The Outcomes of Indigenous Youth Aging Out of Care and Exiting Care in Canada

Environmental Scan

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Issue: There are limited interventions and programs tailored to First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth who age out of or exit child welfare care. As such, there is an increasing need for tailored programming, culturally competent workers, culturally appropriate interventions, increased supports, and attention to the social determinants of First Nations, Métis and Inuit health to improve preventative measures for youth who age out of or exit care.

Background: The current Canadian child welfare system is rooted in the values of the patriarchy, capitalism, and individualism (Justice, 2008). If we are to understand the experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth in relation to the Canadian care system, we must understand that the arrival of European settlers, called settler colonialism, deeply disrupted systems of care (Crichlow, 2002; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth outcomes once they have aged out of or exited care are exacerbated due to a history and ongoing legacy of colonization which caused and continues to cause intergenerational trauma.

Methods: A scan of the literature was conducted over a three-month period (December 2022 to February 2023) to understand the scope of the literature that is available until the present year, with no restrictions on date of publication due to the scarcity of the data.

Results: First Nations children in Canada are removed from their homes and placed into the child welfare care system at a rate of 17 times that of non-Indigenous children during a child welfare investigation (Fallon et al., 2020). First Nations children in Canada enter the child welfare system at a younger age, stay longer, and have a history of being placed in homes that aid in the removal of their cultural identity (Sinha et al., 2011). Ward (2011) suggests that personal and cultural continuity are large protective factors in variations in suicide rates amongst First Nations youth. Morton and colleagues (2021) note that the negative outcomes of homelessness that Indigenous youth often experience are connected to the history and ongoing legacy of colonization, racism, and land dispossession.

Implications: There is a critical need for further research conducted on the outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth who exit care. Without this information, it is assumed that First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth are experiencing the same level of outcomes as the general population, if not slightly elevated, which dismisses their past and does not allow for programming and interventions to be created that adequately address these outcomes.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Indigenous background and identity

Many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities' traditional child-rearing and family systems follow the tenet that the entire community supports the journey of childcare, where responsibility can be shared throughout the community if needed (Ormiston, 2002; Pregent, 2012). Therefore, to understand how the child welfare systems in Canada are misaligned with commonalities across Indigenous child-rearing practices, it is important to present a short background on context related to care, kinship, identity, practices of care. Many First Nations, Métis and Inuit concepts of care/caretaking are different from that of a Euro-Western concept which suggests, for example, that adoption is a suitable means of caretaking (di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015). This does not fit with the ideas of kinship and childrearing where the responsibility of taking care of the child is shared within the community. di Tomasso and de Finney (2015) write that "Indigenous worldviews conceptualize childhood, parenthood, relationship, and community in ways that stand apart from Western notions of rights, attachment, permanency, and the "best interests of the child." Three of the values that inform the practice of custom adoption are explored below: honouring the children; kinship; and fluidity" (di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015, p. 24). When stating that they are honouring the children, it means that children are not just part of their nuclear family but rather part of the community - children are part of a wider *kinship network of relations.* Based on this, studies find that Indigenous youth who age out of care succeed more in that transition when they are connected to their roots and family relations (Fast, Trocmé, Fallon & Ma, 2014). However, once an Indigenous child enters the Canadian, Euro-Western child welfare system, it is likely that "the system does not strengthen or allow for continuity of Indigenous nations and their self-determination" (Fast, Allouche, Gagne & Boldo, 2019).

1.2 The systematic mistreatment of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system in Canada

To expand upon the discussion of misalignment between both child welfare systems, it is important to discuss the ongoing colonial violence associated with care systems for Indigenous peoples in Canada as it directly contributes to the disruption of kinship systems (Crichlow, 2002; Fast, Allouche, Gagne & Boldo, 2019; Justice, 2008). The current child welfare systems in Canada are rooted in the values of the patriarchy, capitalism, and individualism (Justice, 2008). In keeping with this, Sinha and Kozlowski (2013) suggest that if we are to understand the experiences of First Nations youth in relation to the Canadian child welfare system, we must understand that the arrival of European settlers, called settler colonialism, deeply disrupted systems of care that existed by removing children from their homes through the residential schools and the Sixties Scoop (Crichlow, 2002). The residential schools were developed to assimilate Indigenous children into the European culture through whatever means necessary but under the guise of "education" (Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005). These child removal policies had devastating effects on First Nations, Métis and Inuit families during its' implementation as well as afterwards, where many individuals experienced homelessness, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse coupled with the lack of acknowledgement by the public of this system and thus, a lack of social supports made available for Indigenous families (Blackstock et al., 2007).

