through the provision of support (Coccoza & Hort, 2011; Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003; McKinnon, 2006).

The fact that multiple placements and disconnection between children in care from their families of origin has continued to characterize Canadian child welfare systems (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008; Hughes, 2006; John, 2016; Jones & Kruk, 2005; Kruk, 2012; Linklater, 2014; TRC, 2015; Wharf, 2007) suggests this pragmatic blend of approaches suffers from imprecision, ambiguity, and contradictions that often amount to failure to keep families together and safeguard the children systems mean to protect. It also indicates that blending of philosophical approaches has not changed the view that the protection of children and the preservation of families are mutually exclusive.

1.3. The Individualistic Self in Canadian child welfare systems

Interventions and practices created to protect and support children and families, be it in child welfare or other social systems, operate from a particular set of philosophical beliefs about individuals and how they are constituted. Achieving family supportive child welfare systems that prioritize family reunification, stability in children's lives, and a robust sense of community and culture requires philosophical reformulations, starting with that of *selfhood*. *Conceptions of selfhood* and what is believed to constitute them serve as the basis from which human beings think of themselves as certain kinds of individuals and in relation to others. Rose observes that defining 'the self' is hardly an

exact or simple task (Situating Science, 2013). Selfhood is contingent on matrices of meanings, ideas, images, classifications, judgments, and ideals that are deeply rooted in social ecologies. Sugarman (2013) further expounds that beliefs regarding the nature of selves are not universal or stable, rather they are particular to place and time; being inherently historically and socioculturally situated. Conceptions of selfhood direct how individuals should conduct themselves, the goals they ought and ought not to pursue, and the techniques and institutions that are best suited to evaluate their worth (Sugarman, 2013). The conception of selfhood that has proliferated in Western societies, and consequently the one presupposed by current child welfare practices and legislation, is one of selfhood as an isolated experience; interpreting individuals as self-sufficient and independently agentic (Cushman, 1990). This notion of a contextually detached self, sees others and one's own embeddedness in their physical, relational, socio-cultural, political and ideological ecology as merely influential, as opposed to *constitutive* of itself.

Cushman (1990) posits that the prevailing Western conception of selfhood as a masterful, bounded, autonomous self, equipped with "specific psychological boundaries, an internal locus of control, and a wish to manipulate the external world for its own personal ends" (Cushman, 1990, p. 600) emerged—by many historians' accounts—in the sixteenth century. Prior to the sixteenth century, most conceptions of selfhood were fundamentally communal. With the gradual loss of community and tradition, the concept of self grew more individualistic in its constitution (Cushman, 1990). In the 17th century, individualizing influences accompanied Enlightenment thinkers, who saw in rationality a means of liberation from religious modes of thinking and political constraints. Descartes (1596-1650), Locke (1632-1704), Rousseau (1712-1778), and Kant (1724-1804) began to equate rationality with selfhood. Descartes, considered by many as an important precursor of modern psychology, advanced that selfhood rested on the solitary individual thinker, who can come to knowledge and truth through the exercising and application of methods of reasoning. Locke defined the self by its self-consciousness and ability to self-objectify and self-evaluate. Rousseau advanced that selves are not only separate, but also unique; claiming that the individual's purpose in life was to explore their unique potential. Kant believed the self was that which synthesized the unity of individual experience (Martin et al., 2010). In the 1800's, the optimistic and vigorous self of the Enlightenment started to shift to a divided, sexually conflicted self. With the

advancement of industry and work growing more compartmentalized and alienating, exodus from rural to urban areas and poor societal infrastructure, increasing class and power inequalities, polarizing and restrictive gender roles, and outbreaks of "illnesses of the self" such as hysteria and neurasthenia, the Victorian era concept of selfhood began to be described as filled with self-doubt (Cushman, 1995). Moreover, with Freudian notions about the unconscious and its potentially dangerous instincts taking hold, individuals' internal conflict was aggravated. The antidote for self-doubt and uncertainty was further turning inward to self-analysis, self-vigilance, and self-constraint. By the end of 1800's, such self-contained conceptualizations of selfhood began to clash with the interests and demands of capitalism, that requires individuals to buy commodities to strengthen economies. (Cushman, 1995; Martin et al., 2010).

The so-called *Individualistic Self* materialized in the twentieth century, emerging from a growing advertising industry, the advent of credit, and a mentality of consumerism aimed at advancing capitalist needs of expansion, profits, and private property (Cushman 1995). In the United States, this was evidenced by the Post World War II national narrative of the "American life," and the redirection from economic depression and war to economic growth. The narrative persuaded Americans that hard work and a strong economy—determined by the generation of large production and large consumption—could conquer all difficulties, not only of the nation but also of individuals. This outlook encouraged individuals to explore, pursue, and express their individual objectives and meet their individual needs and desires. Self-actualization, personal fulfillment, and self-sufficiency became equated with the construction of one's (successful) personality and identity. Encouraged by aggressive advertising and the facilitation of credit, individuals began to live more private and secular lives, reduce and move away from the nuclear family, and dedicate themselves vigorously to themselves. The result of a consumerist model of citizenship and hyper-individualistic focus in conjunction with the loss of family, community, and tradition, led to the conception of selfhood Cushman (1990) coined as the *empty self*. This self, evacuated from all that once provided it with meaning—family, community, and traditions—addressed its emptiness by "filling" itself with material goods to compensate for what was lost. This individualistic notion of selfhood carried the promise that with the right amount of personal conviction and ambition, individuals could be in charge of themselves and shape their environment to meet their personal goals (Cushman, 1995).

Rose (1998) submits that it is in the 1980's that selfhood assumes its most individualistic and damaging form, with the enterprising self. Inspired by Foucault's analysis of enterprise culture, Rose (1998) explains that with the neoliberalism of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, selfhood began to be equated with management of corporations. Individuals were encouraged to think of themselves as entrepreneurs of their own lives and to live by the trinity of freedom, choice, and individual responsibility (Rose, 1998). As clearly conveyed by the language used to define what constitutes a "good life", this selfhood realizes individuals as in charge of strategizing and exercising their choices and in ways that yield the most rewards and avoid the greatest risks. Emphasis is placed on goal setting, self-management, and short term and long-term investments to maximize one's assets. Rose (1998) advances the enterprising self is attached to advanced liberalism of 'government at a distance', a style of governance where political power is exerted "*through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them" (p. 155).

> Political power is exercised today through a profusion of shifting alliances between diverse authorities in projects to govern a multitude of facets of economic activity, social life and individual conduct. Power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom. Personal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise, the more so because most individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations (Rose & Miller, 2010, 272).

Sugarman (2013) elucidates the origins of neoliberalism and its shortcomings, with shifts from classical liberalism in the nineteenth century. He observes that despite presenting separation of state responsibility from civil society and private life, the liberalism characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century displayed a social approach to welfare. The liberal state recognized that as well as social obligations, individuals had social needs and rights. Under a discourse of solidarity and social citizenship, external non-governmental institutions (e.g., trade unions) and philanthropic organizations (e.g., churches, charitable organizations) joined in the funding and administration of social welfare. However, instead of matching or growing the social network, the state began to limit its social responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. In time, the needs of citizens could no longer be met by non-governmental and philanthropic institutional resources alone, forcing the state to expand its reach and absorb more responsibility to address the needs of citizens. The creation of state

structures and services concerned with social welfare (e.g., universal education, healthcare, child welfare, public forms of entertainment and broadcasting) were the result of such pressures. As the 1970's begins, classical liberalism began to face fierce opposition in North America, Britain, and other Western Continental countries (e.g., France). The liberal state and its associated infrastructural mass were charged with being bureaucratic, patronizing, inefficient, patriarchal, and infringing on human rights. By the mid 1980's, mounting criticism and a deteriorating social welfare system were overturn and replaced by a new economic mentality, termed advanced liberalism (or neo-liberalism) (Rose, 1998; Sugarman, 2013). Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in the UK led the way of neoliberal economic policies that divested governments from responsibility for social welfare networks and services for their citizens.

Under neoliberal governance, citizens are no longer governed by interests of production and control. Instead, they are encouraged and expected to use their freedoms responsibly and align their choices and ambitions alongside the norms and activities of social institutions—which referred mostly to lifestyle choices (e.g., family life, work, leisure, and personality) (Sugarman, 2013). Control, which once was direct and centralized in governments' hands, becomes decentralized and indirect. To maintain social order, the state requires and employs widespread use of budgets, audits, standards, benchmarks, and other individual metrics as the means by which individuals ought to govern themselves (Rose et al., 2006; Sugarman, 2013). Among these technologies are disciplinary technologies which provide authority, expertise, and practical technologies and tools (e.g., methods, instruments, epistemological and ethical principles) that advance individualized and individualizing ways of being and acting in the world (Sugarman, 2013). In disciplinary psychology, this mentality is exacerbated by research and practice increasingly concerned—and financially encouraged by grants, awards, and donations—to abide by medicalized models that find explanations for individuals' being and acting in the world, in individual neurobiological processes, architecture and chemistry, standardized measures and classifications of normality, and to contribute solutions to psychological distress through pharmaceutical interventions (MacLachlan, 2015; Linklater, 2014; Ratner, 2014). Martin and McLellan (2013) explain these autotomizing technologies, considering the example of the role of psychology in self-governance:

> When we become convinced that such selves exist and motivate our everyday actions and experience, it seems reasonable, even essential, to turn inward to understand why we act and feel the way we do. When this tendency of “looking inward” is firmly in place, whenever we encounter difficulties in our attempts to understand our functioning and experiencing, we are more than ready, even anxious, to accept various forms of psychological expertise to help us feel better about our lives, our inner lives in particular, and to manage our lives in general In doing so, we open ourselves to the theories and ministrations of psychologists by framing our difficulties in ways amenable to their ideas and practices. In effect, we become convinced we need to understand and govern ourselves in psychological ways. And with such convictions, we readily and uncritically accept that treating and managing ourselves as inward- looking psychological beings is in our best interests. (pp.160-161)

This view of psychological selves “unmoored from history or from its social and cultural contexts” and “detached from the frameworks of meaning that enable understanding and moral responsibility to occur” (Frie, 2017, p. 235), carries serious deleterious consequences. That view makes individuals fully responsible for their own fate and those experiencing distress and in need of support, deficient and/or culpable for the mismanagement of their own lives (Cushman, 1990; Rose, 1998).

Failing to recognize the situatedness of the self, is not simply a theoretical matter, pertaining to one’s self-reflection and inner domain. Conceptions of selfhood provide the conceptual structure of human activity, the operations of social institutions, and mediation of access to privilege and power (Ratner, 2014; Rose, 2013; Sugarman, 2013). Whether explicitly or tacitly communicated, these narrow beliefs about the nature of selves have immense social consequences. They establish a social dynamic that sublimates intolerance, prejudice, racism, unequal access to individual and collective rights of many kinds, social stratification, and minoritization of particular groups of society as evidential of inherent deficits (of particular individuals and groups), as opposed to expressions of social unresponsiveness, irresponsibility, and injustices (Sensöy & DiAngelo, 2017). Brittain and Blackstock (2015) illustrate this point reporting on the pervasiveness of child poverty in Canada:

> There is overwhelming evidence that the First Nations poverty crisis is grounded in centuries of colonialism, including starvation, disease, murder (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D’Hondt & Formsma, 2004, p. 17), land loss, broken treaties, residential schools, child welfare displacement, government underfunding, and discrimination in the workforce. Despite this evidence, many Canadians wrongly believe that First Nations peoples and “the poor,” in general, are responsible for their own poverty. In the case of

> First Nations, poverty is also codified as a cultural deficit. This belief is perpetuated by uninformed media reports and government spokespeople, and institutionalized through government policies and practices, including child welfare. (p.17)

As I demonstrated previously (Vandenborn, 2014), North American child welfare systems can be neatly mapped onto individualistic conceptions of selfhood. This individualistic stance is ingrained in child welfare's framing of child maltreatment, language, and interventions. The depiction or allusion of parents involved in child welfare as unwilling or unable to make right and responsible choices; the 'health self-management', 'self-help', and 'self-improvement' inclination and language of family interventional services and programs (e.g., parenting courses, anger management, counseling, employment counselling) (Linklater, 2014; Martin & MacLellan, 2013; Oldani, 2009; Ratner, 2014); and the defamilialization process where governments normalize and encourage emancipation of children from their families, observed in all Canadian provinces (Bennet, 2008; Blackstock, 2010; John, 2016; Turpel-Lafond, 2015a) are just some of the many manifestations of individualistic perspectives. Although it is undeniable that many parents involved in child welfare systems act with malevolence, do not exercise their choices in responsible ways, and would benefit from self-improvement, what is missing from consideration is the circumstances that precipitated parents to act in such ways and the narrow and/or non-existent avenues for self-improvement available to them prior to involvement in child welfare. There is ample evidence that child welfare systems fail to distinguish between families in need of protection, and those in need of support (Bennet, 2008; Blackstock, 2010; John, 2016; Linklater, 2014). Child protection interventions are often the gateway to accessing supportive services that the family needed all along (First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2017; Russell et al., 2008; Schumacher, 2001; Trocmé et al., 2010; Turpel-Lafond, 2015a; Wells & Marcenko, 2001). Often, parents are not deemed eligible to receive supportive services because they were not at the threshold of crisis (Bennet, 2008). Others may have refrained from reaching out to services in the first place, as doing so may place them 'on the radar' of child protection systems that are often insensitive to parents' struggles (Friend et al., 2008). This is particularly true for Indigenous families, where "support" –if provided at all—come after children are apprehended and families are broken (Bennet, 2008; Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; John, 2016; Turpel-Lafond, 2013b).

At this point, it is important to emphatically stress that the critique of child-centred approaches to child protection presented thus far, is not directed at the fact that Canadian child welfare systems *focus on children*. After all, the fundamental and prime goal—and the one endorsed by this author, with the most intense concern—is that children must be safeguarded, cared for, and set up to thrive in all aspects of their lives. My critique is aimed at the fact that Canadian systems focus almost *solely* on children, fail to recognize that the families and communities to which children belong are relegated to the sidelines, and the circumstances of involvement of families in child protection services remain of little or no interest to child welfare stakeholders. These consistent, systemic, and compounding flaws amount to the diminishing or elimination of the possibility of family reunification, which in turn affect children in a very negative way (Blackstock & Brittain, 2015; TRC, 2015). This individualistic approach dismisses the profound background of social disadvantage typically associated with parents (and children) involved in the system that may have led to involvement in the child welfare system in the first place (Blackstock, 2010; Brittain & Blackstock, 2015; Bennet, 2008; John, 2016; TRC, 2015). Ignoring the context of families, makes child welfare systems reactive as opposed to proactive. When the socio-economic and cultural problems that are common among families involved in child welfare are not acknowledged as central to the problem of child maltreatment, parents continue to not be provided with the proper support to overcome the systemic barriers that hinder their ability to care for their children. Without support, the likelihood that children will be reunited with their families and/or that reunifications will be sustainable is unlikely. Moreover, it places children in an impossible position, where in order to enjoy a "safe" household, they often have to undergo the agonizing process of separation and loss of their parents, siblings, extended families, school mates, community, and their own identity. A social media post by a child in care, shared by Cindy Blackstock (2016), conveys the weight placed on children in care:

> I wish we could try to help parents get better because when there are young children around they see stuff they shouldn't have and they might go into foster care. It's not a great leaving homes because it's very hard leaving their homes. To me it's heartbreaking because I was 5 when I got into foster care, now I'm 11 years old.

It is worth considering how different this youth's life may have been at 11 if their parents had received help when they were five years-old. Relatedly, and also worth stressing, is

that individualistic enterprising expectations are not reserved solely for parents; they also are held for children. As reported by foster care alumni, upon apprehension, children in care are expected to adapt seamlessly to new placements, overcome their psychological and emotional difficulties by working on themselves (e.g., therapy)—if such services are at all provided—and, often fend for themselves independently (e.g., youth agreements) (John, 2016; Turpel-Lafond, 2015). While expectations of independence may not be negative per se, what is problematic is the understanding on which they are founded; that is to say, that children can be thought of as easily detachable from their families and communities and self-governing if provided with the proper emancipatory tools by the state. When we conceive of children as essentially separate from the families, communities and traditions in which they are deeply rooted, and as unaffected and unimportant to their familial and communal ecology, selfhood and personhood become interpreted as easily changeable and transplantable, which in turn grants a defendable justifications for multiple placements and the disappearance of the family or origin that is typically observed in child welfare systems. Moreover, the impetus to consider the needs of family and seek familial reunification becomes secondary, and if not achieved, considered as regrettable but acceptable collateral damage.

Chapter 2.

Advancing a Communal Conception of Selfhood

2.1. Recapitulating the Communal Self

Rose states that it "if we cannot disinvent our selves, we might at least enhance the contestability of the forms of being that have been invented for us, and begin to reinvent ourselves differently" (Rose, 1998, p. 197). The conception of selfhood I first advanced elsewhere (Vandenborn, 2014) and the one continued here, draws from the socio-culturally situated developmental conception of selfhood of Martin, Sugarman, and Hickinbottom (2010) and the notion of the *communal agent* of Martin and McLellan (2013). This *communally-constituted conception of selfhood* or *'communal self'* for short*,* is predicated on the understanding that selfhood is not an individual, but rather, a socially constituted accomplishment, fostered in social interactivity within systems meanings situated in a larger historical, social, cultural, and political context (Martin et al., 2010; Martin & McLellan, 2013). It takes notice that individuals are invariably born into cultures and societies that precede them, storying themselves by coming to know about their world and themselves through relationships and interactions with others, within well-established sociocultural traditions and practices (Frie, 2017). Drawing from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural developmental theory, it recognizes that individual psychology does not originate in individuals' minds. Rather, individuals become capable psychological beings by making the interpsychological, intrapsychological. That is to say, the way individuals self-interpret and make judgments about themselves and others derive from observation of phenomena first enacted in public, in coordinated activity with others, which then become internalized as their own (Martin et al., 2010; Ratner, 2014). This conception of selfhood recognizes that selfhood cannot occur in a historical socio-cultural vacuum. In line with philosophical hermeneutic traditions (Cushman, 1995; Frie, 2017), this situated notion of selfhood acknowledges that what is internalized and then manifested in forms of growth and development and self-interpretations, is replete with networks of meanings and practices grounded in historical traditions of being (Cushman,1995; Rose, 2019; Sugarman, 2013). That way, selfhood is a socio-culturally constituted *process of becoming* that cannot be made intelligible in abstraction of its background of significance (Martin et al., 2010).

Resistance to defining selfhood as communal is connected to views of agency. The suggestion of selfhood as historically, socio-culturally, and relationally constituted, is often perceived as denying the self of individual freedom, independence, and choice. Behind this unease rests the misunderstanding that in being *situated* in a socio-cultural context, agency is *determined* by it. This implies a social deterministic position that renders individuals as products (or victims) of their environment, with no agentic capabilities to change their condition. The concept of communal self advanced here does not renounce agency. Instead, it finds in Martin and McLellan's (2013) concept of communal agency, a way by which individuals' concerns, interests, and rights are retained, but without the individualism, interiorism, and reductionism of individualistic perspectives. In contrast with individualistic notions of selfhood that tend to view individuals through problem-based and deficit lenses that suggest that "broken" individuals who fail to secure their own well-being, can be "fixed" by equipping them with the proper (individual) tools to enhance their autonomy, responsibility, and self-mastery, a communally-constituted notion of agency sees that one's ability to be a fully realized self and act in accordance with their beliefs, needs, and aspirations are intrinsically connected to one's position in the world. Additionally, this concept "replaces self-absorption and self-interest with personal and social goals and ideals that include the social virtue of collective flourishing as a primary life goal" (Martin & McLellan, 2013, p. 178). The adoption of this broader perspective shifts attention from "fixing broken individuals" to rethinking how difficulties individual experience are nested in the interplay of families, communities, societies, and philosophies in and from which individuals operate as they move through in the world. When agency is recognized as afforded and constrained, on the basis of one's historical, socio-cultural and political situatedness, it demands reorientation to critical consideration of societal, systemic, ideological, and interpersonal conditions that act upon one's agency. Finally, it is important to stress that agency is not only *shaped by* the context, it is also *able to shape* context. This particular point is further elaborated here with the critical scholarship of Paulo Freire (2009) and the concept of *conscientisation*.

In the realm of social justice and context of education, critical theorist and educator, Paulo Freire (2009) provides an elaborate rationale of the relational, situated, and pliable nature of agency in ways that are integral to selfhood that align with concepts advanced by Martin and MacLellan (2013) and Martin and colleagues (2003). In

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (2009) offers the concept of *conscientization* as the process by which one comes to realize and exercise their agency by coming to know themselves in a situated sense. He explains that it is only by understanding one's position in the larger socio-cultural, economic, political and spiritual context that 'the oppressed' can gain clarity and voice and act upon their oppression. Freire states this process happens in three stages. In the first, *intransitive thought*, the oppressed believe control over their lives (and fate) is out of their hands and their own actions cannot change their condition. Systemic experiences and ideologies of dominance and oppression by the dominant class sustain beliefs of deficit and helplessness, which engender a sense that agency is limited to conforming and adapting. Individuals move into the second stage, *semi-transitive thought,* when they are exposed and begin to internalize counter narratives that challenge dominant beliefs, concepts, and practices. Individuals begin to partially comprehend how their actions (or the lack thereof) can lead to (or prevent) personal and social change. Passage to the final *critical transitivity stage*, is marked by the shift from a fragmentary understanding of how individuals' struggles are connected to larger societal determinants of their condition which are inherently historical, structural, and ideological in nature. Once one achieves an integrated understanding of the relationships between themselves and the larger historical and socio-cultural context, one begins to feel empowered to think and to act on the conditions that shape their oppression and living and being in society. Freire emphasizes that this agentic state is not a received skill, bestowed upon individuals. Rather, agency emerges from the dynamic process of critically unpacking and reformulating ideas, ideals, and structures of oppression, through dialogical and participatory renegotiation of relationships and human activity. Freire highlights that the process of "conscientization" that leads to the realization of agency and selfhood, is fundamental for both, the oppressed and also the oppressor.

As considered by Freire's (2009) critical perspective, reframing selfhood and agency from individually to communally constituted and oriented, bears essential importance not only for individuals' self-understanding and well-being but also for social institutional practice and reform. For the way one conceptualizes problems, determines how one ought to respond to them and what they will and can achieve. In individualistic notions, the only barriers standing in the way of individual success in living a meaningful life, are said to be the individuals themselves. Failure to achieve a state of well-being is

a consequence of individual character and not social structures (Cushman, 1998; Hart, 2009; Sugarman, 2013). Sensöy and DiAngelo (2017) observe that focusing on individuals has served to obscure a number of social dynamics, including the pervasive dominance and assumed superiority of white privilege, historical wealth disparities, systemic and unequal access to power and privilege, assimilationist power of social institutions, and the myth of meritocracy. Furthermore, they observe that *being an individual* is a privilege only afforded to those in positions of power and dominance. Those minoritized, are seen as representatives of the whole group they occupy, regardless of their self-identification and the intersectionality of other facets of their self-identifications. Sensöy and DiAngelo's observation helps to elucidate the profoundly uneven ground upon which minoritized individuals and groups are held and judged. To those entrapped in cycles of poverty, systemic racism, discrimination, disadvantage, and no proper political consideration and representation, the notions of freedom and choice sustained by individualistic systems, are largely elusive and imprisoning concepts. This is particularly the case for Indigenous individuals, families, and communities. The magnitude in which child welfare, welfare, justice, healthcare and other social systems has and continue to represent Indigenous peoples without recognizing the pervasive and overwhelming colonizing, assimilationist, and oppressive governmental and institutional practices and policies such as the Indian Act, The Indian Residential School System, Sixties Scoop, Murder and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, speaks of the literal, as well as figurative, imprisoning and revolving quality of being persistently historically, socio-culturally, and politically disadvantaged (Ermine, 2007; Little Bear, 2000; Joseph, 2018; Smith, 2012; TRC, 2015).

In the context of child welfare, theoretically repositioning selfhood as communal ratifies the fallacies of the individualistic self in that the communal self brings relationships and their historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts to the front, as integral to the understanding of selves. This reformulation engenders an attitudinal shift, from one of seeing the protection of children and preservation of families as exclusive to intrinsically connected and mutually-reinforcing. Similarly, families' and communities' contexts become part of and central to 'the best interest of the child'. The stance also changes from one of family deficit to one of possibility, wherein families are no longer interpreted solely as sources of problems and/or risk. Families and communities are accepted in their complexity, in light of their strengths, resiliency, and

gifts as well as their personal, relational, and circumstantial challenges and weaknesses. The socio-cultural, economic, and historical factors that afford and constrain families' and communities' ability to care for their children are taken into account and addressed in ways that enable clearer distinctions between children in need of protection because of negligent care, from those whose families require social support. It is a micro, as well as a macro approach to child welfare, relieving children and parents from the *sole* burden of responsibility for change and, instead, placing responsibility also in communities and governments to support their wellbeing. This interpretation kindles a more compassionate stance towards families, where children's bonds to their families and communities—that are essential to their well-being—are honoured and sustained. Lastly, the communal self promotes more comprehensive and sustainable interventions, in that it acknowledges the need to respond to contextual factors that may have led to involvement in child welfare in the first place. This expansive and proactive approach gives rise to a culture of services being provided in a timely and coordinated fashion and mapping of policies and practices required to substantiate them. Arguably, the communal self inspires a wholistic and integrated, as opposed to fractured and flattened view of selfhood, thus carrying the promise of fairer child welfare systems wherein children are not needlessly separated from their families and communities.

2.2. The Self-in-relation

This doctoral project is aimed at moving beyond theoretical critique, to provide a concrete example of a communally-constituted approach to child welfare. I set out to find an interventional program that enacted the theory of communal self I propose. My search brought me to Winnipeg, Manitoba, to a Family Group Conferencing (FGC) program for families whose lives had become intersected by the child welfare system hoping to be reunified with their children. The program is carried out by a community organization called Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, who serves mostly the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota urban communities of Winnipeg and neighbouring rural communities. Translated from Ojibway, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata means "we all work together to help one another". The name aptly describes the communal philosophy of the organization and the communal conception of selfhood inherent in Indigenous perspectives.

Although, as Hart (Cree) (2014) cautions, there is "no single Indigenous way to being in the world" (p. 74), the *Self-in-relation* captures the principles of interdependence, reciprocity, and accountability to the eco-physical and spiritual world (Cajete, 2000; Hart, 2014; Kovach, 2010; Simpson & Smith, 2014; Wilson, 2008) that are common across most Indigenous conceptions of selfhood. In Indigenous traditions of being and spirituality nothing exists in isolation, everything is relative to every other being or thing. Interconnection begins within the individual and the continuous inner quest for harmony among the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional domains of one's humanness (Linklater, 2014). Interconnection then extends to one's relationships with others and Spirit (Hart, 2009). In that Spirit lies within all things and one is related to all things[6], one carries responsibility to respect all things (Archibald, 2008). Selfhood then, is a life-long process of learning about and respecting how oneself, people, and entities coexist and support one another in their well-being (Cajete, 2000; Hart, 2009; 2014). In contrast with Eurocentric views of selfhood, which tend to focus on the cognitive and/or physical, Indigenous selfhood is to found in the learning of the cycles of life, the elements, the seasons, the land, the animals, the ancestors, Spirit, and their inter-relationships (Cajete, 2000; Little Bear, 2000).

In Indigenous ways of being, interpersonal relationships exist in the constant respectful balancing between the self and others. Hart (2003) observes that Indigenous selfhood seeks to find balance between communitism and respectful individualism. Communitism refers to the sense of community and commitment to preserve it through action (Weaver, 1997) while respectful individualism relates to notions of individual freedom and self-expression. Weaver (1997) explains communitism in the context of literature, as follows:

> I would contend that the single thing that most defines Indian literatures relates to this sense of community and commitment to it. It is what I term "communitism." Communitism, or its adjectival form "communitist," is a neologism of my own devising. Its coining, as I noted earlier, is necessary because no other word from the Latin roots *communis* or *communitas*—communitarian, communal, communist, and so on—carries the exact sense necessary. It is formed from a combination of the words "community" and "activism" or "activist." (p. 43)

[6] In Indigenous worldviews every "thing" is animate, has a spirit, and is believed to contain the energy of the thoughts and the materials that constituted them (Cajete, 2010)

It is important to note here that unlike Western notions of individual freedom and expression where self-interest alone is pursued and elevated, in Indigenous worldviews, freedom and self-expression are essentially tied to the needs of the community and the land. Cajete (Tewa) (2000) explains the Indigenous ideal of living a good life rests on striving to always holding the highest thought, which means thinking of one's self, one's community, and one's environment richly. Richness in turn, stems from thinking in the most respectful and compassionate terms to inspire actions on both, individuals and the community. This way of thinking is what ensures the perpetuation of maintaining a wholesome life. Indigenous ways of being in the world delineate individuals as accountable to their ancestral and future generations. Connecting to ancestral teachings, storytelling, and ceremonial knowledge guides how one ought to think of themselves, act in the world, and the responsibility they have to the generations to come. This extended temporality that spans through generations and multi-dimensionality that comprises the physical and spiritual worlds help elucidate one's place in their families, local and global communities, the earth, and the cosmos (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 2000; Garrouette, 2003).

Common to Indigenous peoples, is the centrality of children to selfhood. As gifts from the guiding spirits, children symbolize the connecting line among the environment, the community, and the spiritual world (Bastien, 2004; Cajete, 2000; Little Bear, 2000). This connection bears the renewal of strength of the family and the clan. Hart (2002) shares a teaching received about the primary importance of children:

> In one of my discussions with a Cree Elder, *awasiak*—children—were described as the "meaning of life." Holding, the centre spot in the circle of humanity, children help people to see their purpose and to recognize their responsibilities to the many generations to come. People are also encouraged to see their responsibility to the previous generations by turning to the teachings passed on to them. From these teachings, people come to understand how to nurture life and that children are to be cherished as teachers from whom all parents must learn. Thus, in an Aboriginal approach, people are supported to hold children as sacred, to learn from their relationship to them. (p .48)

Unlike in Western societies where responsibility for nurturing children rests on the biological parents, as the quote suggests, in Indigenous societies and cultures, that responsibility is also shared with the immediate and extended families, the members of the clans, and societies (Bennet & Blackstock, 2006; Blackstock, 2010; Mandell et al.,

2006). Elders play a crucial role in children's process of being and flourishing. They are entrusted with the teachings that convey Indigenous worldviews and the essential knowledge and codes of behavior that respect and sustain them (Anderson, 2000; Archibald, 2008). Talaga (Anishinaabe) (2018) captures the relational, multi-dimensional, and temporal understanding of selfhood, describing a child coming to the world.

> Before an Anishinaabe woman gives birth to a child, Elder Sam Achneepineskum tells me, she sings to them. She speaks to them when she is in a good place, and she thanks them for coming into the family's life.
>
> The baby is also told stories on their history, so they know who they are when they are born; they are prepared. When they come screaming into being, they are met by a bevy of women, each of whom has a special role to play in the birthing process. Traditionally, when a child is born, the Elders come to give the child the name they will carry for the rest of their days. A naming ceremony can happen at any time. When it does, the child enters into the realm of the tribe.
>
> Directly after birth, the placenta is planted firmly in the earth. The umbilical cord is also saved and buried to ensure the child's future connection with the land.
>
> For one year, the child is not to touch the ground. A baby is carried in their mother's tiki-nagan, a wooden board outfitted with hides and furs that holds the baby snug until that special day when they are ready to walk on their own. When that day comes, the baby has a "Walking Out" ceremony, wherein they take the first step, feel the ground firmly beneath their feet. And then that child is one with the Earth.

Children are the responsibility of both the men and women of the community, but each with distinct ways of realizing their responsibilities to them (Cajete, 2000).

In light of the deep, pervasive and devastating effects of physical and cultural genocide, colonization, and assimilation of Indigenous peoples all around the world, Indigenous selfhood is intertwined with commitments to dismantle power relationships that for centuries have subjugated and interfered with Indigenous knowledge and ways of being in the world (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Sherman (Algonquin) (2008) asserts that "the fact that [Indigenous peoples] have been cognitively colonized to live in the shadow of [their] former selves goes without saying" (p.124). She goes on to say that Indigenous selfhood lies in traditional resurgence, through initiatives in which culture and language are embedded in ways of knowing the connection to land. 'Knowing', in Sherman's perspective, is not to be acquired intellectually, within the mind but by feeling

the history of the connection that one develops over time through their interactions within their land and waterscapes. Kimmerer (Potawatomi) (2013) encapsulates the importance of connection to land, when she states:

> Children, language, lands: almost everything was stripped away, stolen when you weren't looking because you were trying to stay alive. In the face of such loss, one thing our people could not surrender was the meaning of the land. In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, connection to our ancestors, the home our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, our source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold. Whether it was their homeland or the new land forced upon them, land held in common gave people strength; it gave them something to fight for. And so—in the eyes of the federal government—that belief was a threat (p.17)

Kimmerer helps us comprehend what is implicated in the politics of land dispossessions from an Indigenous perspective, selfhood. As Simpson (Nishnaabekwe) (2008) puts it, Indigenous peoples are "engaged in the longest running resistance movement" (, p.13) of decolonization to reconnect with their ways of being. Therefore, connection to land and selfhood, connection to land and parenthood, connection to land and community are not detached from each other, they are one of the same.

2.3. The Meeting of the Selves

Western traditions have been reluctant or unhurried to articulate how Western thought and research can be situated in Indigenous ways of being and seeing the world and doing research. Wilson (Cree) (2008) remarks that "Indigenous researchers have often had to explain how their perspective is different from that of dominant system scholars; dominant scholars have seemingly needed no such justifications in order to conduct their research" (p. 55), placing the onus of defending the legitimacy of Indigenous ways of knowing on Indigenous scholars and Knowledge Keepers. In keeping with a decolonizing stance, I present here ways in which I see how the communal self I propose may be consistent with the Indigenous *Self-in-relation.* At this point, it should be noted that while 'Western' and 'Indigenous' have been referred to on multiple occasions thus far as discrete, such comparisons should not be interpreted as essentializing. This author recognizes that essentializing Indigenous and Western perspectives would further emphasize binary views that reinforce colonial discourses of irreconcilable differences

that contribute to individual and societal divestment from responsibility to decolonization (Ansloos et al., 2019; Regan, 2010). Comparisons are employed to amplify—particularly to those in child welfare who may not be well-versed on the history and impact of colonization—how Eurocentric views, practices, and legislation have been imposed upon Indigenous peoples in myriad ways and maintained the context of profound inequities we have observed for centuries in countries around the world. Elsewhere (Lacerda-Vandenborn, 2020), I discussed the importance of non-essentialization of Western and Indigenous perspectives in decolonizing mental health, noting that Indigenous and Western perspectives present a wide array of positions within them. And while some are quite incompatible, others are less so. Consider this quote:

> It is possible to hold Western research accountable for its colonizing role of Indigenous peoples, all the while working alongside each other to correct the views that made this possible in the first place. Another argument in favour of co-existence and cooperation lies in the fact that Western science is not a monolithic entity. While it is true that mainstream science traditions are largely combative to Indigenous ways of being and doing research, there are numerous pockets of critical, participatory, and historically and socio-culturally situated scholarship (e.g., hermeneutics, critical pedagogy, socio-cultural) and a multitude of theories (e.g., Foucault, Rose, Sugarman, Cushman, Hacking) that have critiqued vigorously mainstream practices and beliefs in ways that resound the decolonizing of mental health project (pp.91-92).

