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Manitoba Education Policy Enactment and the Marginalization of Indigenous Youth in Child Welfare

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Résumé de l'article

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Abstract

The intersecting colonial systems of child welfare and education overdetermine experiences of educational exclusion of Indigenous children in Manitoba. A fictionalized case vignette is used to depict how settler colonialism, carcerality, and anti-Indigenous racism play out in the lives of students with child welfare involvement. Using critical thematic analysis, we analyze reports from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth on the lives and deaths of two Indigenous children, focusing on the role of discretionary education policy enactment. Four themes are explored: racist constructions of the "problem child;" use of exclusionary discipline; being missed from and missed at school; and an ethical responsibility to care rooted in the Cree conceptualization of wâhkôhtowin. Examples of different policy enactment to better support Indigenous students with child welfare involvement are provided through a reimagined case vignette, with a call to educators to center ethical responsibilities of care for children as their primary duty.

Fictionalized Case Vignette

UUUUgh, I hated walking into a class two months late. The second I arrived in class I realized I didn't even know where the bathroom was or what class I landed in. When I got here, they handed me a schedule and for some reason I was back in grade 10 English which I thought I passed, and remedial Math, even though I'm great at Math. I can tell already this'll be another school where they think I'm dumb. I wonder if they will suggest Adult Education?

My first suspension was for smoking on school property, which wasn't a rule in my last school, and since then it seems like I'm on their radar. Besides being labeled as dumb before I even got here, I'm also a "troublemaker." The suspension for smoking only confirmed it for them. Since my first one, two more suspensions for being late, one for not standing up for the anthem, and finally the biggy last week for daring the principal to suspend me. They told me it was a "threat." I knew that when I walked in the door, they were going to treat me differently than other students, assuming they even know I'm here.

When I got back after being suspended, no one even seemed to notice, not even my teachers. I couldn't even come back until the new semester because the principal told me I needed a "fresh start." Everyone probably just assumed I quit or was off to another school already. No big deal – it's the same as the last place. Most of the teachers don't even know my name.

Guidance told me there's some sort of Behavioural Plan that they made for me. Really it's just a bunch of new rules. Apparently it involves me quitting smoking, attending and passing all my classes in one year, going to counseling if they can find any, and never being late. There's no way I can do all that! Who wants to come to this stupid school anyway?! They didn't notice I was gone. They wouldn't even miss me if I never came back.

Introduction

Manitoba has the highest rate of children involved in child welfare across Canada (Brownell et al., 2015). As of March 2022, 91% of the 9196 children in the care of Child and Family Services (CFS) were First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (Manitoba Minister of Families, 2022, p. 102). Further, the academic outcomes for children with CFS involvement are dismal. For example, the graduation rate for children with no history of CFS involvement is 89%, while only 33% of children who have been in care at any point graduate on time (Brownell et al., 2015). In addition to educational exclusion, children with CFS involvement are more likely to face social exclusion, including unemployment, houselessness, poverty, sexual exploitation, criminal justice involvement, and incarceration (Courtney et al., 2014; Ridge & Millar, 2000). As the Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott stated, the rates and outcomes of Indigenous children in care are a "humanitarian crisis" (Barrera, 2017, n.p.).

We understand the root of this crisis to be historic and current settler colonialism, carcerality, anti-Indigenous racism, and general public indifference, all playing out on children whose lives are simply perceived as less grievable (Butler, 2004). As we will trace in the following literature review, child welfare was not designed to keep Indigenous children safe but was and is an intentional genocidal and carceral tool of settler colonialism. There is a clear need to radically reimagine how all children, families, and communities have access to the material conditions and sovereignty necessary for true safety, well-being, and flourishing without relying on CFS or other carceral systems. While we work towards that future, we argue that educators (including teachers, support teachers and principals), particularly white settler educators, have an ethical responsibility

to critically examine how their discretionary power to interpret and enact exclusionary and racist policies contribute to educational and social exclusion, the removal of Indigenous children from their homes, and settler colonialism. *Policy enactment*, as defined by Ball et al. (2011), is a discretionary practice that is differentially enforced depending on who the student is and the professional judgment, context, and decision-making of individual teachers and school leaders.

The opening fictionalized case vignette illustrates how discretionary policy enactment within the colonial and carceral structures of child welfare and education impacts many students' experiences of schooling in Canada. Rather than begin with the literature, we chose to open this article with this story to help both the reader and us to better imagine what it might be like to experience colonial and carceral structures from the perspective of a student. Details from this vignette intentionally reference real experiences documented in Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) special reports focused on the lives and deaths of Indigenous children who had child welfare involvement, as well as draw on our own experiences working in schools. In creating this vignette, we specifically integrated elements from the MACY report on Circling Star (MACY, 2018). For example, we depict a student loving math, being labelled a troublemaker, experiencing exclusionary discipline, being given an ineffective and inappropriate behavioural plan, lacking meaningful connections to supports, and being pushed out of school. We also drew from the report on Tina Fontaine (MACY, 2019). For example, we depict a student attending multiple schools, educators having low academic expectations, receiving exclusionary discipline, lacking a re-entry plan upon return from suspension, and feeling unseen by those at schools who are meant to care.

Using these same two special reports, we conducted a critical thematic analysis of education policy enactment and its impacts on already-marginalized Indigenous kids with CFS involvement, tracing the racist constructions of the "problem child;" the use of exclusionary discipline; and being missed from and missed at school. In this article, we also identify concomitant spaces and opportunities in which educators ought to consider their professional judgement and ethical responsibility of caring for children as their primary duty over bureaucratic responsibilities (Janzen et al., 2020). We conclude by calling on educators, especially white settler educators, to engage in policy enactment from an ethical responsibility rooted in the Cree conceptualization of wâhkôhtowin (Donald, 2021), and then illustrate what these alternatives might look like in a revised fictionalized case vignette.

The Context of Colonialism, Racism, and Carcerality in Canadian Child Welfare and Education

Settler colonialism, embedded in violent systems and enacted by individuals, has greatly affected the lives of Indigenous people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015). In efforts to "get rid of the Indian problem" as framed by then Minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott, wide reaching policies of genocide and assimilation were enacted (National Archives of Canada, 1920). The Indian Act of 1876 explicitly aimed "to eliminate First Nations culture in favour of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society" (Parrott, 2022), including the requirement that all First Nations children attend residential schools. Until the last school closed in 1997, children were removed from their families and communities, denied the right to cultural practices and speaking their languages, and in many cases, experienced physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse, and/or death due to poor conditions and maltreatment, all while framing the schools as being beneficial for the children (TRC, 2015).