1.3 Youth who age out of care or exit care

The ripple effects of these horrific incidences have translated into social, economic, political, and cultural oppression which supports the ongoing oppression and deprivation of Indigenous people. It also translates into an overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare systems in Canada (Fast, Allouche, Gagne & Boldo, 2019). Doucet (2020, p. 139) states that barriers include "a lack of culturally matched foster placements and social workers, gentrification, housing restrictions and a narrow definition of family relationships." To picture how these barriers manifest, the rate of First Nation youth (0-14) placed in out-of-home care rose by 71.5% between 1995-2001 (McKenzie, 2002). Reports find that First Nations children are only 5% of the population but account for 30-40% of children in the child welfare system (Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon & MacLaurin, 2013). More recent data from the First Nations Incidence Study in 2019 suggests that the disparity involving placements of Indigenous youth at all age groups were higher than that of non-Indigenous youth in the same age group; for example, First Nation children from the ages of four to seven were 19 times as likely to be involved in a child welfare investigation with a placement compared to non-Indigenous children from ages four to seven (Carnella et al., 2021). Fast and colleagues (2019) write that the 80% of Indigenous youth that age out of care do not graduate high school and experience high rates of suicide, homelessness, substance misuse, incarceration, and continued involvement with the system (Blackstock et al., 2007; Feduniw, 2009).

2.0 Objectives
The main objectives of this environmental scan are:
1. To examine the literature on First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth's (from teenage years to the age of the majority in the province) outcomes of aging out of and exiting child welfare care
2. To provide an overview of existing practices and policies on youth aging out of and exiting child welfare care in Canada
3. To discuss implications for research, policy and practice and develop recommendations based on the literature

3.0 Research Methods
3.1 Overview of methods and search strategy
A scan of the literature was conducted from December 2022 to February 2023 to understand the scope of the literature that is available and to identify information that can be relevant to the topic of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth aging out of and exiting care. The University of Toronto's search portals were utilized, as well as other search engines and research portals to obtain data. The main sources of data were peer-reviewed journal articles containing primary and secondary data sources, reviews, reports and news articles found in discipline-specific databases as well as grey literature (e.g., reports and government publications) that may provide insights into the policies and practices that are available. Databases searched included: Social Services Abstracts; CINAHL; Social Work Abstracts; MEDLINE; Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts; APA PsycInfo; Web of Science; Scopus; Children and Youth Services Review; Child Abuse and Neglect; Child Welfare Journal; First Peoples Child and Family Review; and International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience. Articles were included if they mentioned the relevant keywords, and a hand search was also conducted to bolster the results further. The inclusion was limited to those articles that were written in English and that reported on Canadian data. Due to a gap in the literature, articles did not have a limitation on year of

publication. A list of keywords and search terms were used to conduct the environmental scan. Throughout the process, a combination of keywords were used to enhance the search strategy as needed.

Keywords: Indigenous, youth/adolescence, transition out of/from care, leaving care, lived experience, North America, Canada, care leavers, aged out of care

3.2 Note on terminology
Within this report, the term Indigenous is used to recognize three groups of people, consistent with the Canadian Constitution, which are as follows: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (Sansone, Fallon, Vandermorris, Adnan & Crowe, 2023). We acknowledge that this may not be the preferred community or nation-specific label, and the term Indigenous does not refer to a homogenous group but rather a diverse population consisting of diverse groups, bands, and communities where each of their sovereign nations have their own cultural practices and beliefs (Fallon & Miller, 2020). This environmental scan also concerns youth that age out of care. We draw on Doucet's (2020, p. 140) definition of, "'aging out of care [which] refers to youth who have reached the age of the majority and are no longer eligible for child protection services…'aging out' is in brackets to de-normalize the term" (Rampersaud & Mussell, 2021). Within this environmental scan, the legislation that expands on this category will be explained.

