Culture as Catalyst: Preventing the Criminalization of Indigenous Youth

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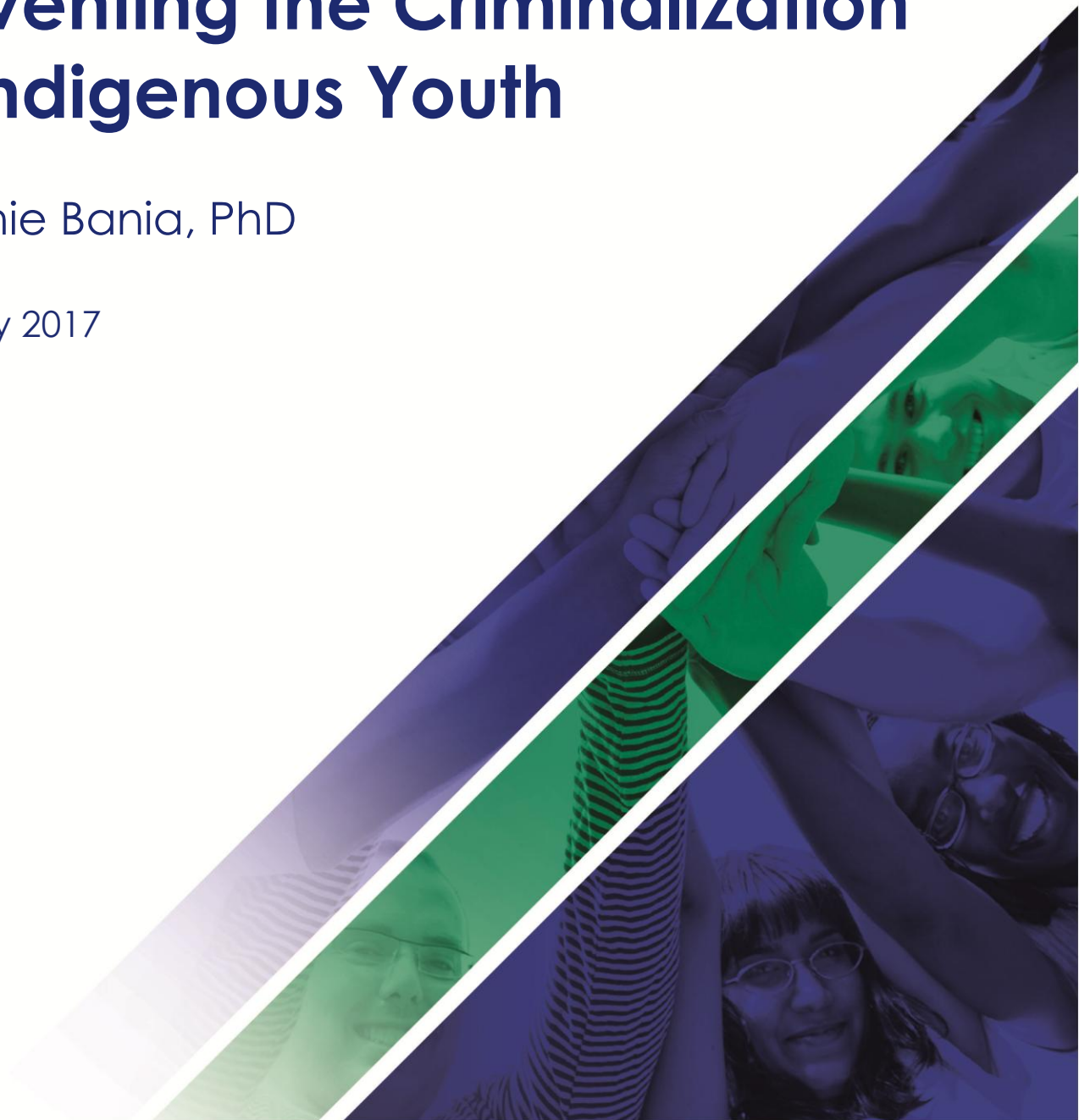
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Executive Summary

Indigenous youth and adults are highly over-represented in the Canadian criminal justice system. Colonizing policies and practices, including the residential school system, dramatically disrupted traditional Indigenous values, families and communities across this country. These traumatic events, combined with other domination practices, all contribute to the current negative outcomes experienced by Indigenous peoples. These include disproportionately high rates of poverty, under-education, unsafe housing, victimization, and hopelessness. Research consistently shows that these factors are among the main root causes of victimization and contact with the criminal justice system.

The role of culture in promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous youth and in preventing negative outcomes - including involvement in the criminal justice system – has been given increased attention over the past few decades. In both Indigenous philosophies of healing and Western theories of resilience, connection to culture is considered a factor in positive youth development. In the aftermath of historical trauma, Indigenous healing involves processes of decolonization (learning and understanding traditional cultural values and teachings), recovery from trauma (an opportunity to understand and grieve losses), and ongoing healing (a commitment to gaining balance). In strength-based approaches and research on resiliency, a connection to culture – described as cultural awareness, acceptance of one's own culture and other cultures, and spirituality - is a key developmental asset that promotes wellbeing and an ability to bounce back from adversity.

In this context, several strategies and programs have emerged that are considered evidence-informed by Western standards (i.e., supported by research), and responsive to Indigenous philosophies and experiences. Key strategies for supporting Indigenous youth in meaningful and appropriate ways include: (1) ensuring cultural safety, (2) working from strengths, and (3) providing trauma-informed supports. Examples of specific programs implemented by governments and community organizations to promote connection to culture for Indigenous youth who face barriers to success include: the *Aboriginal Empathic Program* and *Project Venture* in the United States; *Strengths in Motion*, the *Culturally Appropriate Program (CAP)*, and the *Coyote Pride Mentoring Program* in Canada; and a variety of programs in Ottawa by the *Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health*, *Tungasuvvingat Inuit*, and *Minwaashin Lodge, as well as Project s.t.e.p.*, and the Ottawa Carleton District School Board's *(OCDSB) Aboriginal Learning Centre*. These programs aim to support young Indigenous people in connecting to culture and in achieving positive outcomes by providing them with services that are informed and inspired by traditional values and teachings.

Traditional Indigenous philosophies, and the Western concepts of a 'program' and of research, represent two different worldviews. The first relies on concepts of interdependence and oral teachings, while the latter focuses on standardization and experimental science. As such, areas of tension arise when exploring this topic. Nonetheless, there are commonalities in the learnings gained by each approach, which can hopefully inspire further dialogue, and highlight ideas for effectively supporting Indigenous youth at the local level. That said, we must not lose sight of the important changes needed at the social and systemic levels for longer-term impacts to take hold, such as addressing racism, economic inequity, under-education, poor housing, and disproportionately high rates of victimization and criminalization.

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, there has been increased attention in the field of youth development on the importance of *culture* when working with Indigenous youth in social and community service contexts. While the idea of "culture as treatment" for Indigenous peoples has a long history, especially in the field of addictions and substance misuse (see Brady, 1995), the focus on culturally appropriate programming for youth is relatively recent.

The objective of this review is to gather information on the role of culture in promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous youth, with a focus on supports that hold promise for preventing the criminalization of Indigenous youth. The first section provides a brief but important overview of the historical and social context of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The second section then explores and highlights the links between colonial policies and practice, and the disproportionate victimization and criminalization of Indigenous peoples. This provides a framework within which to explore current thoughts on how a connection to culture for Indigenous youth may serve as a catalyst for supporting their positive development and wellbeing. A series of common principles and strategies for working with marginalized and Indigenous youth are presented, followed by a few concrete examples of these efforts in the United States, Canada and in Ottawa.