As the use of residential schools started to decline in the 1960s, child welfare policies were enacted to continue to remove Indigenous children from their families (Henry & Tator, 2010). These children were routinely placed in non-Indigenous homes throughout Canada, the U.S., and abroad, a practice commonly referred to as the 60s Scoop. Child welfare workers constructed Indigenous women as "bad mothers" and reproduced stigmatizing ideas of the children being brought "into care" (Pon et al., 2011). Like with residential school rhetoric, this discourse simultaneously blamed individual Indigenous families and allowed the Canadian state to produce their own benevolent image of "protecting" children while inflicting great harm. For example, Eurocentric parenting philosophies and practices were widely implemented as the standard of parenting, while Indigenous worldviews, collectivist child-rearing practices, and the importance of cultural and spiritual teachings were used as rationale for "child protection" interventions (Blackstock et al., 2020; Choate et al., 2021). Assimilation thus worked in two ways – Indigenous parents were either coerced to comply with Eurocentric parenting frameworks to try to avoid contact with child welfare workers or their children were removed and placed in non-Indigenous families where they were often assimilated into white settler logics. This was a kind of "institutionalized assimilation" that systematically removed Indigenous children from their families, culture, language, and nations to continue the colonial project of residential schools (Henry & Tator, 2010). As evidenced in the findings of the TRC (2015), these colonial policies were designed to assimilate Indigenous children, displace Indigenous peoples from their lands, and ultimately eradicate their existence, the intent and effect of which was a cultural genocide.

While one might be tempted to understand settler colonialism as a historical event, current day policies and practices rooted in colonial approaches continue to shape the experiences and outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Despite claims of reform, the removal of Indigenous children from their families and cultures and institutionalized assimilation continues today through what is known as the Millennial Scoop (Douglas, 2022). For example, despite Indigenous children making up 7.7% of all children in Canada, the 2021 census shows they comprise 53.8% of all children in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2022). In Manitoba, Indigenous children are more than 90% of the children removed from their homes for foster care (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Women's Council, 2018). There are three times more First Nations children in CFS "care" today than during the height of the residential schools (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, 2023). To be clear, these disproportionate numbers are not an indication of bad parents or failing Indigenous communities but are the direct result of these anti-Indigenous racist and colonial policies. As Thobani (2007) and Pon et al. (2011) argued, the current overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black youth in child welfare is inseparable from the history of Canadian white supremacy and the founding of the colonial nation-state.

Similarly, Canada's public education system has been used as a tool of assimilation, settler colonialism, and white supremacy, most egregiously through the state-sponsoring of residential schools (Charania, 2007; Maynard, 2017; RCAP, 1996; Stanley, 2011). As Justice (2023) argued, schooling has never been a public good, but is a white good that promotes white advantage and (re)creates racial inequality. As Marie Battiste has long attested, Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and worldviews have been intentionally ignored, erased, and kept out of schools through Eurocentrism and cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 1998, 2004; Battiste & Henderson, 2009).

Today, Indigenous children regularly and disproportionately experience educational exclusion, defined as a lack of educational success while in school and of post-secondary

participation (Brownell et al., 2015; Fernandez, 2008; Lund & Stokes, 2020; Pecora, 2012; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016; Sebba et al., 2015). A number of studies have found that Indigenous students regularly face both individual and systemic anti-Indigenous racism at school (e.g., Ennab, 2022; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Louie & Prince, 2023; Wager et al., 2022). For example, Wager et al.'s (2022) qualitative study articulated the ways in which Indigenous youth, especially those with child welfare involvement, report receiving less care and support, experience inequitable exclusionary discipline, and face lowered expectations from teachers and administrators. Ennab (2022) highlighted interpersonal and systemic anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in Winnipeg schools, including students feeling unsafe due to being policed, targeted, and criminalized by school resource officers. Further, students involved with child welfare are statistically more likely to be referred to special education programs, retained, and be suspended or expelled (Scherr, 2007). Children in care experience stigmatization in schools, which leads to social and educational exclusion (Janzen, 2022).

Thus, the intersecting systems of child welfare and education continue to work in tandem to remove children from their families and destabilise Indigenous cultures, languages, and societies, creating wide-spread intergenerational consequences for families and communities (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). As Osler and Starkey (2010) argued, "Education can be part of a solution to injustice and violence...but equally it can promote violence and injustice" (p. 129). From this perspective, the disproportionate outcomes for Indigenous youth, both those with and without CFS involvement, are not unexpected but are the natural result of these systems doing what they have been designed to do. Despite this, as Fine and Weis (2003) argued, it is critical to not only see schools as a harmful site where structural inequities are reproduced, but also as a space where resistant struggle might occur; and therefore, we must be unwilling "to relinquish school as a site irrelevant to powerful and significant social struggle" (p. 3). It is within this colonial and racist context of education and child welfare, and the dire need for a more ethical response to be imagined and practiced, where we situate our analysis.

Methodology

While policies as written can reinforce settler colonial carceral state logics, policies also must be translated into practice and enacted by *someone* (Ball et al., 2011). In the case of education, policies are often enacted by teachers (e.g., when determining who to refer for assessment), support teachers and school social workers (e.g., when developing behavioural or educational plans), and principals (e.g., deciding when to use exclusionary discipline upon receiving a disciplinary referral). Policy is thus a discretionary practice, enacted in particular and diverse contexts and enacted differently by different actors (Ball et al., 2011). Policy enactment requires professional and ethical judgement that can result in dramatically disparate educational experiences for Indigenous youth with CFS involvement. We are interested in exploring how, in this era of reconciliation, there is a "responsibility to engage" (Clark et al., 2016) with policies differently.

Whereas policy studies often begin with, and are focused on, analyzing policy, we are interested in the material effects of the convergence of policy and how it is enacted on children's lives. Therefore, we approached this project somewhat inversely; instead of starting with policy to determine its effect, we used existing special reports focused on the lives and deaths of two Indigenous children with child welfare involvement to consider the effects of educational policy on them. Our primary research questions were: What is the role of educational policy enactment in and on the lives and deaths of two Indigenous children in child welfare in Manitoba? Who enacts

these educational policies and how? What might we learn from these policy enactments that could inform more ethical approaches to supporting children in care in the education system?