4.0 Policies and Practice
4.1 Policy landscape of child welfare in Canada
According to Trocmé and colleagues (2023), in the 18th and 19th centuries during industrialism, capitalism and urbanization, there was increased concern for child abuse and thus a movement emerged where church-run orphanages were re-organized, and "child-saving" societies were established. Canada's child welfare system then became established due to this movement. The Toronto Human Society founded in 1887 was the first child protection organization in Canada, later named the Children's Aid Society in 1891 (Trocmé et al., 2023). In 1893, Canada's first child protection act was also established, promoting foster care (Trocmé et al., 2023). Following this for twenty years, there was service expansion and provinces sought out legal mandates to give them decision making power over the removal of children from their homes if they were victims of abuse or neglect (Trocmé et al., 2023). In the 1950s and 1960s, these volunteer-based societies turned into professionally organized bureaucracies through legislative frameworks that maintained child-saving views, such as the Youth Protection Schools Act and the Child Welfare Act. The concern for child protection and safety moved from the residential school system to the provincial and territorial system of child welfare, which furthered Indigenous peoples history of being dislocated from their families, communities, nations and territories (Crowe et al., 2021). The child welfare mandates brought increased judgement upon Indigenous parents and families and resulted in the removal of Indigenous children, which led to the Sixties Scoop that entailed the removal of children from their homes – this was not confined to the 1960s, and by the 1990s there was an overrepresentation of First Nations children in the child welfare system (Crowe et al., 2021). Following that, the language shifted from morality to research and practice on child maltreatment where new statutes pushed for less intrusive, in-home family support which resulted in a dramatic rise in the rates of families receiving these services (Trocmé et al., 2023). However, the focus on minimizing intrusion resulted in the restructuring of the system. The rise

in out-of-home placements again led to a restructuring, which led to calls for services that provided less intrusive alternatives to removal, and more family and community-based alternatives as well, especially for Indigenous people (Trocmé et al., 2023).

In North America, the child welfare system has been shaped by colonization and the cultural genocide of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. One example of the harsh and destructive colonial policies that was implemented was the residential schools, where children were systematically and forcibly removed from their homes to assimilate Indigenous people into Canadian culture and Christianity (INAC, 1996). In terms of the child welfare services that interacted with this policy at the time, there was state-imposed child protection for children on reserve who were suspected to be abused or neglected according to a North American viewpoint (Trocmé et al., 2023).

4.2 Legislative landscape of the issue
Child welfare services for First Nations children are directed in Canada at the federal, provincial, territorial, and band level, which results in a multifaceted arrangement of policies, structures, and services that differ across jurisdictions. From the legislation side, each province has a different statute that dictates the expiry of orders, or rather the time at which a child has aged out of care. For example, in Ontario the laws state that a child has aged out of care once they turn 18 years old or once they are married, whichever comes first. In 2017, the Ministry announced an increase in the age for care under child welfare services from age 16 to 18, effective January 1, 2018 (Fallon & Miller, 2020). It is worth noting that during the ages of 16 and 17 it is voluntary to remain in care through a program called Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA) (Fallon & Miller, 2020). In the legislation, there are also laws set out to explain extensions of limits to the age. In Ontario, this is called Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) Agreement which is a policy directive to extend the age of care from 18 to 21 as per recommendations in a blueprint written by OPACY which urged the provincial government to increase the maximum age of care to 25 (Government of Ontario, 2021). Additional programs were added, such as the Renewed Youth Supports Program which allowed those that were terminated from care at 16 to re-enter care. In addition, Ontario adheres and is committed to the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* (CYFSA) (2017), which acknowledges that children are individuals with rights to be respected and voices to be heard (Government of Ontario, 2021). In Part II (titled the rights of children and young persons), the Act says that every child has a right to express their views freely on matters that affect them, to be engaged in decisions affecting them, to be consulted on the nature of services provided to them, to raise concerns, and to be informed (Government of Ontario, 2021). This continues to say that there are rights to be heard in respect of decisions regarding treatment, education, training or work programs, the young person's cultural identity, the young person's placement in or discharge from a residential placement (Government of Ontario, 2021). These rights are important, especially regarding how Indigenous youth are treated by the child welfare system, because it gives them the right to refuse residential placements that promote assimilation by not being culturally appropriate, or by vouching for activities that allow them to understand their cultural identity and expand on it through cultural workshops or activities in their daily life.

Examples of legislation in other provinces include: (1) Alberta's Support and Financial Assistance Agreement (SFAA) which extended the age of care from 22 to 24 years of age. However, this was contested due to a legal challenge in March 2020 that determined that the maximum age of care should stay at 22 years; and (2) British Columbia's Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) which in 2018 increased the age of care to 27 years of age to support the transition out of care (Fallon & Miller, 2020).

During the pandemic, new legislation was introduced to address how the pandemic exacerbated the challenges youth in care were facing as they aged out of care (Fallon & Miller, 2020). For example, challenges to accessing mental health care, housing, and social services. In response to this, all provinces except Quebec and Nunavut implemented a temporary moratorium on aging out which also applied to First Nations youth until 2022 (Fallon & Miller, 2020). Some provinces have implemented additional measures, such as British Columbia who expanded eligibility options for youth in the AYA program so that they could take part in a wider range of programming (e.g., life skills, cultural learning) along with greater flexibility to access mental health care services and wellness supports (Fallon & Miller, 2020).

