

**kapītipis ē-pimohteyahk: Aboriginal Street
Youth in Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Montreal**

By

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Abstract

"kapītipis ē-pimohteyahk: Aboriginal street youth in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal" seeks to gain insight into life on city streets for Aboriginal youth: why they go to the street, how they survive, what kinds of services they are more likely to use, what changes they envision for services provided to them, and finally to recommend corresponding changes in service delivery and preventative measures. The primary interest is **their** perceptions of **their** experiences on the street — as Aboriginal people — as much as possible in **their** own voice, and in such a way as to contextualize their lives in Canadian structural colonial history and in modern urban terms.

Utilizing a critical case study method, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine youth, ages 14-20, currently involved in urban street life and two people who have lived on the street in the past. To contextualize their experiences, several parents of street youth and street services personnel in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal were interviewed, although with less depth. Each city has an Aboriginal population in excess of 35,000.

The literature on street youth in general is growing, but a paucity of information exists on Aboriginal street youth experience in Canada, even though they are over-represented in the street youth population in most cities. By placing Aboriginal street youth in the larger context of mainstream society and the urban environment, and by highlighting the role of current and historical structural impacts, this research has been able to access a holistic view of their lives.

The interviews suggest that Aboriginal street youth run to the streets for many of the same reasons as any other street youth, and once they get there their methods of survival are also somewhat the same as those of many runaways. Their cultural backgrounds, history, and structural conditions at point of origin are, however, different from non-Aboriginal street youth. These conditions make them subject to harsher conditions in state care situations (a common entry-point to street life) and on the street. Many experience overt racism, in addition to the stigmatization that street people encounter, in their everyday lives. The youth interviewed told of identity confusion

and self hatred, dislocation from home and surrogate parent communities, difficulty in reunification, and ignorance about Aboriginal rights, history and culture.

The nature of the relationship between Aboriginality and being a young street person is clearly established in that ethnicity was a salient factor in the antecedents to street life and in the conditions once on the street. Interviews with former street persons suggest that race and culture continue to be salient in the process of leaving the street and in staying off the street.

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The pseudonyms of the street youth and former street youth who participated in this research are as follows (in order of presentation): Vancouver — Etah, Joanne, Karen, and Missy; Winnipeg — Noella/Travis, Axle, Jean-Marc, and Dale; Montreal — Natasha and Charnelle. Two sets of parents were interviewed in Vancouver and Winnipeg. All the agency personnel are gratefully acknowledged in each of the cities who took the time out of their busy schedules to assist us in our endeavour. They are too numerous to list.

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children walking the moon

blind into oblivion
lost with no excuse with no remorse
beating the daughters torture force
speaking with ignorance and greed
teachers screaming on their knees
subliminal messages on TV
jesus loves you child
pray child pray till you bleed
shut up and take your place
of disgrace in the line of conservative voice
face it life is a bottomless day
the human race is a dead race
walking as zombies from nine to five
rotting away with society's lies
surrounded in concrete walls
with no will but to fall
paving over insanity
reflected maize of vanity
cold dark ways in the screams and world of lonely streets
day to day begging, preaching
life's beseech
a buskers quote of a sinking boat
rejected from our homes
and wanted from our stolen wombs
pushed to our door of doom
a cold dark room of misery
the ministry is looking down at you
your unscrewed caged pet
walking the circle of the moon

etah 1993

Chapter 1. Introduction

"kapītipis ē-pimohteyahk: Aboriginal street youth in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal" uses case studies to produce a critical descriptive interpretation of the experience of Aboriginal youth who have chosen, for whatever reason, to embrace life on the streets of three major cities in Canada. The title translates from Cree into "We walk all night." This title was chosen because the youth in this study told us that during the day they could always find somewhere warm to sleep where they felt safe. During the night, however, when the temperature fell and when they had nowhere to sleep, they had to walk all night in order to keep warm and safe. The allusion to night walking also honours Etah's poem, "children walking the moon," at the beginning of the study.

Utilizing a critical case study method, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine youth, ages 14-20, currently involved in urban street life and two people who have lived on the street in the past. To contextualize their experience, several parents of street youth and street services personnel in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal were interviewed, although with less depth. Each city has an Aboriginal population in excess of 35,000.

Why does social science, in general, and Aboriginal governments, in particular, need a sociological perspective on youth street life that is specific to Aboriginal youth? Social science shows a large gap in the literature on Aboriginal street youth experience and conditions. For Aboriginal people, the information is necessary because we are unique in Canada for at least three reasons. First, Aboriginal people are "people of the land." We have no other homeland to identify with — we have been dispossessed in our own homeland. This implies not only our generalized sense of homelessness — not only inherent alienation due to our collective dispossession — but to inherent Indigenous rights associated with nation to nation treaties. This means our issues ought to be paramount in Canada and certainly we ought to have information about our children.