That argument advanced that the crux of the matter rested on ensuring that Indigenous perspectives, peoples, and voices were not ignored, edited, or re-interpreted to fit Eurocentric frameworks (i.e., whitewashed), which would constitute the perpetuation of three mechanisms of colonization, as identified by Hart (2009), exclusion, marginalization, and appropriation. To create a future where Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, families, and communities thrive, we ought to recognize that just as colonialism is a shared condition (Hart & Rowe, 2014; King, 2013), so is decolonization. As Donald (2009) puts it, "[d]ecolonization in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together" (p. 5). Therefore, the comparisons traced thus far and henceforth, ought to be taken in the spirit in which they are offered, as a reflexive device to engender understanding of the urgency of embracing decolonization in a fundamental, structural, and sustained manner. In the same vein, the similarities, ought to be taken as possible points of connection for further explorations into mutual understanding.

Elsewhere (Lacerda-Vandenborn, 2020) I offer four main ways in which the communal self resonates greatly with Indigenous perspectives on selfhood. First, both views see the boundaries of selfhood as permeable—as opposed to bounded—interdependent with familial, communal, and societal relationships. Both delineate selfhood as an expansive, life-long process of becoming, where individuals come to know and make sense of themselves, others, and their world through relationships (Hart, 2002; Martin, et al., 2003). Both also understand that selves and their relations are only made intelligible against a background of communal significance, situated in historical and sociocultural narratives. These narratives are steeped in traditions, beliefs, and practices of a given place and time that become internalized and passed on, to be preserved, and also changed, over time (Frie, 2017; Linklater, 2014; Martin, et al, 2003).

> [C]ommunity is essential for our individual and group survival. All human communities share an "ecology," or set of components and inherent relationships, that provides what humans need to survive. We all need food, water, and shelter. We all need other humans to care for us and to nurture us for long periods during our physical and emotional development, and often during our elder years as well. In modern communities, we need health care, education, and livelihood. To build enduring relationships, we need the social, cultural, and spiritual values that communities transmit in formal and informal ways. Every member of a healthy community must have a sense of belonging, love, and affective meaning. If these basic human needs are met within family and community, people grow up experiencing a positive sense of being, a sense of personal power, and a sense of what it means to be related—to be a relative. Through this healthy community, people feel nourished, and this enables them, in turn, to nourish and build healthy community. This ecology of community is fundamental for humans, because we are communal by nature. Through communities, we imbibe values throughout life, transferring culture, language, spiritual beliefs, and patterns of behavior, so that the values are fully internalized within the group. This transference is multidimensional, complex, and unique to each cultural tradition. (Cajete, 2015, p. 85)

Second, neither perspective of selfhood disavows individual agency. Both perspectives acknowledge and honour individuality and agency but recognize that these cannot be conceived in abstraction from the social, historical, and cultural relationships and contexts that constitute them, that afford and constrain these expressions (Hart, 2009; Martin & McLellan, 2013; Rose, 1998). Third, both perspectives of selfhood hold a strong critical stance towards Western neoliberal agendas. Both see that Eurocentric (i.e., individualistic) notions of selfhood narrow, reduce, and impoverish the importance of interrelationality and context, in ways that minimize the power and effects of oppressive

structures have on individuals ability to be and act in the world (Hart, 2009; Linklater, 2014; Rose, 1998; Cushman, 1990). Fourth, and relatedly, both interpretations of selfhood imply societal, governmental, institutional, and community accountability for the well-being of children and families and the need for joined action to realize social reform that will ensure the well-being of children, families, communities, and societies (Cushman, 1995; Freire, 1971; Linklater, 2014; Mullaly, 2001; Rose,1998; TRC, 2015).

In my view, a major contribution of the communal self is that it carves an ethical space between Indigenous and Western perspectives wherein non-Indigenous individuals such as myself, who do not comply with mainstream Western perspectives but cannot speak from an Indigenous perspective, can respectfully position themselves and assume an active role in decolonization and reconciliation. Given the fact that the communal self a) draws heavily from critical theoretical roots that provoke reflection and dialogue about the historical and socio-cultural structures and ideologies that frame human interactions (Cushman, 1995; Frie, 2017; Freire, 2009), b) recognizes the decidedly political nature that contours agency and selfhood (Martin & McLellan, 2013; Martin et al., 2003), and c) accepts community's emotional relationships and shared meanings as integral to the understanding of self, others, and society (Cajete, 2015; Rose, 1998), it fits in the anti-colonial and Indigenist axiological space from which decolonizing approaches must operate. In the context of law—but applicable to any disciplinary and social field wherein one engages with "the other"—Cree scholar, Willie Ermine (2007), explains the concept of the *ethical space* as the space "formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other. It is the thought about diverse societies and the space in between them that contributes to the development of a framework for dialogue between human communities" (p. 193). Donald (2009) adds to the explanation, stating that this *third space* is:

> [A]n ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or invisibilize the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a particular person understands and experiences living in the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference. (p. 6)

Seeing that a great percentage of non-Indigenous individuals experience difficulty ethically positioning themselves once they learn about the history and legacy of

colonization, the communal self may provide a conceptual path, an entry-point for non-Indigenous individuals to walk right alongside Indigenous perspectives, without disingenuously attempting to occupy it and/or appropriate Indigenous knowledges and practices.

In sum, the communal self provides a broader understanding concerning the nature of selves. It not only aligns with Indigenous perspectives of selfhood but also corrects the fallacies inherent in individualistic conceptions of selfhood adopted by Western mainstream disciplinary practices, research, and education. In the domain of child welfare, it is this author's conviction that embracing a communal understanding of selfhood would engender attitudinal and institutional shifts in research, programming, and practice. Understanding that family, community, and context are tied to the very constitution of selves would provide a different narrative that would likely impact legislation, the provision of social services, the stance the state assumes towards families, particularly parents. A communal as opposed to an individualistic perspective would likely foster a move away from blame, punishment, and opposition to one of support, care, and collaboration. This thought it hardly new, Indigenous scholars, advocates, and community members have communicated this message for decades (Blackstock, 2010; John, 2016; Linklater, 2014; Turpel-Lafond, 2015b). They note that adversarial and legalistic approaches are largely associated with generational involvement of child welfare systems in families and communities' lives. The hope is that the communal self can serve to amplify their calls to compel necessary change to nurture children and protect all aspects that constitute their selfhood.

Chapter 3.

Envisioning a Communally-constituted Approach to Child Welfare

My belief that there is a better, more communal, way of re-envisioning the purpose, approach, and practices of child welfare systems was re-invigorated when I learned about Ma Mawi Ichi Itata Centre's involvement with the CLOUT (Community Led Organizations United Together) program. CLOUT delivers a short-term foster care program, where mentors and foster parents work one-on-one with birth parents through a Family Group Conferencing model to ensure parents have the proper support and educational programs to prepare them for reunification with their children. Support comes not only from acknowledging the individual needs of the child, but also those of their families', and the context of community. The quote below conveys the relational, interdependent, collaborative, communally, and socio-culturally situated nature of the program in ways that resonate with the communal conception of selfhood I sponsor.

> [We] provide an integrated delivery of services based on a continuum of needs; as a child, woman, or family outgrows one organization, there is another one waiting to care for their needs. In this way, a connection always exists between where they were and where they are going; it also prevents people from falling through the cracks. Foremost, it builds capacity in the community. To be sure, this is a complex and living approach to programming and service delivery. But complex problems require complex solutions and CLOUT's approach to solving the community's complex problems of systemic poverty, lack of housing, poor health and low education outcomes ensures that everyone remains grounded in the community, especially CLOUT members. (O'Brien, 2010, p. 5)

Ma Mawi has consistently operated through family participatory models.

Ma Mawi was founded in 1984 and is currently one of the largest non-profit, non-mandated Indigenous organizations in Manitoba. It is considered a "grandmother" organization in the landscape of family of community service-providers in Winnipeg for their long-standing history and nurturing approach. Ma Mawi operates over 50 community care, family support, child and youth development, Indigenous knowledge, and sports programs out of 12 different sites, employing more than 200 indigenous staff, and being supported by 850 volunteers. It currently operates with an annual budget of over $19 million dollars, coming from several local, provincial, and federal streams, such

as the City of Winnipeg, Manitoba Family and Services Housing, the Government of Canada, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It also receives support from foundations, such as the Winnipeg Foundation and Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, and private donors. Ma Mawi's budget supports Indigenous families, mostly Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota, in the city of Winnipeg and neighbouring communities, in partnership with 85 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations (J. Anderson, personal communication, October 10, 2017).

In 2000, Ma Mawi was traditionally blessed and gifted the FGC model by the *Waitomo Papakainga* (Waitomo), a Māori Indigenous-led, non-government social service agency in Kaitaia, New Zealand-North Island. The gift placed on Ma Mawi the responsibility to be the Keepers and Leaders of the Māori FGC program and share this Indigenous knowledge through training and working together with partners and allies. Waitomo was established nearly 25 years ago, with the main purpose to support youth at risk and their *whanau.* The organization employs 15 staff members and counts on the support of community volunteers to offer a wide range of programs and activities for the local community, such as *kura kaupapa*, a program for youth expelled from the local high school; *Sons of Te Rarawa*, a rugby program that teaches and supports fathering skills; *Super Māori Fellas*, a group that takes a public stand against violence, in addition to the FGC child welfare program (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Executive Director, personal communication, March 18, 2017). As an Indigenous intervention model mirrored on Waitomo, Ma Mawi's FGC goes beyond connecting families, it is—as the title of Ma Mawi's annual conference series suggest—meant to *return Indigenous children home* and "return the authority of the individual to the individual, of the families to the families, and of the community to the community, representing as they do, the generations of the past and the present" (Redsky, personal communication, December 10, 2015). As in Māori circles, families at Ma Mawi are acknowledged in a broad sense and connections to family and community are seen as foundational to re-establishing well-being for families on the verge of child welfare involvement and those seeking reunification (J. Anderson, personal communication, October 10, 2017).

Since its implementation in 2000, Ma Mawi's FGC program has gained significant local, provincial, and national attention for its high (80%) child welfare family reunification rates. The program has been commended by high profile stakeholders, including former Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott, Manitoba's Families Minister Scott

Fielding, and the Métis National Council (Braidotti, 2017; Monkman, 2018; Wiart, 2015). This prominence helped secure the program's 7-fold expansion in 2017. With a 3-year $2.5 million-dollar investment from the Winnipeg Foundation, Province of Manitoba, and Government of Canada, the expansion made 445 additional enrollment spots available with an estimated potential to return over 1,200 children to their families or prevent them from going into care. In late 2018, Ma Mawi reported on the 116 families and 313 children registered in the FGC program in 2017/2018 (J. Anderson, personal communications, October 10, 2018). The report highlighted that 40 children had been prevented from being placed into care and all completed FGCs had successfully resulted in a plan of reunification with the parent(s) of origin or a member of the family of origin. At the time of the report, 173 children were at different stages of the FGC process with the goal of reunification within the next three to six months and 63 children were fully reunified with their parents. Based on a calculation of 103 children kept out of care, the report estimated that the daily cost saving of family reunifications and prevention to the child welfare system was in the order of $6695.00/day, and for each year they remain out of care, around $2,443,675.00 (J. Anderson, personal communication, October 10, 2018).

3.1. Origins of Family Group Conferencing as an Interventional Approach to Child Welfare

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is a child welfare and youth justice interventional model that originated in New Zealand (NZ). The model emerged from observations and recommendations from at least two high profile reports and intense calls from the Māori for the need to reform NZ's child welfare system. In 1979, the *Daybreak – Puao te Ata Tu* report, revealed serious interrelated concerns about Māori children in care. Concerns included disregard for Māori understandings of family, which are drawn much more broadly than the Western nuclear family—extending to relatives and community; children's well-being being considered as separate from the well-being of their families; prevention of members of the extended family from taking on legal parenting roles; and placement of Māori children in non-Māori foster families and institutions (Connolly, 2004; Doolan & Phillips, 2008). In 1985, The *Māori Advisory Unit Study*—requested by NZ's welfare authorities after recognizing state practices had contributed negatively to the well-being of Māori families and communities—reported on the institutional racism

experienced by the Māori; the disproportionally high numbers of Māori families in child welfare and justice systems; the lack of involvement of Indigenous families and communities in decision-making concerning their well-being; and the importance of reclaiming traditional Māori family rearing and problem resolution practices to preserve the unity of families and heal communities (Peri et al.,1985). In 1989, NZ's government responded with the legislation of FGC as the new child welfare interventional model in The Children and Young Persons, and Their Families Act (Love, 2000). The establishment of FGC meant that child protection practitioners were to work collaboratively with families to ensure that children remain safe and well cared for, wherever possible by their parents or relatives. Although these guidelines do not seem dissimilar from those of mainstream, they present significant differences that are said to reclaim Indigenous perspectives and voice. Connolly et al., (2013) explain:

> For Māori, a sense of being embedded within a kinship group is a strong cultural imperative. Belonging is not only about belonging to a family or whanau but also about belonging to iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe). The term 'whakapapa' is central in this regard. As a noun, whakapapa means genealogy, lineage or descent. As a verb, it means the reciting or laying out of lines of descent, which some Māori people can do for many generations past. For a child of Māori descent, whakapapa links are a birthright. The high profile of Māori traditions and cultural concepts in New Zealand means that the notion of whakapapa is well understood by social workers so that there may be a cultural disposition to recognise the benefits of kinship care. Bringing together an FGC is one of the ways in which whanau strengths are harnessed to support the child and his or her family. It is the key mechanism through which child care and protection decisions are made. The process privileges kinship care, often referred to as 'whanau care' whether the child is Māori or not. It is recognised that a child's sense of belonging and identity will thus be preserved through this connection with family. In situations where the child cannot be placed safely with whanau, a placement with non-family is considered, either through agreement with family or, when this is not possible, through Family Court disposition. (p. 287)

As the excerpt describes, FGC broadens the Western definition of family, from that of the mother(s) and/or the father(s) to whanau. In doing so, it expands the child's circle of care, to prevent children's placement outside kin and from becoming detached from their family, friends, communities, and familiar environments that provide them with sense of belonging and well-being (Doolan & Phillips, 2008). Unlike mainstream systems, FGC operates from the principle that even families who find themselves in a state of dysfunction, are better positioned to offer realistic and sustainable solutions to their

problems than professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists, counsellors, foster parents). Families know their own history, have a greater sense of their internal dynamics, and possess many strengths that can be marshalled to their benefit. They have greater breadth and depth of knowledge from which to consider their capacities and challenges, and to devise a plan that will likely lead to reunification (Pakura, 2005). Relatedly, family members' shared history is connected to a sense of belonging, which makes them more directly and deeply invested in the well-being of their children than foster parents and/or professionals (Connolly et al., 2013). Whanau have the responsibility for the well-being of their children, to help them develop a clear sense of cultural identity and help them learn traditional practices and ways of being. In that they are interdependent and connected, whanau's responsibilities come attached to the right to participation in decision-making that affects their children (Love, 200; Pakura, 2005). FGC also acknowledges that third parties often have limited and skewed views of the family with whom they are working, especially about parental and family capacity, as the relationship between parents and professionals is being developed within a crisis context.

FGC also reformulates the power relationship between parents and service providers observed in mainstream systems, where decision-making regarding the care plan for the child rests entirely with the case worker. In FGC, families (re)gain control over solutions that will affect them. They are afforded the physical, emotional, judgement-free, and family-exclusive space to explore solutions that will meet the expectations of child welfare agencies and hopefully prevent placements outside the family and community (Schmid & Pollack, 2009). FGC is a non-adversarial approach where participants are encouraged to move past the assignment of individual blame for past wrongful acts, and instead are coached to concentrate on the capacities and resources available within the family and community (Connolly & McKenzie, 1999). It is in this context of non-judgment and support that FGC operates as a wholistic, strength-based approach that mobilizes family members and supports (e.g., extended family, friends, neighbours, community members) to an engagement process that culminates in a formal meeting, the conference. At the conference, families engage in open, honest, and constructive conversations about the reasons that led to the involvement of protection services; identify barriers that are preventing parents from fulfilling their parental role; consider services and supports necessary to help families overcome their

barriers; and assess how the families' strengths and resources can be coordinated to create a plan that protects children, preserves families, and prevents future involvement (Connolly, 2004).

Since its implementation in NZ, studies have consistently found that FGC presents a series of benefits when compared to mainstream interventions. FGC has been found to: generate better family preservation outcomes; be more likely to return children in care to their nuclear or extended family of origin; reduce the length of stays in foster care or avoid the need for foster-care altogether; diminish re-entries of families into the child protection system; and foster more positive experiences and interactions between families being served and service providers (Darlington, et al., 2010; Ney et al., 2015). Countries like Canada, the United States, Australia, Sweden, England, Wales, Netherlands, and Northern Ireland have increasingly adopted and legislated FGC interventions, albeit to different degrees (Connolly & McKenzie, 1999; Schout & Jong, 2016). In Canada, most provincial child welfare authorities offer FGC as an alternative intervention but these are reserved to particular regional agencies and eligible case profiles (Bennet, 2008), while in NZ, when it is determined that a statutory response is required, the social worker is required to refer the child to FGC (Connolly et al., 2013). Although FGC has demonstrated clear interrelated advantages over mainstream approaches and has been lauded as a restorative approach, it has not been free of criticism. There is growing research cautioning against the glorification of FGC. Indigenous community organizations and scholars note that FGC has been replicated with different levels of fidelity to the format and spirit of the model. For instance, some mainstream agencies are appropriating the model, and steps are being cut, skipped, and/or imposed upon families. The issue of imposition is particularly noteworthy in that at the heart of FGC lies the principle of willingness to participate in the process. Linklater (2014) explains that in most Indigenous cultures, principles of non-interference and self-determination are held highly (Linklater, 2014). Therefore, imposing the process on families runs against Indigenous models of problem-resolution. In other jurisdictions and/or agencies, case workers are sitting in the family meetings when the Plan of Care is being developed, which may cause family interactions to be contrived in fear of being negatively perceived by an authority figure, fear of being coerced and reprimanded (Berzin et al., 2007). Lastly, mandated agencies are taking up the FGC process without the traditional healing component. That is to say, mainstream agencies are 'white-

washing' the program and delivering it under the banner of an Indigenous interventional model. The latter point is being expressed by Indigenous advocates and scholars from the very place where FGC originated (NZ). Moyle and Tauri (2016) have decried the way mandated child welfare agencies in NZ have increasingly standardized FGC, through scales and formulas and the fact that those implementing the program are mostly non-Indigenous. They explain that the shifting of power from Indigenous, back to non-Indigenous hands, carries serious consequences, greater involvement of Indigenous families in system and setbacks in self-determination of child welfare to Indigenous peoples.

3.2. Family Group Conferencing at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre.

While a more detailed account of the FGC program at Ma Mawi will be offered in the Chapter 5, when I present the perspective of FGC mentors, a brief overview of the FGC program at Ma Mawi is important to situate the subsequent sections of this chapter and the following chapters. The FGC program at Ma Mawi is rooted in the principle of *tikanga*, a traditional Māori concept that encompasses the exercising of traditional practices in the right manner, that is to say, following protocols and teachings routinely and methodically (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Executive Director, personal communication, 2017). This concept conveys the notion of honouring traditional knowledge and protocols. It draws from the interrelationships between ancestors, families, and communities. In the context of the program it sees that child, family, and community well-being are inextricably linked, and that child welfare interventions must involve not only children, but also their families, support networks, and communities, and traditional culture. At Ma Mawi's FGC, children, birth parents, and members of the community work together to design and support a plan of care that will ensure the right steps are taken towards reunification (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, 2015). Ma Mawi's objective with FGC is to work with government agencies, community agencies and partners, families, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders to "return *all* Indigenous children in care home to their families and communities" (J. Anderson, personal communication, October 10, 2017).

According to Ma Mawi reports, the Family Group Conferencing program at Ma Mawi typically last between three to five months, from the time of referral to the

conclusion of the case. In 80% of the cases, children are reunified with their families (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, 2018). Here, family is defined broadly as anyone with whom the child is related by blood or close association and those who assume a primary caregiving role. Re-entries of reunified families into the child welfare system are minimal (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, 2017). Seeing that in Manitoba, 60% of children in care are permanent wards of the state—not expected to be reunified with their family of origin—and age out of foster care without returning home, the success of the FGC program can hardly be disputed. Although in the literature of Family Group Conferencing, FGC is described as having three stages: 1. Preparation, 2. Family Group Meeting/Conference, and 3. Monitoring and Review. At Ma Mawi, the process is described in four stages. The goal of family reunification remains the same in the literature and at Ma Mawi.

3.2.1. Stage One: Assessment

FGC is a non-mandated intervention, meaning it is not carried by CFS agencies but rather in collaboration with them. There are two main routes of access to the program. Families can *self-refer* or *be referred* to the program. Families can self-refer prior to child welfare involvement—when they need support to prevent CFS from being involved—or after CFS has become involved. Families *referred* to the program, typically come to Ma Mawi via mandated CFS agencies that believe the family would benefit from the program. In that FGC is a non-mandated program, the family has a choice of participating or not, even if the referral comes from CFS. Choosing to not participate means their case will continue under the management of the mandated agency. Following the referral, the FGC team assesses the referrals using the risk guidelines of CFS. In cases of low and medium risk, FGC is considered a suitable intervention. In high risk cases, where there the safety of the child(ren) is an immediate concern, the responsibility lies with the mandated (CFS) agency to ensure the steps are taken to protect the child. Risk is defined as follows:

> High Risk – A child is likely to be seriously harmed or injured, subjected to immediate and ongoing sexual abuse, or permanently disabled or dies if left in his or her present circumstances without protective intervention.
>
> Medium Risk – A child is likely to suffer some degree of harm if he or she remains in the home. Intervention is warranted. However, there is no evidence that the child is at risk of imminent serious injury or death.

> Low Risk – The home is safe for children. However, there are concerns about the potential for a child to be at risk if services are not provided to prevent the need for protective intervention. (CFS, 2015, p.3)

Although cases may be referred to FGC by CFS based on their perceived risk, the FGC team carries their own assessment. Risk classifications may change as a result of this assessment. That is to say, a family that comes to FGC as medium risk can be assessed as a low risk case after assessment, or vice-versa. It is also important to note that families who may have been deemed high-risk by CFS, and therefore ineligible to FGC, may seek the support of Ma Mawi—through self-referrals—to have their case brought to Ma Mawi for FGC. During assessment, the FGC team aims to learn as much as possible about the nature of CFS involvement with the family and current case management status.

3.2.2. Stage Two: Preparation

At the *preparation* stage, FGC mentors reach out to family members and other individuals who will constitute the family's support network. They may be part of the nuclear, extended, and chosen family; in simple terms, anyone who is part of the family's history, relationships, or seen as having important ties to the child(ren) may be included. The FGC mentor also meets with the child(ren), to ensure they have input into the family plan. The age of the child(ren) is taken into account in how they provide input. Children under 12 are asked questions about how they want to see their family. Children can express themselves in many formats that can be presented by the mentor on the child(ren)'s behalf at the FGC ceremony. These expressions may include a conversation or interview, drawings, writing a story, or recording of a video. Mentors meet with the potential family supports individually, to explain the nature of the concerns regarding the safety of the children and to inquire about the support person's interest in being part of the plan of care. Sometimes, support people may decline requests, not because they do not care for the child or family, but rather due to circumstances, such as not being able to afford bus fare to the meetings or lacking having someone who can bring or pick up their children to and from school or childcare during their time away. Other times, there are language barriers, where family members do not speak English fluently, and may not understand what is being asked of them. Finally, individuals may decline because they think FGC mentors are social workers from CFS, and they fear "coming under the radar of CFS" in any way. Given the noticeably negative relationship between Indigenous

families and child protection agencies, the latter point is noteworthy. Whichever the case, during this preparation stage is when FGC mentors learn about and arrange to overcome barriers for participation, such as arranging reliable transportation within the city, from reserves or remote fly-out communities, childminding, meals, translation services, hotel accommodation, and meeting with Elders. At this stage is also when FGC mentors convey the foundational philosophy of the program of support and relationships. Mentors emphasize Indigenous principles that bind Indigenous Peoples such as interdependence, community thinking, focus on children, and traditional Indigenous values, such as the ones conveyed by the Seven sacred teachings of the Anishinaabe, Cree Medicine Wheel, among others, depending on the families. Mentors also set the tone for the attitude from which the program operates; working from a strengths-perspective, highlighting the many gifts the family has and what they are capable of instead of shortcomings, and the building of constructive relationships and solutions rather than assigning blame. At the end of the preparatory stage, mentors have a better sense of the family's history, strengths, challenges, and dynamics. They also have more knowledge of the services and support the family will need. This information helps mentors connect with community organizations and local resources and service agencies to ask for their support. Having a support system composed of family members, friends, service and community agencies contributes to arriving at a reunification plan that is realistic and sustainable. Once the FGC team (i.e., FGC coordinator and the mentor assigned to the family) believe the family has a strong support network to ensure the safety of the child, they move into the third phase. They set a date for the (family group) conference and make all the logistical and cultural arrangements (e.g., travel, accommodation, nourishment, Elder's presence) for the meeting to take place.

3.2.3. Stage Three: Family Group Conference

The third stage of FGC is the family group meeting, or *the conference*. During this meeting, family members and their supports get together to converse and develop a structured family plan to achieve family reunification. The conference itself is a private event, where only the family support network —willing participants identified in the Preparation stage, family guests, and members of support organizations (e.g., housing, addiction counselling, parenting support groups) that can participate in the solution—are

present in the room. FGC mentors and CFS case workers participate briefly at the beginning, to formally open the meeting and highlight everyone's role in the FGC process, and at the end when the family reaches a proposed reunification plan. The meeting is structured in four parts: 1. Information Presentation. 2. Private Family Time. 3. Mentor Review. 4. Family Plan Presentation.

The meeting starts with a ceremonial component where all in attendance are welcomed by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. Ma Mawi has ties to Cree, Anishinaabe, Oji-Cree, and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers[7]. The Elder or Knowledge Keeper —who has interacted with the family during the process—starts the meeting in accordance to family wishes. Typically, the conference starts with a smudging ceremony as a way to cleanse the body, mind, heart and spirit of any negative feelings, prayers, and/or traditional teachings which may be on topics such as family, community, interdependence, balance and well-being, strengths of the family and community.

Part 1: Information Presentation

The CFS worker is the first to address the group, identifying the concerns the family must address in the plan they will create. In the event that parents are under parole conditions, parole officers may also delineate aspects that ought to be met in the plan. Although authorities share their concerns and what they deem important, the plan is designed based on concerns *the family* has identified during the preparation. When the family and their supports come to the FGC, they have had time to reflect on how they can be of support and potential problematic family dynamics that need to be overcome. Hence, participants are highly self-aware of their limitations and potential contributions they may bring to the plan. FGC's coordinator, Michelle, notes that plans families design are highly consistent with concerns forwarded by authorities, but not determined by these concerns in a 'checklist format'. The family reflects, discusses, and makes decisions on what they perceive to be important. Michelle explains that shifting the power of decision-making back to families translates into a dynamic where family

[7] Here the distinction between Elders and Knowledge Keeper is being made according to the ways the Ma Mawi community have referred to those sharing traditional knowledge. Knowledge Keepers were characterized as being in their traditional and ceremonial learning journeys, and Elders as having received the recognition from the community for their traditional and ceremonial knowledge and community engagement.

members are more engaged in supporting one another and accomplishing their goals, as it is ‘their plan’ (Michelle, personal communication, October 10, 2017).

Once the authorities share their perspectives, the family’s FGC mentor presents in large easel-sized paper sheets the main concerns identified by the case worker to help guide the discussion. The family is asked to consider primary and secondary plans that identify what will be done to address each concern, whose responsibility it will be, and the supports (i.e., resources or services) necessary to maintain the arrangements in the proposed plan. One of the participants is assigned the role of note taker and facilitator, to ensure the group stays on track. The mentor and CFS worker then leave the room and the family is left to visit and devise the plan. Mentors only provide support if the family requests.

Part 2: Private Family Time

Families and their supports are then given the time and space to discuss the plan based on the needs of the child. The meeting does not have a specific time frame. It goes on for as long as the family needs to reach an agreement. On average meetings last about six hours, although some have lasted as little as four and others as long as 12 hours.

Part 3. Mentor Review

Once the family plan is ready, the FGC mentor and FGC coordinator are invited back into the room, to review and discuss the plan the family has designed. The family spokesperson presents the details of the plan. The FGC mentor ensures details are clear and specific, measures for monitoring and review are outlined, and that the plan is positive, realistic, responsive and responsible for the long-term well-being and safety of the child and family.

Part 4. Family Plan Presentation

When the FGC mentor believes the plan is solid, the CFS worker is invited back into the room and the family presents the proposed plan. At that time, the CFS worker has an opportunity to seek clarification on elements of the proposed plan. If the plan is acceptable, the CFS worker sanctions the plan and commits to its implementation with the resources needed. The sanctioning of the family plan represents the forming of a new, collaborative working relationship between the family and the CFS agency. All

those in attendance in the conference sign the plan as a symbolic gesture of commitment and support to the implementation of the plan. The agreed upon plan is then written by the FGC mentors into a formal plan of care and reunification document that is signed by the primary caregiver(s) and CFS worker. If the proposed plan falls short and is deemed unacceptable to the CFS worker, a new FGC process may start, or the case may be transitioned back to CFS. Ma Mawi's FGC coordinator stressed that in almost all FGC cases, plans result in an acceptable Care Plan for reunification (Michelle, personal communication, October 10, 2017). The conference may end with family members' closing remarks and a closing prayer, led by an Elder or family member.

3.2.4. Stage Four: Monitoring and Review

The Monitoring and Review stage lasts for 12 months after the family group conference and is composed of four parts: 1. Formal Agreement, 2. Transition, 3. Welcome Home Ceremony, 4. Support and Review Meetings.

Part 1. Formal Agreement

The Monitoring and Review stage formally starts with the signing of the reunification agreement between CFS and the child's primary caregiver(s). Once the agreement is signed, immediate steps are taken towards implementing the family plan.

Part 2: Transition

The process of reunification starts with a transition plan where family visitations between the children and the parents increase in the length and frequency. Significant time is allocated for re-integration and reunification of the child(ren) back to the family group. During this transition time, mentors work closely with the family to make sure the family has the needed (psycho-emotional, social, spiritual, financial, and material) support to have the child(ren) back in the home. Once families are reunified, a Welcome Home ceremony takes place.

Part 3. Welcome Home Ceremony

In order to honour the intense process of FGC and the momentous achievement of family reunification, a special ceremony marks the time when children have been comfortably and successfully transitioned back to the family group. The ceremony is led

by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper from Ma Mawi who invites the family, supports, friends, and guests to reflect on their importance to the life of the children being returned home. Family members are encouraged to appreciate their strengths, collaboration, and the future that lies ahead. In the ceremony, all those in attendance form a wide circle facing inward. The child(ren) enter(s) the room and are handed over to their parent(s). Child(ren) and parent(s) are enveloped in a traditional star blanket and go around the room to briefly visit with each person in the circle. Those in the circle communicate their best wishes and share words of encouragement to the family. The ceremony is followed by a feast where all have a chance to visit and celebrate the reunification of the family.

Part 4. Support and Review Meetings

Once families are reunified, FGC mentors continue to provide support to the families for 12 months to ensure the plan is being followed and children are safe. Mentors remain connected with the family group through home visits, regular telephone calls, and the family's attendance in programs and events at Ma Mawi. As FGC mentors and families forge a close relationship during the FGC process, mentors continue to be part of the families' lives, often celebrating important events and milestones of the family. Families also reach out to their mentors if challenges and/or crises arise.

Review meetings with the immediate family, child welfare, and other service providers essential to the plan occur every three months. In these review meetings, all have a chance to assess the progress made since the Welcome Home Ceremony and reflect on whether the plan ought to be revised while keeping the family together. If the safety of the child(ren) is a concern in the family group, parties work on solutions to try and keep the child(ren) in culturally safe temporary foster care to give families the chance to work on their needs and restructure themselves. Once that happens, a new FGC may follow, or arrangements may be made where the child remains in foster care but with continuous access to their family, community, and traditional knowledge.

Chapter 4.

Methods

4.1. Forging the Research Partnership to Learn About Ma Mawi Ichi Itata Centre's FGC Program

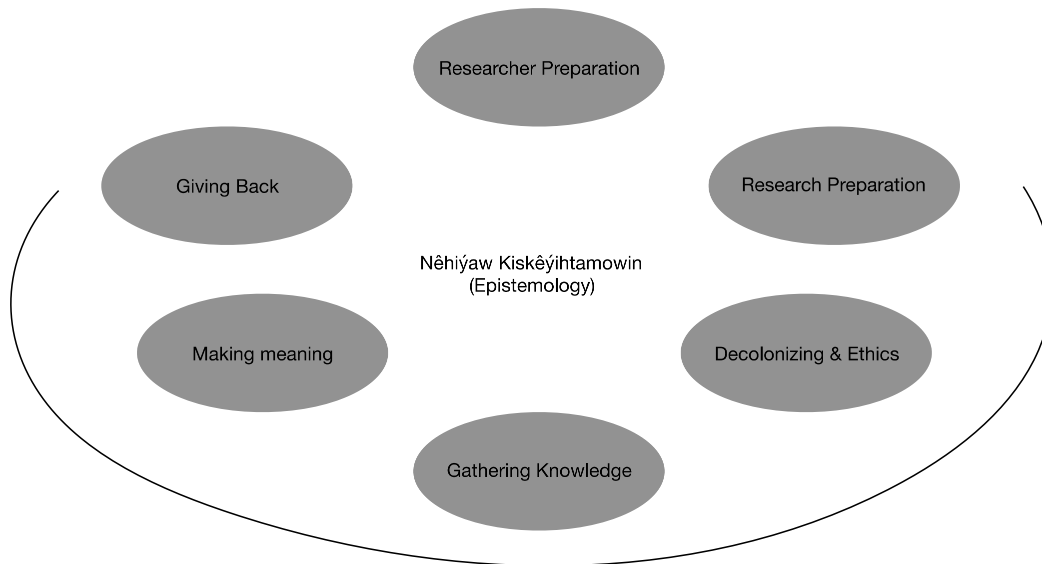
Affinities with communally-constituted views of selfhood brought Ma Mawi and I together, but it was the mutual appreciation for how our partnership could help support the well-being of Indigenous children, families, and communities, that made this doctoral project come to fruition. In this chapter I detail the research orientation, how the research partnership with Ma Mawi developed, my experience doing community-engaged research with Ma Mawi, the difficulties I encountered doing this research in the context of a Western institution, and detailed information about the study design, the participants, and procedures.