4.3 Examples of initiatives
There are some initiatives chosen to be discussed here that were created to support youth leaving or aging out of care in Canada. For example, there is a framework followed by most of the provinces, as well as other jurisdictions across North America, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Cambodia, and Japan called the Signs of Safety. This framework is an approach to child protection casework developed in the 1990s in Western Australia to allow workers to build partnerships with parents and children in suspected cases of child abuse and maltreatment. It encompasses family and individual strengths and allows the worker to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment (assessing dangers, strengths, and safety) (Signs of Safety, 2023). However, in a systematic review, academics at the What Works Centre and Cardiff University CSACADE children's social care centre found three potential reasons as to why the Signs of Safety program does not reduce the need for children to be in care: (1) it has been poorly evaluated; (2) it is not being delivered well, so there is uncertainty as to whether the framework works; and (3) it has no impact. The review also noted that it was possible that the families' situation could limit the ability of workers using the approaches to be able to make a difference (Turner, 2018).

Another initiative, which is tailored to Indigenous youth aging out of care, is called the HEART (Helping Establish Able Resource Homes Together) and SPIRIT (Strong Parent Indigenous Relationships Information Training) training which was created as an alternative to the SAFE and PRIDE foster care training offered by the mainstream child welfare organization, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) (ANCFSAO, n.d. (a)). The program has three components: HEART; SPIRIT; and the Indigenous Family Development Assessment (IFDA) tool (ANCFSAO, n.d. (a)). The program is grounded in Indigenous family and clan values and is designed to support the potential caregivers of Indigenous children and youth to be able to learn their traditions and impacts of historical events (ANCFSAO, n.d. (a)). The program supports

family systems by catering to unique learning styles, ensuring that the curriculum is flexible to be applied within different contexts, fosters a partnership approach, and provides a support system that allows for the understanding of multigenerational trauma (ANCFSAO, n.d. (a)). The program is also able to provide social workers and helpers with a more culturally appropriate and effective approach to engage caregivers to care for Indigenous children and youth (ANCFSAO, n.d. (a)).

Another initiative is the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program which funds child prevention and protection services for First Nations children and families on-reserve or ordinarily resident on-reserve (ISC, 2022). *To note, First Nations children involved with child welfare are subject to different mandates and funding based on their place of residence: First Nations children ordinarily resident on-reserve may interact with a locally run First Nations child welfare agency or one run by the province, while First Nations children living off-reserve who come in contact with child welfare are likely to interact with the provincial authority that serves the area where they live.* The program, serving all First Nations children and families living on reserve, has three streams of funding (operations, prevention and maintenance) as well as an extension of services to assist youth in transitioning to adulthood for an additional two years beyond the age of the majority in their territory or province (ISC, 2022). However, in 2016, the program was found to be flawed, inequitable and discriminatory under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (ISC, 2022). The government is working to implement all orders as well as address all actual costs that need to be covered in their prevention plans (ISC, 2022). The program also falls short because it seeks out youth that ordinarily live on reserve, which indicates that the child has to come back to reserve to provide that they live there to access services, which in turn may reduce their opportunities that are limited in this setting as a result of discrimination towards Indigenous people. The misalignment of eligibility for services for youth on- and off- reserve contributes to and deepens existing inequities amongst First Nations youth across Canada.

Another initiative worth mentioning is the Post-Majority Care Services Toolkit in which the FNCFS program funds First Nations and First Nation authorized service providers to support the delivery of prevention and protection services to meet the needs of children, youth and families ordinarily living on reserve or in the Yukon (ANCFSAO, n.d. (b)). The toolkit will provide youth with information about the program, services, and resources to promote holistic outcomes. The program funds service providers to deliver these services at actual cost to youth aging out of care and young adults who were formerly in alternative care from the age of majority up to (and including) the age of 25 years (ANCFSAO, n.d. (b)). The program is also funded as part of the immediate measures that Indigenous Services Canada is committed to implementing following the program review in 2016 that deemed their program as flawed (ANCFSAO, n.d. (b)).

The last initiative to be discussed is Ontario's commitment to support youth leaving care by connecting them with the supports to succeed. The Ontario government has invested $68 million into a new program focused on life skills and post-secondary education, training, and employment (Government of Ontario Newsroom, 2023). The program, called Ready, Set, Go, launching in April 2023, will provide youth with the skills and supports to be able to smoothly transition out of care (Government of Ontario Newsroom, 2023). The program will also allow youth to remain in care until the age of 23 from the age of 21. Currently, youth transitioning from care are supported by the Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) program, as well

as the Youth-in-Transition Workers program, the Aftercare Benefits Initiative, the Postsecondary Application Fee Program, and the Living and Learning Grant (Government of Ontario Newsroom, 2023). The funding per child is also increasing by $850 so that children can focus on their studies or working. The program was created with input and advice from former youth in care, child welfare advocates, partners, and empirical research (Government of Ontario Newsroom, 2023).