A note on language - the terminology used in this review has a few complexities that are best described in the following way:

> "*The history of relationships between the Canadian state and Aboriginal peoples is complex, and has oftentimes been paternalistic and damaging. As a result, terminology can represent something more than just a word. It can represent certain colonial histories and power dynamics. Terminology can be critical for Indigenous populations, as the term for a group may not have been selected by the population themselves but instead imposed on them by colonizers. With this in mind, one might understand how a term can be a loaded word, used as a powerful method to divide peoples, misrepresent them, and control their identity - what we can see today in Canada with "status" and "non-status Indians," the legally defined categories of people under the Indian Act. On the other hand, terms can empower populations when the people have the power to self-identify. It is important to recognize the potential these words may hold— but it is also important and very possible to understand these terms well enough to feel confident in using them and creating dialogue.*" (UBC, 2016, p. 1)

The term "Indigenous" is used in this review to encircle the rich variety of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples across North America and what later became Canada. In the United Nations, "Indigenous" is used to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement, and settlement of their traditional territories by others. In some cases, other terms are used that reflect the terminology of specific organizations or programs, such as Aboriginal peoples, First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. These represent their preferences and Canada's current state of language in constitutional affairs. It is important to understand that different individuals and groups have their preferred terms and identifying language. The term Indigenous is used in this report in the hopes of being as inclusive as possible, while also acknowledging the many different peoples and cultures that it encompasses.

Methodology

A purposeful sampling method was use for this review. References were scanned and selected based on their relevance to the topic at hand, and the level and quality of the information they provided. Academic references such as peer reviewed journal articles and books, and non-academic/grey literature such as government reports, discussion papers, websites and program manuals were included. For the grey literature search, the Google search engine was used. For the search of the academic literature, the Scopus, JSTOR, and Mendeley databases were used. The snowballing technique was also used by seeking out references that were cited by others. This purposeful method resulted in a focus on Canadian sources - or information relevant to the Canadian context - and a series of references that give different perspectives on the issue.

It was also important to highlight some of the local work occurring in this area. Existing knowledge of some of the key community organizations and resources in this field in Ottawa was used as a starting point. Publicly available information on these initiatives was reviewed through access on the internet and/or through representatives of the organizations in question. Organizations profiled in the section on local examples and other community partners of Crime Prevention Ottawa were given the opportunity to review a draft of this report and provide feedback. Comments from a variety of organizational representatives were received, and their input was incorporated into this final report.

Conducting an exhaustive search of the literature and a comprehensive mapping of local programs and resources was outside the scope of this project. This is a complex topic which merits much care and attention. A more in-depth search and analysis of the topic from a variety of perspectives would be beneficial in the future.

Findings

Context

Understanding the historical and social context of First Nation peoples in Canada is crucial to understanding the types of support that may be most appropriate and effective in contributing to healing and to building resilience among Indigenous youth. The effects of colonialism on Indigenous communities, families and individuals in Canada are briefly presented below. This important issue is now well documented - please refer to the sources cited for more in-depth information. The objective of the brief review below is to shed light on the links between colonial policies and practices, and the victimization and criminalization of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Pre-Colonial Indigenous Cultures

One of the main commonalities across many First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples is the concept of the circle. The **circle** has no beginning, no end, and no hierarchy. One of the representations of the circle and its inclusivity is the Medicine Wheel. Although there are many different interpretations of the Medicine Wheel and various teachings within it, in general terms, it is a representation of *culture* along four key orientations and dimensions (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2016):

Belonging (East):
A sense of belonging is about how you feel, what you see, smell, hear, taste and touch. It is about a sense of safety in the space and environment you occupy. It is about inclusiveness.

Mastery (South):
Mastery is about increasing your knowledge (learning). It allows for changes in behaviours, key outcomes in the physical world. It also leads to positive individual emotional development in the form of self-pride and self-confidence. Mastery cannot occur without first feeling safe and a sense of belonging.

Interdependence (West):

Interdependence is about community, the greater good, and communal pride; the idea that everything we do is interconnected, and that we are stronger together.

Generosity (North):

Generosity is about long-term planning, about making an investment in oneself and in the community moving forward. It reflects the belief that what you do today will have a long-term impact. Many Indigenous cultures believe that what we do today will have an impact on seven (7) generations.

Resources on Indigenous Philosophies
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health – Model of Care Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kksaq5Ohm_g
Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society: http://www.dancingtoeaglespiritsociety.org/medwheel.php
Four Directions Teachings: http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/main.html

Before European settlement, the concept of 'family' within Indigenous communities could be described as a complex combination of biological ties, customary adoptions, clan membership bonds, and economic (e.g., hunting) partnerships (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). This is very different from the European nuclear model of 'family' with a biological unit of parents and children living in a household. In traditional First Nations families, other close/immediate family members included grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other members of the clan. In some communities, adoptions were also customary and done purposefully, where parents would agree to give their child to their grandparents or to another childless couple in the community. In many ways, large extended family systems and special bonds between families were purposefully created to increase connections, where almost all functions within the community were performed within the context of extended family (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008).

This conceptualization of family is grounded in an interconnected worldview that is common in Indigenous communities. As described in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 5): "The effect of these diverse, overlapping bonds was to

create a dense network of relationships within which sharing and obligations of mutual aid ensured that an effective safety net was in place". Often, this interconnected worldview is represented in a spiral that illustrates how the individual, family, clan, community, nation, natural environment, and spirit world are connected through interdependent relationships (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2008). In this way, teachings were passed from generation to generation through healthy relationships, ceremony, role modeling, and living on the land. This served to teach children and youth the values and rules they needed to observe to become adults who understood their place within the interconnected world, for harmony, peace, the 'good life' (survival and health/wellbeing), as well as the survival of the people and the sustainability of the world around them (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2008).

Ottawa as an urban centre is a more recent incarnation of what existed historically along the *Kichi-zibi* or Ottawa River shores, the traditional meeting place of the Anishinabeg and Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous peoples travelling through the region. From a historical cultural standpoint, the local Ojibwa, Cree, and Iroquois relied upon a sophisticated array of mechanisms – including the interconnected worldview mentioned above - to maintain order in their societies before the arrival of Europeans (Coyle, 1986).

Although it is believed that many groups including the Haudenosaunee employed ridicule and even banishment from the community at times against wrongdoers (Coyle, 1986), the shared values of interconnectedness were at the base of survival and respect. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (1999) points out that the traditional idea of 'justice' in Indigenous communities is to reconcile the accused with their own conscience, with the individual or family that has been harmed, and to restore the peace and equilibrium within the community. The Cree word 'opintowin' for example "involves the principles of repairing harm, healing, restoring relationships, accountability, community involvement and community ownership" (Commission on First Nations and Métis People [CFNMP], 2004, p. 1). These principles are at the base of current initiatives around Restorative Justice in Canada, which are largely informed by traditional Indigenous values and practices (Hansen, 2015). Rather than focusing on punishment, they focus on repairing harms and healing at the individual, relational, and community levels (Hansen, 2015).

Colonial Policy and Its Impacts on Indigenous People

Colonization has been defined as "the historical process by which structures of domination have been set in place on Turtle Island / North America over the Indigenous peoples and their territories without their consent and in response to their resistance against and with these structures" (Tully, 2000, p. 37). The very arrival and settlement of European peoples brought disease, epidemics and war

that left Indigenous populations in ruins. Furthermore, many different types and kinds of structures of dominance were put in place, including many acts of legislation and policies that have had dire consequences for Indigenous peoples. These include an array of colonial and later Canadian policies informed by the assumptions and opinions of European authorities that Indigenous peoples were at the very least naïve and unsophisticated and in need of intervention, and at worst 'savage' and 'uncivilized', and requiring assimilation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)[1].