Data Selection

As part of their legal mandate, MACY, an independent office of the Manitoba legislature, receives a death notification for all persons under the age of 21. Each death is assessed and, when warranted, an investigation into the public services involved is conducted and formal recommendations are provided (MACY, 2023). These reports are specific to each child and are done "through the eyes of the deceased child" (MACY, 2023, n.p.). Autopsies, reports, written records from public services (e.g., CFS, education, justice), and interviews with service providers and family members are collected and analyzed as part of the reports.

As a public document that aims to put the child's best interest at the center of the report and to provide wide-reaching recommendations, MACY reports provide important information about how policy and policy actors materially impact the lives and deaths of Indigenous children involved in child welfare. Despite their importance, these 100+ page publicly available reports are underutilized in research. While any of the MACY reports could be utilized, our team read the five most recent MACY child death reports available as of July 2023. After reading these reports, we selected only two of these reports to allow for more in-depth analysis and reporting. After reading about the lives and deaths of these young people, it felt important that we did not merely reduce their lives to themes, but instead stay close to the specific ways in which educational policy enactment played a role in altering their lives and opportunities. We selected the reports written about Circling Star (MACY, 2018) and Tina Fontaine (MACY, 2019) for in-depth analysis[1], due to the depth of description about their schooling experiences in the reports, marked similarities in their experiences, and important gendered differences.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the two MACY reports, we enlisted the theoretical framework of the *settler colonial carceral state* in the educational system as conceptualized by Sophie Rudolph (2023). Within this framework, settler colonial logics (i.e., whiteness as dominant; racialized exclusion; and assimilation, containment, and/or attempts to eliminate Indigenous populations to gain access to the land and further capitalism) are intertwined with carceral logics (i.e., practices connected with "containment and control, punitive discipline and exclusion or the kinds of practices that lead to, and constitute, incarceration" [Rudolph, 2023, p. 2]). The use of carceral logics allows settler colonial states to contain, exclude, and punish Indigenous people as "problematic," while letting the settler colonial Canadian state position itself as benevolent, multicultural, and, more recently, as engaged in reconciliation. Furthermore, we draw on the Indigenous feminism theoretical work of Joyce Green (2017) who articulated the ways in which the violent colonial process is both

[1] When we began this project, we wanted to ensure that we were honouring the lives of Tina Fontaine and Circling Star and their surviving relations and not simply mining their stories as data. Therefore, while analysis of these reports do not require Research Ethics Board approval, the research team contacted MACY to see how we might seek permission from the surviving families to conduct this analysis and allow them to participate in the research process if desired. The MACY office encouraged us to use these public domain reports and did not want to contact the families. We plan to send MACY this article to share with the families if they wish. We also created a report for MACY providing feedback and suggestions for their reports in the future.

gendered and raced, and outlined how patriarchy shapes the forms of oppression Indigenous people face depending on their gender identity.

Data Analysis

We selected Lawless and Chen's (2018) critical thematic data analysis, which extends Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis and codes for what Owen (1984) calls recurrence (meaning is repeated), repetition (repeated use of specific words or phrases), and forcefulness (the importance participants give their language) through an explicitly critical approach to exploring ideology, power, and discourses. MACY reports include findings and recommendations about a number of domains; however, to answer our research questions we limited the text that we coded to that which directly related to school personnel, schooling experiences, or education policy. Of note, there were many other public services involved in the lives and deaths of Tina Fontaine and Circling Star outside of education (e.g., child welfare, justice, mental health services, victim services). Our intentional focus on the role of schooling and school employees in our analysis does not mean education is the only domain where different policy and policy enactment is required.

To increase trustworthiness, we each independently read the reports and engaged in line-by-line open coding. During closed coding, we explicitly linked the data with settler colonial carceral state and Indigenous feminism theories. We paid particular attention to how Tina Fontaine and Circling Star were constructed in these documents – both by the MACY reporters and by the educators, what larger discourses were being drawn on, and what was explicitly being said and not said. After comparing our emerging codes and analysis, we engaged in independent and team analysis to determine the final codes and themes, using existing literature to enrich our theoretical understandings. As is common with critical thematic analysis, we do not artificially separate out findings from analysis and instead present them in an interwoven manner below.

Also of note, the analysis provided in this article is based on the MACY reports as they were written. As such, we were not able to analyze the primary data found in report cards, interviews, or discipline referrals, but instead analyzed MACY's findings. Thus, our data is limited by the subjectivity and chosen framing of the MACY report writers (who we do not always agree with) and there are missing pieces of information or interviews we wished we had access to. Furthermore, we did not triangulate information in the MACY reports with other public reports. Circling Star's identity is not known to the public (Circling Star is his spirit name) and thus triangulation was not possible. In the case of Tina Fontaine, many of the public news reports reinforced racist and sexist ideas about her and her family and lacked the in-depth primary data that the MACY reports offered, especially as it pertains to her educational experiences.

Critical Reflexivity

Importantly, the project is shaped and limited by our own professional and personal perspectives, including the fact that none of the authors are Indigenous. As with all critical qualitative research, we do not assume a "neutral" research process is possible, but transparently name some of our political positioning for readers to contextualize our findings. Author 1, Mayor, is a female white settler born and raised on the island of Bermuda of primarily Scottish, English, and Irish ancestry. She previously worked in K-12 schools as a trauma therapist and is now a social work academic whose research centers on educational barriers and equity, racism, trauma, and anti-carceral/abolitionist perspectives. Author 2, Hathout, comes to this place from settler parents,

who are first generation immigrants. He is a father and husband, as well as a teacher in the humanities at the secondary level. Author 3, Janzen, is a white female settler of Mennonite descent who taught for 15 years in the public school system in Manitoba before becoming an academic. Her research explores the inter-related workings of power and discourses, particularly as they relate to the systematic marginalization of students.