Other initiatives that may be of value to explore are the multicomponent transition programs like Youth in Transition Worker Program in Ontario, educational programs like the Transitional Year Programme (TYP) in Toronto, the Crown Ward Education Championship Teams in Ontario, as well as scholarship programs (Fallon & Miller, 2020). Other targeted programs for youth leaving care include Free 2 Be (Housing First for Youth Leaving Care) Program in Toronto and Mobility for Good in Canada (Fallon & Miller, 2020). Some examples of good interventions for vulnerable youth are the Stepstones' for Youth in Toronto, the Resource Assistance for Youth program in Manitoba, and One Vision, One Voice in Ontario (Fallon & Miller, 2020).

Internationally, one such initiative that is worth mentioning is in Australia, called the Aboriginal Leaving Care Support Initiative which provides funding for an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organization (ACCO) to support Indigenous youth leaving care. Within this program, the importance of family, community and culture to the process has been emphasized in a culturally appropriate manner, along with services that are Indigenous-specific (e.g., housing) (Fallon & Miller, 2020).

5.0 Financial Implications
Approximately 11,700 Ontario children and youth are under state guardianship and annually, 1,000 youth age out of care in Ontario and 6,000 youth age out of care across Canada (Doucet, 2020; Government of Ontario, 2021). More than half of the children in care in Canada under the age of 15 are Indigenous, even though Indigenous children only account for 5% of the population according to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census (Rampersaud & Musell, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2022).

The financial implications of youth aging out of care when they are not ready are substantial. In a 2021 report by Rampersaud and Mussell (2021), it was identified that there are large social and economic costs associated with children entering and being in the foster care system. Based on the total lost earnings of youth leaving state guardianship, the province loses $118 to $315.8 million in revenue. The median income of youth after leaving care is only $10,000 to $19,999 (CAFC, 2018). As well, the cost to the province to provide supports like income supports to those youth leaving care is $235 million. More than half of the youth who exit care will experience homelessness, and that outcome costs the province $629.8 million for emergency shelter (Rampersaud & Mussell, 2021). Furthermore, 75% of youth in custody cease to be part of the child welfare system, lose supports, and their experience of incarceration costs the province $19.6 to $36 million annually (Bala et al., 2015). In their lifetime, the province can incur $1 billion in incarceration costs. Lastly, 66% of youth leaving state care experience mental health challenges (Scully & Finland, 2015). In the province, there were 541 deaths listed, one fifth of which were Indigenous (Jackson, 2019). The cost to the province if as little as 1% of youth leaving care require hospital care in their life is $35.6 million. The total estimated cost proposed

by the report by Rampersaud and Mussell (2021) comes to more than $2 billion. This money would be more effectively spent investing in preventative measures to support the transition for youth as they age out of care and into adulthood.

6.0 Empirical Results from the Literature
6.1 Overview of results from Canada
Articles were deemed relevant if they reported on youth outcomes as they age out of or exit child welfare care. Title and abstract screening was conducted for 210 articles and of these, 58 studies were reviewed fully. Out of the articles that were included in the full text screening, only 10 articles [whether it be reviews, primary research studies, news articles, reports] mentioned Indigenous youth involvement with the child welfare system within Canada. This is expected, as there is a large gap in the literature, or a high rate of underreporting, regarding Indigenous youth outcomes as they age out of or exit care. Furthermore, it is important to note that there were no longitudinal data sources found regarding children aging out of care within this environmental scan.