Building upon legislation, inquiries and commissions from the previous decades, the Constitution Act of 1867 put in place policies and practices to further assimilate Indigenous peoples into British societal culture, through a focus on re-education and conversion to Christianity (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The purpose was to rid Indigenous peoples of their cultural identity, values, traditions, and language. The key tool the federal government used to do so were industrial-style residential institutions, which later became Residential Schools based on the British boarding school model. Different church organizations in Canada were contracted by the federal government to operate the institutions. Despite repeated official and unofficial reports and proof of widespread neglect, cruelty and abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual) of the children attending residential schools – including a high death rate of students - no corrective action was ever taken (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

These policies led to a complete disconnect between Indigenous children and their families, and a whole generation of Indigenous youth and young adults without an identity or education, and suffering from various forms of trauma (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2008). They were burdened with significant psychological issues and did not know how to care for themselves or others. They lacked the ability to develop healthy relationships, and in some cases, passed on the neglect and abuse they had suffered as children onto their own relatives (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; McCaslin & Boyer, 2009). The impacts of the residential school system on its Indigenous survivors are so profound and common that some clinicians have attempted to describe its post-traumatic stress characteristics as "Residential School Syndrome" (Brasfield, 2001). By the mid-1960s, one third of Indigenous children were placed in the child welfare system (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Today, many Indigenous children and youth – including those involved in the child welfare system in Canada – are grandchildren and children of the survivors of

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[1] Consult the comprehensive review in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Residential Schools and/or of Indigenous adults raised in government care as children (Trocme et al., 2006).

The Urbanization of Indigenous Peoples

The proportion of Canada's urban population identifying as Aboriginal increased dramatically between 1961 and 2006, growing from 13% to 53% over those 45 years (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN, 2016) estimates that around 61% of Ontario's Aboriginal population lives in urban areas. They found that 2.4% of Ontario's population identifies as Aboriginal (which equals about 301,430 people), and 3.5% (441,395 people) report having Aboriginal ancestry. Of those self-identifying as Aboriginal, 66.8% were First Nation, 28.5% were Métis, 3.6% reported having multiple or other Aboriginal identities, and 1.1% were Inuit (UAKN, 2016).

The degree of urbanization varies across Indigenous groups. In 2006, non-Status Indians were the largest group in cities, followed by the Métis, registered Indians and the Inuit (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). Most of the growth of the Aboriginal population in eleven main Canadian cities up until 2006 was the result of 'ethnic mobility', which refers to people changing the way they perceive/report their ethnic identity over the course of their life span. Only one-third of the growth in the urban Aboriginal population between 1961 and 2006 was caused by natural increase (infant births in cities) (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). Net migration to cities, which means people physically relocating from non-urban centres to urban centres, played the least significant role in Aboriginal population increase in cities in Canada (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). While many Indigenous families and individuals left First Nations communities to move to urban centres, the net migration of Indigenous people to Canadian cities has played a minimal role (less than 1%) in the growth of Indigenous peoples in urban centres[2] (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011).

In general, there is very little readily available data on First Nations peoples and families in Ottawa specifically. However, according to an official at the City of Ottawa, around 40,000 people who identified as Aboriginal in ancestry lived in Ottawa in 2011. That was higher than in 2006, when that number was just over 29,000, and in 2001 when it was estimated at 21,000 (CBC, 2011). The municipal wards of Rideau-Vanier and Rideau-Rockcliffe had the highest Aboriginal populations at 2,275 and 2,000 people respectively, while March-Innes, West Carleton and Somerset trailed at 1,675, 1,500 and 1,030 people (CBC, 2011).

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[2] Thunder Bay (ON) was the only exception out of the eleven metropolitan areas reviewed, where migration of Indigenous peoples to the city was a major contributor to the increase in their population.

Studies show that housing shortages and overcrowding and the lack of employment opportunities on reserves are the most common reasons why Indigenous peoples migrate to urban centres (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Some return regularly to their communities on reserve, while others settle permanently in cities. Successful urban adaptation is related to several factors, including: the cultural background of individuals according to the traditional evolutionary level of their social heritage; historical elements such as the length and intensity of non-Aboriginal contact; the urban proximity of their communities; the local quality of receptivity (i.e., absence of racism); and the extent of supports for urban Aboriginal peoples in the city they move to (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Statistics Canada's last effort to examine the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Urban Aboriginal populations was done in 2001. It reported on the Aboriginal populations living in 11 selected census metropolitan areas in between 1981 and 2001. It found that overall, employment rates had improved for Aboriginal people in most of the urban areas, except in the primary labour force group aged 25 to 54 in Regina (O'Donnell & Tait, 2001). However, the gap in employment rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people did not change much over the 20-year period, except in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Sudbury, where gaps had closed substantially. It noted that in some urban centres, employment rates among Aboriginal people with a university degree were higher than for their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This was the case in Ottawa–Hull, Montréal, Toronto and Calgary (O'Donnell & Tait, 2001). This kind of study has not been repeated so a comparison of outcomes over the past 15 years cannot be made.

While some Indigenous families have found wellbeing in cities, for others, this urbanization has transformed the issues of intergenerational trauma, loss of culture, loss of identity and the ability to self-determine, into issues of poverty, homelessness, criminalization and incarceration (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2008).

Root Causes: The Connection Between Colonization, Victimization, and Criminalization

As Grekul and Laboucane-Benson (2008) point out, many Indigenous families have been resilient in the face of historic trauma and have managed to overcome great adversity. However, different forms of racism are still rampant, and many families have been significantly impacted by first-hand and historical trauma. This means that many Indigenous children and youth are raised in environments where there is:
- significant poverty;
- systemic racism and lack of cross cultural understanding;
- violence, including against women and children;

- neglect and abuse;
- a lack of trusting relationships;
- a lack of positive role modeling;
- feelings of hopelessness and helplessness; and
- complete disconnection from Canadian culture and healthy Indigenous culture.

Research consistently shows that these factors are among the main root causes of victimization and involvement in the criminal justice system (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2008; McMurtry & Curling, 2008; WHO, 2002).

It is widely documented that various health and life outcomes of Indigenous Peoples in Canada are relatively poor compared to the rest of the Canadian population (Reading & Wein, 2009). These conditions are widely attributed to the long-term and intergenerational impacts of various colonizing policies and practices and enduring systemic and everyday racism (see Reading & Wein, 2009).

➢ **Systemic and Everyday Racism:** Hansen (2015) defines systemic racism as the "continuation of traditionally accepted inequities that keep certain groups from fully participating in the workplace, in our schools, and in many other social institutions". Reading & Wein (2009) explored the role of colonialism and racism in the inequities in health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. There is also some evidence of racism and discrimination towards Indigenous students in our education systems. In a study examining discrimination, Canadian teachers were asked to assess the performance of twenty-four students and recommend either a remedial, conventional or advanced program placement. The authors found that, regardless of the students' performance, teachers gave the students a lower evaluation if they were led to believe the student in question was Aboriginal (Gulati, 2013). Other experiences of racism are more glaring and occur in the everyday transactions of Indigenous peoples. For example, a 2015 Aboriginal Peoples Television Network news story reported that the Ottawa Police Service was called into the YWCA to address a hate crime complaint. On two separate occasions, an Anishnaabe woman being sheltered by the YWCA/YMCA found notes slipped under door that read: "Indians are disgusting" and "stupid, dirty, Indian" (Boissonneau, 2015).

➢ **Economic inequity**: On reserve, at least one in four children in First Nations communities lives in poverty (AFN, 2014). Food security is an issue for almost 50% of residents on reserve, which means half of First Nations people on reserve do not have access to enough food. Almost half of First

Nations households do not have an internet connection, a key means of communication (AFN, 2014).

➢ **Poor education:** The high-school dropout rate for Indigenous people living on reserve continues to hover around 60% (AFN, 2014). Recent research on the school success of various ethnic groups in Toronto reveals that although graduation rates for Indigenous youth are relatively good, their performance scores are relatively poor, and worse than for some refugee groups (Brown, Newton & Tam, 2015). Furthermore, First Nations, Métis and Inuit women are significantly less likely to have postsecondary degrees than other Canadian women (NWAC, 2013).

➢ **Inadequate housing:** The now defunct National Aboriginal Health Organization's Inuit Centre conducted a study in 2008 and concluded that, "Housing is not the only issue, but all issues relate to housing." Participants said "it is hard to thrive in school, perform in professions and to live healthy and harmonious lives without a home, without safe shelter and while living in overcrowded conditions" (Inuit Tuttarvingat of the National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008).