Secondly, we have a unique world view that permeates our varied cultures and shapes our experience. Marginalization of Aboriginal culture leaves consequences for youth identity – they

must grow up in a world where there is little to look back on with pride, referring to our obscured history and marginalized culture, and very little to look forward to in the future, when they are faced with current poor socio-economic statistics reflected in many Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal youth, then, many of whom have been brought up in two worlds, find it hard to understand the contradictions presented to them in foster care, institutional practice and social service delivery, on or off the street.

Thirdly, our experience, historically and presently, is mediated by colonial policy and practice embedded in legislation which regulates and permeates our experience on a daily basis. The structural barriers embedded in colonial existence not only affect the colonized, they affect the colonial society and how they behave toward the members of the colonized group, especially its weakest members. The three conditions named above result in a perceived separateness from the norm of multicultural Canadian society, both from within ourselves, our nations and from the mainstream perspective. The remnants of colonialism, such as the Indian Act, the reservation system, and the over representation in social pathology statistics make us more visible, more overtly affected by and more vulnerable to structural, cultural and attitudinal racism. Presumably, then, street life would have different impacts on Aboriginal youth than on non-Aboriginal youth. We need, then, to explore how these three unique conditions manifest in Aboriginal street youth existence.

Children and youth who do not have the benefit of parental or extended familial protection are society's most vulnerable group. This applies to Aboriginal youth on the street. In a time of cultural renewal and movement toward self determination it is necessary to identify voids in our knowledge base about the conditions of those in need. We must also identify gaps in the social service delivery system. And finally, emancipatory treatment and prevention measures, expressed from an Aboriginal point of view, need to form the basis of solutions that address the roots of the post-colonialist problems in the entire Aboriginal community.

Terminology

First some discussion is warranted on concepts used in the analyses of Aboriginal experience. Colonization and decolonization are terms frequently used in commentary. Since colonization is the acquiring of lands which are governed by a "mother" country and where the colonizer's culture, structures and attitudes are externally imposed, then decolonization is the reversal of the imposed governance along with reclamation of culture, structures and identity. Racism is another concept which is important to explain our experience as Aboriginal peoples. Racism encompasses the structural manifestation of the ideology that one race is superior to another (particularly based on colour differentiation) expressed in repressive policy, legislation, and institutions. Further, racism means the entire spectrum of the impact of race ideology: from the intra-psychic superiority it bestows on one race and the internalized inferiority embraced by the marginalized group; to the concomitant behaviours produced in both which result in the differential distribution of power, status and material goods to the privileged and the oppressed. Racism awareness in this broad definition is becoming aware of race ideology and its history, how it is manifest in the structures of modern society, the impacts on various groups, how it is upheld and perpetuated, and one's personal position in the continuum from privileged to oppressed.

Culture and identity are terms that I use to explore self image as an Aboriginal person. By culture I mean the entire expression of Aboriginal life produced by world view, environment, and community. This definition encompasses distinct outward manifestations in food, clothing, ritual, and art, for instance, and the inward expression in thought, language, symbolism, relationship and spirituality. Aboriginal identity is the condition of linking one's being with a world view and the community it produces. For instance, a person may identify with an extended family concept, an idea that everything has a spirit, with distinct regionally prepared indigenous food items, or ceremonies, clothing, music, and art, all of which might be based on an underlying philosophy of the medicine wheel or the long house (depending on the culture).

In this research the term "street youth" is used (Marlene Webber (1991) uses the term "street kids"). The youth are differentiated from "street people" or the homeless. The persons in this research are young people who have come from various circumstances and have been on the streets for varying periods of time and who fall between the ages of 14 and 20. Street people, on the other hand, would be persons over 20 years old and live in the downtown core, sometimes as homeless individuals, but often they inhabit the cheap skid row housing sprinkled in between the bars. Street people, then, would not be the concern of child welfare authorities or the young offenders' act and would not necessarily qualify for street youth services. The persons shown in "Life Down Here" (Smith & Smith, 1994), a film about Vancouver's Aboriginal street life, could be called street people. The "homeless" again are differentiated by age and by the reasons some people find themselves without a home. Belcher and DiBlasio (1990) write about the difficulties in the definition and population assessment of homeless persons. Many stay with friends or they are in jail or mental hospitals. Many are simply economically unable to afford housing and some have made the back alleys their permanent home (similar to some street youth). The lines are blurred at the upper age range which was used in this study because homelessness, mental disability or illness, and severe addiction may be present (in any combination). For instance, there was an eighteen year old woman who was severely alcohol (and other drugs?) addicted and who also lived with older street men in the back alleys in the westend of Vancouver.