The focus on 'parents'—here defined broadly—was two-fold. First, as discussed in Chapter 1, the voices of parents in child welfare are visibly missing from the literature and national discourse. In child-centred systems, where the well-being of children is often interpreted as divorced from that of their parents', parents lack proper channels to communicate their side of the story. However, parental perspectives are fundamental. When parents' social, economic, cultural, and historical disadvantage remains invisible, the hurdles they encounter in raising their children also remain hidden. Seeing that reunification depends on families achieving physical and mental health, financial and social stability, it is of utmost importance that parents have the opportunity to voice how their circumstances impact their ability to achieve what is expected of them. Second, parents seeking reunification—rather than case workers, foster parents, FGC mentors—are more adept to articulate their own stories and journeys towards reunification with their children. They *are the experts of their own lives*—a premise that FGC also adopts. They can offer insights into the micro and macro factors they believe have contributed to child welfare involvement. Given the historical and intergenerational involvement of child welfare systems in Indigenous families and communities' lives as a consequence of Indian Residential Schools, Sixties' Scoops, and other assimilationist practices and

policies (TRC, 2015), learning about families' stories in relation to their parents', grandparents', and communities', was paramount.

4.1.1. Research Orientation

The research orientation adopted in this project was inspired by the Indigenous scholarship of Hart (2002; 2009), Kovach (2010), Smith (2012), and Wilson (2003, 2008). These scholars follow an Indigenist research orientation. "Indigenist scholarship grounds itself in anti-colonial and Indigenous worldview-based discourses, which we affirm as an important starting place for Indigenous research, regardless of the identities of the researchers" (Hart et al., 2017, p. 333). They are characterized by advancing research paradigms that challenge and seek to dismantle Eurocentric notions, beliefs and practices that have directly and indirectly contributed to the oppression of Indigenous peoples across the globe. These Indigenist approaches align with the critical, socio-cultural and hermeneutical orientation of the conception of the communal self. Kovach's *Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin*, a Plains Cree Epistemological Model presented me with important and helpful guidelines to carry out this doctoral work. This framework, depicted in Figure 3, focuses on tribal epistemology as the foundation for methodology. This model is represented as a nest, in that in this approach, epistemology and methodology "are nested, created, and re-created within the context of relationships with other living beings" (p. 47), embedded in and weaved together by ontological and ethical concepts. The absence of directional arrows indicates that rather than a linear process, research emerges from in-out, up-down, back-forth relationships and interactions. Relationships in turn, are seen in their wholistic context, and not as fragmented units of analysis. As a result, elements of research are not understood as bounded, but rather, in a web.



by going to the centre of yourself (p.49), refers to a reflexive and personal *researcher preparation* process whereby the researcher reflects upon their own positioning. This relationship often involves reflection upon insider/outsider positioning in community and in relation to participants, whether the researcher is Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Preparation requires continuous engagement in self-location or positionality and the clarification and upholding of the purpose of the work. The second, *tâpwe*, the Cree word for truth and trust (p.51), relates to the process of *research preparations*, wherein the researcher engages with Indigenous researchers and community members as co-researchers to define specific plans for collaboration in selecting participants and gathering and interpreting information. It also encompasses the validation of knowledge by consulting with those directly involved in the research to *make meaning* of what is shared. Thirdly, *miýo-wîcêhtowin*, the Cree word for having good relations (p.48), refers to the promotion of *decolonizing aims and tribal ethics*. Indigenous ethics entail committing to reflective practice and social justice for Indigenous peoples, which is fulfilled by methodologies that align with Indigenous values; being accountable to the

community; being reciprocal, that is, *giving back* to and benefiting from community; doing no harm and serving as the an ally to the community. Attending to these principles not only allowed me to situate myself in my research but also to build a strong and genuine bond with the Ma Mawi community.

4.1.2. Starting in a Good Way

The community engagement and relationship building process was the most critical, and one of the richest, parts of conducting this doctoral research project. Ma Mawi's FGC first came to my attention through a Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) news article in 2015. The article reported on the program's unprecedented high family reunification rates (79%) with no re-entries into the system and estimated savings ($1.1 million/year) compared to mandated services. I was intrigued by the outcomes of the program, which are starkly different from those of mandated systems. Unsure as to who to proceed to find out more, I connected with the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives (CCPA). CCPA directed me to their Manitoba office and through them I was able to connect with the coordinator of one of Ma Mawi's program that utilized the FGC model. She and I connected for the first time over the phone. Understandably, there was a great deal of reticence on the coordinator's part. After all, it was a cold call from a PhD student from BC interested in theoretical constructs of psychology in relation to their child welfare program in Manitoba. In hindsight, and knowing what I know now about the importance and process of community engagement, I am surprised I was not swiftly ignored. We spoke over the phone a few more times, and after a few months she asked that I submit a write-up of my intended project. Shortly after the submission of this document, this coordinator took on a different position in the organization and a new coordinator was hired. The new coordinator was made aware of my research interests and after several telephone conversations, I was invited to visit the organization and have an in-person meeting to learn more about FGC. After this first trip to Winnipeg, it became clear to me that the program had the potential to powerfully convey a child welfare approach based on an understanding of the self as communally constituted. The Indigenous-based and Indigenous-led approach I witnessed was qualitatively different from all other programs I encountered before. Ma Mawi's program was consistent with how I envisioned an approach based on a communal conception of selfhood; it had relational and contextual emphases. It emphasized family and community and acknowledged the context of child

welfare involvement in families' lives. It also recognized the interplay of families' ability to care for their children with power structures that mostly prohibit it.

Over the course of two years, I made several trips to Winnipeg, before and after receiving a SSHRC doctoral fellowship in 2016 that partly funded this research. In between visits, the new coordinator and I kept in touch over the phone and via email. These visits helped me learn more about the FGC program and Ma Mawi as an organization. During this time Ma Mawi's team and community also got to know me as an individual, the intentions of my research, its alignment with Indigenous perspectives, and how it could help promote the well-being of Indigenous children and families they supported. During my visits, I was invited to attend and participate in several events promoted by Ma Mawi, including conferences and cultural community meetings and events (e.g., community feasts, ceremonies, professional and academic conferences). With a more substantial understanding of the organization and the FGC program, I submitted a more elaborated research proposal to the Ma Mawi board of directors. The proposal received support and was advanced for the consideration of Ma Mawi's Executive Director. The executive director is a renowned Indigenous leader and activist for Indigenous children, youth, and women in Manitoba, Canada, and abroad. She has spoken before the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and among many accolades, has received the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case and the Senate of Canada Medal for her leading role as Project Director of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. The award also recognized the dedicated program created at Ma Mawi to support girls and young women victims of sex trafficking. Primarily however, the Director is a strong, deeply dedicated, and loving mother and grandmother to her own and the Ma Mawi family. In late 2017, the executive director and I met to discuss my proposal. We had straightforward conversations about issues the Indigenous families and communities that Ma Mawi serves experience, as well as issues pertaining to Indigenous-settler research relations. I addressed her concerns to the best of my ability at the time, committing to adopt a research framework in alignment with Indigenous worldviews. I vowed to continue to learn about the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canada; exercise humility and promote a research environment free of obtrusive observations and judgment (Hart, 2010); and continue to develop a relationship based on honouring, respecting, and protecting the community (Kovach, 2010). She was

pleased with my attitude and the project received formal approval. A month later, during a conference offered by Ma Mawi to the child welfare professional community in Winnipeg, I was formally introduced to the Ma Mawi community (i.e., Ma Mawi's staff, community volunteers, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, parents). At the same event, the organization was celebrating the return of Michelle (pseudonym)—after a term with CFS—as the new FGC Coordinator and in charge of the expansion of the FGC program. Michelle was extremely supportive of my research from the first day, dedicating time and attention to reading through the many ethics documents that preceded the research, engaging in productive discussions to arrive at the study details, supporting the dissemination of information regarding the study within the Ma Mawi community, facilitating access to participants, and keeping me updated on the progress of the program's expansion. To honour and reciprocate the trust invested in me, I saw fit to relocate from Vancouver to Winnipeg to conduct the research in a respectful way. Unfortunately, less than two months after my relocation to Winnipeg, and on the exact week the research was slated to start, my cancer diagnosis put the project on hold. During this difficult time, the Ma Mawi family was extremely supportive; reaching out to keep me informed of their activities, inviting me to present at key engagement events with child welfare stakeholders, checking on my well-being, communicating in direct and indirect ways that I was part of their community. The project resumed gradually in April of 2018.

4.1.3. Doing Community-based research

Unlike in Western traditions, where researchers conceive their research designs independently and are expected to position themselves as neutral parties vis-à-vis their participants, in Indigenous ways of doing research neutrality between the researcher and the researched is neither possible nor welcomed. As delineated by the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS): Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans- *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada* (TCPS, 2016) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) and Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) (First Nations Information Governance Committee [FNGC], 2014), it is expected that prior to entering into a research partnership agreement with an Indigenous organization and community such

as Ma Mawi, there is a solid relationship in place from which trust, mutual respect, collaboration and mutual ownership of the research are forged. This relationship must be equitable and reciprocal, and both parties need to actively engage in dialogue and activities so that it can flourish. Given the grievous history and role of exploitative Western research in the colonization, assimilation, and loss of culture of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous organizations and communities seek clear indications and reassurance that a researcher is not simply interested in obtaining data for their own use, but rather is deeply committed to promoting the well-being of the community where the study is being done. This commitment is conveyed through the researcher's establishment of respectful ties to the community, participation in socio-cultural practices and activities, and a relationship of partnership wherein the researched are co-investigators. As co-investigators, they participate in the development of research questions, research instruments, and the dissemination plan, have equal access to the data, and ultimately have ownership of the data.

A central consideration of this research was ensuring the methodology was congruous with Indigenous research frameworks (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008) and the provisions of Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council and OCAP. As a non-Indigenous researcher from a settler background, it was incumbent on me to educate myself on Indigenous history and ways of being, and to take to heart and with great responsibility the stipulations and recommendations of engaging in a research relationship that was truly collaborative, reciprocal, equitable, respectful, and enduring to the community I was serving. The process that culminated in the formal study was carefully researched and informed by Indigenous academic, professional and community perspectives and collaborations. In the academic realm, Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn, former Chair of SFU's First Nations Studies, created the path that led to Dr. Robert Harding, Professor at the University of the Fraser Valley School of Social Work and Human Services, joining my advisory committee and sharing his expertise in Indigenous child welfare in Canada and New Zealand. Dr. Michael Hart, former Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledges and Social Work, was invaluable in educating me in Indigenous research, its ontological, epistemological, methodological, ceremonial and ethical dimensions. SFU's Indigenous Research Institute (IRI) was also a great source of support, creating the space for graduate students and faculty members to come together and share ideas, thoughts, and concerns. The methodology was also informed by

frontline professionals from whom I learned in high-profile professional Indigenous conferences such as the National Indigenous Conference of Social Work and the Prairies Child Welfare Symposium, where scholars, front-line practitioners, policy makers, provincial and federal government officials, and members of community organizations meet to discuss challenges in the practice of child welfare. Further, I had the privilege to connect, work with, and learn from Indigenous families and communities in all of western Canada, working alongside my late mentor and friend, Stan Parenteau, former Deputy Director of Aboriginal Services at the MCFD, in an educational initiative that sought to return the traditional roles of parents as their children's first and best teachers. Above all however, this project was informed by and co-created with the staff and community members of Ma Mawi and Knowledge Keepers, who invested themselves and had as much faith in this research as I did.

Advocating for an ontological reconceptualization that breaks from positivistic traditions, required a methodology that differs from untenable principles of individualism, objectivism, and neutrality. To that end, I adopted a community-oriented approach that was consistent with my communal theoretical stance and in line with Indigenous research. This approach consisted of an open and collaborative style where Ma Mawi community members, as co-researchers, were encouraged to share their views, needs, and objections at all stages of the research process (Hart, 2009; Wilson, 2008). FGC's coordinator, Michelle, was the point of connection for collaboration, information, and support between myself and Ma Mawi community members. Looking from a positivistic perspective, such a collaborative style of research raises questions of bias. From an Indigenous and community-based perspective however, these concerns are addressed by acknowledging one's biases openly and appreciating the findings with that in mind (Kovach, 2010), much like the rationale of the *pepeha* with which I started this dissertation. Although my position of support for Ma Mawi's program has been implied many times thus far, I should be clear and make it explicit. That is to say, going into the research I was not "neutral" in relation to the FGC program or Ma Mawi as an organization. I pursued this research partnership because I believed their approach represented a promise of a more effective interventional approach to child welfare and was illustrative of the communal perspective I also espouse. I wanted to examine the points of connection between our communal perspectives, how Ma Mawi's communal perspective translated into their approach and every-day practice, and why their

approach is more successful than its mainstream counterparts. I hoped this exploration could yield important insights into child welfare practice as well as to the communal theoretical framework to which I subscribe, in what relates to supporting families and communities.

Ma Mawi's position of support for the research rested on the fact that their FGC program was on the verge of a large expansion. There was genuine interest in learning from a more formal exploration of mentors' and parents' perspectives on the program. The organization saw this research project as an opportunity to find out how the new mentors were understanding the program, the impacts they were seeing, and possible areas for improvement. Moreover, the written dissertation was seen as a good source of information to be adapted for training and funding purposes, such as a training manual for mentors that was being developed and a curation of qualitative data that could help illustrate the program and its impact with funding partners and grant agencies. Knowing each other's positionality from the beginning, allowed myself and my Ma Mawi to engage in a respectful and reciprocal relationship. Both parties respected and worked to support each other's processes and objectives. At no point did I feel pressured to do things a certain way, and to the best of my knowledge, I was sensitive to not pressure the organization or participants in any way either. The lasting quality of the bond we have been able to achieve since this doctoral research ended signals to me that we have been able to sediment a genuinely productive and respectful collaboration.

The study details were submitted to the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) at SFU after extensive discussions between myself and Ma Mawi members. To name a few examples of areas of collaboration, in the parental interview protocols, Michelle helped to identify questions that may have been too straightforward and caused discomfort. She also suggested ordering the questions in a way to ensure parents were not left with the recollection of the negative events that led to child welfare, instead opting to end the interview with a future orientation. Discussions also revolved around recruitment and data collection strategies that ensured an approach that was consistent with the supportive and community-oriented atmosphere of the program as well as Indigenous protocols and ways of doing research. That is, we discussed my getting to know the parents and community informally before inviting them to participate, learning about the community, being attentive to protocol such as offering tobacco and cloth to participants to honour and reciprocate their participation, wearing proper attire and behaving in

accordance with protocol in ceremonies, being informal and flexible, ensuring collaboration and dialogue at every step of the way, and being reflexive of my own practice at all times (Kovach, 2010).

4.1.4. Challenges of doing community-engaged Indigenous research

Doing community-based research in a Western institution is a challenging task. The tensions between Indigenous and Western ways of doing research became apparent in a very practical way before the project started, when I sought ethic approval from the University Research Ethics Board. Although governing research bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) stipulate that research involving Indigenous communities and individuals ought to work in the best interest of communities, the experience of researchers trying to implement the mandates of Chapter 9 of the TCPS is marked by a number of obstacles. In my experience, and that of numerous Indigenous scholars (Hart et al., 2017; Kovach, 2010; Little Bear, 2000; Smith, 2012), Western institutional research governing bodies, such as ethics boards, are reluctant and at times ill-equipped to support community-engaged research projects, particularly those being developed in partnership with Indigenous communities. As Simpson and Smith (2014) and Cajete (2000) observe, although Indigenous scholarship has become more established in Western institutions, gained momentum, and elicited great interest from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, the positivist traditions that dominate the academy create obstacles for the validation of Indigenous worldviews and research methods. Former Canada Research Chair of Indigenous Knowledges, Michael Hart from Fisher River Cree Nation in MB, shared his experience as an Indigenous scholar under the auspices of a Western post-secondary institution, noting that the ambivalence with which his research is received. He observed that while he may be considered an expert, the academy remains a powerful colonial institution in settler societies, determining the extent to which Indigenous tools can be adopted, and how much of Indigenous ways of ways of coming to know and being can be reflected in research (Hart, et al., 2017). The tensions to which Hart refers, emerged quickly in my project, with the submission of the study details to the REB.

The ethics proposal for this research project underwent four rounds of intense review and revisions. The reviews unveiled ideological and legal structural barriers to doing research from a decolonizing lens. While several requested revisions were

resolved with creative solutions, three points of contention persisted in my communications with the Board, stalling the research for months. The first point proved unsurmountable for the Board, leading to the elimination of the first phase of the original research design. The original design, at the suggestion of Ma Mawi, included shadowing families undergoing the FGC process to understand the model from beginning to end, and from multiple perspectives. The rationale for this component rested on the relational, collaborative, and integrative nature of the FGC as an intervention that sets it apart from child welfare programs operating nationally and internationally. For Ma Mawi, having research that captured these essential qualities was of extreme value. The Ethics Board requested that in addition to obtaining individual consent from family members and the mandated and non-mandated agency workers with whom I would come in contact during the shadowing process, consent from the board of directors of *every agency* with whom the workers were affiliated was also to be provided. Seeing that families and mentors interact with dozens of agencies in the process of FGC, the request proved impossible to oblige, as it would take several months or years to do so, if at all. While enhanced consent measures may have been intended as protective, especially in respect to Indigenous research, when analyzed in context, the request led to the elimination of what is considered by Ma Mawi as the essence of the program, the relationships. Realizing that counterarguments were not being received favourably and keeping in mind time considerations, Michelle and I made the difficult decision to give up the shadowing of families through the FGC process. Both of us felt the loss of that design element, as it would have helped us better articulate notions of interdependence and integration of services, individuals, and perspectives that are believed to play a critical role in the reunification of families by FGC. We believed such information would have been helpful in arguing for legislation reform that would benefit families with the same profile as those who came to FGC. To make up for this loss, and with Michelle's council, I reconfigured the interview questions with mentors and parents to try to capture what goes on in the FGC process. The elimination of the shadowing was a clear example of how individual liability and individualistic notions of ethics took precedence over the community's aspirations.

The second point of dissonance related to recruitment. The Ethics Board submitted that as the Principal Investigator, I was to refrain from any direct interaction with potential participants prior to and during the recruitment process and was to enlist a

neutral party to carry out this task. The untenability of this requirement was mentioned earlier, when neutrality between researcher and participants was discussed as incompatible in the context of Indigenous research. Given the complicated history of research and Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2010), researcher "neutrality" —if there is such a thing—would likely be equated with surveillance and evoke feelings of mistrust. Trying to achieve a disingenuous neutral stance would lead to reduced or possibly no participation at all, especially given the sensitivity of the topic of research (i.e., child protection and revoking of parental rights). "Neutrality" conflicts with a main tenet of community engagement expected in Indigenous research, where devoted relationships are pre-conditions for interaction and participation. Finally, in such tight-knit community organizations, where all members and families work in collaboration and proximity with each other, neutrality would be impossible to achieve. After extensive arguing against this constraint, the REB conceded, and recruitment was done by FGC mentors who knew the families well, and to whom they would feel most comfortable to disclose when they had no interest in participating.

The third point was the one that generated the most opposition and vigorous debate. The Board required the inclusion in the terms of reference of the research (i.e., Study Details) and consent forms a clause stating that *any information collected in the course of the study could be subpoenaed*. This request was not only misguided from a research perspective but was also threatening to the relationship I had built with the organization and community. In my responses to the Board, I pointed out that unlike in mainstream child welfare interventions, which are based on legalistic action and the assignment of individual blame and responsibility, the FGC approach concentrates on the strengths and resources available within the family and community. I emphasized that the philosophy of the program is truly collaborative and constructive to support families, and much of this collaboration is achieved through the removal of the threat of legal action. It was argued that the very reason the FGC program at Ma Mawi has received such positive attention, and indeed merited careful study, was that it has avoided legal action with its focus on collaboration. Introducing legal concerns to participants would change the very nature of the phenomenon I meant to study, rendering the research useless. I also argued that introducing this legal clause would achieve the very opposite of protecting research participants. Instead, it would be insensitive to participants' circumstances, create needless stress, and introduce doubt

as to how supportive of families and Indigenous ways Ma Mawi as an organization, and FGC as a program, really were. In other words, it could jeopardize the reputation of the program among the community.

Another main and related issue with the subpoena clause was the violation of trust. The REB's request for the inclusion of the clause would fundamentally violate the trust—tâpwe—I developed with the organization and the larger community that the research would operate from a decolonizing philosophy and approach. I argued that placing the organization and parents in the position where they would be vulnerable to legal scrutiny, would mean my research would repeat the very colonial stance I critique and hope to change. In face of the severity of how systems overrepresent Indigenous children in care across the country, abiding to the Board's request, arguably would perpetuate an individualistic stance that has, to my view, contributed to the state of affairs in child welfare. I emphasized that the legal request did not benefit the community served by Ma Mawi or the broader Indigenous community in any way; it only met the liability concerns of the university. My argument was grounded on the fact that such a request would run counter to the responsibilities of research outlined in the OCAP principles and Chapter 9 of the TCPS. These documents stipulate the need for research to be developed *in true partnership with Indigenous communities and with the well-being of Indigenous families and communities in mind*. By my emphasizing the principles of Indigenous ethics, and how they were being violated by the REB's request, the issue was resolved and the research was approved.

The overly legalistic concerns of the board illustrate quite poignantly the power Western universities continue to have over Indigenous and community-based research. Prominent Indigenous ethics scholars, Ermine and colleagues (Ermine et al., 2004) capture this dynamic, which they characterize as the ethical violence suffered by Indigenous peoples within institutions, when they state:

> These [ethical] European systems, rules, and values that make up the Western worldview and are espoused as the only reality in the world lack concepts by which the experiences and reality of other cultures can be justly named, described, and understood. People with other intellectual traditions and knowledge are welcome in this milieu, of course, but their knowledge can only occupy a secondary or marginal position in relation to the West. This is due to the social-systemic structuring of institutions and what is conceived as appropriate knowledge within a colonialistic framework. Therefore, adherence to the structures of knowledge

> production that are complicit in intolerance are not relevant for the pursuit of emancipation. These systems of education will, in effect, prescribe the recreation of the very social conditions that marginalize Indigenous Peoples. (p. 18)

My experience doing this project resonates strongly with the quote above. Approval for the project followed after eight months of intense defense of Indigenous principles of research, and written statements of support from my senior supervisor and former Associate Dean of the Faculty of Education, to Simon Fraser University's Director of the Office of Research Ethics. This experience was extremely telling of the tensions between Western and Indigenous perspectives on research and the power of Western institutions to the realization of decolonizing research in the academy.

This doctoral project was intended to provide stakeholders in child welfare with a multi-perspectival account of FGC and convey a picture of what a communally-focused child protection intervention could entail. It mean to identify key concepts and attitudes in practice and legislation for this interventional approach to be viable and successful, contextualizing familial circumstances that often lead to involvement of families in the child protection system, and learning about the experiences of parents and families prior, during, and after participation in the Family Group Conferencing program at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. To these ends, the project was executed in two phases: in the first phase, mentors were interviewed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the program, their role in it, and the impact of the program on families from their perspective. The interviews were also meant to yield mentors' profiles and the relationships between FGC with families and CFS. In the second phase, the focus was on parents' experiences in the program, how FGC compared to other approaches they may have experienced, and the perceived impact of the program in their lives. Given the exploratory, diverse, and interrelated nature of the objectives of this project, a qualitative methodology was adopted for its ability to accommodate and allow interconnection of the descriptive, pragmatic, historical, narrative, and reflexive data that would follow from the interviews and field observations. To remain consistent with the interrelational and oral nature of Indigenous research methodologies which are typically nested in narrative and dialogical methods (Kovach, 2010), I adopted a conversational style in the interviews. I also strived to get to the participants' meanings and perceptions as the basis for understanding and later analysis (Smith, 2012).

4.2. Participants

In Phase One, five FGC mentors, four females and one male, ranging in age between mid 20's and early 40's were interviewed to learn about the FGC program as a child welfare intervention at Ma Mawi. All had been hired within six to eight months of the interview when the program expansion took place. All mentors, which will be identified by approved pseudonyms, self-identified as Indigenous but only two specified their nations. All also identified as parents and as having ties with Ma Mawi and/or its community prior to being hired as FGC mentors. Their connection to Ma Mawi was reported in various capacities such as personally accessing programs or supportive services (as clients) at the community care site (e.g., after-school youth programs, educational support, meals, food bank, social support), volunteering, and/or working in other programs within Ma Mawi or other partner community organizations with whom Ma Mawi interacts on a regular basis. All mentors expressed great enthusiasm and satisfaction with their time in the FGC program. Personal fulfillment, giving back to their Indigenous brothers and sisters, strengthening community, feeling valued as a team member, and becoming more aware of their Indigenous identity were cited as reasons for their satisfaction.

The issue of identity in how participants are described in this section deserves special mention. While all participants are described as 'Indigenous', most did not identify their nation of origin. This may elicit the notion of a Pan-Indigenous approach, which was most certainly not my intent. During numerous conversations with Michelle (FGC coordinator) prior to the research starting, I learned that as a result of colonization, residential schools, systemic and broad racism, and intergenerational involvement in child welfare, a great proportion of FGC mentors and families had become disconnected from their Indigenous culture and identity, or had never had the opportunity to know it to begin with. Michelle explained that as an Indigenous and traditionally-based program, FGC often represented the gateway to cultural (re)connection, for families and mentors alike. This cultural identity-formation process, which is introduced carefully and gradually by Knowledge Keepers, Ma Mawi staff, and other community members through teachings, ceremonies, and relationship-building, is a delicate one. At the same time it offers new and heartening paths forward in selfhood, it also involves feelings of confusion, shame, and anger for what was lost, and/or feeling like an imposter.

Although, it would have been interesting to learn about participants' reflections on their collective identity identification, my primary concerned was being sensitive to participants' wellbeing. To minimize potential negative impacts, I opted for a broader framing of the question of identity, asking where they were from as opposed to asking about their specific nations of origin. I honoured the self-identifications offered by participants in the manner they were offered. For example, if they identified themselves as Métis at any point during the interview, I present them as Métis. Those who offered their nations of origin, spoke of their heritage in three main ways: to make known they were card-holding members (i.e., had legal Indigenous status), to express pride in their identity as Indigenous Peoples, and/or to having closer identification with a particular set of teachings, ceremonies, creation stories if their parents or extended family came from different nations or groups (e.g., Métis & Cree). Those who did not offer their nation of origin, I present them as Indigenous.

Alex: In his mid 20's, Alex was the only male mentor in the FGC team. Alex identified as Métis. He had been working with Ma Mawi since 2010; first, in the youth programs with immigrant, refugee, and Indigenous children and youth and, subsequently, in the community helper program at different community care sites. At FGC, he was working mainly with families who had come to the program through the community care site referrals. Alex shared he came from a tight-knit two-parent family and knew from the time he was a teenager, he wanted to be in the helping profession. He was recruited by Michelle to interview for the FGC mentor position at a time when his position as community helper was uncertain, following a fire that destroyed the community care site building where he was based.

Anne: In her mid 20's, Anne had been with Ma Mawi for approximately two years. Working primarily with the supervised adolescent parent residential program for pregnant girls (14-17 years old) in care, which is aimed at providing young mothers with enough education and support to prevent their babies from being apprehended, Anne felt joining the FGC team was a great fit and smooth transition. Given her experience with many of the residents and issues related to teen pregnancy, she felt her mentorship gained strength and "heart" in FGC.

Ella: In her late 20's to early 30's, Ella joined the FGC team after working as a resource worker for a community organization in Winnipeg's inner city for seven years. At that

organization, Ella worked primarily with pregnant girls and babies, who may or may not have had CFS involvement. At FGC, Ella was working primarily with referrals from mandated agencies with children under 10 years old who came to Ma Mawi's short-term foster care program. Ella grew up in Winnipeg's inner city, where she herself experienced a challenging childhood, but never experienced separation from her family of origin.

Lilly: In her late 30's to early 40's, Lilly was the mentor with the longest ties to Ma Mawi. Prior to joining Ma Mawi in a professional capacity, she had received personal and family support services from Ma Mawi, such as after-school and youth programs, food bank, hot meals and transit passes for many years. Lilly identified as originating from Cree and Afro-Canadian ancestry. As an FGC mentor, Lilly was working with referrals from various mandated and non-mandated agencies. She was candid about her past struggles with substance misuse and credited the support she received from workers and volunteers from Ma Mawi for becoming and remaining sober after a 13-year addiction to crack cocaine and work in the sex exploitation industry. Identifying significant historical trauma related to residential schools in her family, she described working as an FGC mentor, as coming full circle, where she could now support families who much like her, experienced severe trauma and poverty.

Melissa: In her early to mid 40's, Melissa joined the FGC team after having worked at Ma Mawi for approximately two years as a youth mentor in a residential program for girls in their late teens (16-17) with complex needs. At FGC, Melissa was working with referrals from various mandated and non-mandated agencies. Melissa shared she always hoped to be in the field of social work but was unable to attend to university. Melissa reported having experienced significant trauma as a child as a consequence of family's history of residential schools. She was caring for an aging parent and recently obtained custody of her grandchild who had been placed in care.

In Phase Two, eight parents—here defined broadly, as any member of the child's kin (i.e., parents/step-parents, grandparents/step-grandparents) occupying a parental role for the child/ren in FGC—participated in the research. Five females (four mothers and one grandmother) and three males (fathers), were interviewed to share their experiences in the FGC program at Ma Mawi and child welfare system in MB. Parents

ranged in age between their late teens to late 40's. All identified as Indigenous and some named their specific nations.

Diana and Leo: In their late teens-early 20's, Diane and Leo were from two Anishinaabe First Nations. Diane was from a community three hours north of Winnipeg and Leo from a community one-hour south. Both grew up in Winnipeg, however. At the time of the interview, the couple had two toddler children with whom they were in the process of becoming reunified. Coming into the interview, both Leo and Diana were quite pleasant but visibly hesitant. As the questions progressed and touched on aspects of personal life and CFS, I could sense their discomfort. Leo in particular, offered increasingly shorter answers. Picking up on Leo's discomfort, Diana's answers also began to decrease in length and content. Sensing their unease and striving to maintain a positive research experience, I focused instead on FGC, which helped improve some of the tension. Diana and Leo were referred to FGC at Ma Mawi by their CFS case worker. After a month in the program, they had a successful family group conference. They were enjoying unsupervised visits with their children five days a week and their Welcome Home ceremony was imminent. Their conference lasted three hours, and nine supports were in attendance. Seven of the nine supports were from Leo's side of the family, including a sister with whom he had become estranged. While Diana reported not having anyone with whom she connected growing up, her mom and sister were in attendance in the family conference.

Erika and Hector: In their early-mid 30's, Erika and Hector were both from Manitoban communities. At the time of the interview, they were in the midst of legal proceedings. The interview revolved mainly about their experiences with CFS and how hopeful they were since they joined the FGC program. Erika and Hector had three children in care. Their oldest children were apprehended approximately 10 years prior to the time of the interview due to a non-child welfare related conviction and incarceration period. Upon completion of their respective sentences, both Erika and Hector spent over three years attending programs, obtaining certifications and assessments to become reunified with their children, to no avail. A year later, they had their third child, who was apprehended immediately at birth. A short period after joining the FGC program, they had a successful family group conference. Family, friends, and knowledge keepers with whom they had connected over the years were present to express their support. Reunification was granted, but a few weeks later, the CFS case worker changed his expression of support.

FGC helped them connect with legal counsel. Their lawyer indicated they had good reason to be confident that the FGC reunification process would resume as soon as they had their day in court.

Julia and Victor: At the time of the interviews, Julia was in her late teens and Victor in his early 20's. Julia was born and grew up in Winnipeg. At age 12, she went into CFS care, where she remained until the age of 18. While in care, Julia was placed in 65 foster care and group homes. Victor was born in a Manitoban Dakota First Nation close to the Saskatchewan border. He lived with his family in his community until he was apprehended and placed in CFS care at the age of seven. Shortly after, he was sent to Vancouver, BC and placed under the care of the MCFD for approximately three years. When he returned, he remained in CFS care, in group homes for most of his youth and under an independent living arrangement shortly before aging out of care at 18. At the time of the interview, the couple had two daughters and Julia was pregnant with their third child. The family self-referred to FGC program at Ma Mawi following the suggestion of a partner community organization worker. After three months in the FGC program, they had successfully made a case to become reunified with their youngest daughter. Their family group conference lasted five hours, and approximately 20 supports were in attendance, from both sides of the family, and several partner organizations. At the time of the interview, Victor and Julia were also in the preparation stage of FGC for their oldest daughter, who required special needs due to a genetic disorder and heart condition. Victor and Julia went into the interviews with great disposition and were very forthcoming about their lives and their experiences in the child welfare system, both as children in care and as parents seeking reunification with their own children.

Sam: Sam was the youngest of the participating parents, just about to become of legal age. Sam was born in a Cree First Nation of Alberta but spent most of her childhood years in a Salteaux First Nation community in Alberta, before moving to Winnipeg. Sam's mother, who worked at Ma Mawi, supported Sam's self-referral to the FGC program while pregnant to prevent the baby from being apprehended and placed into CFS care at birth. Sam and her mother had close ties to Ma Mawi. CFS had contacted Sam on several occasions during her pregnancy. On the day the baby was born, a CFS worker showed up at the hospital suggesting the baby might be apprehended. Ma Mawi acted fast and Sam's family group conference was done a week after the baby was taken home. Sam's grandmother and aunt were flown into Winnipeg from out of province

to participate. Sam's father and paternal side of the family with whom she had not been in communication for years, were also in attendance. Seeing that the FGC was done as a preventative measure, Sam's case was closed on the day of the family conference. Nevertheless, Sam continued to receive support to secure social housing and move in on her own and to return to school to finish her 8th grade at a school that offered daycare.

Sandra: In her mid to late 40's, Sandra is Julia's mother and the link between Julia and Victor and Ma Mawi. Sandra was encouraged to inquire about the FGC at Ma Mawi while attending a program at a partner Indigenous community organization. Sandra played a decisive supportive role in Julia and Victor's reunification case being accepted by CFS. Sandra identified as Indigenous but did not specify her nation. She grew up in Alberta with and around traditional knowledge; going to powwows, fancy dancing, and being crowned Miss Congeniality at a Native Princess Pageant. Her father was in and out of the family's life, eventually leaving them. Her mother struggled with alcohol misuse, which led to her and her siblings being placed in foster care for a period of time. In her teenage years, Sandra moved to Winnipeg with her mother and siblings, but the transition was neither smooth nor positive. Her siblings also began to struggle with addictions causing her to isolate herself from them to raise her three children. Isolation translated into a restrict social and emotional support network and bouts of depression. Sandra was candid about her challenges and saw FGC as a turning point in the family's lives.