As a group of settlers working on this project together, we passed tobacco and consulted with Cree Knowledge Keeper Vivian Timmins on this article. She encouraged us to explain in more detail why we engaged in this research and what the article means to us.[2] Each of us have worked in K-12 education and have been complicit in a harmful colonial, racist school system through our actions, inactions, and policy enactments. We view this research project as part of our responsibility to address the TRC's (2015) Calls #62 and #63 that pertain to the training of educators on the history and legacy of residential school, building empathy and mutual respect, and the need for teacher education on integrating Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods. As Jewell and Mosby (2023) of the Yellowhead Institute wrote, "Indigenous peoples have, time and time again, been taking on the hard work of leading and steering reconciliation efforts. But what does it look like to share the obligations of reconciliation?" (p. 22). Similarly, we do not believe it is the responsibility of FNMI communities or individuals to fix the inequities created by settlers for Indigenous students, but instead we position ourselves as being part of the problem and believe that we have an obligation to listen carefully and do better as a result. In reading these MACY reports, we intentionally listened closely to the lives and deaths of Tina Fontaine and Circling Star and to consider what we, as educators, must do differently based on these stories. Through our writing, our goal is to humbly call ourselves and other settler educators to pick up our responsibility towards change.

Circling Star & Tina Fontaine

As part of our commitment to staying close to the lives of these youth, below, we provide a summary that highlights some of the major life experiences of Circling Star and Tina Fontaine to orient readers who may not be familiar with their stories, prior to presenting our findings. These summaries are not intended to be fulsome accounts and we encourage readers to access the full MACY reports to read more about Circling Star and Tina Fontaine. Importantly, their stories must be understood first as incomplete representations of their humanity and as children, and then understood within the context of the settler colonial carceral state.

Circling Star (As Described in MACY, 2018)

Circling Star was the youth's spirit name. He was described by his family as someone who was active, loved to eat, and enjoyed the outdoors, especially fishing and hunting. Circling Star was close to his family members. He grew up in a rural Indigenous community in Manitoba and went to elementary school in his home community. In this school, he loved math, received positive reports from his teachers, and won an academic award.

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[2] We are grateful to Knowledge Keeper Vivian Timmins for her careful reading and guidance on how to strengthen this piece; however, we want to be clear that the opinions, and any errors or omissions, in this piece are our own. In addition to writing more about what brought us to this work, we incorporated her suggestions to name how our work attempts to respond to the calls from the TRC (2015), make clearer our own positionalities and who we are 'calling in' to do this work, and read and include some additional Indigenous authors she recommended.

At age 13, Circling Star was told that the man who had raised him as his father was not his biological father. This was shocking to him, leading to him running away and CFS becoming involved for the first time when his mother called for support. The MACY report indicated that his biological father was abusive to his mother and may have engaged in violence to prevent her from carrying Circling Star to full term when she was pregnant. Circling Star returned home but was angry and in grief over this news.

Circling Star then entered high school, which was 40 minutes from his home community, being bussed in with many kids from surrounding areas. Almost immediately, Circling Star was reportedly assumed by one teacher to be a gang member and received discipline referrals for minor infractions and multiple suspensions. Circling Star was later suspended for incidents involving intoxication at school and that were labelled as threatening and aggressive. Circling Star drank and used drugs as a survival coping mechanism, which escalated throughout high school. He met regularly with a substance abuse counsellor at school with whom he appeared to have a strong relationship; however, he continued to regularly drink until blacked out.

There were also reports of Circling Star's increasing mental health distress and familial difficulties dealing with the news about his biological father. Circling Star ran away multiple times and was reportedly kicked out of his parents' and later his grandparents' home. This resulted in further CFS involvement; however, when in their care, he received approval to stay in non-familial high-risk homes, experienced physical violence when living with his girlfriend's family, and slept outside and in his car. He was also hospitalized for suicide ideation and reported significant psychiatric symptoms (e.g., hearing voices). At 17 years old, he became a teenage father and travelled to visit his daughter as often as possible when his girlfriend moved to another community. After multiple suspensions and behavioural plans that located all of the problems at school being within Circling Star's control to change, he withdrew from school.

A few days before his 18th birthday, Circling Star crashed the car he was driving into a ditch when driving with a high alcohol blood level. A neighbour saw the accident and called his parents. His parents performed CPR on him for over two hours before the ambulance appeared and Circling Star was pronounced dead at the scene. His mother, who was a nurse, discussed needing to change her work tasks because she was no longer able emotionally to perform CPR in emergency situations after this trauma. Circling Star's father has been unable to work since his son's death. The family continues to struggle with immense grief and loss.

Tina Fontaine (As Described in MACY, 2019)

As described by her family, Tina Fontaine was intelligent, had a big heart, loved jumping on trampolines, and wanted to have a career looking after children. Her family experienced severe intergenerational trauma rooted in colonialism, including residential schools, 60s scoop child welfare involvement, sexual exploitation, addiction, homelessness, and interpersonal violence. When Tina was born, her mother was still a teenager herself in CFS care. Tina's life included early CFS involvement and apprehensions, before being placed at age 5 with her paternal great aunt and uncle, who she called grandma and grandpa. Her father maintained a close relationship with her and her siblings until his death.

When Tina was 12 years old, her father was killed from a head injury during an assault, for which she never received a single therapy or traditional healing session. Her grief was profound and led to a number of mental health difficulties. Tina found ways to survive through substance

use, alcohol, and self-injury. After his death, she began to have a number of difficulties at school and her attendance plummeted. She was suspended in school for cannabis use and the school had no record of whether she returned to school after this suspension. She ran away from home multiple times and reconnected with her mother, who was coping from her own traumatic experiences through substance use. There were numerous reports of Tina being sexually exploited by adult men both online and in person, but little intervention by any of the systems involved in her life.

At age 15, CFS became involved in Tina's life again due to her running away in Winnipeg. She was found by Winnipeg Police Services screaming for help and being dragged down the street by an adult male; however, rather than provide her with support, they detained her for public intoxication and placed her into involuntary detox. Tina was in and out of detox, shelters, and placed by CFS in motels and hotels. Additionally, she was found in an alley downtown, unconscious and without any bottoms, having likely been sexually assaulted. Less than two weeks later, Tina's body was pulled from the Red River, found wrapped in a blanket and weighed down with rocks. Adult male Raymond Cormier was charged with 2nd degree murder but was later acquitted due to circumstantial evidence.

