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## Leveraging Culturally-Relevant Urban Social Housing to Address Indigenous Youth Homelessness and Transitions Out of Government Care

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## Abstract

Indigenous children and youth are overrepresented in settler-colonial child protection systems globally. They experience higher rates of homelessness and housing precarity when leaving care and searching for family and a place to call home. Missing from Canadian policy and research discussions is the role social housing can play to address these realities by providing a social safety net for permanent low-barrier housing. In this article, we highlight a community-based Solutions Lab that analyzed discursive policy constructions of 'youth transition' and explored the implications of austerity-driven social housing reform in a mid-sized metropolitan Canadian city. We illustrate potential challenges and opportunities for leveraging social housing by state governments and private markets which mediate housing precarity, belonging, and cultural conceptions of home.

## Keywords

Canada, child welfare policy, healthy development, social assistance

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## Leveraging Culturally-Relevant Urban Social Housing to Address Indigenous Youth Homelessness and Transitions Out of Government Care

Indigenous children and youth are overrepresented in settler-colonial Child Welfare Systems globally. These children experience higher rates of homelessness and housing precarity when leaving care in search of family and a place to call home. Missing from Canadian policy and research discussions is the role social housing can play to address these realities by providing a social safety net for permanent low-barrier housing. In this article, we highlight a community-based Solutions Lab that analyzed discursive policy constructions of “youth transition” and explored the implications of austerity-driven social housing reform in a mid-sized metropolitan Canadian city. By conducting conversational interviews and reading policy documents in view of field observations with care leavers as well as various actors working in and around Child Welfare Systems, we identified three emerging tensions within transition-related policy constructions creating housing vulnerability and impacting Indigenous youths’ ability to secure shelter and build a sense of home: (1) legal permanence vs. relational permanence; (2) age-based transition vs. readiness-based transition; and (3) independence vs. interdependence. We further illustrate actual and potential challenges and opportunities for leveraging social housing under current political-economic transformations driven by governments and private markets mediating housing precarity, belonging, and cultural conceptions of home.

This project explored child protection and housing policy issues among urban Indigenous care leavers in Manitoba in order to: (1) understand pathways producing housing precarity and ways in which youth build a sense of home; and (2) highlight actual and potential challenges and opportunities to leverage social housing in the context of social housing reform. It is widely recognized within settler-colonial Child Welfare Systems (CWS)<sup>1</sup> that as Indigenous youth transition into emerging adulthood and leave government care, they are more likely to experience homelessness and housing precarity (Kidd, et al., 2019; Peters & Christensen, 2016). In Canada, 52% of children in CWS are Indigenous, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, yet they comprise only 8% of the child population under 14-years-old (Statistics Canada, 2016). Estimates suggest that urban Indigenous Peoples are eight times more likely to experience homelessness and homeless youth are 193 times more likely to report interactions with CWS (Belanger et al., 2013; Shewchuk et al., 2021). The alarming figures come at the heels of multiple federal and provincial government inquiries, constitutional challenges, and policy reforms aimed at improving the lives of Indigenous children and families (Blackstock, 2016; Government of Canada, 2015, 2019; Government of Manitoba, 1999; Metallic et al., 2019).<sup>2</sup>

CWS-involvement and Indigenous youth homelessness can be traced to persisting structural antecedents of colonization, structural racism, intergenerational trauma, and marginalization (Agrawal

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<sup>1</sup> We use Child Welfare Systems (CWS) to refer to the constellation of government policies, services, and administrative bodies that serve children and youth as well as families with open child protection cases.

<sup>2</sup> Federal or provincial funding responsibility is determined at the time an Indigenous child enters care. A child who has, or is eligible for treaty status, and whose parents or guardians are normally living on-reserve at the time the child enters care, is deemed a federal funding responsibility. All other children are deemed a provincial funding responsibility regardless of Indigenous ancestry. These jurisdictional challenges have played out and come to define Canadian CWS for Indigenous communities. However, we do not focus on these challenges within our study and instead highlight experiences of urban care leaving processes.

& Zoe, 2021; Ansloos et al., 2021; Kidd et al., 2019). These oppressive regimes have progressed through state-sponsored genocidal agendas of assimilation and dispossession to justify child removal, family separation, community displacement, and cultural disruption (Agrawal & Zoe, 2021; Baskin, 2007; Kidd et al., 2019; Maxwell, 2017; McKenzie et al., 2016; Patrick, 2014).

Canadian policy and research have begun to pay closer attention to Indigenous youth homelessness and housing precarity. This involves increasing recognition of post-care experiences and what was termed a “Canadian national housing crisis” by the United Nations (Nichols et al., 2017; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.; Shewchuk et al., 2021). Canada’s *National Housing Strategy* (NHS) has further reinvigorated these policy discussions. Enshrined in federal legislation, the NHS broadly supports a rights-based housing approach while committing \$40+ billion toward homelessness prevention, affordable housing development, and research and innovation for vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous Peoples and care leavers (Government of Canada, 2018). Moving beyond tenant rights, the NHS broadly covers rights to social housing (DesBaillets, 2020).

Largely missing from policy and research discussions, however, is the role social housing can play to address housing need and service gaps for Indigenous care leavers. Social housing, sometimes referred to as affordable, public, community, subsidized, or non-market housing, is located in the middle of conventional housing continua ranging from unsheltered to homeownership (Selinger, 2018). It is defined as housing infrastructure and services that are government-owned, managed and/or subsidized (Finlayson et al., 2013). While we understand that providing housing first may undermine the importance of needed complementary services and youth autonomy to prioritize their needs (Gaetz, 2014b), social housing remains a vital safety net people can access regardless of age, cultural background, or family status. Permanent low-barrier social housing is also important for Indigenous youth who are not necessarily experiencing visible homelessness or complete abandonment. With an understanding of Indigenous homelessness informed by relational and cultural dimensions (Thistle, 2017), social housing can be re-envisioned to better serve Indigenous care leavers.

The current project focuses on a Manitoba-based case study to explore the challenges and opportunities of leveraging and re-envisioning urban social housing to address Indigenous youth homelessness and transitions out of care. In so doing, we outline how settler colonial and neoliberal capitalist policy regimes operate at the intersection of child protection and social housing systems undergoing political-economic transformation, mediating Indigenous housing precarity and exclusion from cities. In part, this occurs by producing particular kinds of inclusive urban citizenship predicated on problematic understanding of “successful” youth transitions in policy. Our analysis advances discussions within Canadian social housing and child protection policy contexts, and critically explores the promises and difficulties on meaningfully leveraging social housing as a right among urban Indigenous care leavers.