A primary data collection study by Quinn (2022) found that children who were removed from their communities experienced these outcomes later in life: lower educational attainment, lower employment levels, feelings of loss, isolation and suicide, loss of relationships and identity, gang involvement, violence and incarceration, homelessness, substance abuse and addictions, unplanned pregnancies, and poverty. Specific to Indigenous populations, these outcomes are exacerbated because of intergenerational trauma and policies that displaced them (Fallon & Miller, 2020). As a result, Indigenous youth are over-represented in the Canadian care system (Leonard, 2020; Smith et al., 2022). Even though Indigenous youth in Canada under the age of 14 make up a mere 7.7% of the population, they account for 52.2% of the population in care in Canada (Government of Canada, 2023). In fact, out-of-home care research shows that Indigenous children are over-represented in care in the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Quinn (2022) mentions that First Nations children in Canada are more likely than any category of Canadian youth to be removed from their homes and placed into the care system at a rate of 12.4 times that of non-Indigenous children (Fallon et al., 2020). First Nations children in Canada enter the welfare system at a younger age than non-Indigenous youth, stay longer, and have a history of being placed in homes that aid in the removal of their cultural identity (Sinha et al., 2011). One of the main challenges that stand out for Indigenous youth is their loss of identity. Ward (2011) suggests that personal and cultural continuity are large factors in variations in suicide rates amongst First Nations youth. Often, First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth are separated from their culture and kinship structures and placed in communities that do not fit their backgrounds which results in a loss of identity and loss of connection to land (Fallon & Miller, 2020). Morton and colleagues (2021) note that the negative outcomes of homelessness that Indigenous youth often experience [at a larger rate than non-Indigenous youth] upon exiting or aging out of the care system are connected to the history and ongoing legacy of colonization, racism, and land dispossession. Brown (2023) stresses that outcomes for Indigenous people tend to be exacerbated and the child welfare system escalates Indigenous peoples' likelihood of negative outcomes. These negative outcomes are characterized as "chronic challenges" that put First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families at further risk of encountering the child protection system. Thus, when finding housing for homeless First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth who have exited or aged out of the care system, it is just as

important to find reconnection with the self, with kin, with community, culture, and land (Morton et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is important to consider how trust can be developed in these settings (Brown, 2023).

The lack of outcomes in the Canadian context for Metis and Inuit children's outcomes after they age out of or exit care suggests that we should be investigating this gap in the literature in order to improve how preventative programming is designed and delivered. Thus, this finding is a pivot point to address youth inquire about what it is that researchers, policymakers, and academics should be paying attention to.

Some recommendations that came from these results will be briefly mentioned here. First, Fallon and Miller (2020) explained that there is a need for effective and culturally appropriate policy and program responses to support Indigenous youth. These services should be provided by workers who are culturally competent and can aid Indigenous youth in finding their sense of belonging to community and culture. Second, Brooks (2022) mentioned that there is an importance of ceremony for Indigenous youth mental health that incorporates Elders and land-based education to promote resiliency. Partnering with Elders has been shown to improve mental health outcomes of inner-city Indigenous patients within primary care, resulting in a statistical reduction of depressive symptoms and suicide risk of Indigenous patients (Brooks, 2022). Furthermore, connection to the land is a social determinant of Indigenous Peoples' health and should be strongly considered in programming/intervention-planning (Brooks, 2022). Third, Smith and colleagues (2022) mentioned that there needs to be a cross-ministry and cross-sectoral approach, inclusive of Indigenous organizations and perspectives to improve care experiences for Indigenous youth [in British Columbia]. Fourth, Stubbs and colleagues (2023) draw on suggestions from Doucet (2020) who makes the argument that nonhuman relationships through culture, spirituality and land improves the support for Indigenous youth, as well as animal companions. Lastly, Brown (2023) suggests that social services should consider how to develop high trust amongst Indigenous populations by keeping Indigenous children with Indigenous caregivers. Some child welfare agencies have already started doing this, such as Alberta's Children's Services which is committed to keeping Indigenous families together (Brown, 2023).

One recommendation that could be incorporated, beyond the literature review in this environmental scan, could be the integration of the Measuring to Thrive framework co-developed by Dr. Helaina Gaspard at the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy Institute [IFSD] with First Nations communities, practitioners and experts, that offers a set of indicators that expresses a vision of holistic well-being specifically addressing First Nations lived reality (uOttawa, 2021; 2022). The framework was created to connect the needs of First Nations with funding for child and family services, with the goal of holistic well-being through funding structures, funding amounts and local control (uOttawa, 2021; 2022). The framework produces indicators to reflect on First Nation contexts which provides useful information in decision-making related to policy and practice (uOttawa, 2021; 2022). This framework forces us to reflect on the root causes (of the causes) of contact with the protection system (e.g. poverty) to address the long-term negative consequences and costs associated (uOttawa, 2021; 2022). The

framework seeks for us to design and build a system that reflects the needs and differences in First Nation communities (uOttawa, 2021; 2022).