Tina was failed by multiple systems throughout her life, including education, CFS, Victim Services, Winnipeg Police Services, and others. In addition to her family being devastated by her death, there was a groundswell calling for community safety and systemic changes. A 24/7 safe space for youth in the North End was opened called Tina's Safe Haven, the community-based safety patrol called Bear Clan Patrol resurged in the North End, and Drag the Red was instituted as a grassroots search for missing and murdered Indigenous women in the Red River. In addition, this pressure from the community for systemic change pushed the federal government to launch the National Inquiry of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Girls in 2016.

Findings

(Racist) Constructions of the Problem Child

Both Tina Fontaine and Circling Star had some positive experiences and relationships in public schools, but also experienced difficulties. The analyzed MACY reports demonstrate how Tina Fontaine and Circling Star were constructed through school cumulative records, with their educational struggles and barriers being framed in ways that individualized and blamed these children. Discourses of deficiency and deviancy in school documentation (Janzen, 2022) construct the students' identities. The school documentation focused on the behavioural and characterological problems of Tina and Circling Star, and not on the structures, policies, or actions of adults in and out of school. Absent in both reports were examples of educators taking responsibility for engaging with these children or providing them with the appropriate academic and socio-emotional supports.

While some teachers reported that Tina was smart and shy, her grade 1 report card called her "lazy," "inattentive," and that she "needs to put in more effort." Not only did the teacher frame the academic concerns solely within the need for a young child to change her behaviours and improve her educational outcomes, but no academic support plan was documented. Unsurprisingly, Tina was retained for lack of academic progress two years later. After the murder of Tina's father and her increased emotional struggles and absence from school, Tina was described as being "disengaged from school," "withdrawn," "guarded," and "pull[ing] away," clearly labelling her attitude as the problem in the official record. Notably, little consideration or

responsiveness was noted in the documentation despite the trauma and grief she was experiencing. Further, the school social worker viewed Tina as "very guarded and skeptical of the social worker's intentions" (MACY, 2019, p. 28). Again, in these descriptions, all of the responsibility is located in Tina's own attitude, rather than in the school environment or in the actions of school employees who did not appear to provide meaningful academic or socio-emotional supports (MACY, 2019, p. 28). Similarly, the MACY report noted, "[T]here was no documentation of any sustained involvement of the social work, behaviour resource, or school counsellor in the school file or if any supports were provided to the family" (MACY, 2019, p. 61).

In contrast, Circling Star's early school documentation was very positive, with elementary and middle school report cards including comments like: "He was a pleasure to have in class," "good attitude towards his studies," and "very pleasant young man" (MACY, 2018, p. 15). Despite his previous academic success and positive descriptions, within a mere three weeks of entering high school, Circling Star was frequently described by Teacher X (the pseudonym assigned by MACY) as "disruptive," "rude and defiant," and requiring a threat assessment. The MACY report highlighted this marked change, writing, "Within three weeks of entering high school, the 'pleasant student' with the 'cooperative' attitude was transformed" (MACY, 2018, p. 18). As the dynamic between Teacher X and Circling Star escalated, discipline referrals framed his behaviour as "threatening" and "intimidating" Teacher X by using "gang signs and stare downs" (MACY, 2018, p. 28). The increasingly criminalized language to describe him is reflective of Ferguson's (2001) work, which demonstrated how punitive responses to racialized children often begin with the construction of a "bad child" who is marked for over-surveillance and punishment in school. Similarly, as Circling Star was increasingly labelled with the racist and gendered discourses of being "gang-related" and "dangerous," the school responses became increasingly punitive and carceral. It is notable that, despite the deviant language being used by Teacher X, not all educators labelled Circling Star in this way. For example, his high school math teacher wrote, "Circling Star works hard when he is in class. He is respectful of staff in the classroom. He is pleasant to work with and polite" (MACY, 2018, p. 33).

Despite this, the discourse of blame is also documented in the school's Behaviour Intervention Plan (BIP) that was created for Circling Star without his input. The BIP goals included being taught to understand/respect authority; replacement behaviours included completing his work and remaining in class; and behavioural reinforcements included educators literally patting Circling Star on the back. As the MACY report (2018) noted, "The behavior intervention plan [...] articulated the clear position of the school: Circling Star was to blame and must change his ways" (p. 50). Despite the differences of academic success depending on who Circling Star engaged with, the BIP did not include any actions or accommodations by the school, nor any changes from the adults in the school, especially with those with whom challenges were emerging, a problem that was also noted in the MACY (2018) report: "The onus was on Circling Star, the child, to change the situation without assigning tasks and supports to anyone else to increase his opportunities for success" (p. 24). Here, and throughout the MACY report, policy actors at the school framed the issues as located solely within Circling Star's behaviour problems and placed the responsibility for change on his shoulders, rather than considering how the school might respond differently to Circling Star with the purpose of providing him a more supportive environment for his care and success.

Furthermore, the executive summaries in both reports noted the importance of understanding these stories within the context of colonialism, residential schools, and

intergenerational trauma. Despite this, in the analysis and recommendations for educational policies provided in the MACY reports, there is a marked absence of the role that anti-Indigenous racism - both individual and structural - might have played in the ways these youth were constructed, the discretionary policy enactment decisions being made, or the impact of racism on their lives and deaths. We believe it is essential to name the role that anti-Indigenous racism, particularly for students who are involved with CFS, may have played in consciously and unconsciously influencing how policies were interpreted and enacted by educators.

Indeed, racist and gendered stereotypes are woven throughout the construction of both youth in school documentation and interviews. Circling Star was often described with language of "gang involved," "intimidation," "a threat," "aggression," and being "intoxicated." These descriptors are aligned with research on the colonial framing of Indigenous men as dangerous, criminal, gang members, and drunk (Comak, 2012; RCAP, 1996; TRC, 2015). The deviant criminalizing labels of Circling Star must be contextualized with him being bussed 40 minutes from his home community into a (presumed rural and largely white settler) school in a different community and his mother's concern that Circling Star was labelled and "singled out" as gang-involved upon entry due to his older brother's previous behaviour. Disturbingly, the persistence with which a single teacher - Teacher X - used these kinds of descriptions for Circling Star appeared to not only shape the ways in which he was perceived at school, but also directly contribute to his eventual suspension out of school altogether, as will be explored in detail below. Further, this labelling of Circling Star as the problem elided the numerous reports of him living in an unsafe environment, potentially being beaten by his girlfriend and her family, the shock of learning the father who raised him was not his biological father, and having symptoms of hearing voices. In other words, the racist labelling of Circling Star as perpetrator overdetermined the school's response and missed opportunities to humanely respond to his grief, loss, and trauma.