### **Extended Care Policy and Youth Transition**

The province of Manitoba has the highest number of children in care across Canada with First Nations and Métis representing 91% of approximately 9,850 children in care (Ministry of Families, 2021). Despite innovative and robust CWS policy interventions, Indigenous children in care have progressively increased and the system remains entrenched in settler colonial authority, racist policies, and cultural bias (Government of Manitoba, 1999; Hughes, 2013). Structural and social forms of violence and

oppression (e.g. racism, poverty) as well as their impact at individual levels such as mental illness, trauma, and addiction, are identified as major contributors to weakening the abilities of families to care for children and subsequent instances of apprehension (Ministry of Families, 2017; Robertson et al., 2022; Trocmé et al., 2013).<sup>3</sup> One in three children under six-years-old lives in poverty, a majority of them First Nations, and a large proportion of care leavers also live with mental or physical disabilities as well as various forms of discrimination (McEwan-Morris, 2006; Nino & Godoy, 2018; SPCW, 2020). CWS-involvement is also associated with post-care homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, sexual exploitation, street-victimization, and poorer health and education outcomes (Brownell et al., 2015; Chartier et al., 2016; Nickel et al., 2020; Nino & Godoy, 2018; Winnipeg Street Census, 2018).

Extended care policies are designed to mitigate vulnerabilities among care leavers at the age of majority and support their transitions into “adulthood” and “independence” (Shewchuk et al., 2021).<sup>4</sup> In Manitoba, extended care is referred to as *Agreements with Young Adults* (AYA) that provide financial, housing and social supports. AYA are granted to permanent wards between 18-21 years who are legally ineligible to return to their parents (excluding temporary wards, voluntary/kinship care placements, and adoption). AYA are not mandatory but approved on a case-by-case basis only for youth who agree to access education and training opportunities, Independent Living Programs, and residential treatment (McEwan-Morris, 2006). Although some permanent wards choose not to access these services and are therefore ineligible for care extensions and cannot apply at a later date, others feel pressured and terminate agreements or do not comply with conditions leading to their termination. Furthermore, youth must undergo frequent and burdensome reviews every 3-6 months ensuring agreed upon goals are met, and if AYA’s are prematurely terminated, wards are unable to reapply (Lalonde et al., 2021; McEwan-Morris, 2006). Youth are made subject to rely on other social welfare provisions governing them as “adults” (e.g. mental health, income assistance, housing, etc.) that may not appropriately meet their unique circumstances and needs (Lalonde et al., 2021).

Transition-related policies, such as extended care, seek to address what is termed the “independence-dependence paradox” (Johnson, 2020). This policy paradox frames youthhood and adulthood within a developmental life-course model as discrete and universal categories signifying dependence and independence, respectively. CWS create dependency only to acutely expect self-reliance once youth reach the age of majority. Without policy considerations of gradual emerging adulthood to frame youth transitions into adulthood, care leavers are left ill-prepared, unsupported, and oftentimes homeless (Hokanson et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020). Although intending to rectify this paradox, extended care may run counter to children and youths’ best interests due to weakening social and financial safety nets while social norms prolong the time youth spend in school and thus remain economically dependent on

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to the Manitoba government’s restructuring of child protection funding in 2018 from per child funding models to block funding models, child apprehension was incentivized. Funding was released to agencies based on numbers of children in care (Ministry of Families, n.d.). These practices also reflect Manitoba’s practice of “clawing back” federal Children’s Special Allowances into general provincial revenue that were intended for child protection agencies to provide preventative family enhancement and reunification. It is estimated that \$250 million was withheld from Indigenous children between 2006-19 (Global News, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Between 2017 and 2018, 244 youth aged out of care at 18-years-old, for which 116 were permanent wards (Forget & Owczar, 2021). No accurate figures exist due to a lack of reporting standards across child protection agencies and determining who is considered a youth leaving care as the process can start as early as 16-years-old.

parents (Gaetz, 2014a). As youth homelessness emerged as a “social problem” during government cutbacks in the 1980s, homelessness and low-income housing initiatives have also been impeded by policy and media constructions criminalizing and pathologizing homeless youth (Gaetz, 2014a; O’Grady et al., 2011).

The Winnipeg Street Census (2018) reported that 51.5% of people experiencing homelessness have been in care and a majority self-identify as Indigenous. Among them, 62.4% of respondents experienced homelessness within one year after leaving care, signalling inadequate housing supports. While early transition planning legally begins at 15-years-old (McEwan-Morris, 2006), it typically occurs months or days before youth leave care in Manitoba (Lalonde et al., 2021). Care leavers are generally expected to participate in Transitional Housing Programs, Independent Living Programs, or secure market rental housing that may be unaffordable, unsafe, and discriminatory.

### **Manitoba Social Housing Access**

Manitoba’s social housing is primarily delivered or subsidized through the *Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation* (MHRC), a public housing provider directly owning or managing one third of Manitoba’s social housing stock (i.e. single-family housing, apartments, townhouses, duplexes) or indirectly subsidizing non-profit and cooperative-managed housing providers (Finlayson et al., 2013). Additionally, portable rental supplements are directly paid to tenants accessing market rental and Non-Profit Housing (NPH). Although reported educational and health outcomes for children living in MHRC-managed housing are worse than the general population (Martens et al., 2014), social housing should be interpreted as a social safety net for people experiencing significant socioeconomic disadvantages prior to tenancy (Hinds et al., 2016).

Canadian social housing policy, however, has historically been driven by neoliberal restructuring that views housing more as a commodity than a human right (Paradis, 2018). Social housing development peaked in the 1960s and federal funding programs were terminated for a significant period of time in 1993.<sup>5</sup> During this period, new social housing development across Canada gradually decreased to almost net-zero in the decade following financial cuts. Although federal programs were modestly reinstated in the last two decades to support provincial and urban Indigenous-inclusive housing initiatives, these regressive moves contributed to nationally underdeveloped and undermaintained deteriorating social housing infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2018; Walker & Barcham, 2010).

At present, Manitoba is experiencing a housing crisis for low and moderate-income residents due to rising costs of repairs and maintenance, neighborhood gentrification and circumvention of rent controls, the expiration of federal-provincial social housing operating agreements, and increased demands for

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<sup>5</sup> Government cutbacks included urban Indigenous-inclusive housing initiatives, which had emerged in the 1970s from sustained yet contentious political mobilizations to recognize urban Indigenous migration from reserves, federal-provincial jurisdictional responsibilities, fund culturally safe urban services, and implement rent controls for individuals and families experiencing poverty. *Kinew Housing* in Winnipeg was the first urban Indigenous housing provider in Canada (Walker & Barcham, 2010). In Manitoba, there are various First Nations housing providers owning and managing on-reserve, rural, and urban housing through a patchwork of federal and provincial funding policies. Housing provisions for Métis have historically and recently been organized through separate federal-provincial agreements (e.g. Canada-Métis Nation Housing Sub-Accord, 2018).

social housing (Cooper, 2018; Silver, 2006; Silver & Brandon, 2015). Approximately 7% of housing units are considered social housing (i.e. government, cooperative, non-profit) compared to market housing (i.e. private rental and privately-owned housing) with MHRC serving a high proportion of Indigenous tenants (Manitoba Housing, 2020a; Ministry of Families, 2021). MHRC's units are primarily "rent-geared-to-income"<sup>6</sup> and the remainder are "affordable" units with fixed-rent at or below a city's median market rental rate. In Winnipeg where 74% of Manitoba's social housing exists, one-fifth of households are living in unaffordable housing; that is, paying more than 30% of income toward shelter (Manitoba Housing, 2018). Based on figures from 2020, over 4,600 applicants are waitlisted for MHRC-managed housing, excluding NPH waitlists signifying even greater housing needs (R2H, 2021).