➢ **Victimization and Violence Against Women & Girls:** Aboriginal people are much more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be a victim of a crime. In 2014 (Boyle, 2016):
   o a higher proportion of Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people in Canada reported being victimized - 28% of Aboriginal people living in the provinces and territories compared with 18% of non-Aboriginal people.
   o the overall rate of violent victimization among Aboriginal people was more than double that of non-Aboriginal people. Higher rates of victimization observed among Aboriginal people appeared related to the increased presence of factors such as experiencing childhood maltreatment, having been homeless, using drugs, or having poor mental health.
   o Aboriginal females had an overall rate of violent victimization that was double that of Aboriginal males, close to triple that of non-Aboriginal females, and more than triple that of non-Aboriginal males. High victimization rates among Aboriginal women and girls, however, could not be fully explained by an increased presence of other victimization risk factors. Even when controlling for these risk factors, Aboriginal identity remained a risk factor for violent victimization of females.

➤ **Criminalization**: Aboriginal adults and young people are overrepresented in Canada's justice and correctional systems. In 2014/2015, while Aboriginal youth accounted for approximately 7% of the population aged 12-17 years old in nine jurisdictions examined by Statistics Canada, there were just over 5,700 Aboriginal youth admitted to correctional services in these jurisdictions, representing 33% of all admissions. In 2014/2015, Aboriginal females accounted for 44% of female youth admitted to the corrections system in these jurisdictions, whereas Aboriginal males accounted for 29% of male youth admitted (Statistics Canada, 2016).

➤ **Hopelessness:** Suicide rates among First Nations youth are 5 to 7 times higher than other young non-Aboriginal people in Canada (AFN, 2014).

In his work on issues relating to social cohesion, crime and insecurity, Castel (1995) identifies a continuum of social integration that is based on measures of social affiliation along two axes: (1) employment and the relative economic position associated with it; and (2) social relations, meaning one's interaction with and level of attachment to others, and to social groups and institutions (see Graph 1). Those who fall into the lower left quadrant – those who live in a relative state of poverty and who are socially excluded or isolated – are the most vulnerable to experiencing negative life outcomes.

Graph: Continuum of Social Integration (Bania, 2009)
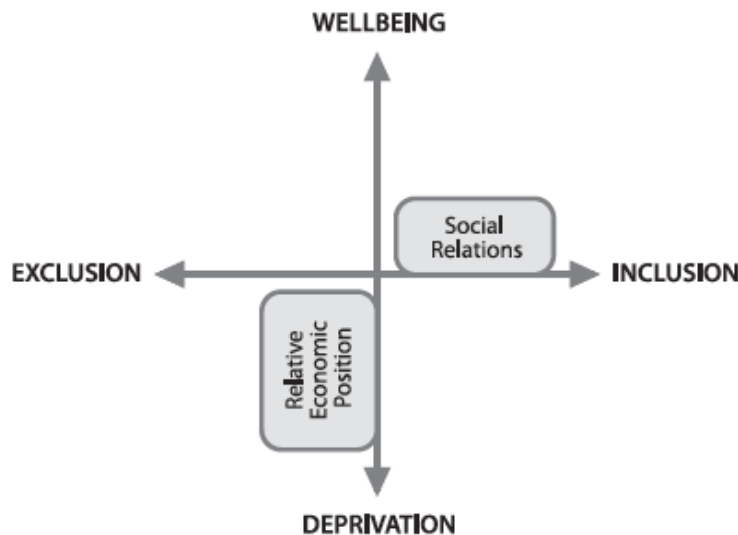
Castel (1995) argues that in our current Western capitalist societies, a person's status within society is increasingly determined by the attributes attached to "work", and the relative economic position their job (or lack thereof) puts them in. A lack of integration or poor integration into the workforce can result in disqualification for civic/political integration and for broader social integration (Castel, 1995). When combined with other forms of social marginalization, such as a lack of meaningful ties with family and friends, discrimination based on race, gender, ability, and the stigma of having been in conflict with the law (see Davies & Tanner, 2003), some youth and young adults are left with a sense of exclusion and pessimism about their future (Chettleburgh, 2007; Totten, 2000 and 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2005).

These young people often adopt survival strategies that are based in the present, on living "day to day" (Castel, 1995). Researchers argue that those who feel the least connected to a valuable and valued role in their community, the lowest sense of attachment to others, and the most pessimistic about their chances for improving their situation, are the most likely to become criminalized and in chronic contact with the justice system (see Castel, 1995).

Synergy in Philosophies: The Healing Journey and Resiliency Theory

When it comes to supporting youth and young adults on their road to wellbeing and success, there are a wide variety of theories and approaches. Two interesting perspectives which seem to have a fair bit in common are Indigenous philosophies of healing, and Western theories of resilience and strength-based approaches. These perspectives are described below. The ways in which they both incorporate a focus on *connection to culture* as a factor in wellbeing are explored.

The Healing Journey: Indigenous Philosophies of "The Good Life"

In Indigenous cultures, the concept of healing is a central theme which has broad application. It generally refers to an ongoing process, the practice and journey of "living well" or of seeking "the good life". It encompasses actions in all facets of life - at the individual, family and community levels – and in all dimensions – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and political (Hart, 1999). As Cajete (1994, p. 46) points out:

> *"the phrases seeking life, for life's sake, to find life, to complete, to become complete, of good heart, of good thought, with harmony, and a host of combinations of these have translations in all Indian languages. These are the metaphors that Indian people use in talking about themselves, their places, and their relationships".*

In the context of the aftermath of historical trauma, this healing journey is seen as a process of rebuilding, of realignment – moving back into balance. Whether this means a deep connection to the Indigenous worldview, or a realigning and rebalancing of European culture with an Indigenous worldview, learning about and seeking the good life shapes all thoughts and behaviours (Martin Hill, 2009).

Some common Indigenous principles that accompany the idea of healing and seeking the good life are (Hart, 1999; Martin Hill, 2009):
- Everyone is responsible for their own healing journey.
- While an individual may seek help and guidance when experiencing difficulties, healing is a process grounded in self-determination.
- Purposeful attention must be paid to the development and preservation of good relationships.
- Pursuing the good life is directly related to the principle of interconnectedness.

Modern conceptions of healing for Indigenous peoples generally include three processes:
(1) decolonization, (2) recovery from past trauma, and (3) the ongoing healing journey (Archibald, 2006). As such, many current healing initiatives encompass these strategies (Archibald, 2006):

1) Establishing a common understanding of basic traditional and spiritual teachings and ceremonies. For those who have been disconnected from their culture, this serves as a learning experience; for others it serves to reinforce their connection to culture.
2) Increasing understanding of the history of Indigenous peoples and the complex historical trauma that shapes current dynamics. This serves to highlight how the past has affected the present, and give an opportunity to grieve losses.
3) Provide the opportunity for participants to recommit to their healing journey. This includes supports for building and maintaining personal health, positive relationships, and connection to the natural and spiritual world.

Resiliency Theory & Strength-Based Approaches

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is one approach in Western social science research and practice that seems to align well with the Indigenous philosophies described above. PYD theory puts forth that all youth are able to build skills and be successful. Young people are particularly malleable and thus they often have greater capacity to change their own mental states and behaviours than

adults (Lerner, Brittain, & Fay, 2007; Lerner et al., 2014). Positive youth development seeks to identify the assets people already have, build upon those assets, and develop new ones to enhance positive lifelong outcomes. The right to self-determination and individual decision-making is considered very important.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Search Institute published a research-based tool called the *40 Developmental Assets* which became popular within the field of PYD (see Search Institute, 2010). This can be used by adult supporters or youth themselves to identify positive qualities, areas of strength in their lives, and gaps in order to help guide future development. Embracing the idea that positive relationships are essential to helping a young person develop their assets, the Search Institute (2016) more recently articulated a framework for *Developmental Relationships*, highlighting that youth need people in their lives who express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities.

Resources on Positive Youth Development
40 Developmental Assets for Youth (ages 12-18): http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18
Developmental Relationships Framework: http://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/Dev-Relationships-Framework-Sept2014.pdf

Even more than Positive Youth Development, a strength-based approach focuses primarily on identifying and building on a young person's strengths. Despite having benevolent intentions, many community intervention programs operate from a deficit-based approach, which highlights people's 'risks' and targets people as problems to be solved (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). The strength-based philosophy argues that this leads to people being labeled and stigmatized, and not seen as capable of affecting change in their own lives, resulting in a process of further disempowerment.