4.3. Measures & Design

Mentors and parents participated in semi-structured interviews. To reflect the commitment to community-based and Indigenous ways of doing research (Kovach, 2010), the interview protocols were developed in conjunction with Ma Mawi's coordinator, Michelle, who participated as a co-researcher. For mentors, the interview (Appendix A) was designed to obtain the information necessary to: a) articulate the rationale of FGC as an intervention, b) learn the sequencing of the intervention process, c) identify and explore the range of services made available to families, d) acquire a sense of the beliefs and attitudes that permeate the mentors' relationships with families and other mandated and non-mandated service providers, and e) get a sense of mentors' perceptions of the impact on families as a result of participation in the FGC

program. The first phase was also the necessary informational base to the second phase of the study, parental interviews. For parents, the interview (Appendix B) was designed to learn about their experiences in FGC to: a) consider their strengths and those of their families and communities; b) learn their challenges and the circumstances of involvement in child welfare; c) obtain their perspective on the program as an interventional practice; d) situate the families' involvement in child welfare in the larger socio-economical and historical context; e) explore the differences and similarities they experience in FGC compared to mainstream interventions; and f) learn about their hopes for the future following participation in FGC. The parental interviews were split into three different sections; past, present, and future, wherein parents could share as little or as much as they felt comfortable. *The past* was intended to explore the historical, socio-cultural, and familial context of the families' involvement with the child protection system. This contextual approach was critical to situate families' current challenges and strengths in their broader overarching histories. Given the prevalence of the trauma caused by the Residential Schools, the Sixties' Scoop, the multi-generational nature by which child welfare over-represents Indigenous children, and the systemic discrimination Indigenous peoples face (TRC, 2015), it was of great importance to attempt to obtain an understanding of how parents may have built their life narratives, transitioned into parenthood, and started to experience difficulties in the broader historical context of colonization, assimilation, and discrimination. *The present*, explored the parents' overall experience with the FGC program, in terms of services, relationships, the supports they were receiving, and how they saw the program and their role in it. It also explored the relationships they were forging and/or rebuilding in the FGC process, and their support network (e.g., families, service providers, community). To end the interview on a forward-looking note, *'the future'* addressed parents' aspirations for their own, and their children's futures. It explored their outlook caring for and participating in family life after the program; how connected they felt to support systems and their communities; and how they felt about and envisioned their futures.

4.4. Procedures

Recruitment

All eight mentors who met the eligibility criterion (i.e., complete formal FGC Mentorship Training) were invited to participate. They were contacted by email after having been

informed by the program coordinator that the research would get under way. All mentors were aware of the research project many months prior to this communication, as the project was announced on several occasions, including in two formal presentations to the staff and professional community where mentors were in attendance. The invitational email contained a copy of the information letter and consent form. The document detailed who I was, the objectives of the research, and what I was hoping to learn. The letter reassured prospective participants that the focus was not to assess them or their professional performance. Rather, it was meant to obtain information necessary to understand Ma Mawi's FGC program and rationale for interventions. It also reassured mentors that participation was optional and would have no bearing on their employment status or advancement. Moreover, it emphasized participation was strictly confidential and information would be anonymized as much as possible. The invitation letter explained there were no direct benefits to participating in the research and risks existed, namely, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed—particularly to those who knew them well in the organization—and experiencing distress in recalling sensitive matters during the interviews. Supports were made available, in case distress did occur.

All parents who met the eligibility criteria were invited to participate in the second phase of the study. Participants were selected on the basis of their willingness and ability to share their experiences. It was common knowledge in FGC that having "outsiders", particularly non-Indigenous individuals, coming into the organization and asking parents personal questions about their lives, children, and CFS, while they were feeling overwhelmed, could potentially harm the FGC process. Given parents' frayed relationships with CFS, parents could interpret the outsider as having connection to CFS and looking for information to use against them in court, which in turn could jeopardize the trust FGC mentors forged with families. Moreover, in recounting things about their lives, parents could be triggered in ways that negatively impact the relationships and dynamics that were being worked with the mentors in the process of FGC. In that mentors were the ones who knew the families the most, it was established that mentors were in a better position to assess parents who should not be invited due to situational challenges (e.g., difficulties with legal proceedings, receiving mental health services) and those who were less likely to be impacted in a negative way, and therefore invited to participate. As discussed in the Chapter 4.1 and 4.3., it was important that parents felt there was someone from the community who they trusted, who they could direct

questions about me as a researcher, the research, and also felt comfortable declining participation. Mentors spoke with eligible parents about the research in April of 2018. Many of these parents had seen me at the Bear Den—the meeting space for families and workers participating in the FGC program—in the months leading up to this communication. Those who demonstrated interest in participating were given a contact information release form, to indicate how they would like to be contacted (i.e., phone, text message, email, in person) by me to arrange a day and time for an in-person meeting to discuss the research in more detail. It was stressed to parents that participation was voluntary, confidential, and that there would be no benefits or penalties in the status of the case or the services they received through Ma Mawi for their participation. It was emphasized that the focus of the interviews was not the category of involvement in child welfare (e.g., neglect, physical abuse) nor the details of their case, but rather to learn about the journey that led to their enrollment in the FGC program, their experiences in it, and in relationship to CFS. Potential participants also received reassurance that their confidentiality would be protected, through the assignment of pseudonyms, removal, and/or anonymization of any identifying information shared during the research. An honorarium of $50 and bus fares to and from Ma Mawi were offered as a token of appreciation for their time and to reduce barriers to participation, respectively.

For the mentors and parents who reached out with interest in participating, mutually convenient days and times were arranged at Ma Mawi's downtown building that houses the FGC program. At the beginning of the meetings, information about the study and its objectives were reiterated. Great emphasis was again placed on participation being voluntary, confidential, and steps that would be taken towards anonymization without compromising meaning. Once signed consent was obtained and the recruitment targets met for both groups, recruitment ceased. The target number for mentor recruitment was set at four to five mentors (out of the eight-mentor staff). That number was believed to provide enough breadth of information and overlap to arrive at a clear description of the FGC program and the role of mentors in it. The target number for parents was set at eight to ten parents. That number was believed to be appropriate to convey rich detailed accounts and to capture binding threads across families' stories and contexts.

Interviews

Mentor interviews took place between April and May of 2018. Interviews ranged between 40 and 120 minutes in length. Parent interviews took place between May and November of 2018, with a break period during the summer, between June and September. Interviews ranged between 20 and 140 minutes in length.

All but one of the interviews took place at a private meeting room at Ma Mawi's inner city office where FGC is housed. The exception was a second interview with a set of parents—Julia and Victor—who asked that the meeting be done in their apartment. They wished to show me how they were preparing their new apartment to welcome home their youngest daughter.

Following Plains Indigenous protocol, I offered participants a pouch of tobacco and a yard of ceremonial cloth to start the interviews in a respectful way (Hart, 2009). I assured participants that that there were no right or wrong answers, that I was interested in their perspectives. The interviews followed the semi-structure protocol and a conversational style. The flexibility of the protocol and the conversational style allowed participants to feel free to share (or not share) what they felt comfortable with and take the conversation whichever direction they saw fit. I listened attentively, asked additional questions directly related to the responses to seek clarification and/or depth and remained sensitive to the participants' cues of comfort and fatigue levels. On occasion, and when appropriate I also shared some information about myself and my perspectives, as expected in a conversational, keeping in mind not to influence how the interviewees would answer questions.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and, following research protocols stipulated by OCAP (FNGC, 2014), participants received a copy of their interview transcripts for review and approval, in the event they wished to omit anything or express something differently. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw their participation and have their data withdrawn at any time, up until this document was submitted to Simon Fraser University for committee review.

4.5. Analysis

Before, during, and after the interviews, I was conscious of my positioning. I was mindful of the privileged place I occupy as a white woman, with a theoretical understanding of child welfare, asking deeply personal questions in the pursuit of an advanced degree, in a historical research context that almost invariably has misrepresented and not benefited Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2010; Little Bear, 200; Smith, 2012; TRC, 2015; Wilson, 2003, 2008). Although measures were taken to address power differentials and foster a collaborative and sensitive research atmosphere (e.g., co-creation of interview protocol, relationship building, adoption of an Indigenous conversational approach to research), socio-cultural and historical power structures cannot be easily equalized. They can, at best, be recognized and considered mindfully and respectfully. The data analysis followed of the guidelines of the OCAP, including review of transcripts and opportunities for individual and group feedback prior to publication (OCAP, 2014).

4.5.1. Phase One Analysis

In Phase One, data obtained from mentors' interview was intended to create a more descriptive—rather than interpretative—account of the program. To that end, the data was thematic analyzed using coding techniques offered by Saldãna (2013) to summarize and condense the data into a clear and consistent description of the FGC program. The data was first coded into over 90 preliminary codes. These codes held units of meaning referring to a variety of topics such as practices and roles, personal reflections and feelings, social and personal relationships, people and places, organizations, aspects of culture, services and resources, ideas and orientations, situations and life events. The codes were then then grouped into four main categories (i.e., program, relationships, resources, context) and approximately 40 sub-categories, which can be found in Appendix C. Finally, the subcategories were synthesized into four themes that conveyed important connections among categories and subcategories that were most relevant for the purposes of this dissertation. The themes and their associated discussions will be offered in Chapter 5. As stipulated by the OCAP, mentors had the opportunity to review their transcripts for changes and/or omissions. The preliminary analysis was presented to them through an hour-long presentation at Ma Mawi. Participating and other FGC mentors in attendance shared their thoughts and asked questions about the preliminary

findings. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and helpful in guiding the areas of most significance to them as service providers and members of the Ma Mawi community. These were taken into account in the final analysis presented in Chapter 5.

4.5.2. Phase Two Analysis

Methodologically speaking, the most intricate part of this doctoral project was determining how to treat the data in Phase Two, in a way that properly captured and expressed the experience of parents in the FGC program and the child welfare system. Moreover, expressing the sociocultural and historically situated, interconnected, and complex nature of the relationships and circumstances that parents perceived as meaningful to make sense of their experience with CFS, and the FGC program, was a tall order. To prevent against fragmentation or decontextualization of the stories, I decided against a thematic qualitative analysis in favour of a more narrative approach. Although the thematic grouping that organically arose from listening the interviews over and over was useful to guide the narrative and the points that deserved most attention, the flow and interrelatedness of the stories were compromised in process of attempting to codify the interview data. After careful consultation with my senior supervisor, Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors and colleagues, Indigenous scholarly literature, and teachings from Knowledge Keepers, I opted for a *storytelling* as a method to present the perspectives of parents on FGC. Storytelling allowed for the alignment of multiple story lines within a single narrative and the "in and out, back and forth, and up and down pathways" (Kovach, 2010, p. 45) that connect the terrain of child welfare, particularly for Indigenous families. As Kovach observes, understanding of the ebb and flow of the relationships and interactions within a wholistic context, is the way to understand the human experience. Maōri theorist, Linda Tihuwai Smith (2012) furthers the relevance of this methodological approach, drawing from like-minded theorists:

> Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place […] As a research tool, Russell Bishop suggests, story telling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control. Margaret Kovach argues that stories are connected to knowing, that the story is both method and meaning, and is a central feature of Indigenous research knowledge and methodologies. (pp. 145-146)

Making storytelling the medium for presenting parents' experiences was daunting. It brought forth a number of questions. To name some, I pondered over how to tell the story of each individual participant in its own right, within the limits of a dissertation format; who the main character(s) would be; how to properly balance individual, spiritual, generational, historical, cultural, and social aspects of the stories; how to start and end the stories; whether the stories should have a chronological or event focused flow. To those who followed my journey in writing this dissertation, they will know these questions challenged me for long months, to the point of paralysis. As someone who does not think of themselves as a 'natural storyteller', I worried about not being able to tell the parents' stories compellingly, failing to make the families' stories justice, and inadvertently imposing my own meanings onto their stories.

After much reflection, I found direction in the work of Stó:lõ First Nation scholar Joanne Archibald (2008), where she speaks of wrestling with "keeping the spirit of story alive" (p.147) from oral storytelling to the printed page. She offers a way forward through the establishment of relationships with Elders, hearing from them, and reverencing stories. Following Archibald's guidance, I went back to the notes of the teachings I had received from a Knowledge Keeper—herein identified by the pseudonym Charlie—who works closely with the FGC families at Ma Mawi. As I reflected on our conversations and my notes, I found my starting point in the teaching of *aakwa'ode'ewin and zaagi'idiwin*, bravery and love, respectively (Charlie, personal communication, November 30, 2018). With his permission, I share these teachings in this chapter. The teachings, offered in the context of FGC, help to clarify the interpretations that will follow and add another layer of understanding on the perspective and experience of parents in the FGC program.

A major limitation of adopting storytelling as a method in a dissertation format is offering a narrative that accommodates different story lines in a cogent way. I came to the conclusion that concentrating on the stories of a single family unit, that of Julia (mother), Victor (father), Cindy, Summer, and Baby (the couple's two daughters and unborn child), Sandra (maternal grandmother) would be the best way to render the experience of parents in the FGC program and the circumstances that led to their enrollment. The decision to concentrate on the story of a single family to which the experiences of the other participants connected, was based on multiple factors. First, the similarities in circumstances and experiences of the other participating parents were very

closely aligned with Victor and Julia's. Therefore, essential aspects of the stories of all participants were properly represented. Second, all three members of the focus family and their mentor provided richly detailed interviews. The richness of the details helped weave a narrative that was cohesive, informative, and powerful. Third, and relatedly, the participants offered their own perspective on shared life events that related to CFS involvement. Having the same events seen from different vantage points allowed for a more nuanced and expansive understanding. These direct and indirect perspectives provided a well-rounded context that was particularly telling, especially in regard to the involvement of the child welfare system in families' lives, its impact on families, and what the FGC program represents in such context. Fourth, having the ability to connect relevant snapshots of stories of four generations from a single family brought families and communities into view, yielding a trajectorial account, seldom available in the literature and/or considered by those making decisions about children in care. Fifth, the story of Julia, Victor, and Sandra's families broached the larger picture of historical, socio-cultural implications of colonialism and how it has impacted Indigenous families and communities for centuries.

Participating families had the opportunity to provide feedback on the preliminary analysis in a group context in April 2019. Although not all participating parents were in attendance, those who were, and other parents enrolled in FGC were encouraged to share their thoughts and ask questions. The preliminary analysis spoke about five main areas: 1) how parents/families saw the FGC program as a) a gateway to understanding their situation, their options, and historical familial context of colonization, b) a place of connection to support of many different kinds and services, and c) empowerment to regain control of their lives, rebuild relationships, and move forward with their plans and aspirations; 2) the frayed relations between families and CFS; 3) the impact of CFS involvement in parents'/families' lives; 4) the context of poverty and disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and CFS involvement in families' lives, and 5) importance of (re)connecting to traditional familial and community roles. The feedback received from parents and other community members served to highlight aspects of most relevance for families that should be captured in the narrative of the focus family offered in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5.

Findings and Discussion: Mentors' Perspectives on Family Group Conferencing

In this chapter, I start to present and discuss the findings of the research. Chapter 5 will offer the perspective of parents on FGC and Chapter 6 of families. Acknowledging Māori scholar, Miriama Scott (2017) when she states that "the focus on written language in society today so often subsumes the voice and verbal expression into written form, and as a consequence the potency, colour and integrity of voice is diminished" (p.18) and keeping in mind that one of the objectives of this research was to afford a space where Indigenous perspectives and voices could be heard in their own right and own words, quotes are amply provided to diminish mediation. The excerpts go beyond the sharing of information, they reveal participants' psycho-emotional states and beliefs about events, practices, people with whom they interact, and themselves. This is significant to help illustrate what the program is trying to achieve, why, and how.

Since the FGC program is facilitated, implemented, and monitored by mentors at Ma Mawi, their perspectives were central to understanding FGC as an interventional child welfare practice. The interview protocol was designed to obtain a mostly descriptive account of the program. I hoped to capture the following: a) the general trajectory of the program, from the first point of access to graduation; b) the roles and profiles of mentors in the FGC program; c) the relational dynamic mentors have with families, mandated agencies (e.g., Child and Family Services agencies), and non-mandated community agencies; d) the main challenges families encounter that may contribute to the involvement of child welfare in their lives; e) the quality of the experience families have in FGC; and f) a general sense of comparisons and contrasts of FGC with mainstream interventions. This information was grouped into four main areas that convey the depth and scope of FGC beyond what was presented in Chapter 3, namely: 1) enrolment into the FGC program; 2) relationships among parents, CFS case workers, and FGC mentors; 3) challenges; and 4) (re)connection to family, community, and traditional culture.

5.1.1. Enrolment into the FGC Program

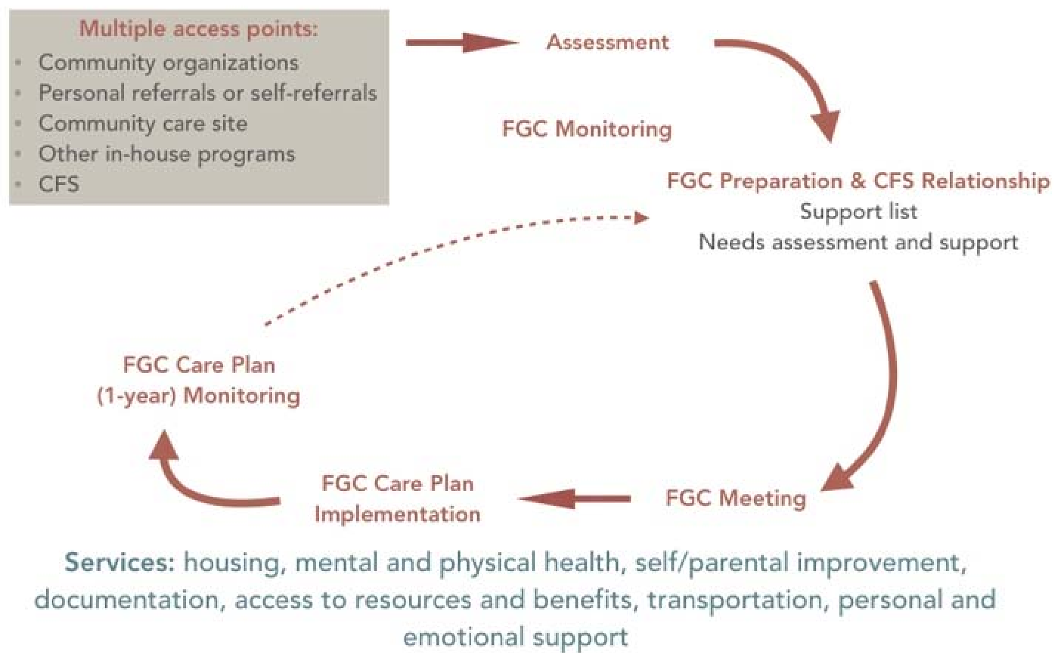


Figure 4. Summary of the FGC process

Figure 4 above provides a summary of the FGC program process. Concerning access, mentors explained that parents whose children had been or were at risk of being apprehended by CFS, were either agency-referred or self-referred to the program. Those agency-referred to the program came mostly via CFS but referrals from community non-mandated organizations and other Ma Mawi in-house programs were also common. Consistent with Ma Mawi's FGC September-2018 report[8], most families with whom mentors were working at the time of the interviews, had come from CFS' Southern authority referrals, followed by the Northern, General, and Métis authorities (see list of authorities and corresponding agencies in Table 2). In some cases, more than one agency was involved in a family's case, meaning that children from the same family were being cared for by different agencies and placed in different foster homes in different regions of the city and beyond. Families who self-referred to the program had

[8] FGC's September-2018 report yielded that on that month 77 of the referrals had come from CFS' Southern Authority, 18 by the Northern Authority, 13 from the General Authority, 10 from the Métis Authority and nine families had self-referred to the program to avoid child apprehension (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, 2018).

accessed the program by either contacting the FGC team directly (in-person at the downtown office, over the phone or email) or by visiting one of Ma Mawi's community care sites where other programs administered by Ma Mawi are offered (e.g., meals, food-bank, child and youth programs, parent programs). The origin of the referrals did not change the progression of the program. Descriptions of the FGC process with "their families"—the way mentors affectionately referred to the families they assist—were highly consistent. Mentors reported the FGC process starts with a formal intake meeting. During this meeting, mentors aim to: learn as much as possible about the case from the families' perspective; inform the families about FGC and its process; and if the family is interested in participating, obtain consent to comply with legal requirements that enables Ma Mawi and FGC mentors to represent families with CFS.

Table 2. Manitoba's Child and Family Services is divided into four child and family services authorities, all of which are governed by The Child and Family Services Authorities Act.

First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

- Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba
- Cree Nation Child & Family Caring Agency
- Island Lake First Nations Family Services
- Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency
- Nikan Awasisak Agency Inc.
- Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family and Community Wellness Centre
- Opaskwayak Cree Nation Child & Family Services

Southern First Nations Network of Care

- Animikii Ozoson Child and Family Services
- The Anishinaabe Child & Family Service Agency
- Child and Family All Nations Coordinated Response Network
- Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services
- Intertribal Child and Family Services
- Peguis Child and Family Services
- Sandy Bay Child and Family Services
- Sagkeeng Child and Family Services
- Southeast Child and Family Services
- West Region Child and Family Services

Métis Child and Family Services

- Métis Child, Family and Community Services Agency
- Michif Child and Family Services Agency

General Child and Family Services Authority

- Child and Family Services of Central Manitoba Inc.
- Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba
- Jewish Child and Family Services
- Rural and Northern Services – Eastman
- Rural and Northern Services – Interlake
- Rural and Northern Services – Parkland
- Rural and Northern Services – Northern
- Winnipeg Child and Family Services
- Manitoba Foster Family Network.

Information, such as when children were apprehended and why, whether apprehension had happened once or multiple times, which agency carried out the apprehension(s), where children were placed, and the relationship parents had with case workers and agencies, was cited as being of great importance to advance the possibility of FGC for families. Also important at intake, was to learn about the circumstances of parents that may have contributed to involvement with CFS. Mentors noted that parents often hesitated to readily disclose such information at the start of the intake meeting. Information would only be freely shared once mentors clarified that Ma Mawi and the FGC program worked separately from CFS, and that FGC mentors were not CFS social workers. Mentors observed that most parents with whom they worked, had been referred to FGC by mandated agencies and therefore, would come into the first meeting with a great deal of anxiety. Mentors attributed parents' anxiety and withholding of information, to the deep-seated distrust and animosity families held towards CFS following the opening of the child welfare case. Such strain was not surprising seeing that CFS workers are the ones who execute the child apprehension orders that remove children from parents' homes, and often, from their lives. The frayed relationship between CFS and Indigenous families is notoriously grim (Bennet, 2008). Parents' lack of trust and suspicion was also a source of anxiety for mentors at intake meetings. Mentors disclosed feeling worried over being perceived by families as someone who would disrupt their family life. Mentors emphasized that establishing rapport with families would only occur when parents understood that FGC is independent from CFS and that Ma Mawi is an Indigenous organization determined to return Indigenous children home. The emotionally vulnerable space mentors and families navigate at these first encounters and the fractured relationship between families and CFS workers was expressed when mentors stated:

> It is overwhelming to them [parents] specially, even asking for help. There's a lot of us out there who don't like asking for help with certain things, I imagine that can be very, very intimidating. And just mentioning to them that we are not CFS, we are not going to be reporting on them [helps] … because unfortunately, high percentages of the families that come here have had very negative experiences with social workers. (Alex, Mentor)

> I always feel… I don't want to say nervous because… I don't know if it is nervous that I feel… I think the only thing that ever goes through my mind is how am I going to get them [parents] to talk to me without them…[disengaging] because everybody's fear is social workers. Nobody wants to talk to social workers—so I want to come off *not as a social worker, so that they can trust me* [emphasis originally added] […] I just make them feel very comfortable. I think I ease their mind right away and tell them that whatever they share with me stays with me, unless of course to keep them safe or the children safe, then naturally I would have to say something. But other than that, "whatever you say will stay between us". They tend to share a lot with me, but not everyone wants everybody else to know what they are going through. (Melissa, Mentor)

All mentors spoke about their concern and efforts to provide families with a positive experience at the intake. They recognized that if parents did not feel confident or comfortable, one less Indigenous child would return home.

At intake meetings, mentors were also tasked with explaining to parents: 1) the family reunification goals and how broadly family was defined (e.g., grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins who can look after the child); 2) steps of the program and the support made available to families through FGC; and 3) the role of parents, families, mentors, and CFS in the process of bringing children in care back home. Melissa noted that once parents understood what FGC meant and how it would be done, it was received as a breath of fresh air, and as the FGC plan progressed, and trust developed, excitement increased with every successful step toward reunification. In her words:

> [Parents] are usually quite confused…they say "ok, what do we do? What is FGC?" and we say, well, "this where you guys are now going to come up and decide on the care plan that is going to eventually replace the agency's care plan". […] [I tell them that] the family will stay in a room for however long it takes to come up with that plan and they'll have to decide, *all of them together* [emphasis originally added], to make the decision of who is going to take care of the kids. […] We cover their [lost] wages, their way in [transportation], we provide daycare, services for the family and, their meals… we provide anything, whatever they want to eat, they choose, and we provide it. *They get so excited!* [emphasis originally added] […]

> I've had one woman say to me: "You are so real. I feel that when you talk to me, I feel the truth. You're not sitting here lying to me, you care, and you want me to get my kids back. You want to help me, and I feel that just by listening you talk."

From a legal standpoint, two conditions have to be met for enrollment in the FGC program. The first is formal signed consent from the family for the FGC mentor/ Ma Mawi to advocate on the family's behalf with CFS. The second is for the family's CFS case worker to agree to FGC as the interventional plan. As alluded to previously, obtaining parental consent was not a concern once parents grasped the reunification objectives and the supportive attitude of the program. Mentors indicated that by the end of the intake meetings, parents were willing and encouraged by the prospects of FGC. Most cases of parents choosing to not participate in FGC typically happened later on in the process, when parents struggled to carry out the steps required of them to make reunification possible (e.g., not going into treatment for substance misuse, staying in an abusive relationship). In such cases, either the FGC plan had to be re-done to find another family member with whom the child could be reunified, or the case was transitioned back to CFS.

FGC mentors expounded that formal consent enabled them to act on behalf of the family with CFS. Although mentors do not have access to the families' CFS files, some information is typically shared by the CFS case workers with the FGC mentors at their first contact. This can include information on the legal standing of the case, the declared objective of care, as well as some details about the apprehension, the parents' or family's perceived challenges and strengths, and past involvement with child welfare and other systems (e.g., justice, health care) that may be impediments to reunification. Mentors observed that discrepancies between the parents' and the agencies' accounts of the case were common, which made navigating the relationship between CFS and families challenging at times.

The second legal condition for parents' enrollment in FGC was for the CFS case workers to agree to FGC as the intervention, meaning CFS remains a gatekeeper for Indigenous approaches to child welfare. Mentors noted that agreement to FGC was made difficult by the way FGC conflicted with CFS's operations. Notably, mentors mentioned working outside regular office hours and days (i.e., evenings, weekends) and being out of the office for prolonged amounts of time while the family conferences were

taking place. Mentors also indicated willingness of the case workers and their agencies to legally accept family reunification as the main objective of care, as opposed to foster care, was a hurdle as it involved legal reviews, and increased paperwork. Lastly, and most importantly, mentors spoke about the commitment of the case workers to assume a position that aligns with FGC. Aspects such as sustained communication, fostering a strengths-based, collaborative and supportive stance towards families, and interest in learning about FGC and its philosophy were some of the main challenges mentors reported encountering while working (or trying to work) with CFS workers and agencies.

In regard to difficulties with receiving support from CFS case workers, Lilly illustrated the mixed receptions case workers expressed when she reached out to them about two children from the same family, being cared for by the same agency:

> With one of my families, I had one of the children found out that he has a sibling in a foster home out of the city. They are in the same agency but with two workers, because one deals with the rural area, and the other deals with the city. […] The worker I was working with seemed … [facial expression of disapproval], so I reached out to the sibling's worker […] and she was onboard, even though I wasn't initially working with her. [The sibling's worker] reached out to the [initially non-supportive] worker and she is just getting onboard now.

Alex and Melissa corroborated the ambivalence with which FGC is met by CFS agencies and workers:

> It depends on the social worker and the agency. Right now, I know FGC has a very good relationship with Southeast CFS, which is one of the bigger agencies and it's definitely a work in progress, I'd say. One example is a social worker who just flat out said "no" to working with FGC, suggesting that the mom needed to get a lawyer, and that was as far as it went. To try and resolve the situation, you need to reach out to the Northern or Southern authorities. I did file a grievance with them, but I didn't hear anything. (Alex, Mentor)
>
> One family I'm working with right now, the social worker was the one who actually advocated for it [FGC] and brought the young woman [mother] here, because she thought that she would benefit from FGC. So, we do have some [CFS] agencies that are onboard and some that are not. I guess they just need to be more educated about the program, which is what the FGC's coordinator does. She goes out and she gives workshops and explains FGC, so we are getting there. (Melissa, Mentor)

Mentors attributed most of the resistance to FGC to a lack of understanding about the program. Alex noted that when CFS case workers learned more deeply about the

program and its potential, a great percentage would lean towards supporting FGC and seeing Ma Mawi as a powerful ally in child welfare

> They [CFS workers] don't know: "why would I want to take part in this" when they don't understand exactly what we are trying to do […] But I had the chance to meet with the handful of social workers and all went really well. People just come from different walks of life and we're all trying to do the same things, trying to work with the same families. (Alex, Mentor)

> All the workers so far that I'm dealing with get along pretty good; we keep in communication with each other daily; we send emails often back-and-forth. […] Sometimes we are not sure the families are being fully honest with us. There is one family that I have that […] probably because of the issues of alcohol that they are fighting right now, if we don't feel that we are getting 100% of the truth, we will call for a meeting with a social worker and the family and hash it all out right there. We have actually had to do that with one of my families, because I didn't feel I was getting the truth from her and the social worker was feeling the same way. When we all got together and laid everything on the table, you could see the relief of the social worker, for her to know that we are at the same place. Sometimes we feel that moms need a little bit more support in getting their kids [back]. Sometimes we have to put parents on the back burner and look at grandma instead because moms may not be ready yet. (Melissa, Mentor)

Mentors hoped that when agencies and social workers learned more about the FGC process, they would embrace FGC. Part of the difficulty social workers had with FGC, stemmed from the understanding (as discussed in Chapter 1) that the preservation of families is in competition with the protection of children. To that point, Alex remarked:

> [W]hen we are engaging with the social workers, for reunification of the children [with their families], it's not like we are jumping there and forcing it. *We are still looking out for the children* [emphasis originally added], and the family. At the end of the day, you want children to be going to a safe environment. […] Kids are never going home to an unsafe place. And that's another thing that I'm hoping, that this message will get across.

Melissa built on the same point, observing that reunification was not about removing children from foster care and placing them back with their parents or families of origin without careful consideration of the safety of the child. It was about granting families the possibility to come to solutions that will provide continuity in the child's life and circle:

> [Some parents] want to place the blame in somebody and they don't want to face the fact that: "hey, I'm the reason why my kids are in care". They want to blame the agency for why their kids are in care. So, we also have to [ask]… "can you please explain to me what happened? Why did they take your kids? Was it really the agency's fault?" And we have to remind them: "let's accept some of this responsibility, let's own up to it". When we

> are having an issue with the family, we also have to let them know that it's okay if they don't think that they are ready. […] I just had to do that today. I've been recognizing with one of the moms [that she was having challenges] and I had to ask her, and tell her that it is okay if she's not ready to take that responsibility right now, and then we engaged in a conversation of who else we can we look at, maybe [her] mom, sister, any aunts that we can maybe possibly talk to.

FGC mentors do not shy away from difficult conversations with parents and families, when they felt they were necessary. At the same time that mentors recognize the difficult circumstance parents and families experience that contribute to CFS becoming involved in their lives, provide families with expansive and unwavering support, and seek for the positives in all family members and their circumstances, there is also a strong culture of accountability. Mentors encourage parents to reflect on their actions, consider ways that could have yielded better outcomes, and refrain from engaging in issues from a victimhood lens. Parents respond well to mentors' positioning, and the reason for such, rests on the quality of the relationships mentors and families form in the process of FGC.

Finally, mentors noted that support from CFS workers was not sufficient to moving ahead with FGC. They observed that labour union regulations around overtime, working outside office hours, case/time allocations, and staffing restrictions often interfered with the CFS workers' ability to participate in the program, even when CFS workers wished to support FGC. Mentors estimated that half of the FGC requests placed with CFS agencies by Ma Mawi received support from case workers. The other half required further involvement of the organization, with the FGC's coordinator reaching out with the CFS agencies to negotiate the cases. The success of negotiations with mandated agencies also varied; while some agencies within the authorities tended to be supportive, others were less so.

5.1.2. Relationships: Families, CFS case workers, and FGC mentors

For the families whose CFS case workers and agencies agree to enrolment in the FGC program, the next step is to prepare for the family meeting, the 'family group conference'. Mentors reported that immediately after the agreement is established between Ma Mawi and CFS, mentors start working with parents and their supports to strengthen the relationships that will sustain the family's reunification plan. Supports are defined as anyone who is part of the child(ren)'s and the families' lives who can support

the family overcome challenges and make reunification possible and sustainable (e.g., family members, close friends, community organization workers). Because neither FGC mentors nor parents have access to the CFS files, mentors rely on information provided by the CFS case workers, families enrolled in FGC and their supports to identify areas of challenge and strength that parents ought to prepare to make a cogent case for family reunification. The more information available, the easier it is to design a plan. That way, the family plan emerges before the conference, from deep and honest discussions and relationships that are forged in preparation for the conference. Mentors note that typically by the time families have the family conference, there is great alignment between the core concerns identified by CFS and other authorities (e.g., parole officers) and the ones being addressed by the family in the plan. Mentors stressed that the family—not the case workers nor FGC mentors—devise the plan. It is up to the families to work things out in the family group conference in the privacy of their own circle and in the manner that best suits them. They are given expansive support to sustain the plan before and after it is sanctioned by CFS.

When asked about the kinds of support and services they provided to the families in preparation for the family group conference, mentors listed any combination of the following:

- Legal support: Inquiring about legal rights and sanctions, translating legal jargon into plain language, explaining the legal process of child welfare process; arranging legal counsel, accompanying parents to legal proceedings, helping families gather relevant documentation
- Mental/ physical/ spiritual health: Helping access to treatment (e.g. addiction, trauma, mental illness), (re)connecting to traditional knowledge and teachings (e.g., Elders, ceremonies, powwow)
- Resources: Canvasing the community for programs (e.g., employment, education)
- Transportation: Driving families, arranging taxi rides, providing bus tickets to and from appointments and events (e.g., court hearings, visitations, programs, community gatherings)
- Documentation: Filling and submitting forms (e.g., government issued ID’s, tax filing) to obtain documentation to access federal and provincial social benefits (e.g., tax benefits, social housing)

- Benefits: Verifying eligibility and helping families access social benefits to which they are entitled (e.g., employment assistance income, child tax, education allowance from bands)

- Housing: Seeking proper and affordable housing, providing down-payments and damage deposits, heling families access rent assistance

- Material goods: Providing and/or helping families access clothing, furniture, groceries, children's toys

- Social and cultural support: Connecting families to the Ma Mawi and other social and cultural community networks to enhance social connectedness (e.g., parenting support groups, family gatherings, child and youth groups and programs)

From the information shared during the interviews, it became clear that FGC goes beyond service provision. The most distinctive aspect of the program that arose from the mentors' interviews was the genuine commitment mentors have toward the families. As mentor Melissa keenly observed: "We do a lot for them that they could actually be doing themselves, but that's where we are teaching them at the same time. We are building them up". During the preparation phase, mentors work closely with the families to build and rebuild relationships and in the process, learn more about parents and other family members as individuals; their needs, aspirations, fears, traumas, and stories. Anne, who mentors young and expecting mothers who are themselves are in care, spoke of the importance of relationship building:

> So, it [takes] a lot of relationship building. I try to make sure that I am consistent with my moms. I'm taking them for lunch. I'm taking them for coffee. I'm meeting them after school, and touching base. And I'm always trying to build them up, make sure that they still feel like they are up here [gesturing upward to convey feeling positive], and that they are the person in charge their future and their babies' future. Sometimes it takes a little bit, more than usual, because some of them are still stuck down here [gesturing downward to suggest not feeling well or hopeful].