6.2 Overview of results from New Zealand, Australia, and the United States of America
Out of the articles that were collected for this study, eight mentioned comparisons with other countries such as the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Of those articles, four made mention of Indigenous youth. However, all those studies did not mention the outcomes of Indigenous youth aging out of care. For example, Murray and Goddard (2014) mentioned how in Australia there are three national inquiries giving voice to Indigenous Australians, and that the government has committed to conducting research into the social impacts of institutional care, the needs of care-leavers and outcomes thus identifying that there is a need for this type of work to be done. One study explained over-representation of Indigenous children in child welfare in the United States of America with statistics as recent as 2009: (1) Canada (5% of the population but make up 18% of the children reported to child welfare); (2) Australia (5% of the population but make up 28% of the children in childcare); and (3) New Zealand (24% of the population but make up 47% of the children in childcare) (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009). The author suggests that there is increased focus on cultural connectedness to support wellbeing. For example, choosing not to terminate parental rights for an Indigenous child who is supported by an Indigenous child welfare agency or tribe (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009). The author suggests long-term foster and kinship care to achieve permanence, which has shown promise in Australia and New Zealand, in addition to more resources, more decision-making power, and more comprehensive child welfare policies to address Indigenous disadvantage (Tilbury & Thoburn, 2009). Another study that was included initially mentions how in New Zealand in the Māori culture, interdependence is cultivated and celebrated and should be applied globally so that young people can rely on their communities rather than the government for support (Stubbs et al., 2023). The last study mentioned how state responsibility should be assumed for the disproportionality of outcomes for Indigenous youth as they were enslaved, assimilated, and relocated by the Government of the United States. To conclude, none of the studies that mentioned these countries of interest reported on the outcomes of Indigenous youth who aged out of or exited care, but they have been included here as they may have meaningful recommendations for policy and practice.

7.0 Discussion and Limitations
7.1 Summary of findings
The findings from this environmental scan confirm that Indigenous children and youth are overrepresented in child welfare systems, in Canada, the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia. First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth outcomes once they have aged out of or exited child welfare care are exacerbated due to a history and ongoing legacy of colonization which continues to cause intergenerational trauma. In addition to facing the numerous outcomes that Canadian youth face when exiting the child welfare system (e.g. homelessness, substance abuse, poverty), Indigenous children in Canada enter the welfare system at a younger age than non-Indigenous youth, stay longer, and have a history of being placed in homes that aid in the removal of their cultural identity. There is a vicious cycle of re-entry into the system that occurs

because of a deeply traumatic past of colonialism and authors that have noted this have encouraged the system to work towards long-lasting changes that are culturally appropriate for Indigenous youth. These recommendations include a need for culturally appropriate policy and programs, culturally competent workers, incorporating Elders and land-based learning, and keeping Indigenous youth with Indigenous caregivers so that they can preserve and strengthen their culture and identity.

7.2 Limitations of existing research
One of the research gaps regarding care leavers, as addressed by Stubbs and colleagues (2023), was that there is no research regarding Indigenous perspectives towards informal supports for care-leavers, building on Atwool (2020) who highlights that informal supports are important in Indigenous cultures.

Another gap, as noted by Fallon and Miller (2020), is that research on Canadian youth is lacking as well as studies that follow youth over time to examine outcomes once they have exited care. Furthermore, researchers have found that since youth who were in care continue to experience poor outcomes as opposed to their peers, the policy responses have not been sufficient in addressing poor outcomes for youth who age out of care (Fallon & Miller, 2020). Fallon and Miller (2020) also note that there is a lack of studies that evaluate programs and interventions for youth aging out of care due to a lack of existing programs that can be evaluated. Thus, there is a need for more programs addressing these needs as well as research to inform programs for youth who are aging out of care.

Overall, there is a large gap in the literature in terms of outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth aging out of care, while there is a wealth of literature on the outcomes of non-Indigenous Canadians aging out of care. This gap in the literature has grand implications for how we create programming to support these youth, and this gap in the literature contributes to why there is not enough programming to address outcomes of Indigenous youth as they age out of care.

8.0 Recommendations
8.1 Best practices for conducting this type of research
Indigenous peoples should fully participate as equal partners, in all stages of data collection, including planning, implementation, analysis and dissemination, access and return, with appropriate resourcing and capacity-building. One of the most followed practices to conducting research with First Nations Peoples is the First Nation Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) which was established in 1998 by the National Steering Committee (NSC) (FNIGC, 2023). OCAP establishes how data and information on First Nations peoples will be used, shared, protected, or collected (FNIGC, 2023). OCAP was created to ensure that First Nation people are stewards over their own information, in the same way that they are stewards over their own land (FNIGC, 2023). The tool supports strong information governance to advocate for First Nations data sovereignty (FNIGC, 2023). Utilizing this tool ensures that the information that is collected and shared can benefit the community and minimize harm (FNIGC, 2023). These principles ensure that First Nations people have control over their data collection and that they own and control the usage, dissemination, interpretation, and storage of that data

(FNIGC, 2023). The FNIGC states that the OCAP® principles were developed in part to fill a gap in Western legal systems that doesn't account for "community rights and interests in their information" (FNIGC, 2023).