In the case of Tina Fontaine, the MACY report (2019) documented her history of being sexually exploited and frequently missing from school prior to her disappearance and death. The school social worker noted Tina's "high-risk behaviours online" (p. 61) and two instances of running away but located the problem or "risk" in Tina's behaviour rather than in her exploitation and victimization. The MACY (2019) report reads, "Despite being aware of the risk of harm that Tina was experiencing, and the desperation of Tina's grandma, there was no evidence in the school records or the child welfare records that the school independently contacted CFS with any concerns, nor did it appear the school worked to mobilize other community resources which may have assisted" (p. 62). The school's lack of response is aligned with research on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S), which articulated how the association of Indigenous women with (sexual) immorality constructs them as vilified, culpable, and ultimately disposable (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2018; Razak, 2016). It also mirrors findings that the police regularly diminish the seriousness of MMIWG2S cases by suggesting victims are at fault for their experiences of violence due to their "risky choices" (Flores & Román Alfaro, 2023; Green, 2017; Razak, 2020). It does not appear that the educators or school social worker recognized Tina as a victim of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, nor did they respond in a trauma-informed way to these documented "high-risk" concerns. This absence serves as a possible example of broader anti-Indigenous and sexist constructions of Indigenous women and the wilful ignorance of their victimhood.

Use of Exclusionary Discipline

While exclusionary discipline was used with both Tina[3] and Circling Star, the repeated and extensive use of these punitive measures is most pronounced in the educational experiences of Circling Star. This is reflective of research that demonstrates the gendered and racialized nature of exclusionary discipline, and therefore, we have focused on Circling Star's experiences in our analysis (e.g., Dei et al., 1997; Solomon & Palmer, 2006). Circling Star's experience with exclusionary discipline reflected his significant shift from academic engagement and interest in school to his eventual punishment and "push-out" (Dei et al., 1997) from school. Circling Star was suspended for more than 90 days during his first two years of high school, received a suspension "until further notice" in his third year, and was finally pushed out of school in his fourth year. His experiences mirror the findings from a number of studies that have pointed to the ways in which alienation, hostility, and carceral and punitive responses towards racialized students are factors in being pushed out of Canadian schools (Dei, 1996; Dei et al., 1997; Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Solomon & Palmer, 2006).

The MACY report noted that almost all of the suspensions were initiated by one teacher, Teacher X, who the report writers described as "authoritarian" and "punitive" (MACY, 2018, p. 19). Salole and Abdulle (2015) found that, "relatively minor infractions can set into motion a series of negative events for youth participants that result in them not returning to school" (p. 150); in Circling Star's case, all the discipline referrals made by Teacher X began as minor infractions. For example, during the first three weeks of school Teacher X referred Circling Star to the principal for infractions like missing a book and getting out of his seat to retrieve it, wearing a hat, or being late to class. Importantly, Circling Star's first suspension resulted from a referral that was explicitly colonial in nature when he refused to stand for *O Canada*. Fourteen of the 19 times Circle Star was suspended involved Teacher X, with discipline referrals escalating from similar minor infractions related to Circling Star's "disrespect" to allegations of "verbal abuse" "aggressive attitude," and "threats of violence" (p. 49). When reading the MACY report, it appeared as though Teacher X surveilled Circling Star for possible infractions and reacted to his actions from a punitive and carceral logic, rather than one based in an ethic of care.

The MACY report highlighted the failure of the principal to work with Circling Star and Teacher X to ask questions about the relational problem between them and work on the co-created problems that were present and growing. These conversations are never documented as having taken place. Instead, "suspensions were handed out repeatedly, creating a picture of suspension as the 'go-to' strategy for dealing with this specific interpersonal conflict" (MACY, 2018, p. 50). Importantly, Solole and Abdulle's (2015) qualitative research found that disciplinary approaches in Canadian schools result in marginalized and racialized youth feeling unsupported and not trusted, interferes with their ability to build relationships, and distracts them from learning. In this case, the repeated suspensions clearly did not result in a positive behavioural change nor a resolution in the conflict between Teacher X and Circling Star, yet they continued to be utilized by the principal. The extensive referrals and decision to utilize exclusionary discipline with Circling Star is an example of the principal's use of his discretionary power to punish rather than problem solve. This enactment might also be understood within the context of the gendered nature of anti-

[3] For example, Tina was suspended for cannabis use at school, reportedly twice. Despite this, the school records lacked any documented assessment for addiction or harm reduction services. There was also no record of attempting to connect Tina with any community supports or efforts to engage her in school.

Indigenous racism that often paints Indigenous males as dangerous criminals (Comak, 2012; RCAP, 1996; TRC, 2015). During this first suspension, Circling Star set a fire that results in his first criminal charge, reflective of common patterns of exclusionary discipline being linked to the school-to-prison pipeline (Hemez et al., 2020); a connection which is also articulated in the MACY report.

Further, the academic plan for Circling Star when suspended was to give him independent work to do at home, a policy enactment decision that, aside from abdicating the school's responsibility for his education, resulted in him falling further behind academically and alienating him from possible school success. After a series of exclusionary discipline measures and escalating conflict at school, Circling Star came to school intoxicated and shoved the principal, resulting in a five-day suspension by the school and a six-week suspension by the superintendent. While policy called for Circling Star to have a reentry meeting in December, this did not happen until February, resulting in a three-and-a-half month absence. When interviewed, his parents noted, "They said it was determined Circling Star would not be able to re-enter classes in December since he would have been so far behind his classmates after such a long suspension" (MACY, 2018, p. 25). When he eventually returned to school, Circling Star was required to sign a contract about his behaviour expectations that included the following language: "Should I [Circling Star], fail to meet any of the conditions as outlined above, then [School Division Policy] (2009), will be followed and I may be asked to withdraw from all classes and jeopardize future attempts to re-register or be put on an alternative program setting, home placement" (MACY, 2018, p. 26). Despite Circling Star's repeated returns to school and increasing needs for support, teachers and the principal did little to encourage Circling Star's school re-entry. After a final suspension in 2014, Circling Star did not return to school. This mirrors Fine's (1991) findings that racialized students who are pushed out of school rarely, if ever, experience school actors trying to convince them to stay. It similarly aligns with Dei et al.'s (1997) findings that teachers commonly absolve themselves from any accountability in student drop-out and instead blame the student's individual "bad choices."