Alternatively, the strength-based approach views problems as separate from the person. When people are viewed as capable, they are able to draw on current assets and learn new skills to manage their own wellbeing in sustainable ways (Cox, 2008; Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). Taken another way, a strength-based approach can help people feel hopeful and develop resiliency in the face of obstacles (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2010; Cox, 2008). Resiliency, commonly defined as *the process of developing and adapting well, even in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress*, has become a popular theory in western conceptions of healthy youth development (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012).

Research shows that a deficit-based approach can set up a power imbalance; workers are positioned as professionals who have more knowledge about how to help people through problems, rather than relying on the individual's intrinsic strengths and abilities to work through challenges. A strength-based approach positions supporters as partners rather than professionals, who use genuine support to act as facilitators of change in partnership with the individual (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2010; Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). Individuals are seen as already 'at potential', so instead of 'fixing' them, supporters help them strengthen their core competencies (Alberta Mentoring Partnership, 2010).

The following principles are at the base of a strength-based approach (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012):
- Believe in a person's abilities to affect change in their own lives.
- Believe that challenges are inevitable and can help people build strengths.
- Remember that language can alter people's perceptions of situations and create realities.
- Recognize that authentic and unconditional relationships are the crux of helping people build capacity.
- Trust that people are experts in their own lives.
- Support people to work toward self-determined goals that can help them build confidence.
- Remember that personal development is an ongoing process.

Those who support strength-based approaches emphasize that it is important for programs to take intentional steps towards using positive youth development practices in all they do, as research consistently shows it to be the best means to foster healthy development for children and youth (Lerner, et al., 2014).

Resources on Strength-Based Approaches
Dr. Wayne Hammond Strength-Based Practice Presentation: http://albertamentors.ca/for-mentoring-organizations/strength-based-practice/strength-based-practice-presentation-dr-wayne-hammond/
Strength-Based Mentoring: A Practice Guide for Mentors: http://albertamentoringpartnership.cirrusvps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/SB_for_Mentors1.pdf
Resiliency Initiatives: http://www.resil.ca/tools/

Connection to Culture: A Catalyst for Positive Change

As shown above, in Indigenous philosophies of healing and the good life, connection to culture plays a central role. In western research and practice related to resiliency, the concept of culture is an important component of positive youth development and wellbeing. Both traditional Indigenous philosophies and Western theories of resiliency see culture as an important source of positive identity, pride, dignity, inclusion and belonging.

In Western research, Canadian studies show that feeling culturally disconnected can be a risk factor for Indigenous people to be involved with violence (Crooks, Chiodo & Thomas, 2009). Studies also reveal culturally specific protective factors for Indigenous individuals, including:
- traditional culture and values, including spirituality;
- access to community Elders; and
- emphasis on healthy extended families and strong community networks (Crooks, Chiodo & Thomas, 2009, p. 7).

In the body of work on resiliency in Canada, cultural awareness and a connection to one's own cultural heritage is considered a developmental strength that contributes to positive development and wellbeing. Through their research on positive youth development, the Canadian group Resiliency Initiatives (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012) identified 31 external and internal factors which contribute to the positive development and resiliency of children and youth. They found that 'cultural sensitivity' is an important internal strength, which includes cultural awareness, acceptance of one's own culture and other cultures, and spirituality (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012, p.2).

In a study by Saewyc and colleagues (2013), cultural connectedness was positively associated with higher self-esteem, family connectedness and school connectedness. Higher cultural connectedness was associated with fewer episodes of binge drinking and other destructive behaviours (Saewyc et al., 2013). In another study, the general self-concept of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students was similar, with a relatively strong sense of self-worth and competence among all students. However, while non-Aboriginal students drew on strengths from the categories of personal functioning and peer relationships to comprise their sense of self, for Aboriginal students, the only variable that contributed significantly to their self-concept was strengths in the category of faith and culture (Whitley, Rawana, & Brownlee, 2014).

Evidence-Informed Practices That Are Culturally Appropriate

Recent literature points to a variety of evidence-informed good practices for service providers who work with youth facing barriers to success, including Indigenous youth. These good practices have been shown effective in supporting youth who have experienced various struggles and forms of disempowerment. These practices, namely (1) ensuring cultural safety, (2) working from strengths, and (3) providing trauma-informed supports, align well with the Indigenous philosophies and principles outlined in previous sections.

Ensuring Cultural Safety

Indigenous youth who face barriers to success may feel especially disempowered given their past life experiences. Ensuring *cultural safety* is key in fostering supportive environments and relationships. Cultural safety goes beyond cultural awareness (acknowledgement of difference), cultural sensitivity (respecting difference), and cultural competence (having appropriate attitudes and skills to deal with difference). Cultural safety includes the aptitudes from these previous phases, but also involves a component of self-reflection to recognize our own cultural lens, and develop empathy and advocacy to move towards understanding and positive change (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2014).

Graph: Continuum of Cultural Care (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2014, p. 3)

Cultural Awareness → Cultural Sensitivity → Cultural Competence → Cultural Safety

To foster cultural safety, avoid making assumptions about an individual's culture or sense of cultural identity, and avoid glossing over or ignoring issues of power and privilege. Address power dynamics head on in a constructive way. Provide staff and volunteers with training and skills development opportunities in (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2014):

- positive communication
- conflict resolution
- restorative practices
- collaborative decision-making

Collaborative decision-making respects the right to self-determination and focuses on processing situations with the youth so that they understand what the implications might be of any particular course of action. This helps them discover what is truly important to them. In collaborative decision-making (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2014):

- Focus on the young person's feelings and needs rather than jumping to problem-solving.
- When issue has been talked about, ask "What do you think you would like to do about this situation," and "How would you like for me to help?"
- If you are not comfortable with what they want to do, ask yourself why before you decide whether to say so.
- If what they want to do is not possible, explain so gently and articulate the reasons why.
- Ask what alternative solutions would make them comfortable.
- Encourage critical thinking through questions and reflections.
- Use the words, "I don't know — what do you think?" "What do you need?"

This approach communicates respect and trust, and builds healthy decision-making skills, a key developmental asset for all youth.

Resource on Cultural Safety
Creating Cultural Safety by Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health (2014): www.wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Creating-Cultural-Safety.pdf

Working from Strengths

The following principles can support any organization in using a strengths-based approach (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012):

- Believe in a person's abilities to affect change in their own lives.
- Believe that challenges are inevitable and can help people build strengths.
- Be mindful that language can alter people's perceptions of situations and create realities.
- Focus on identifying and building upon a youth's strengths (skills, talents, relationships, etc.) vs. common approach of viewing young people as having deficits and problems that need to be solved.
- Recognize that authentic and unconditional relationships are the crux of helping people build capacity.
- Recognize that people are experts in their own lives.
- Support people to work toward self-determined goals can help them build confidence.
- Remember that personal development is an ongoing process.
- Position supporters as partners rather than professionals; use genuine caring to act as 'facilitators of change' in partnership with youth.

Providing Trauma-Informed Support

As previously discussed, Indigenous youth are more likely to have experienced trauma, which can deeply impact their ability to trust and to develop positive relationships. It is important for program staff and other supporters to work from a trauma-informed framework. This includes a strong foundational focus on:
　　　1) recognizing the need for physical and emotional safety, and
　　　2) providing choice and control in decisions affecting their life (Arthur et. al, 2013; Steele & Malchiodi, 2012).

Resources on Trauma-Informed Practice
Trauma-Informed Practices Guide by the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health: https://bccewh.bc.ca/2014/02/trauma-informed-practice-guide/
Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre: www.trauma-informed.ca

Evidence-Informed Programs for Indigenous Youth

The very notion of a *program* to support Indigenous youth is by nature a bi-cultural idea and construct. The Indigenous concept of healing is deeply based in traditional cultural principles and practices, while the concept of a 'program' with a structure and plan is more European. Hence, there can be areas and instances of tension when combining these two different worldviews. Nonetheless, the following tables provide examples of programs that have been created to help prevent Indigenous youth from criminalization. This includes program examples from the Unites States, Canada, and Ottawa.