Notwithstanding exacerbating housing needs faced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chee, Nygaard, & Vosters, 2021), recent and aggressive austerity-driven housing policy reforms are threatening social housing provisions among racialized and low-income communities (Cooper, 2018). They are compounded by a weakening urban welfare state, rising costs of living, and a growing Indigenous youth population confronting cities as contradictory sites of cultural renewal and home as well as cultural erasure and discrimination (Alaazi et al., 2015; DeVerteuil & Wilson, 2010; Dorries et al., 2019). Indeed, scholarship highlights how these structured social forces and oppressive regimes operate through (sub)urban housing development to the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples (Blatman-Thomas & Porter, 2019; Haas, 2021; Lea, 2015; Quicke & Green, 2017; Veracini, 2012), yet few studies focus on social housing and its particular intersection with CWS (Conlon, 2021).

### Overview of Research and Methods

The findings reported here emerged from a 2-year (2019-2021) *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation* (CMHC) and *Canadian Institutes of Health Research* (CIHR) funded community-based Housing Solutions Lab (SL) to explore housing solutions for Indigenous youth leaving care in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The SL also sought to understand pathways producing housing precarity that highlight the challenges and opportunities to leverage and re-imagine social housing. Following social innovation lab approaches (or what was referred to as Solutions Labs by CMHC), we engaged diverse stakeholders, researchers, and citizens to identify solutions addressing complex sociocultural, political, and environmental contributors to youth housing and homelessness (Weinlick & Velji, 2021). The SL was initiated in partnership with a convening Lab Leadership Team consisting of representatives from Aboriginal Youth Opportunities, Fearless R2W, HTFC Planning and Design, Shift Collaborative, Nigaanii Wabiski Mikanak Ogichidaa (NWMO), and the University of Manitoba.

We planned our SL processes and methodologies across five phases (Definition, Discovery, Development, Prototype-Testing, and Road Mapping) and grounded them within Indigenous and local knowledge frameworks that were central to addressing the needs of Indigenous youth leaving care in Winnipeg (for more details see Morton, Mager, & Barter, 2021; Morton, Mager, Champagne, & Nigaanii Wabiski Mikanak Ogichidaa, 2021). The Cree concept *Wáhkóhtowin* (translates to kinship) was also identified by community partners as an organizing principle that guided how we conducted ourselves and fostered collaborations throughout the SL. Using the core values of our community

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<sup>6</sup> Rent-geared-to-income assistance in Manitoba refers to subsidized housing where families pay no more than 30% of their household income towards rent.

partner, Fearless R2W, we were also able to operationalize Wáhkôhtowin as an interpretive lens to make sense of the data (see Figure 1).

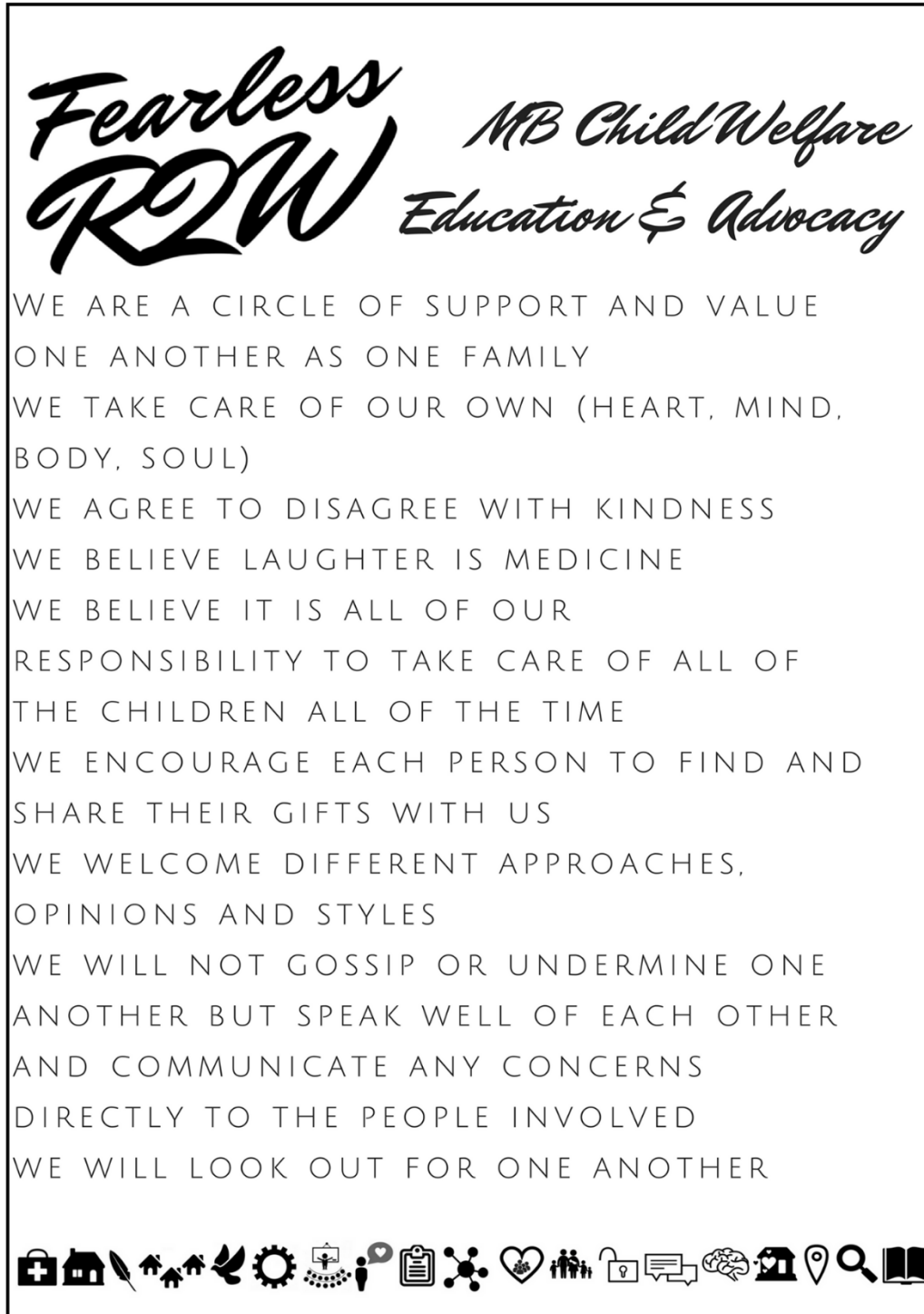


Figure 1. Fearless R2W Core Values for Organizing the Housing Solutions Lab

Ethics approval was obtained through the University of Manitoba Health Research Ethics Board (HS22898[H2019:227]) and the Lab Leadership Team assumed various roles, including SL oversight, research and evaluation, workshop facilitation, and prototype team management. We engaged over 100 organizations, decision-makers, and advocates, and approximately 60 current and former Indigenous youth care leavers (Morton, Mager, & Barter, 2021). Over the duration of the SL, the team carried out several community engagement activities, including specific engagements related to social housing reform. These engagements included informal meetings with housing advocates and social housing providers, as well as two engagement sessions with community members (including youth, families, and services providers) and the *Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad* informing a provincial child and youth advocacy body overseeing government policy. Extensive field notes were developed from these engagements and discussions, and they were supplemented by reading policy-relevant documents identified with participants.