Relationship building nested all interactions mentors reported having with families in the FGC program. Figure 5 (below) provides a representation of the comparisons and contrasts between FGC and CFS that emerged from points mentors identified.

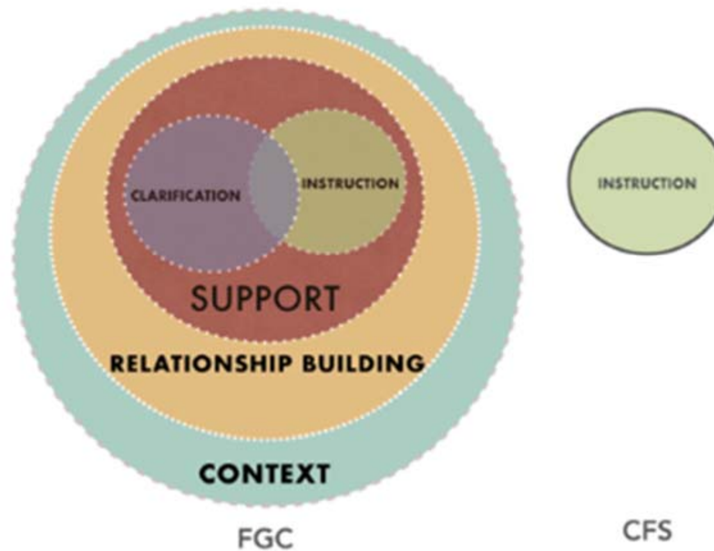


Figure 5. Diagram comparing and contrasting approaches between FGC and CFS toward parents involved in child welfare.

Both approaches were said to assume an instructive role. Whether being administered by FGC or CFS, when family reunification is being sought, instruction to secure legal aid, access programs and/or services to address physical, socio-emotional, psychological, needs, obtain documents, and receive social benefits and housing are unchanging factors to all parents. The manner in which instruction was provided by FGC mentors and CFS workers appeared to differ greatly, however. FGC mentors reported subscribing to a philosophy of 'loving families back to health', whereas CFS was depicted as adopting a 'tough love' approach—and one that seldom seemed to connect with parents. From their professional experience and conversations with parents, mentors described CFS case workers as being contrived and/or oppositional; often lacking in understanding, attentiveness, and responsiveness to families under their care. Alex considered:

> They [CFS] have access to the same thing, it is the means by which you go out of your way to help them [parents] get there. You can't just tell someone who already suffered the most traumatic event of their lives by losing their children, to just… it's easy to say: "if I ever lost my kids I would do whatever I need, to get them back" you don't know how that feels, and what that would do to you, it can break you… I couldn't imagine, it's horrible to even think about it, but telling someone how to do something is one thing,

guiding them and reassuring them, and providing them that support, is totally different.

The way they talk… is another thing that I've picked up on. [CFS workers'] personalities come into it, making things personal. It's sad to say, but maybe in a couple years that may change, but if I'm being honest, some social workers from CFS take things… take things personal… and say things out of spite… no knock [on social workers], but at the end of the day, the main thing for them is to protect the kids and that's where they come in. Whereas in FGC, people are trying to rebuild the family, bring in family members and resources, and to bring them all together. That's a big difference for sure. (Alex, Mentor)

Ella reflected on CFS from a mentor and also personal perspective:

[Being an FGC mentor] was a very big connection for me because I grew up in the inner city, in a really rough home but we never had CFS involvement. So, I never grew up in a foster home, I was never taken away from my mom. So, even in the worst of times, we still were able to stay together as a family. It helps me recognize what they [family] are needing, and maybe what [strengths] they [CFS] are not seeing in the home. (Ella, Mentor)

Stories offered by other mentors accentuated cases where the relationship between CFS and families of children in care were marked by disconnection and antagonism.

She [mother] was supposed to get her children reunified, every year for the last seven years, and her worker was telling her that: "you've done so many programs, let your kids go, they are in the system already, move on". And she lives right across from the school, and it's so hard. She said they weren't even allowed to come to her house during lunch break, so they would go across the street to the park, and she would watch them have lunch. […] All our families have some struggles with CFS but this woman today, my heart just broke for her […] She said one night her youngest one, who always wants to be with her, was sleeping at a friend's nearby and came over in pyjamas and asked if she could come back home and she said "I couldn't keep her, I had to bring her back [to the foster home]". I have children myself […] and I can't imagine having a young child asking you to spend the night, and you having to take her back to the foster home, because you don't want CFS to have anything on you. Her story is horrible, the abuse, she's had [by CFS]. She goes to church, she is traditional, and […] her social worker [scoffing] told her something like: "that's what every mother in CFS does, turns to God". (Lilly, Mentor)

From my understanding, from a lot of young moms that I have talked to […] their social worker has a set mind that they can't do something, and they can't parent their baby. So, when you approach young moms like that, their mentality is to start believing that they are not going to be able to parent those babies, that they thought they could in the beginning. (Anne, Mentor)

Despite working with different family profiles (i.e., young moms whose children were at risk of apprehension, parents whose children were under permanent orders, and children under temporary orders) the difference between mentors' perceptions of their own instruction to families and their perceptions of how CFS workers provided instruction to families was unmistakable.

Mentors were quick to stress that CFS case workers' attitudes should not be generalized. Mentors recognized the interplay between the attitudes social workers displayed and the culture and administrative limitations that may prevent CFS workers from devoting the same level of support to families as mentors.

> A social worker would probably like to do that too, but their caseload is too hectic. I only have seven families while a social worker has 30. They don't get the opportunity to build those relationships because they're so rushed thinking about what they have to do, and they tend to neglect families. They can't get to where they need to be because they just don't have what we have. (Melissa, Mentor)

> It just seems that the whole culture of how they [CFS] do things is: you are just sitting down, writing down the list of things, and sending you off and not really providing you with the resources… again that could be because of the amount of people that they're working with, and have to speak with, and whatever they have going on in their jobs which sounds like it's a lot. So, we have a lot more time to give, and speak one-on-one, and speak with family members… and that's another thing too, with agencies: I feel like kids get apprehended and they are not given to family right away. It's like they have it set up so that the kids are ready to go to another foster home and there is no communication with family. I guess if there is no emergency placement set up right in the beginning, they don't have the time to seek other family members where they can stay […] I would definitely say there is a time restriction, and for us, we have more time to look for more options and provide resources and help them [parents] with certain things as opposed to just being told: "you need to go do this". This is crazy because people in those situations…hypothetically, if your kids are going into care it's because you [parents] have things going on, and obviously that happened for reason, no matter what it was. So being told to "do this, this, and this" by someone handing you a sheet of paper with a case plan and sending you off on your way, and not providing them with a whole lot of positivity and reassurance, or giving them an outlook nor pointing them in the right direction, it's overwhelming! That's what it is! So, I feel like that's definitely a big difference.

Conjecture aside, there was consensus among FGC mentors that CFS workers did not demonstrate the same level sensitivity or interest to the families with whom they worked, as FGC mentors did. Alex and Melissa's quotes were particularly informative, in that they

spoke of two main interrelated aspects that proved central to my understanding FGC as a relational intervention, and the roles and perspectives of mentors in it. First, FGC mentors have unwavering high regard for families and deep empathy for their circumstances. Second, mentors interpreted their role in FGC as a labour of love and communal responsibility.

FGC mentors' approach is in large part associated with the overarching culture of support and care Ma Mawi is known for in Winnipeg. Lilly, who received services from Ma Mawi in the past and currently mentors FGC families, reflected on Ma Mawi's atmosphere and ways in comparison to other "supportive" approaches, and how these experiences shape her mentoring in FGC:

> I took the long way and I have supportive people in my life. I'm lucky that I wasn't the victim of some of the abuses that some had, but if I can make bad choices, why the hell wouldn't they? I had people supporting me, loving me, taking me to programs, knocking on my door, and doing interventions. So, when you have a whole family struggling, you have to just keep them connected and just keep on. Keep on telling them, build them up: 'you're worth it, your children are worth it, you deserve it. Call,' we are here for you, what can we do for you?' A hand turned out and not hand out, and it's just like that.
>
> A big part of it, that has kept me on the straight and narrow, is having Ma Mawi. Honestly, having people with experiential understanding… I remember going to rehab and one of my counselors was a Hutterite. Trying to explain what I was feeling and going through just didn't work because even if they had seen addictions in their families, which they didn't, but even if they did… they wouldn't get it. I went to those organizations, some run by Caucasian people, and I got kicked out, and that really impacted me. I still think about that. Someone not having a minute to talk, when addiction counselors' know what I'm going through.
>
> I think about these weird little things so much, and if I was at a really bad space, that could have just been the end of it. I could've done something so bad for myself, for feeling like a complete failure. I always take that into consideration when I talk to my families. I grew up with sadness and things like that and that's why I love the families I work with so much, because I want to love them. […] Some people say Lilly, take a step back, because sometimes I come in and I'm really excited. I really do enjoy working with them [families].
>
> I think we need more places like this [Ma Mawi], because even with my kids… being placed with my mom—I honestly think that if they [CFS] had taken my two kids then, and not let them live with my mom, I think I would have gone right off the loop by losing them. I would have probably just

> continued on [drugs]. They could've been lost in the system for years to come.

While Lilly's life experiences involved struggles not shared by other mentors, all mentors spoke of having personal experiences with issues that the families they support through FGC also experience. Mentors shared that personal and/or experiences with family members and loved ones who struggled with poverty, mental health concerns, substance misuse, CFS involvement, and violence allowed them to understand the complexities of what the parents with whom they worked as well as to connect with them at a deep personal level.

5.1.3. Challenges

According to Ma Mawi's 2018 report, the main categories of involvement of parents enrolled in FGC were struggle with addictions—meth being the primary substance of concern—followed by homelessness, and domestic violence (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, 2018). Mentors noted that all three categories were highly complex and at times, mutually reinforcing. For example, mentors spoke of mothers who refrained from leaving abusive partners because they feared being left homeless and having their children placed into care, parents who became addicted to drugs after becoming homeless, and others who had become homeless as a result of misusing substances. Alex and I spoke about the complexity and difficulty of addressing substance misuse issues in Winnipeg:

> **Alex:** Detox beds aren't available, there is only a few with the city… there is one on Magnuson, and one at HSC [Health Sciences Centre], I believe. And again, they are very specific, for example for opiate addiction and alcohol. And if they are full over there and there aren't any detox beds … there is nowhere to go. And there's nothing you can do about it. So, it's a little bit of a process, if there are beds available, you can get in on the same day, but if there are no beds openings, you have to wait to get in the waitlist and that's one of the struggles for sure. Also, I would say that usually, but not all the time, there is a real good chance that you have to get into detox before you can get into one of the treatment facilities. And getting into those even [is challenging], they have intakes at certain times, then you need to have your forms in by a certain time, and a lot of the families are required to go to treatment… so that's tough… waiting.
>
> **Elisa:** It must be hard to keep them [parents] in that positive space until treatment happens…
>
> **Alex:** And chances are that they have already been to treatment, sometimes, many times. Sometimes they have numerous certificates, for

> having completing treatment and programs. I would say that that's definitely the main thing right now. It is difficult trying to support them, and keep them on the road to positivity, while they are waiting to get into treatment.
>
> **Elisa:** I guess addictions is one of the visible concerns that we see. When you engage with the families, what are some of the things that you believe may be behind it [addiction]? Things that are going on in their lives?
>
> **Alex:** I mean, a lot of the times, it's just like everyone else, even us… we are going through some things at the time and you are maybe in a vulnerable place. Maybe some of the people that we don't have friends or even family members, who knows? And unfortunately, the access to negative things, especially in the core areas of the city is really high. There is bad people out there, that feed off people who are in those states of mind. That's unfortunately the way it is. There is a lot of resources out there but for people to access to that is not easy. You would think they would be easier, with the Internet and everything, but still a lot of people who are living in the [downtown] core area [poorest zip code of Winnipeg] that don't have access to that.

Melissa and Lilly considered the associations among the toll of addictions, poverty, and child welfare. Melissa spoke about the disproportionate number of grandparents being called upon to care for their grandchildren in the Winnipeg area and Lilly reflected on the unrealistic socio-economic expectations of CFS:

> All they [parents] want is for their kids to get out of care. What becomes hard is finding that somebody in that family who is strong enough and capable, because sometimes grandma already has four or five of her other [grand]kids and the home is just not big enough. We are just finding out that our families don't have the resources they need. (Melissa, Mentor)
>
> I'm just realizing that to get some children back to their families […] the situation is that sometimes they don't have a bedroom, it's about poverty… that's a big problem. A simple bed would go a long way. (Lilly, Mentor)

In addition to the main categories of involvement, mentors recognized that parents arrived at Ma Mawi with complex problems including serious emotional problems, unhealthy coping mechanisms, historical trauma, economic challenges, limited or non-existent social support, and complicated or fractured familial and romantic relationships. My interview with Anne, who supports young and expecting mothers in care, proved particularly enlightening on this point:

> **Anne:** The majority of them are [Permanent Wards] … they come from a rough history; where they've had this rough life, this rough past, all these placements, and all then of a sudden they're having this baby. So, we try to work with them, we definitely try to encourage counselling, and other

services that they may need. […] It's tough sometimes…We had this one mom… she hurt her boyfriend at the time when she was addicted to meth. They were doing it together and she found out she was pregnant. She said she found out right away she was pregnant, and she had a feeling that she was pregnant. So, she stops smoking. She said it was really tough but knowing that she could be pregnant was too much for her. She ended up quitting and she confirmed with the doctor [she was pregnant], same thing with the boyfriend, he quit it to have a healthy lifestyle for the baby, and to not have baby exposed to that. It's funny because sometimes people need long-term addiction treatment, and for this mom it was enough to know that she was going to be bringing a life into this world… it was enough for her to quit. She came into the program and she is doing amazing. When I first met with her, we were at a pizza place and I was doing my thing getting to know her, her family, and building that relationship with her. I asked her what was really driving her to come into the program, what she saw in her future, what was bringing her here, and she said: "do you really want me to be honest with you?" And I said sure, I'm going to have a long relationship with you so, yes. And she said: "the reason why I'm at this program is because"…

…[Anne gets emotional and we take a minute to continue the interview]….

... "knowing that I'm having a baby and knowing that I'm coming from somewhere of not being so well, smoking meth … I really want to do better for my child", because when she was a baby in the womb of her mom, her mom didn't have to strength and the ability to stop smoking, and she continued throughout her whole pregnancy, so it followed her…

[Anne gets choked up again]

… that's what helped her and think about what she has to do for her child, it was really touching.

Elisa: I can see this is very emotional for you…

Anne: …she goes: "that's the real reason why. I want to be that person to break that cycle. I love my mom, but the choices my mom made at that time were not so good, and I want to be able to be that person to change my life and my child's life".

Elisa: How powerful. That must've been a very difficult thing to do, to have that understanding and the strength to make that difference when a substance has a grab on you. What a brave young lady.

Anne: Yes, and she's doing good. She's been very well. Sometimes she has her days…

Elisa: … who doesn't, right?

Anne: … yeah, she's great and I'm happy.

In addition to illustrating the interconnection of challenges families in care face, these quotes show how FGC mentors saw their role in the program. Mentors felt their role was to empower parents through positive relationships. Unlike in mainstream interventions, where parents are often judged and stripped of the few rights they have as a result of involvement in child welfare, mentors found opportunities through FGC, to show different ways of relating to self and others. Of notice in mentors' supportive approaches was a de-emphasis on 'charitable' attitudes, where a connotation of one party as the 'capable giver' and the other as the 'incapable receiver' tends to exist. Rather, mentors spoke of uplifting Indigenous parents as a way to halt and counter the internalization of negative self-talk that prevails in Indigenous families and communities as a result of colonization. Consider this except from Melissa's interview:

> **Melissa:** The challenges are definitely there… [..] I'm having a hard time with a family I have right now; I have asked for her [mother's] support list three times now and I'm not getting any answers from her when I call. I'm thinking she doesn't want her family knowing what is going on. That's another issue that I'm also realizing… there is a lot of hiding what's happening, with our families and our kids. Not everybody wants to share but if we did, we can help one another.
>
> **Elisa:** Why do you think there is hiding?
>
> **Melissa:** Shame. They feel that they didn't do what they have to do as a parent to their children but what I tell them is 'who was there for you? Did you get that treatment? How can you even learn to love somebody when you weren't loved yourself?' I think we need to be able to feel all those emotions, someone has to give that for us in order to give it to somebody else. […] I feel she has no support; none of her siblings supports her and if she were to tell me today "I don't want to take my kids", there would be no one that we could move the kids to. Her mom won't take the child either because of everything that is going on with her [daughter's] life. That's what I'm finding hard: getting that support list. A lot of our families don't have the support. So that's why we have to try and build up now, we need to tell her people 'to love each other, we need to give each other that support'.

No matter the challenges, FGC mentors spoke of the tight and meaningful relationships with the families they assisted, conveying the essence of FGC as a strengths-based approach to child welfare, with the recognition that families involved in child welfare are wrestling with substantial personal, social, emotional, historical disadvantage and trauma that affects them and their communities in significant and profound ways. Lilly offered her personal life story to make this point in a poignant way. This part of our conversation was one of the most candid, heartfelt, and impactful

moments of this research project. Lilly shared unreservedly about her experiences with extremely difficult topics. In my view, Lilly's story provides rich details of the personal, interpersonal, socio-cultural, and historical complexity of issues of colonization that surround Indigenous peoples that get compiled, flattened, reduced, and attributed as pertaining to an "individual's issues". Lilly's analysis of the colonial thread that bound her experiences from childhood to adulthood, are deeply compelling of the need of orienting to the colonial legacy and its many and complex manifestations.

> **Lilly:** I must have been …I think I was 4. That's one of my earliest memories. I grew up with my mom, and my mom was an alcoholic. My dad was in the army. My mom was a mean alcoholic. For the most part, I lived in poverty. I don't remember being hungry or things like that. My mom always kept her home clean, we always had clean clothes, we were always put together but we were still the working poor. So, there were struggles. I remember going to the pawnshop and things like that. My mom was an alcoholic, and my dad would go away to [army] exercises. I remember that I dreaded it, because I knew that whenever my dad wasn't at home, all hell would break loose. My mom would be bringing… I always remember sexual exploitation, because my auntie and my mom… I remember this… the company that came over… they would say it was our birthdays [Lilly's and her sister's], it was always our birthdays, all the time. She would go: "oh, it's my niece's birthday", and "my daughter's birthday", and they [mom and aunt] would make men buy chicken or take-out food for "our birthdays", or I remember her making me steal someone's… someone she had brought over, it was a big party… I remembered they made me crawl on the floor to steal her purse so that they could rob their purse, and things like that. *We were young*! It kind of shows… I guess big part of that was part of residential schools… and my grandmother, because there were seven kids, and my auntie raised them. My grandmother and my grandfather always worked and never showed them affection. And that's what my mom still says to this day; that my grandmother never loved her. But I kind of put things together; … I'm all over the place, as you can see [chuckles]…
>
> **Elisa:** No, not at all. I see how these things are connected…
>
> **Lilly:** …My mother has scars from her wrist to her elbow because she was in what used in a group home, and those were girls who back then, in the 60s and the 50s, would put those tattoos. And you can see the scars now because she put them in with a needle and cigarette ash in the girls' home, when she was 12. So, she had a lot of pain, I can see that, from sitting here now, as an adult. She was the second youngest and even as I grew up, my mom was always very aggressive, but they always treated her like the black sheep in my family. So, I can see why she was the way she was, and when she drinks, she fights and all that. Those are a lot of my memories… just the negative… her fighting, bringing people home, to 'roll' them, as people used to call it. Rolling them and taking their money and things like that.

Elisa: When you were young, did you realize what those things were?

Lilly: I think I knew they weren't right, but at the same time we knew that when they [company] were coming back with them, we would get treats, and my auntie would give us so much money. But I think we knew that what they were doing… it wasn't right. We knew there was something off. Even though my mom would be: "is anyone looking at my daughter?' [as a statement of protection] "if anyone ever touches you, you better tell me". She protected us from that [sexual exploitation] but still didn't, by exploiting us in other ways. She doesn't realize this. But she was like that because my father was a pimp, my biological father… growing up with all that exploitation… it's about poverty. Something I was thinking yesterday because I thought 'eventually, I will tell someone my story, not all of it but some of it'… I remembered…how that connects with how I ended up working for escort agencies for 14 years of my life and it was 24/7. I was telling [Michelle- FGC coordinator], I worked when I was 19… but actually I stood right there [pointing to the direction of train tracks], where the train tracks are a block away, when I was *15 years old*. And I got into the car with my first guy—I never did anything sexual—but he bought me a six-pack [of beer] and cigarettes, we had dinner and I remember leading him on, but I was thinking… how did I? I just blocked that out... *but I was 15!* I think it's because that's normalized, and I see people out there younger than me…and it's just that, when you've got no money and you're living in poverty, you do what you do. And that's something normal.

Yes, we can talk about systems and macro theories and addictions, you can talk about all that, but you cannot talk about addictions and not know the communities. I was outside at 15 years old, and that's not because my mom put me out there but that's because of the community I grew up in. When I was 15, I already looked 18, but I cannot justify it because I was seeing girls who were at 11. One time I went with a friend and an older gentleman to a house, and we got there, and a woman was drinking, and doing her hair, and she handed out the 12-year-old condoms because she was going to work [in sex industry]. And she had been the foster parent, who had brought her here to Winnipeg from the reserve, and I guess that that's what she was doing, she was getting her to work. It was like nothing and I remember sitting there and thinking 'oh my goodness'. Seeing that, …a few months later I was outside…

Elisa: It does tend to normalize things…

Lilly: And that's something that people in other communities would not understand. You wouldn't see a blue-eyed girl standing there, it might happen, but it's not common…

Elisa: I have two questions that came to mind. One of them is about your relationship with your mom, you identified that she was a victim of residential schools and how it impacted her relationship with her parents and her ability to connect with you and your sister. Do you think that she saw that as being something that happened because of residential schools?

Lilly: No, my mom was not educated about that either. When she was 13 years old, she went to [school], and she already had those anger issues. She said that when she went to school-- my grandmother used to dress her in a skirt and a white shirt. She looked like a Brownie, and she used to get teased. One day she walked into the school and she was *one minute late*, and her teacher said "you fucking dirty Indians are always late", so my mother reacted; there was a garbage can there and she threw it, not meaning to hurt him but it bounced off the black board and hit him in the eye and cut his eye. *She was expelled for life*! He embarrassed her *in front of everybody*, he called her *a dirty fucking Indian* [emphasis originally added] …

Elisa: [ironically] And *that* was okay, "*acceptable behavior*"…

Lilly: Yes! So, she had that penalty, but you see I don't think she recognizes it [as a problem of residential schools]. I see that [as an issue of residential schools] because I grew up on it. The next time you come back here, I have a little thing at home, it's a gift that was given to us about what happened on my reserve. I never grew up in my reserve, but my grandmother is buried down there, and it goes back to when the Indian Agents came to get children for the residential school. It tells a little story and you might be interested in seeing it, and I have a book from when my grandmother was in residential school. What bothers me is that half of the names have question marks. Is that because they just disappeared from residential school, which happened, to many kids that went, they never came back. It bothers me because those are 'unknows'. We don't know their faces or who they were and that was not that long ago. I understand that way daddy was an impact of residential school because of being in school learning about that and then I look at my family and I say to myself hey wait a minute.

Elisa: Have you had the opportunity to talk to your grandmother about this?

Lilly: No. My grandmother ended up passing away about five years ago and I was one of the younger grandchildren and we never talked about this, we never talked about residential schools. *Ever*. She took it to her grave. And I'm missing out now, because I wish I could have asked her these questions. I did ask one of my cousins if she had ever asked our grandma about residential schools. And the only thing she [grandma] said is that 'if you did what you are told, nothing happened to you', *which is false*! She never spoke of it. My grandmother was very proud, very assimilated. She would never take us back [to the reserve]. When I wanted to go to school a few years ago, and I went back to the reserve for funding, to which we are entitled, she said: "why are you going to ask for money?" She was all huffy and puffy about that. And this is part of this colonial mentality, right? To buy into what you were told so not to create problems.

You don't ask questions you just be quiet. And with her—this had a lot to do with me educating myself—my grandma had an Eaton's card in 1952, and there were Natives that were still not allowed to leave the reserves at that time. I see that assimilation in the smallest things; when my

grandmother made sandwiches… you could never have a sandwich without a piece of lettuce, because if you did then "you were a little poor Indian". Weird things like that.

Elisa: Little things that carry a lot of meaning…

Lilly: Looking back, that's why we always have lettuce, it was a way to show that 'you are not Native, from that reserve'. When we came here [to Winnipeg], she lost her culture, she lost her language, Cree, and my grandfather spoke French, but they never spoke Cree because she never went back. She raised her kids out here because she ran away from 'that' [being Indigenous]. She went the other way. She was fortunate because she always worked at the cold storage and my grandfather worked too. But my mom said that none of her friends' parents worked, because they weren't accepted. My grandparents slipped through those cracks, and until they were buried, they were assimilated. And that's why I grew up without my culture. My grandmother would knock me and my mother didn't have any of our culture because of residential schools… and I was always wondering who the hell I was. Never knowing who I was… until I came here to Ma Mawi. Now I'm at peace with my heart.

Elisa: I'm so glad to hear that. Do you think that the struggles you mentioned earlier, were in a way because you were missing this piece, of understanding who you were? and now you are in a place where you feel like you do, you can move forward?

Lilly: I think so. I recognize that a lot of that, has to do with your culture. Going back to working with our families, and our kids, I understand. When kids are being put in non-cultural appropriate homes, I understand that feeling.

My grandmother didn't want to admit she was Aboriginal because she was in a residential school and she tried protect her children… but she didn't, she did more harm by taking their culture and their identity away from them. Even to this day, my mother, when we go out, and she's about 60, she thinks that everybody is looking at her because she's the Aboriginal. And I tell her: "mom, no". But she's stuck. I tell her that she is calling attention to herself by saying: "people are looking at me because I'm Aboriginal" [demeaning tone].

Elisa: Is she connected in any way to Indigenous culture now?

Lilly: No. I wanted her to come here. I've tried to invite her to Ma Mawi and now she's starting to say that maybe she would like to see an Elder. She's starting to come around. I think that with all the racism she dealt with, especially in Germany…

Elisa: I guess it's natural to feel traumatized; if you think that every time that you say it out loud, you get this negative response, why would you say anything? Right?

> **Lilly:** Yeah, I can see the challenges and I talked to my mom every weekend. She's still drinking, and I wonder if she got back to her culture, if that would help. But she's not ready for that yet, but I hope eventually she is. These are the things we hear: 'residential schools, CFS, being put into culturally inappropriate homes, being in poverty'; it's the story you hear, over and over. Then you end up getting exploited, and into drugs, your kids are gone, it's a cycle.
>
> **Elisa:** Unfortunately, it's an all too common story
>
> **Lilly:** Sometimes with FGC, what I'm seeing… I'm so thankful with my position here, I have a little bit of a budget to be able to buy beds, pay the damage deposit, to make a difference [to families]…

In addition to conveying Lilly's remarkable strength, bravery to confront her painful past, and warrior spirit to transcend the many challenges she encountered in the course of her life, Lilly's story indicates the complexity of the issues that many Indigenous families and communities experience as a result of colonial practices. Lilly highlights conditions of poverty that drive families away from their own communities due to the lack of resources and unsafe conditions, the prevalence of substance misuse as a coping mechanism, and the exploitation of children and youth by family members and foster families (Penrose, 2018, 2019). Lilly's testimony also imparts the deep individual, interpersonal, and intergenerational psychological impacts of racism and oppression with which Indigenous families and communities have had to contend.

Crucially, what Lilly's story also establishes is that despite various challenges, family remains a critical bond for self-understanding and healing of self and relationships. Lilly was better able to make sense of and overcome her own difficulties when she became attuned to the intergenerational challenges that permeated her family's history. It was only after learning that her grandmother had attended a residential school where only half of the children who attended ever came home to their families, that her grandmother had been indoctrinated to the Christian faith to the point where life with and in her culture and community were made incompatible, and that her grandmother had been led to conceal her Indigeneity at all costs in order to 'pass' as white in order to access employment and have a less arduous life, that Lilly was able to consider possible reasons for her challenging childhood and youth. Lilly felt that the collection of resignations her grandmother had to make, deprived her from a true sense of self, which in turn, translated into an inability to emotionally connect with her children, including her Lilly's mother. Lilly noted that her mother struggled with anger issues from

a young age, presumably from wanting to have a deeper connection with her mom. She also examined the impact of severe racism on her mom. Lilly also attributed her mother's struggles with alcohol, and consequently, parenting, for her growing up in group homes and being involved with someone who exploited her sexually for years before becoming a parent. Lilly felt she was only able to heal and move forward when she began to comprehend the complexity of the issues that surrounded her family as a part of a whole, that affects Indigenous families in Canada and globally.

FGC mentors' passion for helping families is an act of resistance to Canada's colonial legacy. All mentors spoke about the FGC program as a place where they were coming to know about the depth and breadth of the history of colonization in Canada and how that was changing how they saw themselves and their families:

> [W]e are getting stronger every day, we are learning more about our [Indigenous] cultures coming back now. You see it now, whereas in the past you didn't. People are asking about it, whereas before I didn't even know how to talk about it because at home you would only… you go to church… my granny didn't believe in the Powwow. When I met my husband—because he's really into his [Indigenous] culture—my grandma would roll her eyes and make noises [of disapproval]. And I didn't understand that, and I was confused by that because we are Aboriginal people and "why don't you believe in our culture?" But that was because she was never even taught about her culture. Although she spoke her language, she was the only one who had a story to tell, she was abused […] The Creator has put me where I am today. If I hadn't found Ma Mawi, I don't know where I would have found those answers to help me figure out why I am the way I am. I now understand why my grandmother was a Christian all her life; she went to residential schools, my grandpa went to grade one and my grandma went to grade 9 and they joked about that, but they never ever talked about what had happened. We never heard any stories, never… (Melissa, Mentor)

5.1.4. Re(connection) to Family, Community, and Traditional Culture

When asked about the impact of the FGC program on the families they supported, mentors spoke of ties they saw grow within the families, to the Ma Mawi community, and to traditional culture. These three aspects fall under the Māori concept of whānau, where well-being is seen as in direct relationship to healthy relationships to oneself, the community, and cultural identity and traditions (Love, 2000). Mentors remarked on the ethos of community engendered through the FGC program, where

everyone was encouraged to see their own importance to the well-being of others and consider how their own gifts contributed to the harmony of the whole.

> [Smiling broadly indicating great satisfaction] New families come in here for a few weeks, on certain days. They are here with their families; there are aunties and uncles all over this place [smiling]. It's amazing to see all these people when they first come in, and the difference after a short period of time; their engagement and the way that people are talking, even their mannerisms, and smiles on peoples' faces. Kids have a blast in this room! Parents feel like this is home to them. We say: "help yourself, this is for you guys". We are only here because we have families to help and support. […] So, if we think like that, that goes a long way because it creates that bond. When they come in here and they hangout, you don't think anything of it. They are just friends in here, just family. That's essentially what the model of the Bear Den [see Figure 6] is. We're all from different walks of life but we are all connected in a positive way". (Alex, Mentor)

Figure 6. Partial view of the Bear Den: Family Group Conferencing's "living room", where families have visits with their mentors, children, other families, Elder and Knowledge Keepers, and case workers.

Mentors explained that through the teachings associated with FGC and the guidance provided by the Maōri brothers and sisters from Waitomo Papakainga, and Anishinaabe, Cree, and other teachings offered by Knowledge Keepers and Elders at Ma Mawi, FGC offers new or reopens paths for families to become reconnected to traditional ways of thinking, being, and wellness.

> The first thing I do, when we talk about FGC, I always ask them [parents]: "do you want to have an Elder present for you?", and they would say: "what do you mean?". I'd tell them: "okay, that would be my response too if I hadn't learned what I am now learning now" and then I explain to them, and they say "yes, absolutely! ". That's the seed that I guess we planted in them. After that, they start asking questions about where they can go to drum group? (Alex, Mentor)

Mentors relayed that at FGC, Elders and Knowledge Keepers speak with parents and mentors about the traditional roles of parents, families, and communities; share teachings associated ceremonies, song, prayer, drumming, dancing, powwow, and braiding; and Indigenous ways of relating to each other and to all things. The traditional ways of being in and seeing the world supported by the program, is interpreted by the mentors as a grounding force for parents. What is learned in the program is often the beginning of a pivotal self-discovery journey, that results in greater harmony within their own families and at the Ma Mawi community.

> It's a really big important piece for families that come here, for their mind, body, and soul, it just helps them. So far there have been a few families that I have met with that have not really been into their culture, and now they are drumming singing, and it's amazing to see. FGC is based off Indigenous ways of dealing with conflict before CFS even existed. Back when our villages existed, and there was conflict amongst family and children were going through difficult times, the village would come together and be a support system. That's how it was in the beginning of time before colonization. FGC, the model, is solely based on indigenous ways of teaching and learning. It's 100% with the culture. It's been modernized to the present day, trying to engage the culture we have everything else, it's a very important aspect of moving forward with family group conferencing. (Alex, Mentor)

The benefits of (re)connecting to culture and traditional knowledge was not only reserved to parents, mentors also spoke of experiencing enhanced wellness, and greater understanding and sense of pride of their Indigenous identity as a result of their involvement in FGC.

> Well I'm also new to my culture. I'm just learning…. I've actually just recently gone to a sweat, I had never been to one before… I went with our team to a ceremony and it was *amazing.* I can't wait for the next one. But to know that a lot of people carry a lot of stuff and still wake up with a smile, that helps me, helps me know that I'm not the only one, that we are all going through this together and when you know and when you understand where you're coming from, makes you feel so good. Because then you can explain it now. You can talk about it, whereas before you would go: "what the hell is wrong with me?" (Melissa, Mentor)

Melissa's question stayed with me, as I believe it spoke to the internalized oppression colonial systems rely on to maintain their grip. What I gathered from mentors is that the traditional knowledge FGC fosters, creates avenues for mentors, families, and communities to connect or reconnect to the resilience, strength, beauty, power, and sophistication of their Indigenous identity, knowledge, ethics, and relationships to self, others, Spirit, and cosmos.

Traditional knowledge permeates every aspect of FGC at Ma Mawi, including the physical spaces. The Family group conferences are held in Ma Mawi's Round Room, which was designed with Indigenous teachings and knowledge from the Plains in mind, to represent the interconnectedness of family, community, spirit, and the Creator. The significance of the room was later elaborated by one of Ma Mawi's Knowledge Keepers, who works closely with FGC families and is often the one who opens and closes the family group conferences. One of the main Knowledge Keepers at Ma Mawi, herein referred to by the pseudonym Charlie, with whom I had the opportunity to chat several times and who carried several ceremonies in which I participated, explained that the circles symbolize the cyclical nature of all things. In the circle there is no beginning and no end, all is becoming, in a continuous recurrence of patterns. He noted that the circle symbolizes harmony, unity, interdependence, and the Medicine Wheel. The Round Room features 365 pouches of traditional medicine—sweetgrass, sage, tobacco, cedar (Figure 7)—to honour the importance of using traditional medicine to heal the mind, the body, the spirit, and the heart. Bundles of the medicines are also placed on the four directions—north, south, east and west—to denote wholeness, in that each direction relies on the existence of the others to be understood as one (Charlie, personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Figure 7. Detail of the medicine pouches and bundles in the Round Room

The seating arrangement on family group conference day is also significant (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Lay out of the room in preparation for the Family Group Conference (FGC) family meeting in the Round Room.