The objective is to provide a few examples to inspire further dialogue on this topic, and highlight practical ideas and strategies that could be explored at the local level in a relatively easy way. We chose programs that have been evaluated for their effectiveness and impacts, and for which a variety of evidence shows promise. We also chose programs that appear to incorporate some of the processes of traditional Indigenous conceptions of healing, and of the strengths-based approach.

Some argue that culturally-specific initiatives can sometimes be effective and at other times may be counterproductive. Some research suggests that it may sometimes be better to have mixed (or culturally non-specific) supports. In contexts where Indigenous young people face social exclusion based on race, having a mixed group of youth participate in an initiative may improve broader social inclusiveness and cohesion. In the same way, a cross-cultural group within an emotionally and physically safe environment can break down stereotypes and promote cross-cultural understanding. In other contexts, where Indigenous young people are disconnected from their history, culture, and even family, a culturally-specific initiative may be a vital part of building a strong cultural identity (Barwick 2004; Hollis et al. 2011; Stacey 2004). These types of decisions should be made to find the best fit and safest option for the youth in question.

U.S. Program Examples

Below are two program examples from the United States, the Aboriginal Empathic Program, and Project Venture. Both take place in schools as well as in community settings.

Aboriginal Empathic Program	
Main objectives	Help Indigenous youth develop emotional awareness and impulse control to reduce the likelihood of violence and criminalization.
Target risk and protective factors	Risk Factors Difficulty controlling impulses Destructive behaviours Bullying Weak attachment to school Incidents of violence Protective Factors Emotional maturity Problem-solving and awareness Impulse control Emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing Connection to school Connection with parents, school, and peers
Quick description	This program was modified from the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) program to reflect Aboriginal cultural values and teachings, and specifically those of the Mi'kmaw population. The program is delivered in a school setting (in the classroom) and focuses on teaching children to understand and manage their emotions and to solve problems in a positive way.
Target population	Aboriginal children in grades 1-5
Setting	Classroom and community
Level of support	Individual, group, and family
Components	In Class Lessons Different methods are used to implement lessons, including role playing, journal writing, picture-based scenarios, and storytelling Home Visits Program staff conduct home visits each week for select children to reiterate positive development and integrate

	teachings into the family and community settings
Specifics of delivery	40 lessons (1-2 hours each) per grade level Focus on using elements of Mi'kmaw culture, including the Medicine Wheel, Talking Circles, Mi'kmaw language Lessons are reinforced by teachers and school administrators
Frequency	Weekly in-class lessons Weekly home visits for select children and families
Duration	Delivered over 5 school years, through weekly in-school lessons
Impacts	An evaluation of the Aboriginal Empathic Program was completed using a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-survey data. Results show: School staff and parents supported the implementation of the program. Program was effectively designed and was a successful adaption of the PATHS program for the Aboriginal community. Students reported the program helped them manage emotions better. Teachers reported students using language from the program and increased likelihood of walking away from a conflict. Teachers reported students showing more concern for one another and giving each other more compliments. Some teachers reported less aggressive behaviour in class and less time required addressing behaviours in class. Some parents reported their children had increased self-esteem.
References	Educational Program Innovations Charity (2016) Public Safety Canada (2009)

Project Venture	
Main objectives	Help American Indian youth develop strengths to build general resilience, which can be used to prevent alcohol and drug misuse.
Target risk and protective factors	Risk Factors Early substance use Protective Factors Developing a positive self-concept Effective social and communication skills Community service ethic Self-efficacy Increased decision-making and problem-solving skills
Quick description	Project Venture is an outdoor experiential program that emphasizes positive youth development and building resilience. The program was developed specifically for American Indian youth.
Target population	American Indian youth in grades 5-8 who display early signs of potential substance misuse. Has been implemented in various American Indian communities in the United States.
Setting	Classroom, outdoor, community
Level of support	Individual, group, and community
Components	Weekly problem solving games and activities in school Weekly experiential activities (after-school, on weekends and during the summer) Monthly outdoor challenge activities, including hiking, recreation and camping Service leadership projects in the community throughout the year After a year of participation, youth can become service staff / peer leaders in subsequent years
Specifics of delivery	Activities are led by trained experiential educators One staff member works with 7-15 youth per group Staff debrief activities with youth to help them gain life lessons Programming is guided by American Indian traditional values, such as family, learning from the natural world, spiritual awareness, service to others and respect
Frequency	Classroom activities take place weekly with a minimum of 20 one-hour sessions per year After-school and weekend activities take place weekly

	throughout the school year
	Outdoor challenges take place monthly
	Community service projects are delivered four times per year
	Wilderness camp and treks each take place once per year
	Youth self-select for community and wilderness-based activities, so frequency of participation in the program varies
Duration	Activities delivered throughout the school year
Impacts	The program was evaluated using a random control design, where schools were assigned to a program group or control group (no program). Results show:
	Program participants demonstrated less growth in substance use than members in the control group.
	There was a significant effect for less growth in alcohol use for the program participants.
References	Carter, Straits, & Hall (2007)
	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010)

Canadian Program Examples

The three tables below present examples of evidence-informed programs in Canada that focus on Indigenous identities. These are the ***Strengths in Motion*** program in Thunder Bay (ON), the ***Culturally Appropriate Program (CAP)*** in Manitoba, and the ***Coyote Pride Mentoring Program*** from Edmonton (AB).

Other Canadian examples of evidence-informed programs built within a lens of cultural safety for Indigenous youth and families are:
- the ***X-Roads Program*** by The Pas Family Resource Centre in Manitoba (see https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/xrds/index-en.aspx)
- the ***Walking the Path Together*** program in Alberta (see https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/wlkng-pth/index-en.aspx)
- the ***Strengthening the Spirit – Oskâyi Kiskinotahn*** program in First Nations communities in Alberta (https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/strngthnng-sprt/index-en.aspx)

Strengths in Motion (Thunder Bay)	
Main objectives	Provide Aboriginal children involved in the child welfare system culturally appropriate strengths-based supports in the school setting. The strengths-based intervention approach provides opportunities for students to develop their positive view of self, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, social competence, sense of purpose and hope for the future.
Target risk and protective factors	Involvement in child welfare system High level of transition in home and school life Isolation
Quick description	McKellar Park Central School is located in Thunder Bay (ON) and approximately 50% of the students self-identify as First Nations. The intervention aims to promote a culture of strengths throughout the entire school. It shows students that they have strengths and that they have the potential to use them to increase their own wellbeing and a positive school climate.
Target population	Middle-school and high-school youth
Setting	School
Level of support	Individual, family, peer, school
Components	Personal strengths assessment using the Strengths Assessment Inventory The Good Start Centre: 2 half-day sessions for new students and their families to orient them to the school and community (relationship building, information about school and community resources, enrolling students in a buddy program, etc.) Cool down / prevention time: students who are experiencing difficulties on a particular day will spend time with a caring adult in the school who is aware of their strengths and cultural teachings. They will spend time talking about how the students can use their strengths to engage in behaviours that are more positive. Alternatives to suspension: rather than sending kids home, administrators set up in-school suspension time for the student to participate in restorative practices (talking or healing circle) and work on their skills. Ambassador's Club: students who do not tend to excel in the areas on which children are assessed in the school

	setting are invited to become Ambassadors for positive change at the school. They meet with school administrators over a lunch period every two weeks to develop their leadership skills and plan activities for the school. They also organize school assemblies and give school tours to new students. The New Experiences Program: Delivered by a local children's mental health agency, this component provides workshops and consultations to children and parents to address specific issues that come up (i.e., grief, trauma, bullying, cultural teachings, developing goals and dreams, etc.)
Specifics of delivery	Focus is on: taking on responsibilities within the school community being included for positive behaviour developing self-esteem and self-efficacy experiencing a sense of accomplishment
Frequency	Informal supports are ongoing; formal programs run weekly and bi-weekly
Duration	Throughout the school year
Impacts	A quantitative and qualitative program evaluation showed that compared to a school that did not have the program: students were more focused on helping others, which also increased their own level of school engagement and involvement; students felt better about themselves and their competencies as well as their classroom environments; students reported making better choices; the academic achievement of students increased; parents felt their children developed greater confidence and self-esteem and had improved academically; parents felt their children were more likely to engage in extracurricular activities; parents of students expressed fewer concerns regarding the victimization of their child over time; school staff felt the program was particularly beneficial in terms of increasing students' sense of confidence and competence, especially in communication skills school staff felt that bullying was much less of a problem While the sample of respondents was small (mostly due to high rates of student transitions), the results of the evaluation show that the strategies employed are

	promising practices.
References	Brownlee, Rawana, MacArthur, & Probizanski (2009) Rawana et al., (2009)