Circling Star's experiences are a clear example of the importance of understanding the ways in which policy alone does not determine what happens to a child; instead, policy enactment by educators plays a critical role. For example, a list of infractions was provided in the school's Code of Conduct policy, but teachers are left with discretion about how to intervene if these are violated and suspensions are the decision of the principal. Additionally, while the school division articulated a discipline policy that implied that alternative, positive, and proactive strategies should be prioritized and exclusionary suspensions should be used as the measure of last resort, the principal chose to use suspensions early and frequently and few alternatives were provided. As reported, "Unfortunately, in Circling Star's case, it seems the favoured strategy for addressing his behaviours was by excluding him from school through suspensions, with little attention paid to the sadness and trauma underlying this behaviour" (MACY, 2018, p. 10). Despite the criticisms of Teacher X and the principal's use of suspensions, the education recommendations made by MACY to have more training and a review of discipline policies fail to address the role of teachers or principals as policy actors impacting children's lives and ignore the ethical responsibilities of individual educators to care about the lives and educational successes of Indigenous children.

Missing From and Missed at School

While Circling Star's presence in school was marked with hyper-visibility for surveillance and punishment out of school, Tina appeared to be largely unseen and rendered invisible, even as

she increasingly disappeared from school. As Dei et al. (1997) found, many racialized students report a lack of connection at school, writing, "Central to this view is what could be called a 'network of disinterest,' that is, a sense that nobody is interested in, cares about, or has worthy expectations of the drop-out" (p. 72). For example, Tina's attendance history included several years of chronic and severe absenteeism in her early education, even before her precipitous drop in attendance after her father's murder from 83% in 2012-2013 to 12% in 2013-2014, with no documented supports or interventions offered. As noted in the MACY report, "attendance was an issue and there was little effort demonstrated to re-engage her through her sadness" (MACY, 2019, p. 9).

According to the MACY report, the school remained unclear about when exactly Tina stopped attending school and if her withdrawal from school was connected to a suspension for cannabis use. As reported, "In speaking with the school principal, he was unable to indicate the length of suspension and suggested to our office that according to his recollection, Tina may have stopped attending school altogether at this time" (MACY, 2019, p. 31). The lack of recollection of Tina is perhaps reflective of the ways in which she was missed by many of the adults who were meant to care for her. This depiction of the invisibility of Tina aligns with previous findings that children in child welfare are erased through the enactment of policy in schools (Janzen, 2022).

Despite Tina losing her father, her checkered attendance history, a dramatic drop in attendance, and two suspensions due to cannabis use, the school and school social worker repeated the same three ineffective goals from the previous year: "Continue to try to connect with Tina on a regular basis; continue to check in and provide support to Tina's grandma and grandpa; and continue to advocate for therapy through victim support" (MACY, 2019, p. 35). Despite her two suspensions for cannabis use at school, there is no documentation about Tina's drug use and no assessment for harm reduction or addiction services was provided. There was also no record that the school attempted to connect Tina with any other local community support or services, nor did they attempt any other approach to re-engage her in school, despite her growing absence. The language of the goals of "continue to try to connect with Tina" feels significant; a half-hearted attempt to make a connection with a student that was ultimately missed.

Importantly, many of Tina's experiences of being missed at school mirror her later experiences of going missing from CFS, shelters, the police, and her eventual death. While analysis of other public services discussed in Tina's MACY report are outside of the scope of this article, it is notable that her experiences of being missed at school are repeated in other domains, including Victim Services, potentially an indication of a larger pattern of the gendered nature of anti-Indigenous racism that often paints Indigenous women as dismissible (Flores & Román Alfaro, 2023) and disposable (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2018; Razak, 2016). As Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2016) wrote, the "violent indifference" of settlers allows the racialized and gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people to continue. The school and educators, as portrayed in the MACY report, seem to reflect this kind of "violent indifference" and may have played a role in Tina becoming a MMIWG2S victim. We are left to imagine what might have been different if educators had noticed her presence at– and her absences from– school. While it is impossible to know with certainty, we do believe if the educators enacted policy and responded to these children more ethically, this might have made a difference.

Wâhkôhtowin: An Ethical Responsibility for Care and Relationality

When analyzing the MACY reports, we were struck by the repeated call for school officials to follow existing policies and by the recommendations for changes to education policies. While of course these are important critiques, we remain unconvinced that simply following policy (whether existing or reformed) would have resulted in a different outcome for Circling Star or Tina Fontaine given the ways in which discretion results in different policy implementation (Ball et al., 2011). Largely missing from the MACY reports were examples of an ethic of care being demonstrated by those who work with students, especially those experiencing difficulty in their lives. Based on the reports, we see very little effort by the educators to support either child, despite this being the educators' responsibility and especially given the multitude of indicators that both children were profoundly sad and deeply struggling.

The absence of documented teacher attempts to create connections and relationships with either child are marked, particularly given that the first principle of the Manitoba Teachers' Society Code of Professional Practice (2014) states that, "A Member's first professional responsibility is to the Member's students" (n.p.). Both MACY reports included heartbreaking examples of the lack of educators' relationships with these youth. For example, Tina's grandmother told the MACY report writers that she "made the decision to keep Tina home in the spring of 2014 and for the remainder of the school year to work on her emotional wellbeing and return to school in the fall" (MACY, 2019, p. 35). This decision highlighted how Tina's grandmother did not view school as a safe place for Tina, nor a place where she was able to receive socio-emotional support. Additionally, the school record included an apology note from Circling Star that reads in part: "Right now I feel as if no one cares about me so I don't care about anything…. I can't even go back to school in [redacted] because of my mouth. And my mom tryed [sic] so hard to get me back in school, and I messed it up for myself. Nobody told me to write an apology letter to you, I just know I messed it up for myself and to be honest I don't feel very good" (MACY, 2018, p. 36). While this note is a clear attempt to repair and call for help, there was no documented response from any teachers or the principal to Circling Star's apology. Despite known colonial, intergenerational, and familial traumas and ongoing child welfare involvement, the educators in both cases did not offer trauma-informed, culturally-appropriate responses nor successfully engage either youth in school.