Here, we present select findings within our overall dataset, including conversational interviews following Indigenous Research Methodologies (e.g. Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017; Kovach, 2009) we have previously used and developed. We interviewed care leavers ( $n = 15$ ) as well as service providers, advocates, and youth workers ( $n = 13$ ). These groups overlapped; five participants in the former group work with youth in care and six participants in the latter group were former youth in care. Interviews were conducted in-person or over video call; permission to use real names or pseudonyms was requested, and participants reviewed their verbatim transcripts. Participants received honorariums and non-commercial tobacco or sage (i.e., traditional medicines) in exchange for their sacred stories and knowledge, following Anishinaabe, Cree, and Métis cultural lifeways or protocols. Interviews were conducted by a university researcher and SL co-coordinator (first author) or a youth research assistant with lived experience in care.

In addition to the interpretive lens of Wâhkôhtowin, the analysis was informed by Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) to support our exploration of child protection and social housing policy framing among urban Indigenous care leavers in Manitoba. CPA seeks to analyze policy “problems,” processes, and outcomes with methodological flexibility to expose the complexities, inconsistencies, and power relations underpinning what policies say and what they do (Diem et al., 2014; Hankivsky et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2012). Focusing on discursive policy constructions of “youth transition” found in interview data and field observations, CPA allowed for an understanding on how ideas, texts, practices, and beliefs shape the lives and wellbeing of Indigenous youth leaving care. While further analyzing various policy-relevant documents, CPA also helped us uncover continuities between past and present colonial relations that legitimate the settler-state and market interventions in contemporary social housing policy (De Leeuw et al., 2010).

Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data was conducted by repeatedly re-reading interview transcripts by the first author to identify and explore convergent and divergent patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kovach, 2009). Qualitative data software (Dedoose) supported data organization, coding, and categorization to arrive at a deeper analysis of formal, informal, and kinship supports assisting or impeding care leavers from securing housing and building a sense of home and family. The interview-derived categories were situated within transition-related policies observed early in our SL and the academic and grey literature. Interview-derived themes were subsequently read by the first and

second author alongside fieldnotes and reflections about recent Manitoba-based social housing policy reforms and existing access issues to understand *actual* and *potential* impacts on care leavers. Triangulation of interview data, field notes, policy-relevant documents, and community-engagement reflections contributed to the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis (Thorne, 2008). During this analysis and triangulation process, social housing and aspects of housing “vulnerability” consistently emerged from youth experiences with CWS, as well as recent government housing policy reforms.

## Results

We first explore three emerging tensions and transition-related policy constructions creating housing “vulnerability” that enable and constrain Indigenous youths’ ability to secure shelter and build a sense of “home:” (1) legal permanence vs. relational permanence; (2) age-based transition vs. readiness-based transition; and (3) independence vs. interdependence. These tensions focus on the problematic conceptualization and operationalization of “youth transitions” through concepts of permanence, adulthood, and independence. We refer to transition-related policies throughout as an assemblage of structures, laws, discourses, and practices, including but not limited to extended care policy, that support youth transitions out of care. Second, we outline findings regarding how emerging state-sponsored social housing reforms under austerity additionally create actual and potential “vulnerabilities” that intensify existing housing needs and service gaps for care leavers and service providers. Overall, we demonstrate how these vulnerabilities together—that is, transition-related policy constructions and social housing reforms—expose Indigenous care leavers to structural violence.

### Legal Permanence vs. Relational Permanence

All care leavers we interviewed generally had negative or volatile relationships with guardians assigned by courts that prevented them from growing strong attachments in and beyond care. Poor relationships were compounded by unstable placement trajectories: running away, changing guardianship, community relocation, residential program enrollment, and foster care and group home licensing severing financial supports for guardians and social supports for youth. Court-ordered legal permanence (e.g., permanent ward status, adoption) pre-transition assumes that transferring legal guardianship to caregivers provides youth with a permanent family and home even in the absence of maintaining cultural and community connections (Pérez, 2017; Sinclair, 2007). This approach, however, cannot guarantee legal relationships are meaningfully translated post-care and imposes a permanency hierarchy whereby adoption—next to reunification—is viewed as the most suitable option. When describing what “family” and “care” mean to him, Tyrel, a care leaver, states:

People who are good to you. It’s not blood, it’s just people who treat you well. If someone treats you well and they always treat you well, I think you could say they’re family. I call him my brother, but he’s not my brother and takes care of me. He feeds me, he’ll put a roof over my head, he’ll help me get job, his mom will call me her son. You know what I mean? The people who take care of you, the people you want to take care of, who make you want to do better.

As a person who had not been in care, Breda, a youth-serving organization director, also shared similar sentiments from her perspective:

[Foster care] should be looked at as a lifetime commitment because kids need support. I still go to my parents for support and I'm nearly 30-years-old. It's not, you know, stay with me for a year when you're 16 and I'll feed you and cloth you. It's I need to provide emotional support. I need to provide education. I need to provide community support and get you involved in things.

All interviewees, including the quotes above, referenced the importance of fostering relationships with care leavers. This form of relational permanence, which is defined in the literature as emotional attachment to a parent-like adult, or “forever family” as one participant described, is observed among the general population with trends of young adults returning home and receiving support from parents (Desjardins, 2019; Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2020). It is also common for care leavers to return to birth families, albeit with different biographical histories and outcomes (Havlicek, 2021). In only one case, a current care leaver described a strong relationship with her foster dad and older siblings. He ensured they attended school, obtained IDs, supported their community volunteering, involved their birth mom, showed unconditional love, and left them a house and car when he passed away.

Many participants also described the disruption of relationships with residential program staff who provided a sense of family and home, including: service providers, support workers, counsellors, community advocates, and elders. Many participants did not have positive relationships with social workers and viewed them as mostly absent or not equipped to deal with their emotional needs, let alone their placement needs. Indeed, Lauren, a care leaver, described feeling homesick after leaving a rural healing lodge at 16-years-old:

You have people that might go back to their family and some don't have families. And some people might come from a good place where they felt safe like Hands of Mother Earth [H.O.M.E] for me. If we could get set up [before transitioning] and still have someone. Not a social worker because they fucking suck and you never see them . . . It's hard to come from a place where everyone cares about you to nothing. It was heartbreaking. I was so homesick for [H.O.M.E].

Although the importance of relational permanence is well-documented, avoiding emotional attachment resonated in many care leaver narratives; in some cases, to the extent it negatively fostered hyper-independence. Erica, a former care leaver and women's support worker, mentioned: “The [youth] that were independent were overcompensating. They were so independent to the point they didn't let anybody in because they didn't want to give their power. It is a form of protection.” Moreover, relational permanence was difficult for care leavers to pursue or defend alone without legal sponsorship. Some also found it difficult to explore and maintain informal and kinship-based attachments to other youth, adults, siblings, and extended family.