Culturally Appropriate Program (CAP) (Manitoba)	
Main objectives	To support Aboriginal people involved in the criminal justice system or at-risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system in reclaiming their identity.
Target risk and protective factors	Risk factors: Involvement or risk of involvement in criminal justice system Protective factors: Self-awareness Self-determination Healing from trauma Culture
Quick description	CAP is a 4-day DVD driven program that is offered to Indigenous persons in youth centres, correctional facilities and probation offices across Manitoba. It is a decolonizing and healing program that promotes self-awareness, self-determination and reconciliation. The Medicine Wheel is used as the framework of the program to assist in learning pre-contact history, the impacts of contact with another culture, the current conditions created by colonization, and healing from these impacts.
Target population	Indigenous adults and youth (men and women) in conflict with the law
Setting	Youth centres, correctional facilities, probation offices
Level of support	Individual and/or small group to promote peer support
Components	Pre-contact: recognizing First Nations (FN) family values FN pre-contact relationships FN parenting, kinship, rites of passage Roles of men and women (based on gifts and strengths, not gender) Autonomy and collectivity Positive and negative energy (harmony) Appreciate elders and storytelling Introduction to traditional government systems pre-contact

	Pre-contact healthy self-care History of contact and impacts: Diseases, breakdown of traditional structures, dispossession, relocation History of colonizing laws and practices including residential schools Intergenerational impacts Current Self and community: Physical, mental, emotional, spiritual self Addictions, Post-Traumatic Stress Family violence, abuse, neglect Lateral violence (gangs, bullying, sex abuse, etc.) Oppressed and oppressor Healing along physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self Positive thinking and goals Pre-contact wheel and current wheel Family Changing habits using Stages of Change framework Forgiveness Combining two world views using the Medicine Wheel
Specifics of delivery	There are currently 61 facilitators across Manitoba, funded by Manitoba Justice There are 5 DVDs including a Train the Trainer DVD with manuals
Frequency	4 days of programming with a ceremony on day 5
Duration	About 25-hours long in total
Impacts	Evaluated in 2015-16 with adults using self-report questionnaires: 97% of adult respondents felt the program increased their self-awareness 97% of adult respondents felt the program increased their personal development 98% of adult respondents felt the program increased their feeling of empowerment 95% of adult respondents felt the program increased their self-determination between 93%-97% of adult respondents felt the program increased their knowledge in a variety of areas related to the program themes
References	Department of Justice, Government of Canada (2016)

Coyote Pride Mentoring Program (Edmonton)	
Main objectives	Coyote Pride is a mentoring program for Indigenous pre-teens. Youth participate in cultural activities with mentors, who encourage youth to have a healthy lifestyle though traditional teachings and role modeling.
Target risk and protective factors	Children and youth who are at risk of not succeeding in school because of barriers, including: loss of cultural identity lack of self-esteem racism growing up in isolated areas lack of parental support bullying special needs lack of interest in school peer pressure drug and alcohol use or exposure
Quick description	Coyote Pride matches Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal mentors who emphasize the importance of education and cultural values. Groups are established at each school that is a part of the program. Activities include: Recruiting and supporting Aboriginal people from the community to become mentors. Providing necessary training and resources for mentors. Offering traditional teachings about values, beliefs, ceremonies, and an increased pride in culture. Connecting cultural advisors and Elders who support and attend the program.
Target population	Indigenous pre-teens in grades 7 to 9
Setting	School
Level of support	Individual, small peer group
Components	In-school mentoring in small groups
Frequency	Mentoring groups meet once a week at school
Duration	One school year
Impacts	Coyote Pride is developing an Advisory Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The effectiveness of Coyote Pride has not yet been studied in-depth. However, mentoring is considered a promising strategy for supporting Indigenous youth (Klinck et al.,

	2005; Sinclair & Pooyak, 2007; Ware, 2013). A few elements have been found to make mentoring more successful for Indigenous youth, including: focusing on natural mentoring instead of formalized matching; using a small group mentoring approach instead of one-on-one matching only; and matching based on similarities and respect for differences.
References	Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (2016 – see http://bentarrow.ca/programs-and-services/cultural/coyote-pride/#)

Key Resources on Mentoring Indigenous Youth

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership developed many resources for "*Building a Mentoring Program with First Nations Metis and or Inuit (FNMI) Communities*". Some of these resources can also inform programs not focused on mentoring. The resources include:
- Guidelines for Mentoring with FNMI communities
- Tips for creating an inclusive Advisory Group
- Tips to recruit and retain Aboriginal mentors
- Tips to consider when training Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal mentors
- Protocols for working with Elders
- Handbook for Aboriginal Mentoring

These tools can be found here: http://albertamentors.ca/tools-research/#start-mentoring-program

Ottawa Examples

Finally, here are five initiatives in Ottawa that focus on supporting Indigenous youth through culturally appropriate services.

The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health

www.wabano.com

The Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health has an Indigenous Model of Care, and delivers a number of programs and social supports for Indigenous peoples in Ottawa. Some examples of youth programming include:

➤ **After School Program** (ages 7-18): This program helps children and youth enhance their culture, wellness, life, nutrition and education in a safe environment with their peers. It runs three nights per week during the school year.

➤ **Aboriginal School Liaison** - I Belong Here Program "Nidaji Tibeninadāgwaz Ondaje" (kindergarten to grade 12): The Aboriginal School Liaison acts as an advocate for students and their families between home and school. They:
- Provide in-school cultural support to First Nations, Inuit, Metis students
- Improve academic achievement
- Provide awareness and support in self-identifying as a First Nations, Inuit, Metis person at school
- Provide resources to help enhance cultural awareness and understanding to teachers/students/school board

➤ **Wasa-Nabin Urban Youth Program**: Offers weekly one-on-one support, workshops, employment readiness supports, and life skills development for youth ages 13-18.

➤ **Youth Transition Program "Rekindling Youth Spirit" (16-24 year olds):** Supports Aboriginal youth leaving Child Protection Services, or improving adult life after a Crown Protection childhood. Through individual case management, education and outreach services, the program guides youth through the stages of traditional native development to re-establish cultural pride.

➤ **Youth Diversion Program** (ages 12-17): Provides culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal youth in conflict with the law between the ages of 12-17. The program supports young offenders in healing by using culturally

appropriate programming to redirect them away from the judicial justice system. Youth develop an action plan that is culturally based and access services that address their specific needs.

➢ **Youth Reintegration Program** (ages 12-17): Provides culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal youth who are in conflict with the law. The Coordinator acts as a liaison between parents, probation officers, police services, lawyers and the community. Programming includes (but is not limited to): life skills development, talking circles, cultural teachings from Elders, ceremony, 1-1 Counselling, group workshops, mentorship, education and Employment supports.