Breaking down the four principles: "ownership" refers to ownership of the data, information, and knowledge; "control" sets forth the narrative that First Nations have a right to seek control over all aspects of the research process that impacts them; "access" refers to the fact that First Nations need to have access to the research collected on themselves and their communities, which ideally should be formalized through protocols; and "possession" refers to the physical control of the data, where ownership is asserted (FNIGC, 2023).

First Nations communities and regions reserve the right to interpret OCAP; however, they may see fit and extend those interpretations through their actions accordingly (FNIGC, 2023). OCAP is in no way prescriptive over their decision-making. However, OCAP is limited in that it was established to address First Nations authority over information, so it does not represent Indigenous principles as a whole – there should be improved principles specific to Inuit and Métis people to further extend data sovereignty in these communities and regions (Anderson & Cidro, 2019). This is not to say that OCAP has not positively benefitted how research is conducted in these communities, as it has resulted in ways that resituate power structures and mitigate helicopter research (Anderson & Cidro, 2019). However, OCAP could be expanded to incorporate Inuit and Métis communities into the discussion of principles (Anderson & Cidro, 2019). Furthermore, there is little to no guidance on how to navigate this relationship and engage in discussions between Indigenous people and researchers when it comes to interpreting the OCAP appropriate to each region (Anderson & Cidro, 2019).

8.2 Inclusion of Indigenous Youth's Voices/Lived Experiences in Project Planning
There is a need for research to be more inclusive of Indigenous youth's voices to be more ethical and equitable. Indigenous youth have identified that research on Indigenous people has been exploitative, and often does not engage or honour their identities, stories and experiences in a way that is diverse or that focuses on resilience (FN Caring Society, 2019). Research needs to uplift Indigenous youth and build their communities. It should promote the revival of Indigenous cultures, ceremonies, languages and stories, and researchers are responsible for changing the narrative (FN Caring Society, 2019). Researchers should also include the entire community in order to incorporate diverse voices (e.g. Elders, children, youth, two-spirit people), rather than simply centering on the voices of those Indigenous individuals who hold positions in governance.

8.3 Recommendations for change
As cited by Fallon and Miller (2020), Reid (2007) suggested international best practices for youth leaving care. Reid (2007) named seven "pillars" that show how successful the transition is for a youth, including: "positive relationships and support systems; education; housing; life skills; a sense of identity and self; emotional healing of past experiences; and engagement of youth in their own plans." Outcomes will only improve once all areas of each pillar are address (rather than just one), along with a strong financial foundation to ensure success.

A notable example of how to address all pillars in depth can be found in the report by Rampersaud and Mussell (2021), who collated a list of recommendations for change that were created by first-voice advocates with lived experience of being in care. The recommendations were as follows:

(1) focus on interdependence with peer and non-professional support networks and community;
(2) prioritize permanent and long-term caregiver and housing placements with a housing first for youth philosophy;
(3) create conditions that make [higher] education attainable;
(4) expand mental health support and continue that support to youth leaving care;
(5) provide transition supports;
(6) increase financial supports to improve youths' overall quality of life and match their current cost of living expense;
(7) support young parents with services so that their children are not at risk of entering the system;
(8) provide services and supports to guardians of origin;
(9) reunite youth with their families;
(10) shift from a prevention and intervention model to a family model;
(11) address the high representation of children of colour in the system;
(12) mandate a standard of care and service delivery to child welfare agencies;
(13) monitor progress over time;
(14) remove barriers to seeking and staying in school;
(15) provide mentorship;
(16) address criminalization; and
(17) value alternative ways of knowing like Indigenous epistemologies by providing culturally specific supports and mentorship.

These recommendations may be impactful in reducing the lifetime costs to the province of youth aging out of care.

9.0 Conclusion
Future research should focus on addressing the limitations of the existing research as mentioned in this environmental scan. There is a critical need for further research conducted not only on the outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth in Canada who exit child welfare care, but also in countries of interest such as the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia. Without this information, it is assumed that Indigenous youth are experiencing the same level of outcomes as the general population, if not slightly elevated, which dismisses their past and does not allow for programming and interventions to be created that adequately address these concerns and shortfalls of the child welfare system thus far in addressing the needs of Indigenous youth. Furthermore, it is important to focus on studying the positive experiences of youth that successfully age out of or transition out of care to provide insights into strategies that can better support youth and build resilience among this group (Fallon & Miller, 2020).

10.0 References

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