Betty, a housing policy advocate and former care leaver, explained the need for a balanced and person-centred approach to permanence:

We should start [planning] a year ahead of time and see if there's any opportunity to reconcile with family members? Like who would you feel comfortable with? Who do you feel lives a good life that you see yourself living so you can go to school and do what you want? . . . We have gaps in dealing with those things, helping people transition from a system that has created dependency into some kind of transition in life where they thrive and become successful and

have supports around them, whether that's government supports or reconnection with family, or informal supports.

While blending various supports may be challenging when faced with court-ordered legal guardianship and family separation, all interviewees identified other broader capacity-related barriers to achieving relationship permanence, including: inconsistent training and standards for foster parents and group homes, high caseloads for social workers, and insufficient care networks providing youth and culture-based programming. Relational permanence, then, is best fostered when balanced with legalistic notions of permanence and operationalized with sufficient system capacities and standards.

### **Age-based Transition vs. Readiness-based Transition**

Transition-related policies adopt chronological age as a marker of adulthood indicating the termination of youth supports. However, rigid developmentalist age-based transitions do not always reflect whether youth want to leave care or consider their financial, educational, and sociocultural readiness (Doucet, 2021). Eighteenth or twenty-first birthdays can become traumatic life events without considering “coming of age” as a cultural and collective rite of passage to build community, belonging, identity, and understanding about what it means to be Indigenous (Mellor et al., 2020). Manitoba-based advocacy to increase the age of care leavers, however, has been met with government opposition due to developmental and economic arguments suggesting an end to youthhood, and other “adult” welfare systems being better-equipped to support changing social needs (25 Not 21 Collective, 2016). Jainna, a youth worker and former care leaver, explained:

Once a young person turns 12 we find courts and governments think they are big enough, strong enough to speak for [themselves] in a court of law. We just think that as a young person ages they need us less and less. But for a young person from care, our argument has always been for it to be in favour of extensions of care as [youth] may be physically 17, 18, but because of trauma of the system or things that happened, they can still be emotionally younger and need more support, not less, right?

Only four study participants signed *Agreements with Young Adults* (AYA) providing extended care with financial and social supports. The reasons participants did not apply included: lack of knowledge, onerous application processes, unsupportive social workers, residential programs attendance, and not wanting to feel controlled. Participants were also critical on how extended care policies are still subject to creating dependency without supporting young adults to develop life skills or allowing them to leave and return to care as needed.

Measures of successful transition disproportionately favour care leavers enrolled in education and training programs as extended care funding primarily remains in the purview of provincial employment and economic development policy in collaboration with post-secondary institutions, CWS authorities, and non-profit agencies (Government of Manitoba, 2021). Transition-related policies reflect broader trends within western liberal democracies emphasizing education and economic independence during adulthood that does not always resonate with young people (25 Not 21 Collective, 2016; Lalonde et al., 2021).

Only two out of 15 care leavers attended post-secondary education in the first three years after leaving care (another two attended later in life), while others only completed high school. Substantial resources are directed to the *Tuition Waiver Program* for care leavers (no age or extended care enrollment requirement) that fully covers post-secondary education costs. However, they are matched with modest living allowances as well as health and social supports. Among Indigenous children, Alberton et al. (2020) suggest that the protective role of educational attainment alone diminishes in view of intersecting forms of disadvantage compared to White children. Patricia, a care leaver and peer-harm reduction worker, described her experience leaving university due to grief, inadequate income, and poor mental health supports:

I failed a bunch of courses because I just stopped caring. Well it wasn't just that. There were other reasons like the death of family and friends. [Child and Family Services]<sup>7</sup> would help you with school supplies and living allowance. But you have to go to school full-time. You have to work [to make extra money]. They themselves don't really give counselling and therapy support. Its on like a contract basis so for two months you have a therapist and then suddenly it'll stop. You have to beg your social worker, communication will be choppy, and then you won't go for five months.

Although education and employment opportunities were deemed important, care leavers emphasized that successful transitions also included: reconnection with culture; reconnection with birth and extended families; engagement in community organizing/volunteering; care for their children and prevention of further CWS-involvement; and coping with trauma from care and having a strong sense of self.

### **Independence vs. Interdependence**

Transition-related policies (including tenancy and housing program rules and responsibilities) emphasize care leavers' autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency. These values are informed by Eurocentric or western views of the individual self as agentic, rational actors (Kirmayer, 2007). As youth demonstrate behaviors reflecting these values, they are rewarded via access to Transitional Housing Programs (THP), Independent Living Programs (ILP), and financial assistance for shelter, food, clothing, transport, entertainment, and other bills. Indeed, participants often explained that care leavers must "prove" independence with minimal financial/social supports once housing programs are accessed, or they must be seen as "deserving" and without supports to enrol. Such housing policies govern individuals in isolation of their social and collective lives and devalue important cultural notions of community-building, interdependence, and healthy relationships. Thus, despite THP and ILP showing positive outcomes for care leavers (Woodgate, Morakinyo, & Martin, 2017), tensions can arise when youth from varying cultural contexts and backgrounds access their programs.

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<sup>7</sup> Located in the Ministry of Families, the *Child and Family Services* (CFS) department is the name of the ministerial department governing Manitoba child protection policy and guiding child protection authorities and agencies that directly coordinate and deliver services for parents, children, and youth in care. CFS was the term used among participants. However, we prefer child welfare systems (CWS) to refer to the constellation of government policies, services, and administrative bodies that serve children and youth as well as families with open child protection cases, including, but not limited to CFS.

At a deeper level, then, this also suggests that programs not only aim to provide housing security in some way, but are also shaping moral values about the kinds of persons these youth “ought” to be as a result of their interactions with these systems. In other words, housing “security” is more likely when young people learn to take on the modes of western individualism and related ideologies, such as independence and self-sufficiency, and are directly and indirectly rewarded for being and becoming a certain kind of person. Linda, who is a group home manager, foster parent, and former care leaver, explained how ILPs require young adults to “prove” their independence:

[ILP] are run in a really colonized manner. They have expectations that don't stint with creating community or your own social safety net after leaving care . . . [ILP] say, you have to live alone so funding is that you live alone. Secondly, you live in a safe neighbourhood but that may be far from people you know. Three, you can't have people over. Four, you can't have a roommate. Five, you can't use any substances in the program. It's not teaching people. If you're going to get high in your house at a legal age how's that going to look and how are you going to navigate having people over.

In order to demonstrate housing need and access housing programs, care leavers were only recognized on the basis that they had no existing supports. They had to “beg,” “wait,” “lie,” and refrain from “double-dipping.” For example, access to *Housing First Programs* expect clients to be chronically homeless for at least six months or episodically homeless at least three times in the past year (Aboriginal Health & Wellness Centre, n.d.). As a result of an inability to access these programs, one youth explained how she found a sense of home and safety in a youth detention centre: “I was in the CFS system, but I graduated to the Manitoba Youth Justice system . . . I was a product of it as well, and I made it a habit to always go there, all the time, to the point where they were mostly my guardian” (Trillshaggy, care leaver).

Care leavers stated that market housing often presented similar tensions with interdependence, and they faced added discrimination due to racism and adultism, no credit history or bank accounts, lack of references or guarantors, poor rental history, and landlords not understanding various financial assistance programs. Some care leavers found themselves in affordable “slumlord” housing that was unsafe and uninhabitable. We also learned from participants in the larger SL that market and social housing tenant occupancy rules penalize family members, such as grandparents, for having care leavers intermittently live with them signifying the devaluing of intergenerational support systems.