The seating is laid on a circle shape, with a framed picture of the child(ren) at the centre to remind members to keep in mind the focus of the hard work, the children. The frame rests on a yellow piece of cloth that symbolizes the element of fire, the sun, and the spiritual energy of determination and enlightenment, to inspire constructive solutions for the child (Charlie, personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Chapter 6.

Findings and Discussion: Parents Perspective on Family Group Conferencing at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata

Figure 9. Bear Den mural
By Anishinaabe artist Markus Houston from Sagkeeng First Nation, MB

Pointing to the beautiful mural painted by the Anishinaabe artist from Sagkeeng First Nation, Markus Houston (Figure 5.6), whom I had the pleasure to meet a number of times at Ma Mawi, Charlie underscores the many meanings behind the space he was honoured to have named, as the *Bear Den*. The space affectionately referred to as the "the heart of the FGC Program at Ma Mawi", is akin to the hibernation place a bear seeks for safety, warmth, and healing, after spending the whole summer foraging. Families come to the FGC den to be nurtured and feel replenished in body, mind, and spirit. In an atmosphere of support and positivity, families are relieved from carrying their heavy burdens all on their own. Some of their energy is spared and freed to be redirected to healing their wounds and relationships. And, much like the "mama bear", who emerges with her cubs to begin a new cycle of life in the spring, the Bear Den encourages families to redefine their family circle and conceive new of ways to care for each other and grow together healthier and stronger.

The bear symbolizes individual and relational characteristics. Individually, it represents courage and honesty. For those who come to the FGC program, this means being brave to acknowledge and speak the truth to self and others. Relationally, as represented in the mural by the black bear's embraces of the family, the bear symbolizes the maternal spirit and protecting the young. Charlie brings attention to the child sitting at the centre. The child's position of prominence is representative of the primary sentiment

of the FGC program, the sacredness of the child and our responsibility to them. He reinforces the importance of children as links to the spiritual world. Protecting and maintaining them in good health (wholistically speaking), reverberates through the kin and community—local and global. He notes children also represent time: the past, present, and future, and the connection to ancestors and future kin. In FGC, the spirituality and temporality of this symbolism is translated into the cultivation of a psychological space, where families come to understand how past influences have contributed to their present situation and how they are going to co-construct the place they want to be in the future, strong and united. Reflecting on his own experiences, Charlie imparts the message distilled from the individual and relational aspects of the bear. He remarks that it takes great courage to own up to our carelessness and recognize the point where our lives may have gone off-course. In the same breath, he states that it also takes great bravery to exercise self-compassion, noting that oppression and depression create patterns of negative self-talk that tend to obscure our positive qualities and caring actions. He explains that taking responsibility for the errors *as well as* honouring the strengths, individually and collectively, is a key principle of the philosophy of FGC (Charlie, Knowledge Keeper, personal communication, November 30, 2018).

Focusing on the human figures in the mural, Charlie explains that the lack of facial features is deliberate. The featureless faces are meant to encourage us all to see ourselves in the large conception of family. He also expounds that we were all children once and that we all require maternal and paternal figures in our lives. Therefore, we are all utterly responsible for protecting children, be they our own or those of others, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, in care and outside of care, in our own communities and beyond, in our country's borders and around the globe. He concludes that for the Anishinaabe, love is a gift of the Eagle. The Eagle holds tremendous spiritual power, as it has the strength to carry all other (of the seven) sacred teachings. Unconditional love is to be sought, shown, and exercised in our relationships to ourselves, our kin, our community, our ancestors, nature and Sprit. We are to infuse love *(zaagi'idiwin)* into respect *(mnaadendimowin),* courage/ bravery *(aakwa'ode'ewina),* honesty *(gwekwaadziwin),* wisdom *(nbwaakaawin),* humility *(dbaadendiziwin),* and truth *(debwewin)* (Charlie, Knowledge Keeper, personal communication, November 30, 2018; Johnston, 2008).

6.1. We are family

Love and children are at the centre of all things. As I reflected on the Knowledge Keeper's teaching, a flashback of Summer and Cindy playing with their parents and grandmother, presents itself as the starting point of the story. Sitting on the colourful Seven Sacred Teachings rug in the Bear Den play area, Cindy and Summer engage in play with their parents, Julia and Victor. From afar, Sandra watches them giggle with a continuous smile on her face. The picture could not have been any more symbolic of the teachings I had received, and the aspects of the FGC experience parents would later share as things they valued most about the FGC program; expressions of love, the importance of family relationships, and traditional teachings. Julia and Victor are fully engaged with Cindy, the older of the two daughters, who pushes a doll in a stroller around the table. They laugh out loud when she switches places with the doll and asks to be pushed herself. Although Cindy is slim built, she is too heavy for the flimsy stroller. Nevertheless, she manages to get a few laps in after some protesting. When the toy shows signs of buckling under her weight, Victor and Julia act in a synchronized fashion; while Victor takes on the challenging job of convincing Cindy to leave the stroller behind, Julia lays out the crayons and picture books at the kids' table. Meanwhile, Summer, ventures on wobbly "walks" around the room. As I watch the rosy-cheeked toddler with a wispy pig tail, head in my direction with a wide smile, Sandra, proudly turns to me and says: "she just learned to walk, you know?" Summer stays just long enough to gain some balance and carries on with her explorations, while Sandra and I engage in conversation. We marvel at Summer's determination to keep going despite her stumbles. The symbolism of perseverance and picking yourself up after falling is not lost on me. As will be substantiated by their family's stories, it takes an incredible amount of tenacity and grit to seek and stay on the course of family reunification with the legal and psychological barriers imposed by CFS and society as a whole. Sandra and I bond through the exchange of stories about when our children learned to walk and talk, the sleepless nights when they were teething, and other joys and challenges of motherhood. A little while later, tired of "walking" about and fighting a bit of a cold, Summer raises her arms to her foster mom, communicating she would like to be picked up. The foster mom does so but walks her over to Sandra. The foster mom then leaves the room discreetly, as a sign of support of the family's bonding time. I had noticed the foster mom's warmth

at a previous visit, while she talked with Julia, Victor, and Sandra. Their body language communicated amiability and cooperation.

As Julia, Victor, and Cindy colour, and Sandra and Summer cuddle, I think to myself that one would hardly believe this is a supervised visit. The atmosphere in the room is relaxed, happy even, in stark contrast with Julia's account of CFS supervised visits:

> At the agency, they had a room this small room [gesturing to a narrow space] and that's where we would have our visits twice a week, and she [visit supervisor] would be sitting right there. The social worker had told her she didn't have to be in the room at the agency, but she would sit there, and I wouldn't feel comfortable with my babies […] she would be telling me, 'she likes this, she likes that' and I was thinking, 'you don't know my baby', and 'you're telling *me* what to do with her?'. It's uncomfortable to have someone sitting there just watching me. (Julia, Mother).

Julia's description is consistent with what Erika and Hector shared about visitations at their CFS agency. They spoke about the bareness of the room (e.g., few to no toys, no windows, no television) as a hindrance to engaging in play with their daughter. They also remarked on the high level of surveillance by visitation supervisors and camera system in the visitation rooms, which interfered with bonding with their child. Thirdly, they emphasized the animosity they experienced every time they entered their CFS agency for their visitations. I personally witnessed the level of surveillance parents spoke about during Hector and Erika's first visit with their daughter at Ma Mawi. A CFS' visitation supervisor followed Hector and Erika while they walked their toddler daughter around the room at all times, barely keeping a 4-foot distance. The level of intrusion was so pronounced that I felt compelled to ask the FGC coordinator (Michelle) about the practice. Michelle replied that this level of surveillance was not at all uncommon when visitations are first transitioned from CFS to Ma Mawi. She noted that as families get settled into FGC and CFS workers become acquainted with Ma Mawi's inclusive and strengths-based philosophy, CFS' surveillance tended to ease up, and give way to more supportive and collaborative stances and interactions between parents and CFS workers.

In contrast to Julia, Erika and Hector's recollection of supervised visits in the child welfare agencies, the Bear Den is bright, inviting, with comfortable furnishings and plenty of toys and areas for children to play. There is also an open-concept kitchen and a big

table, where parents, children, mentors, foster parents, and case workers share meals and chat. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are laid out for those who work and visit the den. The mentors invite all visitors to help themselves to drinks from the fridge and food in the cabinets. Even though the environment is serious—mentors can be seen having intense conversations over the phone, coming in and out of meetings with their coordinator, and rushing to their vehicles to take care of emergencies—there are plentiful moments of unity and laughter. It feels like a family living-room and there is good reason for that. As expressed by the FGC mentors (in the previous section), Michelle (FGC coordinator), and Knowledge Keepers, at Ma Mawi, anyone who comes through the door is encouraged to think of themselves as part of the family. Ma Mawi's staff state explicitly and implicitly, the meaning of 'being a family member'. That is, every member of the family is deserving of feeling valued, heard, and taken care of, on the good and bad days. It also means having a responsibility towards the well-being of others, especially the children. Many subtle but meaningful expressions of interdependence encapsulate the notion of 'being part of the family' at the Bear Den. On any given day, people can be seen engaging in conversation with people they know and also those they are meeting for the first time. There is plenty of jokes and light-hearted teasing going around, to offset some of the severity of the issues they all face day-in and day-out. Mentors, parents, and volunteers cook and prepare snacks for the families who may come to the den. On days when parents receive traditional teachings from the Knowledge Keepers, the den buzzes extra loudly. Exchanges of experience and encouragement abound. Parents can be seen holding and feeding each other's children, moms changing each other's babies, and all keeping an eye out for the children playing together. Invitations to join activities, particularly those related to the passing of traditions and ceremonies (e.g., star blanket and traditional skirt sewing, sweats, Letting Go ceremonies) are emphasized, and are often the place where friendships blossom. Some families visit the den every day, even if just for a cup of coffee and a chat. Others come mostly for their visits and meetings. Visitors to the den often bring family members, friends, and colleagues. Workers from supporting community organizations and some CFS workers bring their peers to the den to show and introduce them to FGC. All are equally welcomed.

As Julia and Victor's visit with their girls comes to an end, Cindy and Summer are packed up to leave to their respective foster homes. The two girls hold on to Julia and Sandra tightly, objecting to the separation. As crying ensues, Julia, Victor, and Sandra

try their best to put on a brave face, reassuring the girls they will all be seeing each other in the days to come. Their words have no impact on the girls, who do not grasp the concept of time, scheduled visits, and legal proceedings. I suspect the words they offer are mostly self-soothing. It is when the kids leave, and silence fills the room, that the reality of the child welfare system sets in. Julia, Victor, and Sandra's voices turn a little quieter, heads hang a little lower, and smiles get narrower. Despite the visible sadness, hope prevails. Victor, Julia, and Sandra engage in conversation with their mentor, Lilly, about the next steps in their reunification process until Summer is in their care, full-time.

The snapshot described above took place shortly before my interviews with Sandra, Julia and Victor. Victor and Julia were the first (set of) parents I interviewed. Meeting them had a very large impact on me and their stories resonated with the others that followed. Victor and Julia had been in each other's lives from the time they were pre-teens and seemed to be greatly in tune with each other. Victor had a gentle and sunny disposition; a thought also shared by his mentor, when she stated: "Victor is the most kind-hearted, loving person, soft hearted and he has nothing but love for those little girls. He tells them they are beautiful all the time" (Lilly, Mentor). Victor and I developed a quick rapport and our conversation ran with ease. He often chuckled when he spoke, even when recounting challenging times and events. Julia was more reserved but was fully engaged, listening, nodding and emoting quietly while Victor talked. As the interview went on, Julia felt more comfortable and started to share more. When Victor's phone rang half-way through the interview—and the voices of their daughters could be heard in the background—Julia and Victor lightened up. They told me the girls had arrived for their visitation. I asked if they would like to continue to chat another time and they cheerfully agreed to a second meeting. A few days later, Lilly asked if I would agree to having the interview at Victor and Julia's new apartment. The couple had recently moved and wanted to show their new home to me. I was very humbled and honoured with the invitation. To reciprocate their kind gesture, I brought a potted plant as a housewarming gift. The flowers were appreciated, and I was immediately shown where they would go; a large balcony that overlooked the street and a park on the side. At the end of a very candid second interview, they showed me around their neat and beautifully decorated apartment. A large picture of the girls at Ma Mawi had a special place in the living room's shelving unit. They took special pride in the large playroom, where a large cardboard playhouse had been set for the girls to draw and colour away. A pile of educational

games, as well as toys and costumes were nicely organized. They shared they could hardly contain themselves with excitement and anticipation to having Summer come home, and eventually, Cindy. It was obvious that every single detail in the playroom had been laid out with love and care. They exuded happiness and pride in their new home. I left our meeting feeling thrilled for them, particularly after learning all they had gone through to get to that point.

6.1.1. Mothers

Victor and Julia, a young couple in their early 20's and late teens respectively, were almost always in the company of Julia's mother at the Bear Den. The trio always seemed in great harmony with each other, often laughing and working on things together. Julia bubbled over when she spoke of her mother: "She's a lot of help, she loves to help! She loves the girls as much as we do, I guess as if they are like her kids [*chuckles warmly*]. She's always there at visits too" (Julia, Mother). Zoe also spoke kindly of her mother, who was helping her care for her baby boy. Zoe credited her mother's fast acting to connecting with Ma Mawi and setting up of an FGC within 10 days of the baby's birth, for preventing her baby boy from being taken into care. Julia's mother, Sandra, was also the one who took initial step towards the process of bringing Julia and Victor's children home.

> I love her a lot. I need company, she will come over. She'll give me company [smiles]. […] She helps me whenever I need her help. In the beginning, I, we didn't know what to do. So, my mom went to a program [at another Indigenous community organization who partners with Ma Mawi]. The lady there helped my mom and my mom helped me. We had a meeting here [at Ma Mawi] and that's when I told him [Victor] about it. Once my mom helped me is when everything started getting together, the FGC, meeting Lilly [FGC mentor] and Michelle [FGC coordinator] (Julia, Mother).

A day earlier, Sandra had expressed the same love for her daughter. Perhaps one of the greatest declarations of her love for Julia was caring for her (and Victor's) children when she/they couldn't. Their mentor, Lilly had shared with me that Sandra was a strong point in Summer's FGC reunification family plan. Having a designated family support who could step in, guide, and relieve the young parents at times of need, made it a more persuasive case with CFS.

Although Victor was the parent who legally petitioned for and obtained reunification with Summer, it was clear Sandra had, and would continue to have a pivotal role to helping raise her grandchildren. Sandra was in the process of obtaining the legal designation as a “place of safety” (POS). The Child and Family Services Act (2019) refers to a POS as any place to which children in care can be sent in an emergency situation and/or for temporary care to ensure their protection and safety. Securing POS status was very important for the family and something that weighed heavily in all of their minds. At the time of the interview, Julia was in the last trimester of her pregnancy with her and Victor’s third child. Prior to FGC, Julia had learned the baby was at risk of being involuntarily apprehended at or shortly after birth, a practice known as ‘birth alert’. Birth alerts are placed by healthcare professionals (e.g., pre-natal nurses, doctors) with CFS when there is a perceived risk to the baby. Sandra conveyed their fears of the baby being apprehended, despite her willingness to care for the baby:

> All I’m trying to get ready for is the newborn, because I know a newborn is on is on its way. I’m trying to get the newborn at my house before it goes to *birth alert*, because that’s basically what it sounds that the [CFS] plan is, for the newborn, to be birth alert. Two weeks ago, one of [workers] from the agency came over to Julia’s place, and I’m doing dishes, being grandma, helping prep the meal, and she said “you know, after Julia’s baby is born, they [CFS] provide the crib for you” [as opposed to before], and after she left I was thinking this is ‘birth alert’. Now I don’t know if I have to look for legal aid, or talk to my lawyer, to ask him how I processed this so that it’s not a birth alert. Because it is birth alert, they will have the baby in the house for a week and I bet you, they will have it up apprehended. […] I got all my checks [good standing with CFS] and I got everything [courses and programs], and you are still going to take the baby from me? That’s what my worst fear, that I have the baby and then they come and take it away just like that! [snapping fingers] That’s what my worst fear is and that’s what it sounds like to me. […] I know for a fact she is having a boy and that’s a good thing. (Sandra, Grandmother)

Birth alert is a practice typically targeted at young mothers, and the ones most scrutinized, are young mothers, particularly those who were in care themselves. Seeing that the Manitoba child welfare system is the one that most over-represents Indigenous children and youth (by 90%), the practice affects almost solely, Indigenous mothers and families (AMC, 2019). Birth alert gained national visibility through social and news media in 2019, when an Indigenous Manitoban family video documented the moment when police officers pried a 1-day old nursing baby from his mother’s embrace, while multiple family members watched and protested. As the social workers and police officers swiftly

removed the newborn and marched out of the hospital room, mother and child could be heard wailing. The clip elicited public outcry and questioning about the rationale of the practice that is in no way supportive of allowing children to bond with their mothers and families. Manitoba Families, an organization that as the name suggests supports families, estimates that approximately 500 birth alerts were issued per year over the past few years (McKendrick, 2020). Birth alert threats and apprehensions were not only a concern to Julia and Sandra, they affected all five mothers in the study. Zoe spoke of the atmosphere of fear that permeated what was meant to be a moment of plain joy in her life. In her words:

> CFS really gave me a hard time. When I was in the hospital a lady [CFS worker] came in and said "well, is it your plan to take the baby home? I said, 'of course the baby is coming home with me'. She said "well, I don't know". I was just so scared the three days I was in the hospital, scared that someone would come and take him from me. Then the social worker came to my house when he was a week old. I called Ella [FGC mentor] and she came in and told the CFS worker that she doesn't think they [CFS] should be involved because I had support.

Zoe had her FGC days later, preventing the baby's apprehension. Diana and Erika did not share the same fate. Both had their children apprehended at birth.

FGC mentor, Lilly, spoke of cases of expecting mothers who contemplated interrupting their pregnancies against their will, out of desperation of going through a CFS apprehension. Some mothers had been in care themselves, others had experienced their other children being apprehended, and in many cases, both. In 2019, Southern Chiefs' Organization responded with the unanimous approval of a resolution in favour of ending the practice (Tsicos, 2019). The pressure from Indigenous organizations and the public prompted the provincial government and CFS to review the practice. In early 2020, the Government of Manitoba declared it would interrupt the practice as of April 2020 (McKendrick, 2020)[9]. Although the promise is reason for celebration, it begs the questions of whether apprehension will now happen shortly after parents return home with their children from hospital. As Sandra expressed: "That's what my worst fear, that I have the baby and then they come and take it away just like that [snapping fingers]" (Sandra, Grandmother).

---

[9] In April of 2020, the provincial government rescinded the promise to end the practice in April of 2020. A timeline for when the practice of birth alert may end was not offered.

Sandra's POS designation was an important step toward the family's final goal of a *customary care agreement (CCA)*; an accord wherein an Indigenous child can be cared for by the extended family network (i.e., grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) in a way that recognizes and reflects the unique customs of the child's Indigenous community (LAM, 2019). Julia could not make a strong case for reunification due to her past struggles with CFS, running away from foster care placements and the apprehensions of Cindy and Summer. Cindy's apprehension was described as being in relation to leaving the supervised residential program with Cindy without accounting for their whereabouts, while Summer's—through birth alert—was justified along the lines of cumulative involvement with CFS and concerns of substance misuse following Cindy's apprehension. Victor could also not make a successful case for being the primary caregiver of two children under two years old while holding a job. Therefore, the hope for keeping the family together rested entirely on POS being granted to Sandra. Having Sandra as the baby's primary caregiver would permit the two younger siblings (i.e., new baby and Summer) to grow up together, as an FGC reunification plan with Cindy was being arranged.

Victor spoke with great endearment about his family: "My family was close. Loving and caring of each other. They tried to teach us to be better than how we were raised, and stuff like that. They just wanted the best for me" (Victor, Father). His memories evidenced the past tense, however. He spoke of fond memories of visiting his uncle and aunt and spending time in the house that once belonged to his grandmother. He disclosed feeling removed from the Dakota reserve and the community where he is from; the house his family had grown up in that was occupied by others with whom he is not closely related; and the people from the reserve who knew of him that he could not remember or identify. The sense of disconnection he expressed had an ambivalent quality. While I could sense loss in no longer being able to call his reserve 'home', there was also a sense of relief. That was emphasized when he shared his mother's efforts to move them off the reserve and go to Winnipeg to get away from the environment he described as problematic.

> I don't know but growing up my reserve was...my family stick with my family, and other people would stick to theirs, people just talked a lot. It wasn't really healthy growing up on the rez [reservation], with all the drama and stuff. So, my mom moved us to Winnipeg. Out there we barely had any family members but my uncle and my auntie. Yeah, this is how it's been

> since we moved to Winnipeg. I just have my brother and my sister. (Victor, Father)

Recognizing that aspect of Victor's life made me understand ever more clearly the significance of having a place such as Ma Mawi, to call your community. Another point that captured my attention was the manner in which Victor spoke about his mother. His words were saturated with affection, and yet, had a sombre tone. At first, I suspected the sombreness may have been related to the separation they had experienced when he was apprehended into foster care as a young child. Later I learned that while that separation was a significant factor in how their relationship unfolded, his tone was related to his mother's recent passing, which had devastated him. Less than a year prior to the interview, Victor had tragically witnessed his mom's murder and he was still processing that terrible loss.

Victor's love for his mother could be seen and felt. When he spoke of her, the corners of his mouth curved upwards, the outer corners of his eyes wrinkled, and his voice was soft. As he shared stories about their lives, I was touched; filled with profound admiration for their ability to remain close in light of so many difficulties and also desolation for the way her life ended. In a manner that once again evoked heart-breaking parallels with Residential Schools, Victor talked about running away from foster care to see his mother and his siblings. He wanted to go home, to her. He spoke with kindness of her battle with alcohol misuse that led to his apprehension into foster care and shared how deeply hurt he felt when people, especially social workers, would try to define his mom based on her struggles. In his eyes, despite it all, she had tried to do the best she could to make their lives different, and that could not be ignored.

6.1.2. Finding a Larger Family

Victor, Julia, and Sandra manifested a profound attachment to Lilly, their FGC mentor. Mentions of Lilly's helpfulness, genuine concern, encouragement, and role in facilitating reunification with their children were constant. Julia talked about the ease with which she could reach out to and communicate with Lilly: "with Lilly you feel like you can call her" (Julia, Mother).

> Lilly is such an awesome person, if you tell her something, she'll go through. And that's why Julia is living in this beautiful home she has now. […] Lilly would just basically do her magic on the phone, "we got a jump on

> this, we got a jump on that". That's how we got most of the toys in there [the apartment where Victor and Julia had moved into], basically because of Lilly. She is a mentor, but she is the best mentor I have ever met in my life. I couldn't even do anything like that on my own; get baby toys, get table and chairs, get couches, area rugs, picture frames. Lilly took was working on everything. […] They [Julia and Victor] have it made now. They have a three-bedroom apartment. The toys they have here, and the toys they have at home. They have it all. Just yesterday, I was talking to Julia, when I went over there to have a visit with the girls before they got picked up by the foster care mom, and the foster mom said the social worker said they would be getting the kids back sooner, because they have a place now. Everything is coming together now. (Sandra, Grandmother)

As a new mentor, Lilly felt very strongly about the program, partly because she herself had experienced the impact of being at the receiving end of Ma Mawi's support at a time in her life when she was in pressing need.

> I remember one of the women at one of the community care sites, she had faith in me. I would go there for a food voucher and she would say: "Lilly, go back to school" because when I did, I had good grades. She would always tell me that [encourage her to go back to school] and I just loved her because she would never judge me. She would work me up. It took a few years, but eventually I did go back to school. She wrote my letter [of reference]. I think I was meant to be at Ma Mawi because she would always ask when I would come and work here.
>
> FGC is giving them [families] that voice and that hope. I was in this situation, I reached out to this organization [Ma Mawi], they assisted me, and they [parents] are here voluntarily, and doing what they need to do to get what they needed to do to get the kids back. By getting their kids back, we just open up so much… they can do anything. "Hey, I can go to school. How hard is that?" The hardest thing is for them to get their kids back and they are already doing everything to get the kids back in the home. So, I'm looking forward to seeing where they go from there. I have just done my first FGC; they are going to be reunified and I'm on the next step of the journey with them. I am able to be part of that. (Lilly, Mentor)

Lilly's testimony helps elucidate how organically mentors connect with families. Much like Lilly, whose life had come full circle as a result of the support she herself received from Ma Mawi, FGC mentors saw themselves and loved ones in the families they support. They believe they could be supports for the families to lean on to heal and get to the other side of their difficulties, together. The support Lilly provided Sandra, Victor, Julia, and the children was not unique in the context of FGC. Families spoke of the can-do attitude and contagious positive energy their mentors had shown them in the process of FGC. Zoe spoke of the support provided by her mentor, Ella, in bringing her family

together to prevent her child from being apprehended into care. She also considered her new-found connections with other FGC mothers and Ma Mawi community.

> It was such a good day! My mom's side of the family, my dad's side of the family…they don't talk at all. I was really worried, nervous to get everybody here, but Ella [smiling] she did it! It was a really good day; everybody was laughing, talking, and nobody was being weird. It was a good day for [my child] for everybody to be here together. We have pictures of both of [the child's] sides of the family. We have family outside of the city and Ella even got them here. My grandmother was here [from Alberta].
>
> Having the support for me and my baby is really nice and if need someone to talk to or help, I have it [Ella]. When I was pregnant, I was really alone all the time and after the baby was born, I had the baby blues, you could say. I cried all the time, and I can talk to her about that kind of stuff. She gives me resources and who to talk to.
>
> If you want to come and hang out of the house with the baby, you can just come here. There's always something to do here. There's always kids here. (Zoe, Mother)

Coming into this doctoral project, I had a keen sense Ma Mawi's FGC program was not simply about providing services to Indigenous families, it was something special. While in the beginning, I struggled to articulate why or how exactly, these manifested and became clear as the research went on. As I got to know the mentors, families, the Ma Mawi community, and Winnipeg, the unique and transformative nature of the program was made clear. The program, by the virtue of those who support, work, and volunteer in it, draws from a premise that might make many in mainstream child welfare quite—if not entirely—skeptical. The program prioritizes offering love and support as a way to growth and change. The rationale, so aptly captured by the teachings and mural of the Bear Den, is that people require reprieve, love and kindness to arrive at a place where they can stop reacting and start acting. From an individualistic perspective to child welfare—as discussed in Chapter 1—the notion of unconditional love, represented by the teaching of the eagle, could be mistakenly taken as parents side stepping responsibility for neglectful and/or abusive acts. However, from a communal Indigenous perspective, love towards oneself and others is required to come to terms with one's past, to open the door to self-understanding that will lead one to appreciate their responsibility and consequently enable changes and a different future. The sentiment behind the rationale of FGC and Ma Mawi that was clear in my conversations with the parents, mentors, volunteers, and workers from other support organizations was that

moments where individuals received loving words and actions, as opposed to judgement and punishment, were the turning points for families whose lives had been impacted by child welfare. The reverberating power of love and kindness are apparent in the way families enrolled in FGC move forward when they find a larger family who take care of them when they need the most.

6.1.3. Loving Families Back to Health

When Michelle, the FGC coordinator, explains FGC to those who are not familiar with the program, she often uses the phrase: “FGC is about loving our families back to health”. The notion of love being described here should not be interpreted through a romantic lens; wherein problems are fully resolved, relationships are healed after a few conversations, serious issues such as struggles with addictions dissipate easily, and dysfunctional dynamics disappear as soon as one steps out of Ma Mawi’s building. What the FGC and Ma Mawi’s larger community accomplish is a space where one does not need to be infallible to be deemed worthy of support and love. The Ma Mawi approach accepts that individuals make many mistakes and that is part of the process of becoming. It emphasizes that all require comfort and kindness to make sense of their experiences, their actions, and what they can accomplish with such encouragement. Also, it reframes experiences and events to unveil the positive qualities and resilience individuals possess and may not realize.

The teaching of the braid of sweetgrass—also depicted in the Bear Den’s mural—signifies this strengths perspective. The Knowledge Keeper explains that life is like a braid that is interlaced as we move along in the four stages of our lives; birth, child/youth, adult, and elder represented by the four suns in the Houston’s mural. He explains that the braid of sweetgrass is composed of three strands of seven threads each where each strand carries an important meaning. The seven threads of the first strand represent the seven sacred teachings (i.e., love, respect, honesty, courage, wisdom, truth, and humility). The seven threads of the second strand signify the seven generations ahead of us; our children, grandchildren and their offspring. The seven threads of the third strand represent the seven generations that precede us, our ancestors. He notes that much like a single thread, a single individual is extremely vulnerable and likely to break. However, when the 21 threads are interwoven, and we consider that one’s life is integral to the lives of our ancestors, our offspring, and the

ways we honour Spirit, much like the braid, one stands strong and unlikely to break. In the context of the FGC program, the metaphor has interconnected meanings. It means the seven sacred teachings are to be incorporated into the work done with families to help families reconnect with their Indigenous identity, culture, sense of purpose, and traditional familial and community roles. It also means families are stronger when they understand how the proximal and distal circumstances of colonialism may have contributed to the ways they think, feel, and act, about themselves, their families, communities, and others in society. This understanding helps families break unhealthy patterns of the past and forge new paths moving forward, where the next generations will not suffer the same consequences. Finally, the Knowledge Keeper expounded that child welfare systems have spent decades focusing on 'single threads' such as perceived deficits, individuals' struggles, and families' challenges. This focus, he argued, has maintained and often aggravated the poor well-being of entire families and communities (Knowledge Keeper, personal communication, November 30, 2018). "*Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata: We all work together to help one another",* is more than a maxim, it is the experience of families in the FGC program. At FGC all are interlaced as one, as family.

> I see myself happier nowadays, looking forward to the future, instead of looking back at the past and seeing how I used to live. I see myself as a happier person now, knowing that I can go back to school, I am starting to worry about myself and not CFS. That is a lot better for me. (Victor, Father)

> I just feel great that when we had FGC, everything, the planning is just as it is supposed to be. Everything is on the right track and that makes me feel good too. I also want to finish school and then get a job from there because I know you have to get a diploma, to get a better job. I want to finish school and even work on the side, and then putting my daughters in school, daycare. (Julia, Mother)

Victor and Julia's thoughts about overcoming challenges and sensing brighter days with their children were echoed by other parents. Hector shared that coming to FGC was life changing.

> I'm thankful that FGC stepped in, that we came here. They gave us a lot of clarity, a lot of knowledge of what we are entitled to. I'm very thankful for this place and our mentor. Our mentor is a great guy, he's a standup person. FGC is willing to go all the way with you. They even worked with me through my stubbornness. They pushed me to look forward. They are always teaching us, to look ahead and not to the past. And I just got a

> phone call this morning that the case worker signed off on our FGC with our youngest daughter.

Zoe shared similar appreciation for the perspective FGC and her mentor offered her.

> I'm finally adjusting to being a mom. At first, I was really sad seeing my friends out, doing their thing but now I have lots of mom friends. We take our babies out and I'd rather do that than what I was doing before. Now, I just want to go back to school. I want to try to get a job, hopefully this summer, because when I go back to school, I don't want to be away from him.
>
> I want to raise my baby right. I want him to play sports and I don't want him to be around bad people. I hope I can keep him out of that kind of stuff. I want him to go to school and play sports. I want him to play hockey. When the hockey game is on, he listens to it. Maybe that will help [chuckling].
>
> Ella is helping me with the "adult stuff" [chuckles]. She helped me do my taxes, get mine and the baby's ID's done, and now she's helping me with the forms to get my own place and resources.
>
> In the future I see me in my own house, me in school, hopefully having a job and a supportive partner… maybe. For now, I have family. I see him [son] in school. I can't wait for him to be older, to see him in school, running around. I can't wait for him to say "mom".

Parents spoke of the many ways the FGC process and team created opportunities and new beginnings when parents could only see obstacles and did not believe the future would or could be different. The resounding message that my interviews with parents revealed is that FGC mentors travel the distance with parents through the process of child welfare to ensure parents get to hear their children call them 'mom' and 'dad'.

6.2. The CFS shadow

6.2.1. Injustice and Insensitivity

The brightness of unconditional love, support, collaboration, and sense of unity that exuded from the parental interviews in relation to their family members, FGC mentors, and the Ma Mawi community existed in continuous juxtaposition with the shadow of a persistent sense of helplessness, injustice, and destruction cast by the involvement of Child and Family Services. While based on the literature, I anticipated the negative impact of CFS on the lives of families, its magnitude proved unfathomable. All parents who participated in the research reported feeling that Child and Family Services had

acted in an unfair and insensitive manner towards them. These actions ranged from assuming an adversarial stance to abuse of power. Examples of abuse most often referred to being coerced into signing documents without legal counsel, not having visitation rights and participation in the children's lives to which they were legally entitled honoured by CFS, being submitted to double-standards, hyper-surveillance of parents private time with their children during visits, and accusatory language and claims. Parents reported feeling helpless as complaints often resulted in retaliation. Antagonism and abuse of power was certainly Victor's experience.

> It just feels like they are fighting to keep our kids in there. They don't want to work with us. I remember when we first started going there [CFS agency], when the kids first got taken away. I didn't even have a lawyer, but I was told to go to court, and I'd go to court and I would be agreeing to the 6-month temporary wards and *I didn't even have a lawyer* [emphasis originally added]. I finally asked one of those people [at the court], "aren't I supposed to have a lawyer?" and they said "oh, you don't have a lawyer?" I finally got my lawyer and as soon as I did, he told me that I [as opposed to Julia] had the highest chance of getting the girls back. And that's what's been happening ever since …working to get them back, to have my daughters back. That agency *never* [emphasis originally added] told me to get a lawyer, and I didn't know what I was signing. They just say, "it's faster if you agree with this paper and do what we are telling you to do". That's where they tricked me at first, because they told me I'd get my kids back after I did [signed] those and I did, and they said "well, that's not good enough, your visits are not working out, you can't take care of special needs". They just go harder and harder, and they make it harder on the parent.
>
> When they first took my daughter [Summer] away… my mother's murder had a trial and that lasted a whole week and before that, I was asking them [CFS] about visits with my youngest daughter. I told them I couldn't make it because of my mom's trial and she told me: "so why are you asking for visits?" I don't know, I just think that was a very inappropriate question. She didn't care, and that's when she was trying to push me around, and my family. She would be saying: "if you don't like it, bring it up in court", and that's why I never liked her, and since then, I knew when she was trying to do me wrong, I'd just get mad at her and I wouldn't agree, and that made our relationship even worse. Eventually, I started to think that they just wanted to keep my daughters from me. (Victor, Father)

Although the callousness in the social worker's response to Victor's proactive communication about the upcoming trial of the person accused of the murder of his mother was particularly disturbing, the overall attitude of insensitivity, inflexibility, and confrontation was not isolated. All parents reported being confronted or diminished by social workers in regard to their commitment to their children and parenting abilities.