An important exception to this absence of relationship is the connection Circling Star felt with his Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) counsellor. Circling Star repeatedly met with this counsellor for years, for a total of 36 sessions, including coming to school to see her when he was suspended. As reported, "Our investigation revealed clear evidence of the positive rapport that the [AFM] counsellor was able to establish with Circling Star, and this relationship evidently had meaning for Circling Star as well, for he continued to seek out this counsellor" (MACY, 2018, p. 9). Despite the MACY report's criticisms of the approaches the AFM counsellor used and her decision to follow AFM policy by not reporting content from Circling Star's sessions with his family, his relationship appeared to be an important anchor that kept him connected to school for as long as he did, even in the face of repeated suspensions.

Based on the overall absence of findings of relationality between educators and these youth, we are interested in what an ethical response of care might do in terms of helping Indigenous children with child welfare involvement feel an increased sense of connection at school. Ahmed (2013) describes the politics of citation as "a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies"

(n.p.). Drawing on Ahmed's work, Tuck et al. (2015) urged academics to consider the ways in which citation positions some knowledge and groups over others and urged us to stop erasing Indigenous knowledges and scholars in our writing. Similarly, Battiste (1998) explained that cognitive imperialism works through the education system to legitimize a Eurocentric worldview and to devalue Indigenous knowledges and worldviews. Because the experiences analyzed in this paper highlight the ways in which settler colonialism, carcerality, and anti-Indigenous racism are embedded in the experiences of these students, we felt a responsibility as settlers to be rooted as much as possible in an Indigenous worldview and ethic in our calls for change. With this in mind, we made the intentional and political decision to center the nêhiyaw (Cree) conceptualization of wâhkôhtowin and to cite Indigenous scholars when looking towards the needed changes in education policy enactment. While we recognize as non-Indigenous researchers there is the potential risk of appropriating Indigenous knowledge, we come to this attempt with humbleness and transparency about our beginner understanding of wâhkôhtowin. We believe wâhkôhtowin offers important alternative instruction for settler educators that is rooted in relationality, reciprocity, and care.

Wâhkôhtowin describes the interconnectedness of all things, sometimes translated to "all my relations" (Jarvis, 2019). As an ethical guideline, wâhkôhtowin centers kinship, relationship, reciprocity, trust, and collective responsibility (Campbell, 2007; Donald, 2021; Jarvis, 2019; O'Reilly-Scanlon et al., 2004). Wâhkôhtowin provides instructions on "how to conduct yourself as a good relative" (Donald, 2021, p. 58), urging us to understand that all of our own health and survival are wrapped up in the health and survival of others, including between all humans and more-than-humans. In other words, we must not simply know that we are all related, but we ought to behave like we are related (Jarvis, 2019; Wildcat, 2018).

Donald (2021) explicitly ties the wisdom of wâhkôhtowin to K-12 education, arguing that part of our responsibility is to consider whether our schools and pedagogical choices are rooted in colonial logics or in kinship. The MACY reports demonstrate the deep need to prioritize establishing strong relationships with all students, particularly those who face marginalization due to anti-Indigenous racism and the colonial child welfare system. While we cannot know what different outcomes, if any, might have occurred for Tina Fontaine or Circling Star if wâhkôhtowin had been used as the guiding principle for all those who interacted with them at school, we were struck by how profoundly missed, punished, and pushed out - rather than cared for - both of these children appeared to be. Applying Donald's (2021) analysis, we believe educators ought to consider whether or not their policy enactments are embodying the principle of seeing all students as their relation. Rather than enacting policies that might technically respond to the situation, we call on educators to consider the ways in which a relational lens might shift how they interpret and implement policy. How might the experiences for children like Tina Fontaine and Circling Star be different if educators asked themselves: Would you want this policy interpreted in this way for your relative?

Alternative Fictionalized Case Vignette

In an effort to imagine what it would look like for educators working with Indigenous students involved in child welfare to operate from an ethical responsibility of care and from our understanding of the principles of wâhkôhtowin, we conclude by returning to the fictionalized case vignette that opened this article in order to offer an alternative. In this reimagined case vignette, we draw from our own experiences working with children in schools, from previous data that demonstrates the importance of reducing stigma and increasing hospitality and relationship in

schools for students in child welfare (Janzen, 2022; Janzen et al., 2020), and from spending time discussing imaginatively what else could be possible if educators lived the principles of wâhkôhtowin (Donald, 2021; Jarvis, 2019). We urge all educators, particularly those who are settlers, to critically consider how we each might actively choose to enact policy differently and to think holistically, creatively, and most importantly, relationally to create school environments that truly put our responsibility to students at the center of our work. Indeed, these children are in *our* care and we need to act as though that is true.

I am so hyped! When I got to my new school, there were two students that are from my home community that were assigned to greet me and walk me around the school. They are called "The Welcome Wagon." LOL! They gave me the APB on the teachers, programs, clubs, and cultural programs. It was awesome. The next day was like a celebration. They invited my worker, my foster parents, and the school even got my Mom to be there! I was really excited to see her and show her around. That was great - we started with a welcome in my language and my mother told them all about how I loved math and drawing when I was young.

First report card in a new school and I was scared–but this was different. A real change. They put me in an advanced math class and even though it freaked me out, I got a student tutor and managed to do pretty well. Last week all the kids in care in the school met to make lunch together and the day after that was the Art Club Gallery. I love being busy. In one of my drawings, I used a pattern from my home community and it was displayed in the gallery! I'm so proud of myself. I never imagined putting one of my own works on display for everyone to see. The art teacher has been awesome and our daily chats about what's happening in the art world helped me make connections between my community and what's happening now in my life.

Also, the guidance counselor is so chill. They are always there when I need them, they even check in with me every once in a while, mostly to see if I need anything, if I'm aware of upcoming events and programming or so I can call my CFS worker. I haven't missed a meeting in a few months now–new record! Even last semester, I got caught smoking on school grounds, everyone was called and I left there with an earful of advice, and a handful of pamphlets. I got in trouble at home but I didn't miss a day! I went to this info session on scholarships and housing just for kids in care–that whole aging out thing freaks me out. But I'm feeling pretty good. I may take them up on quitting smoking. I think they really see me as a leader here, they even asked me to be part of the Welcome Wagon. Wow–that would make my Mom proud.

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