When young adults are unemployed or ineligible for extended care, they are forced to become economically self-reliant, sometimes having to resort to illegal or dangerous means (e.g. stealing, drug dealing, sex trade work); developing dependency among friends, birth families, and street families (e.g. couch and floor-surfing, borrowing money); and applying for *Employment and Income Assistance* [EIA] programs that have fewer resources and stringent eligibility criteria and rules (e.g. welfare, rent subsidies, disability benefits, child benefits). We consistently heard from youth that EIA was the most punitive system next to CWS. EIA limits client choice, increases surveillance, penalizes people giving or receiving additional financial and social supports, and aggressively weens people off. Candy, a care leaver and community worker, explained,

[Y]ou'll get the intake assessment appointment right away. But you wait 2 months to meet the worker . . . You then have monthly or annual reviews where they'll ask questions like “Who lives

in your home? Is anybody working? Are children attending school regularly? How much money do you have in your bank account?" They also want you to do specific [training] programs. They have pathways they want people to follow, and anybody that deviates, it's an issue. You have no control over where you want to go in life.

All care leavers we interviewed that applied for EIA had been cut-off at least once due to transiency, inconsistent reporting, missing appointments, and negative interactions with workers. EIA was not considered a reliable financial safety net. However, a participant described how young parents (many who were in care themselves) are supported by EIA and CWS when accessing government-managed social housing, but require an open case file. All care leavers interviewed, except for two young women that were parents, did not access social housing. Mary, a parent advocate and former care leaver, explained:

A young mom dealing with child welfare has a better chance of getting a place than a youth who isn't a parent. A young mom gets more money on their budget. It's not just mom, there's kids involved. But there's still the same barriers, still that non-contact and non-understanding . . . If CFS apprehends the children, parents immediately lose money they were getting for the child. If they're in private housing or any social housing other than [government-managed housing] they lose it. [Government-managed housing] is the only social housing that has a grace period. They can keep the unit for 2 years if working towards reunification. EIA will pay a reduced amount for that unit because it's still housed.

Based on evidence from interviews and the literature, housing policies and tenancy rules create vulnerabilities for care leavers by negatively impacting the promotion of interdependence and relationality. They are guided by Eurocentric and individualistic rule-based approaches that are rigid, exclusive, and penal, which focus on an individual rational actor. Dominant policy rules fail to adequately accommodate care leavers living with family or friends, ensure tenant rights, respond to the high acuity of mental illness and active substance use, and 2SLGBTQ+ or living with disabilities face discrimination. In comparison, Indigenist and collectivist value-based ways of being emphasize flexibility, inclusivity, and forgiveness (Alaazi et al., 2015).

### **Creating "Vulnerability" Through Social Housing Policy Reforms**

In response to a growing affordable housing crisis across Canada and Manitoba, specifically, Manitoba's government has recently reformed social housing policies through an aggressive process of "rationalization" and austerity in light of many Indigenous people and care leavers being identified as "target" populations requiring social housing (Manitoba Housing, 2020a). Under conditions of neoliberal restructuring—a shift toward individual responsibility, maximization of utility through markets, and managerial technologies of governance (Jacobs & Travers, 2015)—increasing austerity-driven rationalization within social housing policy has the potential to adversely impact housing providers as well as existing and new tenants.

Manitoba social housing data are unavailable for previous wards of government care. Although 8% of government-owned and managed housing tenants, excluding non-profit housing, are under 29-years-old, these figures do not confirm who are leaseholders (Manitoba Housing, 2018). Many are likely

tenants under 18-years-old living with parents. Yet, we suspect youth occupancy rates are low based on anecdotal evidence, except for young parents, particularly women, who are care leavers themselves and reunifying with children in care. There exists a patchwork of housing partnerships with youth-serving organizations and government-owned housing providers delivering THP and ILP. However, these housing programs do not grant opportunities for permanent low-barrier housing where young adults are considered leaseholders and entitled to tenant rights.

**Transferring and privatizing housing assets.** Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation (MHRC) has initiated a process of selling and transferring directly-owned and managed government housing units to Non-Profit Housing (NPH).<sup>8</sup> Based on recommendations in a Manitoba Fiscal Performance Review (KPMG, 2017) report favouring austerity in social housing, it is Manitoba's largest housing reform in recent history. The transfer is communicated under the premise of a deteriorating and vacant public housing stock, debt relief from previous government overspending, and enhancing housing access to meet growing needs (Grabish, 2019). Lessons from other countries have illustrated the pitfalls of selling and transferring government housing assets, which suggests policy reforms are primarily driven by ideological motives (Cooper, 2018; Smith, 2020). Transferring government-owned and managed housing does not only entail the transfer of buildings and management, but transmission of debt, risk, and responsibility over to citizens that serve to relieve governments and unduly strain an overextended NPH sector (Smith, 2020).

Housing advocates have consistently stated that these regressive moves will be costly in the long-term, reduce deeply affordable barrier-free housing, as well as diminish an important source of public equity and guarantees of democratic oversight over public goods (Cooper, 2018; MNPHA, 2019). The transfer is also coupled with recommendations to consolidate NPH, which is reasoned to decrease service duplications and inefficiencies among a large network of smaller providers (KPMG, 2017). The full implications of this recommendation are unclear. Presently, MHRC is selling housing assets en masse to larger NPH providers to the exclusion of smaller ones. In the long-term, NPH may see reduced funding and increased competition among smaller providers, such as minority Indigenous housing providers or youth-serving organizations, thus limiting the provision of culturally safe and youth-relevant housing for care leavers (MNPHA, 2019). Larger housing providers are at risk of also losing sight of the unique and person-centred needs among care leavers.

Anticipating that NPH cannot fully absorb a large number of MHRC units within the transfer's short timeframe, it is likely to turn to private investors, for which government oversight could become almost non-existent, give rise to slumlord housing, and destabilize an already fragile social housing sector. Housing advocates have advised that the transfer's resources and energy could be better redirected on building-up instead of over-loading NPH (Cooper, 2018). Furthermore, the transfers and sales also coincide with cutting near-term costs for MHRC-managed housing, including: operational cuts (e.g. charging laundry fees, removing pest control supports); outsourcing services (e.g. security, property management, meal preparation); reducing MHRC support workers; and lowering income eligibility thresholds for portable rental supplements.

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<sup>8</sup> Government-owned housing assets, particularly in rural areas, have also been sold to non-profit housing organizations and individuals through a rural homeownership program and lease-to-own housing options.

**Mixed-income housing models.** The impetus to promote (self-)sustainability in NPH has been supported by all levels of government through mixed-income housing developments. They consist of buildings with a mix of rent-geared-to income, affordable, and market rental housing compared to 100% rent-geared-to income. The federal strategy of mixed-income housing through the Canadian NHS seeks to “promote diverse communities [and] build housing that is sustainable, accessible, mixed-income, and mixed-use” (Government of Canada, 2018, p.4). Mixed-income housing has been long argued, albeit erroneously, as a strategy to improve lives of people living in poverty by deconcentrating neighbourhood disadvantage, increasing job market access, encouraging social mixing, and role-modelling good citizenship (Darcy, 2010).