While speaking about the attempt to prevent her child from being apprehended at birth while expecting her third child, Erika and Hector shared the following:

> When I got pregnant, I wasn't sure if I should tell them [CFS] or not because I wasn't sure if there was going to be a birth alert. But at the same time, I started to think: 'what is there is a birth alert and if it's too late'. We worked with them [being upfront] but this [CFS] worker we have…I don't know if he means to be the way he is, but I've never worked with anyone so ignorant before. When we met him, he said: "you guys are too high-risk to parent". We were there, sitting at a CFS boardroom [in disbelief] and we said: 'how can you say that? you don't even know us?'. He said: "we have everything on file, and we go off by that". (Erika, Mother).
>
> He was bouncing off his chair while we spoke [as a sign of disdain], and he pounded his wrists on the desk and that "I'll see you guys in court". (Hector, Father)

Parents posited double standards were the norm. Hector spoke of the ways by which he had no recourse when he and Erika were misquoted and misrepresented in court. After feeling helpless for having their words misrepresented and decontextualized, they decided to take matters into their own hands and (explicitly) record their conversation with their CFS worker. The worker told them to turn it off, stating he did not consent to the recording. They complied and when the worker turned his recording device on and Hector stated they also did not consent to being recorded, the CFS worker stated they did not have the right to not consent. Double standards in regard to changes in visitation scheduling were mentioned by all participants as a pervasive issue. They shared that social workers would often cancel and change visitation appointments without parents' knowledge or consultation, without regard for parents' schedules, commitments, and financial implications. However, if parents needed to do the same, that would be interpreted as a sign of lack of responsibility or commitment to the child welfare process and brought up against them in the court proceedings. When parents offered reasons such as employers' inability and/or unwillingness to accommodate their visitations times, daycare/childminding (for other children) availability limitations, and financial hardship (e.g., not being able to afford bus passes), these were seldom well-received. For some, family visitation scheduling was so erratic and inflexible that it was impossible to keep regular jobs, forcing them to seek financial assistance and food banks to make ends meet. The issue with accessing assistance is that it often entraps families in cycles of poverty that are ultimately levelled against them in court while seeking family reunification.

> A lot of the days, it takes my whole time, and some days I don't even see my boys because I'm busy and doing all of this; I'm busy going to court, I'm busy here [Ma Mawi] right? One of my sons is going to be turning 18 tomorrow. He's understanding, and he works. There are days that he leaves at 8:30 and he doesn't come back until 10pm, because he works late. Right after school he takes the bus and he goes to work. If there are days that he's off, I don't even get to see him because I'm doing this [dealing with CFS]. I'm constantly busy. And my other son: he had friends living in the city so he was taking off and going to see them, which is about five blocks from my house. He was always going back to their place. But they moved into the city because of the flood evacuation, and now they moved back, so now he is at home and I get to see him more. But there were days that I was doing this, I would hardly get to see him. And I would come home feeling depressed. The depression that they [CFS] have put me with this [trying to regain custody of Cindy] …it's terrible but you have to push through, because there is nothing you can really say. You have to go along with what they [CFS] say. (Sandra, Grandmother)

Sandra and Victor also spoke of the constant moving targets imposed by CFS, often to no avail, in ways that resounded other parents:

> They say:" you have to take a special needs course" because of your oldest granddaughter, "you have to take a sign language course because of your oldest granddaughter". When I talked to my lawyer, he said "you don't have to do anything, let's just see what happens with this". If I know that there is a program out there or will push things, then I'll do it. (Sandra, Grandmother)

> They tell us to take these programs and talk to counselling and get the FASD tests and stuff, we go do them, and then the time would come up and they'd say: "ok, you did this, you did this, but now you have to go do these programs". (Victor, Father)

> From 2015 to 2017, all we did: programs, nothing but programs. We have a binder full of our assessments, everything, and that still was not good enough, at all. (Erika, Mother)

> We have [favourable] Parent Capacity Assessment (PCA), psychological assessments, drug and alcohol assessments but when we were referred to a lawyer, he said: "all you did doesn't count to this case worker, he has no intention of ever returning your kids". (Hector, Father)

Lilly came to a sobering observation in regard to parents not being able to satisfy CFS' requirements, while discussing Victor and Julia's case.

> And that's because they [CFS] want parents to burn out. Because if they keep on doing it, they [parents] will give up. It's horrible how it works. I see kids that are in danger and in need of our protection, but it's not the case [with Victor and Julia]. I have another family like that, where one the social worker doesn't want to meet. She [the mother] has done 50 different

> programs and yet, you still don't know [if she will be considered for FGC]. (Lilly, Mentor)

Child and parental assessments—formal and informal—were more often than not described as tools that would allow CFS to remove children from their families and/or to keep them in foster care, but not as indicative of parents' fitness and/or evidence for family reunification. Sandra illustrated this point when she considered Cindy's apprehension, which she described as an abusive in nature. Sandra explained that in the context of Cindy's "FASD diagnosis":

> The social worker said: "you know when babies sit like that, that's called a 'W-Formation'", and I said "And?" She said, "well, when kids sit in a W-Formation, it's FASD and she is way smaller than what a baby usually should be at". I said "ok", but I didn't understand that, and I didn't understand anything about FASD. And she said: "that's Fetal Alcohol Syndrome". I said: "are you sure that she has that? Because I can't picture Julia drinking while she was pregnant". […] Later we learned that she had a chromosomic disorder and that's what made her special needs. So, she didn't have FASD. She actually had this genetic disorder. The social worker was wrong on that, and she made me feel horrible when she told me about her [Cindy] being FASD. (Sandra, Grandmother)

Sandra theorized that had Cindy not been improperly diagnosed, Julia might not have engaged in substance misuse as a coping mechanism for the loss of her child. Victor also spoke of the many hoops he had to jump through to satisfy the CFS worker's unfounded FASD diagnosis. Furthermore, Victor and Julia had to submit to genetic testing to prove they did not have the same chromosomic disorder their daughter possesses.

> They were telling me to get a cognitive delay test. They thought I was FASD and I guess their supervisor was telling the foster parents and everybody else that I was FASD. But before I even had kids, I had an FASD test and it said that I wasn't, that I was delay and FASD free. We got the FGC done and they [FGC mentors] said I didn't have that, and then I didn't have to do that anymore. And then they [CFS] were asking… some kind of psychiatrist told them to watch me with the girls to see if I was a fit parent, to parent by myself. And then they wanted me to do grief and loss counseling again, and I *already did that* [emphasis originally added], then they wanted me to do in-patient AFM [Addiction Foundations Manitoba—rehabilitation program] and I was only smoking weed at the time. I went to my AFM worker and they said that there were no concerns about me, and they [CFS] still wanted me to do that [AFM]. So, I had to get my AFM worker to talk to

> them, and that got off my list. I did Triple P [Positive Parenting Program[10]] twice, Grief and Loss, Caring Dads, CPR. I did a bunch of programs for them. […] and I did my chromosome testing, that was another thing they were asking for, because my daughter has this genetic condition they wanted to see if me or Julia had it. We did that right away. (Victor, Father)

Victor, Julia, and Sandra had taken and were taking many courses to support their daughter with her developmental and special needs, including but not limited to child development, nutrition, sign communication, and Jordan's principle. After learning Cindy also had a heart murmur that required an operation, they were trying to learn as much as they could about the special care she would require following the surgery that would be done by a specialist on the West Coast. They had petitioned and been granted the right to accompany their daughter in her doctors' visits and yet, despite reaching out to the social worker, they had not been called to be part of any of the appointments to that point.

> It scares me to because you want to know what's happening to our daughter, at the doctors', because my daughter has a heart murmur and they won't tell me anything that's going on with her. She is supposed to go for surgery but they're not letting us about anything. I'd like to be there. (Julia, Mother)

> They [CFS] are saying that to raise our daughter they need some kind of a super-parent and that's how they've been making the case in court, that I don't have enough experience to parent a child, especially a special needs child. My lawyer said they were picking on me because I was young. Well, nobody has experience until they actually have their kid but that's what they kept telling me in court. It's stupid. (Victor, Father)

Several things stood out in Sandra, Julia, and Victor's experiences with CFS regarding Cindy's special needs. The word that kept coming to mind was a "superhero-parent". While the CFS worker's choice of words may have been hyperbolical, the expectations imposed on Victor and the family, certainly were not. The couple's FGC mentor spoke of the exorbitant number of demands placed on the family for reunification: "all of the training that he [Victor], Julia, and Sandra have done! There were more than 50 different certificates. That's more than me, and even the coordinator, have. And these are the hoops they make them jump through" (Lilly, Mentor). Sandra corroborated Lilly's views

[10] Triple P—Positive Parenting Program—is a community psychology intervention, originally tailored for at-risk children. It was designed to increase parental knowledge, skills, and confidence and reduce the prevalence of mental health and emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents (Triple P, 2010).

while sifting through a large stack with more than hundred pages of certificates, letters of reference (of her character), and court papers that documented the past two and a half years of her life, from the time Cindy was apprehended from her care.

Sandra cared for Cindy for two and half years from when CFS removed Cindy from Julia's care. Sandra recounted that she gladly took Cindy in, as she cringed at the thought of seeing her granddaughter being taken into foster care, the same way she and her daughters had. She explained that things were going well. When another grandchild, from her other daughter was apprehended into care and she took that baby in too, she found herself caring for two young children and a son. To make matters worse, CFS was ignoring Sandra's calls for professional and respite support for Cindy's increasingly atypical development and behaviour—at the time "diagnosed" by the CFS worker as FASD. Sandra shared that every time she would ask for help, she felt judged and further ostracized by the suggestion her daughter had neglectfully used alcohol during the pregnancy. The requests for help also placed Cindy and Sandra under greater scrutiny from CFS. Emotional, Sandra spoke of the day when Cindy was apprehended from her care:

> I just went to do my taxes. I went to a place where they do them for free. I did my taxes, walked through a store, grabbed a burger, hopped on my bus and I was 10 minutes late. The person who picked them [granddaughters] up and dropped the kids off at every visit was the case worker's sister, of all people. So, she was the one who set this whole thing [Cindy's apprehension] up. So, I was home, I was 10 minutes late, I had my transfer and then I was waiting, waiting, waiting and I was wondering: "why is baby not home yet?" So, I called the police and I asked them if there had been any type of a car crash. The worst was going through my head. They said to call the children's hospital. I called emergency and they never heard anything. I went right down to the police station. The drop off time was 4:30, and I went to the police station at 6:30 or 7. But first, I went to ANCR [Child and Family All Nations Coordinated Response Network]. I went there first and they said: "no we haven't heard anything so go to the police station. I went to the police station, I reported her, and as soon as I went there, they asked: "what is the [agency's] supervisors name?" As soon as I said that, they had her on phone within three minutes before even saying anything and they said: "she is already in care, she is living in a foster home". I asked why did they put her in a foster home? "The reason for that is because you were three hours late"
>
> **Elisa:** Three hours?
>
> **Sandra:** *Exactly!* [emphasis originally added]. I had to transfer [buses]. I was so mad that I threw the transfer away, the bus transfer was my proof

to let everybody know that I was only 10 minutes late. I guess the person who dropped them off told the police and her sister [the supervisor] that I was 15-20 minutes late; she said "I went there at 4:30 and nobody was there. I left I went there at five and nobody was there, I left and I went there at 6:30 and nobody was there". I said, if I had a camera sitting right there, you would have been there at 4:30, knocked on the door, picked up the kids and left right away. Because your sister is somebody big [referring to power status within the agency] you can get away with stuff like that. And then they started to come up with stuff like: "you never took her to the doctor's, you're never did this". They were pouring me paperwork, after paperwork for being 10 minutes late for my granddaughter's drop-off.

[Sandra cries, visibly upset]

Elisa: I'm so sorry you have to go through this, Sandra

Sandra: [crying] It's terrible, it's very terrible. They're taking kids away from their families, people that don't even deserve it. But you see people taking kids to the beer vendor all the time, "let's go get a couple of beers", and someone who is 10 minutes late, who is trying their best, is not good enough right? And that's why my case is here, and it's a huge case. But now everything is just being put back together [referring to FGC]

Sandra shared that Cindy's apprehension stood out as one of the saddest days in her life. In addition to feeling the apprehension had been an overreaction and that Cindy would undoubtedly be better off in her care than with a stranger, the apprehension evoked memories of the time her daughters had been apprehended by CFS. She knew all too well the hardships her daughters had experienced as a result of the distancing created by CFS becoming involved in their lives and how their mother-daughter relationships had suffered as a result:

Shortly after Julia lost her daughter, maybe about five months in of living on her own [under a CFS independent living agreement], she lived on William Avenue [an impoverished part of Winnipeg]. Six months in, her place burnt down, the whole place burnt down, I don't know if there was a drug addict that was downstairs, messing around with the stove, but she was trapped in her place. Victor was actually downstairs, and he had to run back up to get Julia. All of her stuff was burnt to the ground; all of her papers, the court papers she had about her daughter, everything was demolished and all she had was the clothes she was wearing. All night, for a whole night, she was walking around downtown in circles, wondering where to go.

[Sandra breaks down in tears] …

…that's the devastation she had to go through. She called me the next day and said "mom, my place burnt down". I told her to come over and she said she didn't want to intrude on me. And I thought, "oh my god, she wouldn't

> come to my house". She said she would go stay with her sister. She stayed with her sister for about a year. (Sandra, Grandmother)

6.2.2. Ripple Intergenerational Effects

CFS materialized as a source of thoroughgoing personal and familial destruction for generations of families interviewed. It also stood as a source of continuous colonial oppression impacting Indigenous children, families, and communities. The stories of Cindy, Summer, Victor, Julia, and Sandra will manifest these claims with precision; showing the often-unsurmountable walls built between parents and their children in the child welfare system and the profoundly hierarchical and colonizing workings of a system that continues to punish families for their historical socio-cultural disadvantage. It is against this backdrop, that this section advances the tenaciousness of parents and their resolve to embark and continue on the treacherous road to family reunification through mainstream child welfare systems. Victor offered the following insight to that point:

> You can see how CFS doesn't work anymore. You see it in the news, all these kids [in care] … growing up wrong, and you can see how they [CFS] just see how they want to keep your kids. I learned that the agency that we were part of, has the lowest reunification rate in the city, and there is a reason, because the supervisors and the people they hire… I don't know maybe because they don't have experience, but whatever they're doing… or whoever taught them, were taught to keep the kids instead of working with the parents to give them back. And then you come here [FGC], and you see a big difference compared to what they [CFS agency] were doing. They [CFS] didn't even help me with housing, not even a housing form. And in court we got an agreement plan saying that CFS were supposed to invite me to every medical appointment they [daughters] have, and I haven't received one invitation yet, and that was two months ago. And *if I broke something in that agreement* [emphasis originally added], they would cancel it [the agreement] or something. *It's so crooked, it's all I can say. They are crooked. They want to say that Native people were kind of stupid, but they are kind of stupid, they don't know what they're doing there* [emphasis originally added]. (Victor, Father)

Victor's emotionally charged assertion carries great meaning, in that it is informed by his, Julia's, and Sandra's dual experiences as children and youth in care and parents seeking reunification.

Sandra (grandmother) spoke of her own placement in care as a young child, when her mother encountered difficulties with an unhealthy relationship. She recounted vague memories of being moved around in foster and group homes run by non-

Indigenous individuals and the feeling of being severely homesick and confused. Reflecting on her own experience as a parent in child welfare systems, she later understood her mother's drastic decision to pick her (and her sibling) up for an unsupervised visit and fleeing the province to 'start fresh'. Given the insuperable requirements she herself experienced by CFS, she saw her mother may have felt as discouraged and desperate as she felt trying to get Julia and her sister back into her care. Sandra shared Julia and her sister had been apprehended from her care due to suspicions of the girls' father being affiliated with a gang. Although the claim was not substantiated in court and Sandra left that relationship, she was never able to become legally reunified with her daughters before they aged out of care. Sandra attributed not being successful in becoming reunified with her children to CFS.

Julia spoke of the traumatic time her life was intersected and forever changed by CFS:

> **Julia:** [Sad expression and tone] When I was 12, I went into CFS. I didn't know where to go. I came home from school one day, and all of a sudden, my mom and all of them [sister and stepfather], were gone. I guess from there, I was just pretty much left alone with my sister. But my sister was already living with my grandma [to avoid being placed in care], so I just stayed with my grandma, and my grandma told me "I can't support you", because she wasn't getting money or anything for me. So, I pretty much called CFS and put myself in care.
>
> **Elisa:** […] that must have been a very difficult thing to go through…
>
> **Julia:** You know, it's just confusing. Not knowing what to do […]
>
> **Elisa:** […] I can't imagine
>
> **Julia:** And then, it feels good that my mom came back into my life because she's been there for about three years now
>
> **Elisa:** That is nice. Were you in CFS for a long time after that?
>
> **Julia:** Since I was 12, 13, until I was 18.
>
> **Elisa:** That's a while.
>
> **Julia:** Uhm… and I was like everywhere in the city…because I couldn't stay in a stable home, a foster home.
>
> **Elisa:** Why is that?

> **Julia:** I think it was just the homes, I wouldn't feel comfortable; so, I'd just run away, and I'd get kicked out of there and go to a different place, just the same thing, over and over again.
>
> **Elisa:** How many times did that happen to you?
>
> **Julia:** I think I got placed 65 times in foster homes and emergency and staying at some support workers' places.

During a period of time within these 65 placements, Julia became pregnant with her and Victor's first child, Cindy. Julia was then admitted into a residential program run by Ma Mawi for expecting and young mothers under the care of CFS. The program, which seeks to support and prepare young women for motherhood, features among many things, education on infant and child development, nutrition, personal finances, counselling, and social peer-support. After staying in the program for three years, CFS felt Cindy had to be placed into care because Julia was failing to account for her (and Cindy's) whereabouts on the weekends. Julia was spending the weekends at Victor's aunt with whom she closely identified. To avoid Cindy's placement into a non-family related foster home, Ma Mawi was able to arrangement for Cindy to be placed into Sandra's care. Sandra agreed with the placement but noted that the placement could have been avoided, if CFS had considered the reasons behind Julia's behaviour.

> She [Julia] would always go there [Victor's aunt] just to feel at home, just to feel normal, and not feel like there's workers around her all the time. That's where she would run away to, and she would spend the whole weekend there, and come home, and then they [CFS] would assess that, and write it down and say, well, "Julia is not ready for this, or not ready for that". So that's where she stood basically. I guess it was back in 2015 [2.5 year prior], when the first apprehension of Cindy [happened]. They [CFS] returned her [Cindy] back to Julia but [about 4 months later], the social worker from the agency came to the house with my granddaughter. I wondered why she was there, and she said: "she [Cindy] is getting apprehended because Julia keeps running away, we don't know where she is, "would you be a 'Place of Safety?" I said for sure because I was going to Julia's place at [the residential program] for Christmas, Easter, dinners, and things like that. I was in her life 100%. Every day I would go there, or every other day at times. And she was going to school and we would spend time together and that's how Julia's daughter ended up in my care, because I was going back and forth there [residential program]. (Julia, Mother)

While the dynamic between Julia and CFS could have benefited from more open communication to prevent the apprehension of Cindy, Sandra believed Julia's past involvement with CFS and her interminable number of placements in care were the

reason behind “weekend escapes”, to find a sense of normal and a place where she felt at home, surrounded by family. Sandra noted that losing custody of Cindy was extremely hard on Julia. Julia began to abuse substances and eventually left the residential program. Julia was so averse to the idea of going back into foster care that she chose to couch surf with periods of homelessness.

Feeling homesick and wanting to go home was also something Victor expressed. He explained he was placed under CFS care due to his mother’s problems with alcohol addiction, around the time he was six years old. He had had also experienced neglect and unhealthy behaviours in his mother’s care but felt what he encountered in CFS was far more traumatic.

> Well I didn’t really like it [CFS] because I guess I ran away too much back to my mom’s place. They put me in two homes which is a lot for somebody. My social worker said that I would be there for six months if I was good, so I did whatever they wanted me to do and they just kept me there for three years. Then [after three years], I kept running away, back to my reserve for a month, and they said they couldn’t keep a bed for me over there [foster home], so I ended up locked up because I breached my curfew. (Victor, Father)

Victor explained that after fleeing his first foster home placement to be with his mom, he was taken to a foster home on the West Coast away from his siblings, where he stayed for the three years.

> I would ask my social worker why I was in CFS. They said it was because my mom was drinking when we were in her care. And that was just wondering why it took so long for me to go back to my mom… My social worker said that I would be there for six months if I was good.
>
> It kind of feels like your parents are not trying to get you back. I don’t know… [pauses with visible sadness] … I kind of hated my mom at the time for not getting me back and my brother and sister. I guess this is how CFS is… I remember when my brother ran back to my mom’s house when I was living with her, and CFS didn’t like it so they [criminally] charged my mom with keeping a kid from foster care. And my mom started to kick my brother out because she didn’t want to get charged again. That made my brother think that we didn’t like him anymore. (Victor, Father)

Sandra’s, Julia’s, and Victor’s stories share a thread of the ever-presence of CFS, from as far back as they can remember. For all of them, their involvement with CFS importantly influenced how they saw themselves, how they felt about their parents, the family relationships they were denied growing up (with siblings, extended families, and

communities), and the negative perspective they acquired of Indigenous peoples as a whole. All of them bore the hefty socio-emotional toll of being removed from their homes, family, communities at formative times in their childhood. All were left to their own devices to make sense of the disappearance of their parents from their lives, and conjecturing reasons as to why they deserved the punishment of separation and their pleas to return to their families were denied. All were left to heal from the complex ambivalence between hurt, hatred and love for their parents. All felt they had to suppress their Indigenous ways to 'fit in' in foster care and society. And all experienced profound maladjustment from the stigma and discrimination associated with being a child and youth in care, and later on, as parents with open cases in child welfare systems.

From a wider lens, the stories of Sandra, Julia, and Victor represent the replication of policies and practices associated with colonial systems. As Hart et al. (2020) explain, colonial systems devalue and/or or render Indigenous systems and peoples as "flawed", to ascertain white dominance and the internalization of oppression. Individualistic systems and patriarchal ideals of family structure and function restrict, narrow, and disallow Indigenous families' and communities' ability to function by dismembering families and communities with the dislocation of children from their kin and cultural identity.

> The dislocation of the children is a central strike against Indigenous societies, as well as the obligations and rights of families and communities within these societies. While there are times when these undermining perspectives and actions of Indigenous people have been held unconsciously, there are many times when they have been held overtly by decision makers, politicians and bureaucrats who placed themselves in control of Indigenous peoples lives. One of the great challenges that emerges is that Indigenous persons, families and communities are left having to "prove" themselves, when too often the issue remains one of the imposed structures and people administering them. (p. 6)

Much like the stories shared by Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and Sixties Scoop survivors detailed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (TRC, 2015), Julia and Victor's testimonies talk about the trauma of being involuntarily removed from their families under the guise of "betterment", the desperate lengths children go to attempt to return to their homes and the punishment when they try; the intense emotional suffering and confusion from being led to conclude their parents and families do not care about or love them enough to try and get them back, and the inhumane sanctions imposed on

parents that lead them to be hostile to their own children to avoid being criminally prosecuted and consequently obstruct any chance of future reunification (Fontaine & Craft, 2016).

6.3. Hope

The stories shared thus far in this sub-chapter illustrate the pervasive generational effects of child welfare systems in the lives of Indigenous children, parents, and their families. I struggled to articulate how to describe the ripple effect that occurs through generations. I found in the Tlicho Dene interdisciplinary artist Casey Koyczan's art installation entitled *Gone but not Forgotten*, a perfect vehicle. This art piece, crafted by driftwood collected from the Assiniboine River and tied together by knots, was inspired by and offered as a response to, the many bodies of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls washing ashore the riverbanks. With the piece, the artist hoped to convey the symbolism of the interconnectedness of the women and girls to their families and communities. Just as if a single piece of wood were to be removed from the unit, the whole piece would be thrown off-kilter, when a family or a community loses one of their members, the whole group suffers extensive and sometimes irreversible changes. Although the parents did not speak of colonization, residential schools, or Sixties Scoop, the context of colonialism, assimilation, and oppression enveloped all of their families. Anishinaabe poet and social worker, Mary Black, substantiates the connections articulated here with a moving poem, entitled *Quiet*[11]:

> I will not be quiet
> we, as Indigenous women, have too much to lose to
> exist in silence while our people drown themselves
> in booze
> Trying to erase the memory of a damaged generation
> but it's easier to stay quiet than to heal an entire nation
> so we suffer
>
> I will not be quiet
> our families were forced to keep their mouths closed
> and until we choose to speak
> the outside world cannot begin to know
> how deeply and badly we still feel the pain

[11] "Quiet" emerged from Black's refusal to stay silent on the complex experiences of Indigenous women concerning domestic violence in Winnipeg.

How the patterns strain my brain leave me feeling
insane
cuz I carry a world of hurt on my shoulders and the
heaviness only increases as I get older
So I will not be quiet
or try to hide the cycles of repetition that our families

and communities have been perpetually living in I refuse to carry the guilt or the shame from being sexually abused by the system in place that was
created with the intention of 'keeping us safe'
No
I will not shut up
And I will not sit down
until our 1,200 missing sisters are found, I will scream I will scream and I will yell because they have been
silenced
I will fight this silent battle with our women against
violence
And the most violent
or benevolent being could not keep me from speaking
the true meaning of "Free"

I will not be quiet
As the system steals our babies and keeps us living
with less
The genocide isn't over, it just has a new name—C.F.S.
When they told us they'd keep us safe, they lied
If this was the case—then WHY?
Why are there so many suicides?
Why did my best friend suffer so deeply inside that he
felt the need to take his own life
When he hadn't even lived yet
Why do our parents carry so much regret
Why has so much damage come to our women
Why, at the age of 12, did I become a victim
of sexual assault
And not just me, but so many of my friends and my
family
Women and girls who are beautiful beyond
explanation—their bodies to become used and
abused,
Just another violation
on an Indigenous
Woman

See, the system was designed to have us take our own
lives
To keep the blood stained hands of the guilty clean

And keep the death on the hands of our children and
our babies
And as long as we are idle and silent
Our children will keep dying because they are
surrounded by violence
Violence and addictions—confused by the abuse
And how badly they must hurt, to want to tie a noose
around their neck or stick a gun to their head
when at the same time some children lay peacefully in
their beds
while our babies are dying
While our children
are crying

Until we speak and stand up as a family
we are going to keep losing our girls to the streets
And our lives will be conquered by the blood that we
see
and instead of the knowledge our children will seek to
erase the history of our grandparents deceased
Who died enraged at the people that we
would turn out
to be
Because without our knowledge, our stories and our
traditions,
we have become the ones who cage us
in this Hell
that we are living in.
So no. I will not
be quiet

(Smith, 2018)

As it was noted by the mentors in the 5.1. the majority of parents in FGC start to learn about what Indigenous peoples have been through, and how their communities and families might have been affected, for the first time when they come to FGC. Parents who participated in the research spoke of FGC as finally arriving at a place where things they hoped and imagined were starting to fall into place and their future was moving on a positive direction, and no longer withstanding their situation in silence.

"Everything is coming together now" (Sandra, Grandmother).

And to think that when they first came to us, Victor and Julia were not together, he was living in a downtown hotel, she was coming in because she had found out she was pregnant and thought CFS was taking the baby. And here we are five months later, *only five months!* And it looks like they'll

> be able to keep the baby, they reunited together as a couple, and they are happy and peaceful. (Lilly, Mentor)
>
> I can see me with my girls, going back to school, a job and a car, and maybe a better place to stay. I want a place with an upstairs and downstairs. I can see myself five years from now. I'll still be happy. Maybe a month from now I can sign up for school. I already know what I want now that I'm getting my girls back. (Victor, Father)

For Julia, Victor, Sandra, and all other parents who participated in the research, FGC symbolizes a place of rejuvenation, reflection, and forging new the paths into a more heartening future, for themselves and for their children. As conveyed by the main story Julia, Victor, and Sandra and supporting statements by the other participants, Indigenous parents have done and are doing their part, painstakingly. To prevent Indigenous children from going through the experiences their parents and grandparents before them, it is now incumbent on settler society to critically consider the ways by which they are complicit in sustaining colonial structures of thought and power, to actively engage in dismantling them, and hold themselves accountable. As detailed by the many domains (e.g., education, child welfare, research, churches, governments, law) identified in the 94 Calls to Action of the TRC (2015), everyone is implicated in the task of decolonization towards reconciliation. In our own contexts, platforms, private and public lives, there are points of entry into this work. It is our job, as settlers ti find them, and co-create decolonial psychological, physical, spiritual, cognitive, ideological, and legal spaces that provide Indigenous Peoples with reprieve, rejuvenation, and healing from forced colonization, assimilation, and discrimination. The task ahead of us in child welfare rests on deep listening, not only with our ears and minds but also with our hearts and spirits. It is our responsibility to protect the sacredness of children, and to do so we ought to create the conditions for the healing, wholeness, and wellness of the family and community.

Conclusion

The objectives of this dissertation are to reaffirm the theoretical stance that individuals are communally constituted, intrinsically interconnected to context and those with and from whom they learn to gain a sense of self; for there is no self without the other, and outside of a cultural system of concepts, beliefs, and values. By offering the readers a glimpse into the lives and circumstances of parents whose lives became intercepted by child welfare systems, I hope to provide first-hand accounts of the severe limitations of systems predicated on individualistic conceptions of selfhood. I also hope to convey the lingering generational impact of these systems in families' lives. Lastly, this dissertation is a contribution to the TRC and other Indigenous calls for radically different ways to conceive child welfare. By presenting a child welfare intervention based on a communally-constituted notion of selfhood, this research shows there is another, more promising, strength-oriented, responsive and responsible way to think about difficulties family experience.

This doctoral dissertation is not simply a theoretical disciplinary academic exercise, it carries a much larger intention, that of making a robust moral argument that by insisting in adopting individualistic legislation and practices and resisting communal approaches to selfhood, Canadian governments and society are actively choosing to remain in their colonial roles. This assessment or criticism is not directed at any one individual, professional class, discipline, or institution, but rather the Eurocentric ideas that guide collective action. The stories shared by mentors and parents convey the complexity, interconnection, and generational historical, socio-economic, cultural and political challenges and circumstances that undergird child welfare involvement. These layers evidence the importance of looking beyond caring for children as mainstream systems do, and into families, communities, and traditional teachings as a way forward. This research addresses the ideological, practical, and relational mechanisms that have and continue to separate Indigenous families from each other and their communities, supporting Bastien's claim that child welfare is the newest face of colonization (Bastien, 2004), even if through and despite the best intentions of well-meaning individuals. The stories shared in this document connect the dots from colonization, to residential schools, to child welfare, through the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and knowledges, assimilation, internalization of systemic prejudice, governmental and

systemic abuse of power, the justification of poverty, and discrimination and racism in painful details. Although from a (Western) governmental perspective, child welfare systems see the removal of children from their homes and placement into foster care as an expression of protection, from an Indigenous perspective, this could not be further from the truth. In fact, its consequences have been devastating.

> CFS's governing framework, and associated legislation, practice, and professional training concerned with family well-being have failed to consider that the criteria used in such assessments of risk remain based on non-Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices. Child welfare mandates have been implemented in ways that emphasize patriarchal two-parent family structures, deficits as reasons for family dissolution, and the privileging of services that are based in non-Indigenous worldviews and practices. Wholistic perspectives, where the extended family/community are seen as central to individual well-being have been relegated to a secondary and/or irrelevant status. Indigenous people continue to be problematized while little attention is paid to them in the colonial context (Hart, Lacerda-Vandenborn, & Robinson, 2020, p. 9)

In the so-called Post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission era, settler society can no longer hide behind "not knowing". Alfred in Regan (2010) observes:

> Exposing the mindset that perpetuates "benevolent" colonialism, urges settlers to take responsibility for decolonizing themselves and their country. [W]ords of apology and reconciliation are not enough to make the significant social and political change that is so sorely needed. Words must be accompanied by concrete action at all levels of Canadian society. If such actions are to be transformative, they cannot be predicated on good intentions but must be rooted instead in a fundamental recognition of the human dignity and right to freedom of self-determining Indigenous peoples. (Regan, 2010, p. x)

In my view, individualistic notions of selfhood propagated in child welfare—and other systems, for that matter—are just that, a concept that enables and furthers "benevolent" colonialism in ways that impact every aspect of Indigenous life.

This dissertation is my entry point into the work of decolonization; my contribution to breaking the silence and not being quiet. It takes to heart Mary Black's calls and those of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond; exposing the ways in which disciplinary beliefs and practices concerning the nature of selves have been employed by social institutions to communicate to individuals and groups in myriad of ways, the kinds of persons they are, what they can (and cannot) do, are (and should not be) entitled to in society (e.g., benefits and sanctions). As I argued elsewhere (Vandenborn, 2014), and

based on Rose's (1998) analysis of psy-disciplines—or the psychological sciences concerned with the investigations of psychological phenomena (e.g., psychology, psychiatry, school psychology, counselling)—thinking and making sense of oneself and others without the influence, language, concepts, expertise, techniques furnished to us by disciplinary psychology is an impossible feat in contemporary society. When Victor defended himself with the statement: "[t]hey thought I was FASD, and I guess their supervisor was telling the foster parents and everybody else that I was FASD. But before I even had kids, I had an FASD test and it said that I wasn't", he is illustrating the power of disciplinary psychology's classifications. Whether, individuals such as Victor, accept the classification ascribed to them or not, the fact remains that such classification will require incorporation into their personal narratives. That is to say, individuals have to psychologically and spiritually work through the process of shedding the damaging labels conferred to them. They have to convince themselves that *they are not* the classification given to them. Moreover, what psy-disciplines furnish to us, goes beyond private philosophical musings. It influences how governments think about and control its citizens. It helps architect the meaning networks that structure practices that will afford privilege and power to some and deny them to others. Although psy-disciplines are not generated by the state itself, they serve neoliberal governamentality purposes.

Neoliberal governments are removed from the position of authority of dictating to citizens what they can and cannot do in their private, and to an extent, the public spheres. Under a discourse of scientific "evidence", "neutrality", and "objectivity", the technological apparatus (e.g., measures, language) of disciplinary knowledge is elevated as a particular kind of rationality that coaxes individuals to particular ways of being and acting. The classifications, categories, and what is defined under them as desirable and undesirable traits and behaviours, serve as the guidelines to self-analysis, self-worth, and self-management. This self-monitoring is precisely the necessary condition for government at a distance. This distal governing perspective, through selfhood, is connected to major neoliberal socio-economic functions. When individuals' constitution is delineated as acontextual, ahistorical, apolitical, asocial, and acultural, what they are, experience, and manage to achieve in their lives is conceived as inherently independent from what surrounds them. When such contextual factors are relegated to ancillary or unimportant positions, there is little impetus or perceived value in changing them. Such beliefs allow governments to divest themselves from social welfare responsibilities that

once belonged to them. Thus, freeing capital for production and expansion, tenets of capitalism and neoliberalism (Rose, 1998; Rose & Miller, 2010).