Project s.t.e.p.

www.project-step.ca

Project s.t.e.p. is a local partnership initiative managed by United Way Ottawa and involving over 10 community partners committed to addressing the need for support, treatment, education and prevention (s.t.e.p.) of youth addictions in Ottawa. This project supports comprehensive substance abuse education, prevention, and treatment programs in more than 50 high schools and in three non-mainstream high schools in Ottawa. One of the non-mainstream high schools is the Urban Aboriginal Alternative High School, and the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health delivers Project s.t.e.p. supports within this population. This culturally-appropriate part of the project offers Indigenous youth individual counselling, talking circles, life skills education and cultural activities to create an environment for youth to feel they belong and to develop the courage and skills to meet life's challenges. The 2012/2013 report on the outcomes from Project s.t.e.p. in non-mainstream school settings shows that:
- 90% of youth said they met their objectives
- 85% of youth felt better about themselves
- 76% of youth felt they had built healthier relationships
- 71% of youth had reduced their frequency of substance use.

Tungasuvvingat Inuit Centre

http://tungasuvvingatinuit.ca

Tungasuvvingat Inuit provides social support, cultural activities, counselling and crisis intervention for the urban Inuit population in Ottawa. The **Family Resource Centre** focuses on programs for Inuit families and promotes the healthy development of young children from birth to six years old. The **Housing Support Team** assesses clients' housing needs and assists clients in acquiring safe housing.

The **Employment Services Team** provide job readiness and career development supports. The team works with job seekers, employers and government programs to bring the right people together with the resources they need for success. The **Mamisarvik Healing Centre** is an Inuit-specific, 12-bed, 53-day, co-ed, residential and day treatment program for those aged 18 and older who are struggling with trauma and addiction issues.

OCDSB Aboriginal Learning Centre

http://www.ocdsb.ca/ab-ocdsb/AboriginalEducation/Pages/Aboriginal-Learning-Space.aspx

Opened in 2014, the Manido Onji "Place of Spirit" is the Ottawa Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB) Aboriginal Learning Centre. The Aboriginal Learning Centre is an OCDSB space that is housed at Rideau High School and was designed in consultation with students, youth workers at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, and several Elders from various Indigenous communities. The Aboriginal Learning Centre has three main purposes:
To provide a space for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) educational

programming at the local school level.

1. To provide a space for professional development and FNMI educational programming across the school board.
2. To provide a culturally safe and relevant space that can be used by the Aboriginal community for events through the Community Use of Schools process.

The Aboriginal Learning Centre has a room dedicated to smudging, a tradition common to many Indigenous cultures. A mural was painted onto the wall of the smudge room by students from Rideau High School and the Urban Aboriginal High School. Students, educational staff and community groups are welcome to use the space.

Minwaashin Lodge

Minwaashin Lodge provides a range of programs and services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and children who are survivors of domestic and other forms of violence, and who may also be suffering the effects of direct or historical trauma. All programs and services are provided in the context of cultural beliefs and values as part of the healing journey. The **Spirit Movers and Fire Keepers Youth Program**[3] provides youth (ages 7-18) with the awareness, knowledge, and teachings about Aboriginal culture, and promotes and initiates the development of healthy friendships and relationships with other youth. It supports Aboriginal youth with ties to their culture through sacred teachings and by promoting holistic healing. The program:

- Provides youth with opportunities to develop pride and respect for their Aboriginal culture
- Promotes healthy peer relationships between youth through positive role-modeling, teachings and social activities
- Promotes links and establishes connection between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies and organizations that provide service to youth in the Ottawa area.
- Encourages and facilitates the healing of relationships between youth and their families of origin and extended families.
- Maintains on-going contact with incarcerated youth, to provide friendship, Aboriginal teachings and traditional ceremonies.

Change at the Social & Systemic Levels

As Saewyc and colleagues (2013) stress: "Recent efforts to foster connectedness to traditional culture and language revitalization appear linked with healthier youth behaviours for Indigenous youth in Canada, but may not be sufficient without addressing poverty and historical trauma" (2013, p. S4). While Saewyc and colleagues (2013) found positive associations between connection to culture and youth wellbeing, these findings were not as evident among youth on reserves, despite higher cultural connectedness and language retention. Youth on reserves reported poorer health and increased prevalence of risk behaviours, although this was strongly linked to higher prevalence of food insecurity, violence exposure, and unstable housing. Indigenous Elders, adults and youth consistently affirm that connections to language and traditions are important. However, in this study, cultural connectedness alone could not buffer against other key risk exposures, particularly on reserves (Saewyc et al., 2013). Developmental prevention policies and programs for marginalized and

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[3] http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/annex-annexe/p70.html

disenfranchised Indigenous youth are unlikely to make a significant long-term difference – and could even accentuate the frustration – if current systemic issues and social conditions are not addressed (Bania, 2009).

To redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) recently made 94 separate calls to action. These calls to action are divided into 2 sections: legacy and reconciliation. The legacy sections deal with the root causes underlying some of the most pressing struggles faced by young Indigenous people today: child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The Native Women's Association of Canada (2013) stresses the importance of education reform planning for children and youth on reserve. This includes involving First Nation communities in determining the goals and processes of their education systems through full, informed consultation, in a way that respects the First Nations' right to self-determination. A focus must also be placed on increasing the wellbeing of Aboriginal women and girls, and they must be actively sought out and included in any endeavours (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2013). For reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) sheds light on the new relationship that must be formed for Canada in all its parts to make place for Indigenous youth, and for them to learn who they are, and be allowed to hope.

The topic of this review is complex and merits much care and attention. A more in-depth search and analysis of the topic from a variety of perspectives would be beneficial in the future.

Conclusions & discussion

This review gathers information on the role of culture in promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous youth and preventing their involvement with the criminal justice system. Although this was not an exhaustive search, the review reveals how colonizing policies and practices, including the residential school system, dramatically disrupted traditional values, families and communities across this country. These traumatic events alongside a combination of other domination practices, including those found within child welfare systems and systematic racism, all contribute to the current negative outcomes experienced by Indigenous peoples. These include disproportionately high rates of poverty, under-education, unsafe housing, victimization, and hopelessness. Research consistently shows that these factors are among the main root causes of victimization and contact with the criminal justice system. Indeed, Indigenous youth and adults are highly over-represented in the Canadian criminal justice system.

In both Indigenous philosophies of healing and Western theories of resilience, connection to culture is considered a factor in positive youth development and wellbeing. In the context of the aftermath of historical trauma, Indigenous healing is seen as a journey of rebuilding, of realignment – of moving back into balance. This involves processes of decolonization (learning and understanding traditional cultural values and teachings), recovery from trauma (an opportunity to understand and grieve losses), and ongoing healing (recommitting to balance). In strength-based approaches and research on resiliency, a connection to culture - cultural awareness, acceptance of one's own culture and other cultures, and spirituality - is a key developmental asset that promotes wellbeing and an ability to bounce back from adversity.

In this context, several practices and strategies have emerged that appear responsive to the experiences of Indigenous peoples, and that are also supported by Western research for their effectiveness in supporting marginalized youth. These strategies include: (1) ensuring cultural safety, (2) working from strengths, and (3) providing trauma-informed supports. Several programs and initiatives have been implemented by governments and community-based organizations across Canada to promote connection to culture for Indigenous youth who face barriers to success. In the United States, this includes efforts like the *Aboriginal Empathic Program* and *Project Venture*. In Canada, examples include *Strengths in Motion* in Thunder Bay, the *Culturally Appropriate Program (CAP)* in Manitoba, and the *Coyote Pride Mentoring Program* in Edmonton. In Ottawa, a variety of organizations have programs to support Indigenous youth through connection to culture, including the *Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health*, the partnership *Project s.t.e.p.*, *Tungasuvvingat Inuit*, the Ottawa Carleton District School Board's *(OCDSB) Aboriginal Learning Centre*, and *Minwaashin Lodge*.

The very concept of a culturally appropriate prevention or intervention 'program' for Indigenous youth is by nature a bi-cultural notion. Areas of tension are likely to arise when combining these two different worldviews. Nonetheless, the information in this report can inspire further dialogue around how best to support Indigenous youth at the local level. For more lasting change, important social and systemic issues must also be addressed. While individuals' connection to traditional Indigenous culture is important, other important barriers, such as racism, economic inequity, under-education, poor housing, and disproportionately high rates of victimization and criminalization must be addressed.

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