Couched in language around multicultural diversity and fiscal (self-)sustainability, mixed-income housing promotes self-financing mechanisms, limits deeply affordable housing, and displaces long-time residents, leading to gentrification (MNPHA, 2018; Silver, 2006). There are no guarantees that social housing will remain accessible to low-income or vulnerable tenants. Financial supports (e.g. EIA, extended care) are insufficient to cover rental rates, and self-subsidization can promote discrimination against less-than-desirable tenants (e.g. poor credit and rental histories, previous eviction records), which is consistent with our observations of some existing NPH providers, such as the municipal WHRC, that have youth leaving care as priority tenant populations but high vacancy rates.

Similarly, Indigenous housing providers have challenged mixed-income housing on the basis of these concerns, which are further characterized by assimilating Indigenous housing into market governance systems that undermine urban Indigenous self-determination and government responsibilities and housing subsidies. Limited government subsidies may also diminish capacities for smaller urban Indigenous providers to deliver culturally-appropriate and congregate living (as opposed to scattered) housing models. Furthermore, large capital investments are required for mixed-use redevelopment, and self-subsidization would expect Indigenous organizations to serve tenant populations outside their organizational mandates (MNPHA, 2018). With recent successes to house Indigenous care leavers, these moves toward self-sufficiency may impede the ability of Indigenous housing providers to adequately deliver culture-based, permanent, and low-barrier housing for Indigenous care leavers that ensure they remain close to their community or kinship ties.

**Social housing as “transition” and “program.”** There are also serious concerns regarding the changing language MHRC is using to describe its emerging role within government-managed social housing. Rather than framing social housing as a safe and stable place to live, MHRC is increasingly describing its *Social Housing Rental Program* as “temporary assistance” until tenants are prepared to “transition” into an *Affordable Housing Rental Program* and ultimately market housing when household income exceeds cut-off limits (Manitoba Housing, 2020b). This ignores the reality that market housing is increasingly out of reach for moderate-income households let alone low-income ones. This framing problematically privileges rental markets and homeownership as the benchmark for successful housing transition, permanency, and urban tenancy.

In addition, in this framing MHRC is attempting to alter subsidies as separate from the actual housing units. Recently, MHRC changed its internal policy to allow property managers to remove a tenant’s subsidy as penalty for non-compliance and misbehaviour (e.g. failing to prepare for pest treatment, noise complaints, failing to submit annual income reviews, overcrowding, etc.). When a tenant’s subsidy is

removed, they can continue living in the physical unit but lose access to the subsidized “program.” Tenants are charged the unit’s estimated market rate, typically in gross excess of their budget. In effect, subsidy removal is likely to lead to non-payment and eviction, eventually freeing-up units for market rental. These reforms increase the precarity of tenants in government-managed units and limits any legal recourse by restricting tenant rights. They have potential to exacerbate care leavers’ housing needs and compound existing barriers to accessing social housing, including: lack of knowledge; intimidating application/interview processes; having inadequate IDs, credit history, and references; being placed in unsafe housing/neighbourhoods; and keeping in contact over years to maintain positions on waitlists or deprioritized as a single tenant.

### Discussion

Policy and research on leveraging social housing to support youth leaving care has been limited in Canada. Beyond short-term programmatic interventions to prevent homelessness, permanent low-barrier social housing can provide a social safety net and place for young adults to call home. Increased investments in social housing have potential to address Canada’s housing crisis and provide a cultural, therapeutic and politically viable landscape for home. Métis scholar Jesse Thistle (2017) has since proposed a nationally recognized definition for Canadian Indigenous homelessness in order to guide housing interventions:

Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families, and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally, or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships (p. 6).

When conceived through notions of Wāhkôhtowin, creating culturally safe social housing in the city undertakes a broader goal of demarcating housing and cities as places of belonging, kinship, and interdependence that are tied to home and homeland.

Among Indigenous youth who are overrepresented in Canadian child protection and housing insecure populations, however, discursive policy constructions of “youth transition” are intimately lived and felt in myriad ways as they grow up, age out, and make home in the city. Cleavages within transition-related policies to represent material, cultural, and political complexities of Indigenous youth identity are missed. They rigidly categorize and mediate what it means to be a “successfully transitioned” adult capable of living and belonging in private housing markets. Indigenous young adults are made vulnerable to discursive trappings of independence-dependence policy paradoxes (Johnson, 2020). They are situated within racialized medico-legal discourses of youth development and biological ownership that become tied to managerial-economic and individualistic rationalities relinquishing government care once deemed necessary as children (Sinclair, 2016). Indeed, government social housing safety nets undergoing austerity-driven political-economic transformations further threaten, instead of alleviate, experiences of housing precarity.

## Housing Precarity as Structural Violence

The making of settler-colonial cities in North America, such as Winnipeg, have emerged as imperialist projects underpinned by a logic of dispossession and erasure of Indigenous Peoples for (White) settlement and home-making (Dorries et al., 2019; Hugill, 2017). Settler-colonial urbanisms operate through varied processes of racial capitalism, White supremacy, and nation-state building to produce cosmopolitan forms of inclusive urban citizenship and fertile ground for urban infrastructural redevelopment (Cowen, 2020; Toews, 2018). They are reflective of the disappearing landscape of government responsibilities over social housing primarily administered among low income racialized communities and their sense of home. However, this logic is simultaneously operating within a milieu of state-sponsored processes of cultural recognition and inclusion (Coulthard, 2014). In other words, they rhetorically identify Indigenous housing need while extinguishing social housing rights and development. Canadian cities, however, have always been on Indigenous lands and constitute Indigenous Peoples' relationships to governance, community, cultural identity, and colonial resistance (Simpson, 2017). From this vantage point, the spatial configurations of cities can also better account for Indigenous youth mobilities and place-making that resist housing instability and transiency as pathological but as embodied movements of home (Merhar, 2017).

At the intersection of child protection and housing policy, care leavers are expected to grow up and behave in ways that demonstrate their virtue as good citizens—healthy, stable, obedient, career-driven, rational, and independent adults. These policies centre on care leavers being and becoming a good adult, but also a good participant in Temporary Housing Programs and Independent Living Programs, and eventually, a good tenant in private housing markets. The discursive essentialization of marginalising-structural disadvantage as personal moral obstacles to be overcome is reproduced as reward in the form of extended government care and socioeconomic mobility when youth “successfully” transition and stabilize. Moreover, child protection and housing policy are also means of Eurocentric or western values of individualism, self-reliance, and autonomy, which are reinforced in youth leaving care and thus form part of a moralized “acceptable” citizenry. Thus, policy constructions of virtuous youthhood often centre around Eurocentric socioeconomic rationalities of developmental individualism, privatization, and material accumulation, while rationalizing disconnection from interdependencies to land, community, and culture (Johnston-Goodstar, 2020; Kirmayer, 2007).