As the parental interviews revealed, voiced and unspoken messages received from CFS, often by the means of psychological language, testing, and assessments were used as instruments of oppression, under the guise of "scientific expertise", while families, communities, and societies continue to struggle with blatant social disparities, veiled and unveiled discrimination and racism, and an unhurried positioning to address the socio-cultural, economic, and political issues that thread together the experience of the majority of families in child welfare systems. At this point, it is important to reiterate that this dissertation is not meant to disparage disciplinary knowledge, psychologists, or social workers. That would be antithetical to embarking on this detailed analysis and producing this research document. This author recognizes that for the most part, those working in child welfare are inspired by the education they receive at post-secondary education institutions, enter their profession with the intention to help and carry their practice with compassion, and even make changes to the system. The image of the apathetic, adversarial, and ill-intended worker, more often than not is symptomatic of faulty premises of neoliberalism that removes much (if not all) of the human connection and interaction from the equation, and places workers in helping professions in the position of managers; tasked with balancing ever-increasing caseloads, dwindling resources and supportive services, and constant pressures to "streamline their practice" with the aid of acontextual metric tools and assessments, often under the threat of job security and civil litigation.

This dissertation hopes to evoke reflection of the need to bring into view what is often invisible. The ways by which neoliberal ideas of governamentality and individualistic selfhood engender a kind of rationality wherein individuals become the locus of attention and the "face of the problem", from both sides. That is to say, these conceptual networks lead those operating in child welfare to interpret, accept (or be forced to submit) to justifications of maltreatment around individual deficits, while contexts of social inequity and colonialism are pushed out of focus. Relatedly, parents whose lives become emmeshed with child welfare tend to locate the problem of not achieving reunification around case workers' ill-intentions and dispositions, failing to recognize the limitations of the system, persistent underfunding, and the pressure to which workers are submitted in the exercise of their professions. In both cases,

individuals are the ones being sacrificed while the ideas that inflict violence on both parties and sustain neoliberalism remain unchallenged. Coming to the end of this project, I see the promise of Ma Mawi's FGC program in the opening of the space for a different way of relating. In addition to being devoted to and successful in returning Indigenous children in care home, Ma Mawi is creating a meaningful space for relationships-building and dialogue with decision-makers in ways that remove barriers for other families and agencies in MB and beyond, and resound the critical need for and benefit of Indigenous self-determination.

Wilson (2008) posits that *"if research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right"* (p. 135). This thought gives me confidence, as the greatest lessons of this dissertation were not the content knowledge on child welfare systems, family group conferencing models, or theoretical conceptions of selfhood. Rather, this research gave me an unparalleled opportunity to consider what I am going to do with the privileges I enjoy that have been and are denied to others. I realize that untangling colonization is not done with one project, one community, and a few stories. It is about committing to a particular sensibility of going through life, in the position of a learner and not shying away from confronting the discomfort and vulnerability that is associated with learning about the painful experiences of those who suffered as a result of our proximal and distal actions. It is about learning from others to do better, be better in ways suggested by Donald's concept of *Métissage*:

> To help with rereading, reframing, and reimagining the relationships connecting Aboriginal peoples and Canadians, and thus facilitate the decolonization process in educational contexts, I suggest a curriculum sensibility termed Indigenous Métissage. Indigenous Métissage is a research sensibility that imagines curriculum and pedagogy together as a relational, interreferential, and hermeneutic endeavour. Doing Indigenous Métissage involves the purposeful juxtaposition of mythic historical perspectives (often framed as commonsense) with Aboriginal historical perspectives. The ethical desire is to reread and reframe historical understanding in ways that cause readers to question their own assumptions and prejudices as limited and limiting, and thus foster a renewed openness to the possibility of broader and deeper understandings that can transverse perceived cultural, civilizational, and temporal divides. One central goal of doing Indigenous Métissage is to promote ethical relationality as a curricular and pedagogical standpoint. (pp.5-6)

Through the process of doing this research, I moved from tentativeness to becoming comfortable in the discomfort of being what Reagan (2010) describes as being

an ‘unsettled settler’. I received from my community co-researchers gentle teachings of the spirit of community-engaged scholarship and why it matters. Ma Mawi opened my mind and my heart to an entirely new way of thinking about and doing research, even though we may have not called it that when we were doing it. What I learned with and from them, gave me a greater sense of purpose and a clearer sense of identity as a researcher moving forward. The axiological dimension of working with and in community is an area that I am deepening and continuing to explore with Ma Mawi and other project partners, in Canada and Brazil. In keeping with the principles and commitments of community-engaged research, the findings of this research will continue. Ma Mawi and I are currently producing a mini-documentary on FGC that will feature parents who participated in the program, Knowledge Keepers, and staff. The documentary will also broach research partnerships from a perspective of community. The video will be used for training purposes in the organization, and as dissemination material for the child welfare professional community, stakeholders, and funders. We are also presenting each other’s work in local, national, and international events (e.g., meetings, conferences, lectures), and developing projects that will extend the findings of this research. For instance, we have discussed a longitudinal study with parents who were reunified with their children to learn about the long-term impact of the program in the family and their lives; a longitudinal study with mentors to consider their professional wellbeing in light of the intense nature of the relationships they forge with families; and a pilot international research partnership with Brazil and Portugal to consider protective factors and areas of vulnerability of intergenerational care, wherein grandparents are assuming parental roles in contexts of social disadvantage. As partners, Ma Mawi and I are invested in learning from each other and finding ways to elevate family and community voices. We understand each other to be “apoema”. We both see far; we envision what lies ahead in the realm of possibilities. The magnitude of the work needed to correct the issues of child welfare in Canada is enormous. Here the metaphor of the raging forest fire of the hummingbird story comes to mind. Much like the hummingbird, we both feel a sense of responsibility to take action. The fire of child welfare has been burning for decades, and if we consider colonization, for centuries. We can no longer afford to watch lives and communities deteriorating and being lost in front of our very eyes, it is high time to work collective to put it out.

Finally, I wish to recognize the humbling gift of community I received with this project. This doctoral project coincided with a very existential time of my life. There were times during it when I did not know the old academic adage of "one's dissertation not being their life's work" to be true. Feeling that I was part of the Ma Mawi community and had a place within it, gave me a sense of purpose to keep fighting my battle for all of us. The relationships built at Ma Mawi will last a lifetime, in many forms. Many stories, tears, and laughs were shared with me during the past few years. Some I share here, others stay with me in my private realm of cherished memories. Many people entered my life to show and teach me things in ways they may never comprehend. Perhaps I may have entered theirs as well. I met people who inspire(d) me, and my life will never be the same after them. Hopefully the work of this dissertation will inspire others to take this work in their own ways. One thing I know, Ma Mawi and I came together because we dared to imagine a new story for families and communities. Our partnership renewed my conviction that the way forward can only be found in a communal story, that honours place, space, Spirit, and all our relations. This is Ma Mawi and mine story, and in that we are all inextricably connected, this is yours too. Miigwech.

Figure 10. Gifts presented to me at the conclusion of the research by the FGC community.

The traditional ribbon skirt, sewn by FGC mentors and parents, was presented wrapped in yellow ceremonial cloth. The appliqué symbolizes the legend of the hummingbird of the Apoema Project and our coming together to "put out" the fire together. The abalone shell was a gift from the folks of Maōri Waitomo Papakainga to Ma Mawi that was passed on to me with the four traditional medicines of the Plains (sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, and cedar) and a piece of Pau Santo from Brazil.

References

Alpert, L., & Britner, P. A. (2009). Measuring parent engagement in foster care. *National Association of Social Workers*, *33*(3), 135-145. DOI: 10.1093/swr/33.3.135

Anaya, J. (2014). *The situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada*. Human Rights Council of the United Nations. http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/country-reports/the-situation-of-indigenous-peoples-in-canada

Ansloos, J., Stewart, S., Fellner, K., Goodwill, A., Graham, H., McCormik, R., & Harder, H. (2019). *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne, 60*(4), 265-280. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cap0000189

Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. UBC Press.

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs [AMC]. (2019). *Bringing our children home*. Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs https://manitobachiefs.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Bringing-Our-Children-Home-Final-Report-June-2014.pdf

Bastien, B. (2004). *Blackfoot ways of knowing. The worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi*. University of Calgary Press. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv6gqrdz

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich.

Bernard, R. (2017). *Broken promises: Alex's story*. Representative for Children and Youth. https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/rcy-brokenpromises-alexsstory-feb2017-lo_web-2.pdf

Berzin, S., Thomas, K., & Cohen, E. (2007). Assessing Model Fidelity in Two Family Group Decision-Making Programs: Is This Child Welfare Intervention Being Implemented as Intended? *Journal of Social Service Research, 34*(2), 55-71.

Blackstock, C. (2010). If reindeer could fly: Dreams and real solutions for Aboriginal children. *Education Canada*, *47*, 4-8. https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/EdCan-2007-v47-n1-Blackstock.pdf

Blackstock, C. [@cblackst]. (2016, December 2). This grade 3 child understands every FN child needs a family now- not 5 yrs from now per Budget 2016. Please end inequality. https://twitter.com/cblackst/status/804654229956808704 [Tweet]. Twitter.

Blackstock, C., Clarke, S., Cullen, J., D'Hondt, J., & Formsma, J. (2004). *Keeping the promise: The convention on the rights of the child and the lived experiences of First Nations children and youth.* First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. Retrieved from http://www.fncfcs.com/sites/default/files/docs/KeepingThePromise.pdf

Bennett, D., & Sadrehashemi, L. (2008). *Broken promises: Parents speak about B.C.'s child welfare system*. Pivot Legal Society. http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/pivotlegal/legacy_url/310/BrokenPromises.pdf?1345765642

Bennet, M. (2008). *Jumping through hoops: A Manitoba study examining the experiences and reflections of aboriginal mothers involved with child welfare and legal systems respecting child protection matters*. First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada. https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/docs/FCDP_Ex_Summary_Bennett_2008.pdf

Bennet, M., & Blackstock, C. (2006). First Nations child and family services and Indigenous knowledge as a framework for research, policy, and practice. In Freymond, N., & Cameron G., (Eds.). *Towards positive systems of child and family welfare: International comparisons of child protection, family services, and community caring systems* (pp. 269-288). University of Toronto Press.

Braidotti, L. (2017, October 16). *More families to be reunited in Manitoba: $2.5 million in funding will facilitate 105 additional Family Group Conferences.* Winnipeg Free Press. https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/times/More-families-to-be-reunited-in-Manitoba-451114403.html

British Columbia Laws. (2019). *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Government of British Columbia. *http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96046_01*

Brittain, M., & Blackstock, C. (2015). *First Nations child poverty: A literature review and analysis*. First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service (FNCARES). https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/First%20Nations%20Child%20Poverty%20-%20A%20Literature%20Review%20and%20Analysis%202015-3.pdf

Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: The natural laws of interdependence*. Clear Light Publishers.

Cajete (2015). Indigenous community: Rekindling the teachings of the seventh fire. Living Justice Press.

Cameron, G., & Freymond, N. (2006). Learning from difference: Comparing child welfare systems. In N. Freymond, N., & Cameron, G. (Eds.), *Towards positive systems of child and family welfare: International comparisons of child protection, family service, and community caring systems* (pp. 3-26). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2018). *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, December 2018. https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2-2018-en-interactive-final.pdf

Coccoza, M. & Hort, S., E., O. (2011). The dark side of the universal welfare state? Child abuse and protection in Sweden. In Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (Eds), *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations* (pp. 89-111). Oxford Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199793358.003.0005

Connolly, M. (2004). A perspective on the origins of family group conferencing. *American Humane Family Group Decision Making Issue*, 1-3. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238072451_A_Perspective_on_the_Origins_of_Family_Group_Conferencing

Connolly, M., & McKenzie, M. (1999). *Effective participatory practice: family group conferencing in child protection*. Aldine de Gruyter.

Connolly, M., de Haan, I., & Crawford, J. et al. (2013). The safety of young children in care: A New Zealand study. *Adoption & Fostering 37*(3), 284-296.

Cushman, P. (1990). Why the self is empty: toward a historically situated psychology. *American Psychologist*, *45*, 599-611. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.45.5.599

Cushman, P. (1995). *Constructing the self, constructing America: A cultural history of psychotherapy*. Da Capo Press. DOI: 10.1353/psy.2003.0026

D'Alessandri, F. (2013, December 12). Herança indígena [Indigenous legacy]. Portal da Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense. https://web.archive.org/web/20160327060543/http://uenfciencia.blogspot.com/2013/12/indios-puri.html

Darlington, Healy, & Feeney. (2010). Challenges in implementing participatory practice in child protection: A contingency approach. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(7), 1020-1027.

Donald, D. (2009). Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts. *First Nations Perspectives 2*(1), 1-24. from http://www.mfnerc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/004_Donald.pdf

Doolan, M. & Phillips, P. (2008). Conferencing in New Zealand: Child protection. In Burford, G., & Hudson, J. (Eds.) Family group conferencing*: New directions in community-centered child & family practices* (pp. 193-198). Transaction.

Ermine, W. (2007). The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal*, *6*(1),193-203. https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/17129/1/ILJ-6.1-Ermine.pdf

Ermine, W., Sinclair, R., Jeffery, B., (2004). The Ethics of research involving Indigenous peoples: Report of the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre to the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317055157_The_Ethics_of_Research_Involving_Indigenous_Peoples

Farris-Manning, C. & Zandstra, M. (2003). *Children in care in Canada: A summary of current issues and trends with recommendations for future research*. Child Welfare League of Canada. https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/ChildrenInCareMar2003Final.pdf

First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (2017). *Child poverty report card*. https://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-BC-Child-Poverty-Report-Card.pdf

First Nations Information Governance Committee [FNGC]. (2014). OCAP: Ownership, cotrol, access, and possession. https://fnigc.ca/sites/default/files/docs/ocap_path_to_fn_information_governance_en_final.pdf

Fontaine, P. & Craft, A. (2016). *A knock on the door: The essential history of residential schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. University of Manitoba Press.

Freire, P. (2009). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

Frie, R. (2017). *Not in my family: German memory and responsibility after the holocaust*. Oxford University Press.

Friend, C., Shlonsky, A., & Lambert, L. (2008). From evolving discourses to new practice approaches in domestic violence and child protective services. *Children and Youth Services Review, 30*, 689-698. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.01.006

Garrouette, E. M. (2003). *Real Indians: Identity and the survival of native America*. University of California Press.

Gilbert, N. (2011). A comparative study of child welfare systems: Abstract orientations and concrete results. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 532-536. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.10.014

Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (2011). Changing patterns of response and emerging orientations. In Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (Eds), *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations (243-258). Oxford Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199793358.003.0005*

Globo (2019, April 22) *Descendentes de índios Puri lutam para resgatar origem em Barbacena* [*Puri descendants fight to rescue origin in Barbacena*]. Globo.com. http://g1.globo.com/mg/zona-da-mata/mgtv-1edicao/videos/v/descendentes-de-indios-puri-lutam-para-resgatar-origem-em-barbacena/6678033/

Government of Manitoba [GMB] (October 10, 2017). *Tri-Council Funding Partnership Support Family Group Conferencing at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc.* [Press release]. https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=42311

Hart, M. A. (2002). *Seeking mino-pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal approach to helping.* Fernwood.

Hart, M. A. (2009) Anti-colonial Indigenous social work: reflections on an aboriginal approach. In Sinclair, R., Hart, M. A., & Bruyere, G. (Eds.), *Wícihitowin: Aboriginal social work in Canada* (pp.25-41). Fernwood Publishing.

Hart, M.A. (2014). Indigenous ways of helping. In P. Menzies, & L. Lavallée, (Eds.), *Journey to healing. Aboriginal people with addiction and mental health issues: What health, social services and justice workers need to know* (pp.73–85). Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Hart, M. A., Lacerda-Vandenborn, E. & Robinson, D. (2020). *An Indigenist based evaluation of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata's Family Group Conferencing Program. [Unpublished manuscript] Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre*.

Hart, M. A., & Rowe, G. (2014). Legally entrenched oppressions: The undercurrent of First Nations peoples' experiences with Canada's social policies. In H. N. Weaver (Ed.), *Social issues in contemporary Native America* (pp. 23-41). Ashgate.

Hart, M.A., Straka, S., & Rowes, G. (2017). Working Across Contexts: Practical Considerations of Doing Indigenist/Anti-Colonial Research. *Qualitative Inquiry 23*(5), 332–342.

Heather H. (2012, June 28). *Forced adoptions*. [Comment on the blog post: "Parents Injustice"]. https://parentsinjustice.proboards.com/thread/43/story

Helm, C. M. V. (1995, October 17-21). *Kaigáng, Gurarani e Xetá na historigrafia paranaense* [*Kaigáng, Gurarani and Xetá peoples in the historiography of Paraná*] [Conference presentation]. XIX Reunião Anual Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais ANPOCS, Caxambú, SC, Brazil. https://www.anpocs.com/index.php/encontros/papers/19-encontro-anual-da-anpocs/gt-18/gt10-12/7604-ceciliahelm-kaigang/file

Hetherington, R. (2006). Learning from difference: Comparing child welfare systems. In N. Freymond & G. Cameron (Eds.), *Towards positive systems of child and family welfare: International comparisons of child protection, family service, and community caring systems* (pp.27-52). University of Toronto Press.

Hughes, T. (2006). *BC children and youth review: An independent review of British Columbia's child protection system*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/BC-HuguesReviewReport.pdf

Indigenous Services Canada. (2019). *Government of Canada, with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation leaders, announce co-developed legislation will be introduced on Indigenous child and family services in early 2019*. Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/news/2018/11/government-of-canada-with-first-nations-inuit-and-metis-nation-leaders-announce-co-developed-legislation-will-be-introduced-on-indigenous-child-and.html

Ji, D. (2015) The fidelity of implementation of family development response in British Columbia. [Thesis, University of British Columbia]. https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0166351

Johnston, B. (2008). *Ojibway Heritage*. Emblem.

John, E. (2016). *Indigenous resilience, connectedness and reunification – from root causes to root solutions: A report on Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia*. Final report of special advisor Grand Chief Ed John. http://fns.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf.

Jones, L. & Kruk, E. (2005). Life in government care: The connection of youth to family. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 34*, 405-421. DOI: 10.1007/s10566-005-7754-8

Joseph, B. (2018). 21 things you may not know about the Indian Act: Helping Canadians make reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a reality. Indigenous Relations Press.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants.* Milkweed.

King, T. (2013). *The inconvenient Indian: A curious account of native people in North America*. Anchor Canada.

Kovack, M. (2010). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.

Kruk, E. (2012). The disappearance of parents from children's lives: The cumulative effects of child care, child custody, and child welfare policies in Canada. In Lauster, N., & Allan, G. (Eds). *The end of children? Changing trends in childbearing and childhood*. (pp. 121-139). UBC Press.

Lacerda-Vandenborn (2019). The meeting of the selves. In Charlton, J. (Ed.) *Decolonizing mental health: Embracing Indigenous multi-Dimensional balance* (pp. 83-96). Charlton Publishing.

LeBooks. (2009). Apoema. In *Glossário Tupi-Guarani ilustrado* [Tupi-Guarani Illustrated Glossary] p. 183.

Legislative Review Committee [LRC] (2018). *Transforming child welfare legislation in Manitoba: Opportunities to improve outcomes for children and youth.* Government of Manitoba. https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/child_welfare_reform/pubs/final_report.pdf

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba [LAM]. (2019). The Child and Family Services Act. Government of Manitoba. *https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/c080e.php*

Linklater, R. (2014). *Decolonizing trauma work: Indigenous stories and strategies*. Fernwood Publishing.

Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged worldviews colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 77-85). UBC Press.

Love, C. (2008). Family group conferencing: Cultural origins, sharing, and appropriation-A Maori reflection. In Burford, G., & Hudson, J. (Eds.) Family group conferencing*: New directions in community-centered child & family practices* (pp. 15-30). Transaction.

MacLachlan, M. (2015). Culture, empowerment and health. In Murray, M. (Ed.). *Critical health psychology* (2nd ed) (pp. 125–143). Palgrave Macmillian.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (2015).

Mandell, D., Blackstock, C., Carlson, J. C., & Fine, M. (2006). From child welfare to child, family, and community welfare: The agenda of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. In Freymond, N., & Cameron G., (Eds.). *Towards positive systems of child and family welfare: International comparisons of child protection, family services, and community caring systems* (pp. 211-236). University of Toronto Press.

Maranhão, F. (n.d.). Povos indígenas no Paraná [Indigenous peoples of Paraná] Secretaria da Comunicação Social e da Cultura.http://www.museuparanaense.pr.gov.br/modules/conteudo/conteudo.php?conteudo=68

Marquese, R. B. (2006) Resistência, tráfico negreiro e alforrias, séculos XVII a XIX [Resistance, slave trafficking and slavery abolishment from centuries XVII to XIX]. *Novos Estudos Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento, 74*, (107-123). DOI: 10.1590/S0101-33002006000100007

Martin, J., & McLellan, A. (2013). *The education of selves: How psychology transformed students*. Oxford University Press.

Martin, J., Sugarman, J. H., & Hickinbottom, S. (2010). *Persons: Understanding psychological selfhood and agency*. Springer.

McKendrick, D. (2020, January 31). *Manitoba government to end controversial practice of birth alerts in April.* CTV News Winnipeg. https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/manitoba-government-to-end-controversial-practice-of-birth-alerts-in-april-1.4792086

McKinnon, I. (2007). *BC's children in care: improving data and outcomes reporting.* BC Children and Youth Review. https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/bcs_children_in_care_improving_data_and_outcomes_reporting.pdf

Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2012). *Residential Review Project British Columbia*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/services-supports-for-parents-with-young-children/reporting-monitoring/02-residential-review-project/resrevproject_final_report.pdf

Miradouro [Online image]. (n.d.). Cidades do meu Brasil. https://www.cidadesdomeubrasil.com.br/mg/miradouro

Monkman, L. (2018, March 26). *Maori experts back in Manitoba to help grow Indigenous-led child welfare practices: Centre in Winnipeg's North End having success using New Zealand's family group conferencing model*. CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/maori-new-zealand-manitoba-indigenous-child-welfare-1.4594392

Moyle, P. & Tauri, J. (2016). Māori, family group conferencing and the mystifications of restorative justice. *Victims & Offenders: An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice, 11*(1),1-20.

Mullaly, B. (2001). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege* (2nd ed.). Oxford.

Ney, T., Kinewesquao [Richardson, C.], & Maloney, M. et (2015). Family group conferencing: does it engage Indigenous families in child protection? In Sohki-Aska-Esquao [Jeanninne Carrière] & Strega, S. (Eds.) *Walking this path together: Anti-racist and anti-oppressive child welfare practice* (pp.62-86). Fernwood Publishing.

O'Brien, C. (2010). Together we have CLOUT. State of the Inner City 2010: We are in for the long haul. Canadian Centre for Policy Analysis Manitoba Office. ISBN: 978-1-926888-31-6. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/state-inner-city-2010

Office of Children's Advocate (2016). *Don't call me resilient: What loss & grief look like for children and youth in care*. Office of Children's Advocate, Manitoba. https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/loss-and-grief-final-mb.pdf

Oldani, M.J. (2009). Uncanny scripts: Understanding pharmaceutical emplotment in the aboriginal context, *Transcultural Psychiatry, 46*(1), 131-156. DOI: 10.1177/1363461509102291

Oliveira, E. S. C. (2012). O Paradigma da extinção: Desaparecimento dos índios Puris em Campo Alegre no Sul do Vale do Paraíba [The paradigm of extinction: The disappearance of the Puri people from Campo Alegre in the south of the Paraíba Valley]. *Anais do XV Encontro Regional de Historia da ANPUH-RIO*. ISBN: 978-85-65957-00-7

Pakura, S. (2005). *The family group conference 14-year journey: Celebrating successes, learning from lessons, embracing the challenges*. American Humane Association's Family Group Decision Making Conference and Skills Building Institute. https://www.iirp.edu/pdf/au05_pakura.pdf

Penrose, D. (2018). *In need of protection: Angel's story*. https://manitobaadvocate.ca/wp-content/uploads/In-Need-Of-Protection-Angels-Story-Dec-2018.pdf

Penrose, D. (2019). *A place where it feels like home: The story of Tina Fontaine*. https://manitobaadvocate.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Tina-Fontaine.pdf

Peri, M., Herewini, M., & Wilson, R. (1985). *Maori Advisory Unit Advisory Report*. Auckland, New Zealand: Department of Social Welfare.

Prefeitura de Miradouro (2019, May 1). Nossa História [Our History]. Prefeitura de Miradouro. http://www.miradouro.mg.gov.br/container/nosso-municipio/historia/

Ratner, C. (2014). *Macro cultural psychology: A political philosophy of mind*. Cambridge University Press.

Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. UBC Press.

Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing ourselves. Psychology, power and personhood.* Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of Freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (2019). *Our psychiatric future*. Polity.

Rose, N. & Miller, P. (2010). Political power beyond the state: Problematics of government. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *61*(1), 271-303. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01247.x

Rose, N., O'Maley, P., & Valverde, M. (2006). Governamentality. *Annual Review Law Social Sciences, 2*, 83-104. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.lawsocsci.2.081805.105900

Russell, M., Harris, B., & Gockel, A. (2008). Parenting in poverty: Perspective of high-risk parents. *Journal of Children and Poverty, 14*(1), 83-98. DOI: 10.1080/10796120701871322

Saldaña, J. (2011). *Understanding qualitative research: Fundamentals of qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.

Schmid, J. & Pollack, S. (2009). Developing shared knowledge: Family group conferencing as a means of negotiating power in the child welfare system. *Practice: Social Work in Action, 21*(3), 175-188.

Schout, G., & de Jong, G. (2016). Collecting feedback as a tool to reduce care paralysis: something for family group conferencing coordinators? *Child and Family Social Work*, 22,1197–1206. DOI: 10.1111/cfs.12336

Schumaher, J., Slep, A. M. S., & Heyman, R. E. (2001). Risk factors for child neglect. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 6*, 231-254. DOI: 10.1016/S1359-1789(00)00024-0

Scott, M. (2017) the power of voice in the space of social work: A tool of respect, an expression of Mana and the epitome of organa. In Crawford, H. (Ed.), *Effective social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp.17-36). Manukau Institute of Technology.

Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Teachers College Press.

Sherman, P. (2008). The friendship Wampum: Maintaining traditional practices in our contemporary interactions in the Valley of the Kiji Sìbì. In Simpson, L. B., (Ed.), *Lighting the eight fire* (pp. 111-126). ARP Books.

Simpson, L. B. (2008). Oshkimaadiziig, the new people. In Simpson, L. B., (Ed.), *Lighting the eight fire* (pp. 13-44). ARP Books.

Simpson, A. & Smith, A. (2014). Introduction. In Simpson, A. & Smith (Eds.), *Theorizing native studies* (pp.1-30). Duke University Press.

Situating Science. (2013, Nov 17). *Nikolas Rose - Engineering selfhood in the 21st century* [Video]. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3r87Vx-Jw0E

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Smith, M. R. (2018). Ojibwe Actor and poet Mary Black. First American Art Magazine, 17. https://works.bepress.com/matthewryansmith/150/

Sohki-Aska-Esquao [Jeanninne Carrière] & Strega, S. (2015). An introduction: Anti-racist and anti-oppressive child welfare. In Sohki-Aska-Esquao [Jeanninne Carrière] & Strega, S. (Eds.) *Walking this path together: Anti-racist and anti-oppressive child welfare practice*(pp.1-20). Fernwood Publishing.

Sugarman, J. (2013). Persons and historical ontology. In J. Martin, & M. Bickard, M. (Eds.), *The psychology of personhood: Philosophical, historical, socio-developmental, and narrative perspectives* (pp.81–100). Cambridge Press.

Swift, K. J. (2011). Canadian child welfare: Child protection and the status quo. In Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (Eds.). *Child protection systems. International trends and orientations* (pp. 36-59). Oxford Press.

Talaga, T. (2018). *All our relations: Finding the path forward*. House of Anansi Press.

Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Sinha, V., Black, T., Fast, E., Felstiner, C., Hélie, S., Turcotte, D., Weightman, P., Douglas, J., & Holroyd, J. (2010). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* 2008: Major Findings. Public Health Agency of Canada. Ottawa, 2010. https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/CIS-2008-rprt-eng.pdf

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Government of Canada. http://nctr.ca/reports.php

Tsicos, S. (2019, September 20). Province reviewing use of controversial birth alerts. CTV News Winnipeg. https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/province-reviewing-use-of-controversial-birth-alerts-1.4602322?cache=yes%3FclipId%3D89531%3Fot%3DAjaxLayout

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2009) *Kids crime and care: Health and well being of children in care: Youth Justice Experiences and Outcomes*. Representative for Children and Youth Office and Office of the Provincial Health Officer. https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/BC-YouthJusticeReport.pdf

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2013a). *Much more than paperwork: Proper planning essential to better lives for British Columbia's children in care*. A representative's audit on Plans of Care, March 2013. Representative for Children and Youth. https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/reports/monitoring-reports/much-more-than-paperwork-proper-planning-essential-to-better-lives-for-b-c-s-children-in-care/

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2013b). *When talk trumped service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C*. Representative for Children and Youth. https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/reports/monitoring-reports/when-talk-trumped-service-a-decade-of-lost-opportunity-for-aboriginal-children-and-youth-in-b-c/

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2015a). *Paige's story: Abuse, indifference and a young life discarded*. Representative for Children and Youth. https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/rcy-pg-report-final.pdf

Turpel-Lafond, M. E. (2015b). *A report and next steps for action from a forum for change reconciliation for today's First Nations, Métis & Aboriginal children through custom adoption and lifelong family and tribal connections.* https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/rcy_forumreport-v8.pdf

United Nations (2008). *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples [UNDRIP]*. United Nations. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

United Nations (2015). *Universal declaration of human rights*. United Nations https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf

Vadenborn, E. (April, 2014). *The social implications of the individualistic self for the child protection system in British Columbia* (Publication No. etd834). [Thesis, Simon Fraser University]. Summit Institutional Repository.

Vygotsky. L. S., (1978). *Mind in Society: The development of higher mental process.* Harvard University Press.

Weaver, J. (1997). *That the people might live: Native American literatures and Native American community*. Oxford.

Wells, K. & Marcenko, M. O. (2001). Introduction to the special issue: Mothers of children in foster care. *Children and Youth in Services Review, 33*, 419-423. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.06.022

Wharf, B. (2007). People, politics, and child Welfare. In Foster, L. T., & Wharf, B. (Eds.). *People, politics, and child Welfare in British Columbia (pp. 1-9).* UBC Press.

Wiart, N. (2015, June 26). Foster care program for aboriginal families boasts 70% success rate. CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/foster-care-program-for-aboriginal-families-boasts-70-success-rate-1.3128375

Wilson, S. (2003). Progressing Toward an Indigenous Research Paradigm in Canada and Australia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education 27*(2), 161–178.

Wilson, S. (2008). R*esearch is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.

Yahgulanaas, M. N. (2008). *Flight of the hummingbird: A parable for the environment*. Greystone Books.

Appendix A.

Mentor Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and how you came to work with Ma Mawi.
2. How long have you been at this job? How do you like it?
3. How do families typically come to FGC at Ma Mawi?
4. What is your first contact with the families like?
5. What is the main objective of FGC?
6. How are the families' needs for services determined and delivered?
7. What does a typical FGC process look like?
8. Who takes part in the FGC Program and what are their roles?
9. What kinds of arrangements are made with Child and Family Services for FGC to take place?
10. What is the relationship between CFS workers and Ma Mawi team members during FGC?
11. What kinds of arrangements are made with other non-mandated agencies for FGC to take place?
12. What is the relationship between other non-mandated support organizations and Ma Mawi FGC team members during FGC?
13. Are there particular characteristics to a successful FGC?
14. What happens when an FGC process is not working out?
15. In your opinion, how does FGC differ from Mainstream interventions provided by CFS?
16. What happens if the objectives traced by the FGC do not align with those of CFS?
17. What is the impact you see of FGC on the families enrolled or graduated from the FGC Program? Can you give me some examples?
18. How do you see your role on the impact you observe?
19. What do you believe to be the advantages of FGC as a child protection intervention?
20. What are the challenges of FGC as a child protection intervention?
21. How do you see the support of Ma Mawi as an organization in FGC?
22. Does the larger community have a role in the FGC process?

23. What is the role of traditional Indigenous knowledge in FGC?
24. Are there differences in dealing with Indigenous versus non-Indigenous organizations when it comes to FGC?
25. Is there anything I did not ask you, that you'd like to share?

Appendix B.

Parent Interview

Past

I'd like to learn a little bit more about you… Perhaps we can start with a little bit about you. Anything you would like to share with me will be appreciated.

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Where did you go to school? How was that?
3. Who were some of the important people in your life growing up? How/why were they important?
4. What were some of the important places in your life growing up? How/why were they important?
5. What was life like growing up?
6. Can you tell me about your family and your community?
7. What are some of your fondest memories growing up?
8. What were some of the challenges you experienced growing up?
9. When you look at the past, what do you see?

Present

Now, I'd like to learn a bit more about you and your experiences with FGC at Ma Mawi…

1. How long have you been in the FGC Program? How has this experience been so far?
2. What brought you to FGC at Ma Mawi?
3. What has been most important to you about being at FGC?
4. What services has FGC provided to you and your family?
5. Have these services been helpful? How so or how not so?
6. How is your experience at Ma Mawi different or similar to other experiences you have had with social services, if you have had any?
7. What do you consider to be the strong points of Ma Mawi's FGC?
8. Are there any things that Ma Mawi could improve about FGC?
9. Has being part of FGC changed you and how you see things in any way?

10. Has being part of FGC impacted your relationship or understanding of your child/ren? How so?
11. How would you describe your connection/relationship to Ma Mawi?
12. How would you describe your connection/relationship to your community?
13. Has your participation in FGC changed how you connect with your community?

Interview 3: Future

Now, I'd like to turn our attention to what's ahead…

1. What are your hopes for your future?
2. What are your hopes for your child/ren's future?
3. Is there anything that can get in the way of what you hope for yourself and your family?
4. Do you think FGC will help you achieve the plans you have for your future? What gives you that impression?
5. What would you hope Ma Mawi could do for you moving forward?
6. What would you hope your community could do for you moving forward?
7. When you look at your future, what do you see?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with me, that I didn't ask, but that you find important?

Appendix C.

Phase One Analysis

Categories	Program	Relationships	Resources	Context
Sub-categories	Hiring/ training	FGC Mentor & FGC Staff	Legal aid	Family support/ connection
	Access points	FGC Mentor & FGC parent(s)	Financial/ Material	Community belonging/ support
	Assessment/ Qualifying criteria	FGC Mentor & FGC extended family/ support network	Educational/ informational	Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations
	Approach/ philosophy	FGC Mentor & CFS case worker(s)/ agency(ies)	Basic needs (housing, food, shelter)	Historical trauma & violence (Residential schools, Sixties Scoop, Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls)
	Goals & Outcomes	FGC parent & extended family/ support network	Social/ Recreational	Traditional ways
	Sequencing and timing	FGC parent & Ma Mawi community/	Emotional	Educational barriers
	Roles	FGC parent & CFS case worker(s)/ agencies	Traditional knowledge	Prior CFS involvement
	Jurisdictional oversight	Ma Mawi/ FGC administration- CFS authorities/ agencies	Psychological	Poverty
	Challenges		Substance misuse recovery	Psycho-emotional Challenges
	Benefits		Informational/ procedural	Mentor personal characteristics
	Parental control			Mentor background
				Substance misuse