When youth transitions are rendered “unsuccessful” by settler “common-sense” and obfuscations of material conditions (neoliberal restructuring and violent racism), Indigenous youth transitions come to be characterized as personal and moral failure—a symptom of developmental and cultural pathology (Petroni, Ybarra, & Rink, 2021). These constructions harmfully manifest as terminating extended care and housing program eligibility, undermining tenant rights, and differentiated and exclusionary access in private rental markets. Youthhood, constructed as both “vulnerable” and “deviant,” become the new object from which to manage socio-biological difference through settler-state recognition, while subjecting youth to ongoing state-sponsored neoliberal-capitalist structural violence (de Finney et al., 2018; De Leeuw et al., 2010; Maxwell, 2017). Giving rise to “inclusive” racialized rehabilitative-welfare economies in settler-state institutions (e.g., treatment program, psychiatric wards, youth detention, prison) and slumlord economies in impoverished neighbourhoods, ghettoized containment allows cities

to become materially and culturally “emptied” for the reproduction of (White) settler urban space and cultural ethos (Gray, 2016; Stewart & La Berge, 2019; Toews, 2018).

Mills and LeFrançois (2018) distinguish racialized developmentalism from idealistic White developmentalism to suggest that Indigenous Peoples are framed as permanently childlike, uncivilized, and immune to further development. The child-victim—vulnerable and deviant, not-yet-adult and not-yet-citizen—justifies within reasonability ongoing state intervention, marginalization, and dependency on transcerceral adult social service systems managing life worth living and suffering through other social technologies of class, gender, sexuality, geography, and ability (Conlon, 2021; de Finney et al., 2018; Maxwell, 2017; Stewart & La Berge, 2019). As such, calls for inclusion are in fact reconstituted through settler-colonial and neoliberal-capitalist ideologies of exclusion/dispossession and victimhood/deviancy by governments and markets (Coulthard, 2014; McLeod, 2012). They legitimate who can and cannot successfully transition into adulthood and achieve urban citizenship in housing tenure.

### **Indigenous Resistance as Home-making**

Indigenous young people, however, are reclaiming cities through everyday reproductions of Indigenous urban space and refusing dominant modes of control, commodification, and individualism to conceive the right to home as a right to city and homeland (Dhillon, 2017; Dorries et al., 2019; Simpson, 2017). Emerging adulthood and home-making are not simply about finding a job, going to school, and securing housing. Rather, work, school, and housing become intertwined and co-constitutive with everyday practices of recovering and nurturing relationships with land, ancestral ties, community, kin, self, culture, and ceremony that were suppressed in care (Asselin & Drainville, 2020; Bencomo, 2022; Corntassel, 2018; Doucet, 2020; Mellor et al., 2020; Morton et al., 2021; Quinn, 2022).

Furthermore, Indigenous young people in Manitoba with support of adults and elders are persistently resisting and subverting oppressive policy regimes in favour of active citizenship and direct actions to shelter a predominantly houseless Indigenous population, provide opportunities for cultural and spiritual connection, and sustain economies of care through community-building to take care of each other (25 Not 21 Collective, 2016; CCPA, 2016; Monkman, 2021; Morton, 2018; Story, 2017). Indigenous teachings and knowledge, like concepts of *Wâhkôhtowin*, are thus central insofar as they accommodate diverse experiences of precariously housed youth who do not fully or always resonate with homeless identities, but require a safe place to call home to foster Indigenous youth identity development.

Accordingly, future policy research, first and foremost, should explicitly focus on social housing models and systems among urban Indigenous youth leaving care and Indigenous housing providers. Using comparative, mixed, and longitudinal study designs can produce more robust and evolving understandings of differing cultural and policy contexts. Policy research must not only focus on pragmatic housing challenges and opportunities, however. Exploring notions of home and housing security from decolonizing and Indigenous policy perspectives may also represent different kinds of “middles,” “transitions,” “refusals,” and “identities” conceived by Indigenous youth themselves who are often excluded from child protection policy research (Sinha et al., 2021). The home-as-house has represented places where colonization, austerity, and trauma are intimately lived and resisted. It is thus paramount that Indigenous young people are centred and cared for during decisions on child protection

and housing policy and research, and more importantly, have their oppositions and aspirations witnessed and heard.

### Conclusion & Implications

Manitoba has one of the youngest and most obstinate extended care policies, unlike other Canadian jurisdictions that are upward of 26-years-old and provide tiered support as young adults age (Shewchuk et al., 2021). In fact, Manitoba's government has shown their ability to increase age cut-offs during COVID-19 that granted a six-month moratorium period for care leavers (Rosen, 2021). Despite instrumental long-term cost-saving economic arguments favouring investments in care leavers (Conference Board of Canada, 2014), governments have not acted accordingly. Recent reports highlight how Manitoba's CWS fails many children and youth (Hughes, 2013; MACY, 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Ministry of Families, 2017; Ricard, 2019). It is a system that remains entrenched, insistently reporting poor outcomes for care leavers, yet its budgetary and administrative portfolio has progressively grown.

In 2019, the Canadian federal government passed *Bill C-92, An Act Respecting Indigenous Children, Youth and Families*. As the first piece of Canadian Indigenous child protection legislation, legal experts and activists identified the glaring absence of "youth transition," despite recommendations imploring legislators to include care leavers (Metallic et al., 2019). Gitxsan child welfare advocate Cindy Blackstock states: "Bill C-92 offers Indigenous children a colonial Faustian bargain: accept the flawed bill in its current state or get nothing" (Blackstock, 2019, p 1). Recent recommendations on national youth transition standards have been proposed by advocates, researchers, and frontline workers across Canada (Doucet, 2021; Doucet & National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, 2020), many of which are reflected within our findings on transition-related policy constructions, such as relational permanency, readiness-based transition, and care frameworks centering interdependence. They reflect the voices of participants in our study and can support Indigenous care leavers secure housing and build a sense of home. Nevertheless, policy shifts may also require radical transformations through intersecting housing, social assistance, criminal justice, and healthcare systems.

The sentiments within federal child protection reform also hold true for Canada's NHS, which has received its share of criticism and presented challenges to fully realizing social housing as a right (DesBaillets & Hamill, 2022; Paradis, 2018; Schwan & Ali, 2021). Referencing social housing, however, Walker (2008) states that urban Indigenous-inclusive citizenship and self-determination in housing will not remedy Indigenous housing need without the common pursuit toward affordable and adequate housing for all Canadians. The recent efforts in Manitoba on social housing reforms do not merely impact Indigenous care leavers, but negatively impact Manitobans more broadly and Indigenous housing providers more acutely to provide culturally relevant notions of housing that meet the needs of diverse communities.

As Manitoba's child protection and housing policy contexts witness settler-colonial intervention in the face of a disappearing welfare state, racial capitalism, and White supremacy, the long-term effects of recent urban social housing reforms are not fully understood but cautionary. Insofar as they have potential to aggressively perpetuate conditions of housing precarity, care leavers are continuously positioned and managed as perpetual subjects of "being-in-transition"—that is, never fully and successfully achieving inclusive citizenship as adults and securing stable housing tenure. Social housing

political-economic transformations also underlie problematic discursive policy trends morally framing the assimilation of Indigenous housing providers into private housing markets as a form of “good” urban Indigenous governance, in addition to “successful” housing transition and redevelopment as efficient, competitive, and self-sustaining. Re-imagining a culturally relevant social housing process for Indigenous youth ageing out of care will be essential to address the concerning trends that are well underway.

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