Urbanization and Aboriginal youth

Urbanization is the process of moving from a rural environment and adapting to an urban milieu. Most of the literature on urbanization includes migration under its umbrella. In 1900 13% of the global population lived in urban centres, by the year 2000 this figure is expected to rise to 48% (Smith, 1991). A Native Council of Canada Socio-demographic Project Report states that the Canada-wide off-reserve Aboriginal population percentage has increased to 80% (Valentine, 1993). Migration patterns vary and are affected by a number of variables including: the proximity of reserves

to urban centres, the size of the reserve community, multiple forms of mass media that are delivered to the reserve and promote urban lifestyles, road access and the political and institutional development of the reserve community (Gerber, 1980). Aboriginal people face the immense transition to urban life for many reasons. Most often they seek resources such as employment, housing, education or health services that are not available in their home communities. Often people are leaving an economy unable to sustain them because of environmental degradation, underdevelopment and broken corporate promises. Sometimes women and children are forced off the reservation because of family violence. Aboriginal people also migrate to the city simply to follow a dream of joining in the prosperity of mainstream Canada.

Many young children and youth enter the urban environment through the child welfare system, some as ex-foster children and ex-adoptees, and others as escapees from detention facilities. They gravitate to the city because their community ties have been broken or the city provides an excellent hiding place. In any case it is the only place to go. Yet others are progeny of urban reserves where an immense invisible gulf separates them from mainstream urban Canada. Ironically, the latter are underrepresented in the street youth population, according to street youth service personnel.

Historically, the urbanization push is promoted by the political agenda of assimilation which has been the "central pillar to Canadian Indian policy" (Ponting, 1986:25; Armitage, 1995). Given that existing resources on the reserves are limited in their ability to employ, house and service growing populations, significant numbers of Aboriginal people feel their only option is to move to an urban centre. The advocacy of mass urbanization was central to the Hawthorn report of 1966 which pointed to the limited resource capabilities of the reserve communities and population growth as dominant factors in this trend. Frideres (1993) states that another significant catalyst was the post-war transition from an agriculture-based North American economy to industrialisation. This shift

forced Aboriginal people who depended on employment in agriculture to go to urban centres to seek employment.

Beginning in the early sixties, then, migration to urban centres was significant; it then declined to levels comparable to non-Aboriginal populations by the mid-eighties (Siggner, 1986). The movement from the small towns and rural reservations to the large urban centres marks the decline of special status and the erosion of traditional cultural and community ties. This point is illustrated when we examine statistics on language maintenance displayed in table I.

Table I: Percentage of People Who Maintain the Use of Their Language (Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1993).

	Adults (15 +)	Children (> 15)
Inuit	75 %	67 %
North American Indian On Reserve or Settlements	65 %	44 %
North American Indian Off Reserve	23 %	9 %
Métis	18 %	9 %

The same comparison can be made with respect to people over 15 years old who participate in traditional Aboriginal activities. Again, it is clear that the move to urban centres is a potential threat to cultural maintenance. In short, if language and traditional activities are gauges to cultural maintenance, these charts graphically depict the potential dissolution of culture and tradition that results from migration out of reserves and rural settlements. The practices of people in Inuit communities, which are generally more isolated northern communities, and North American Indians living on reserves or settlements are in sharp contrast to the practices of those living outside these cultural enclaves.

Table II: Percentage of people (15+) Who Participate in Traditional Aboriginal Activities (Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1993).

Inuit	74.1 %
N.A.I. On Reserves or Settlements	65.2 %
N.A.I. Off Reserve	44.8 %
Métis	39.8 %

Statistics on urban Aboriginal people are questionable for a number of different reasons, beginning with the definition of the membership of the Aboriginal population — this definition varies depending on the sponsors of the study. For example, some studies use statistics for registered Indians published by Indian and Northern Affairs and generalize to the population of all Aboriginal people. Additionally, in 1986 Statistics Canada made changes in their census taking procedures with respect to Aboriginal people; though the new questions around ethnic origins and identity are more descriptive, the procedural change does not allow for comparisons of years before and after the switch so it is difficult to chart the changes in urban migration. A comparison of the 1986 and 1991 census does show a consistent growth in urban populations of Aboriginal people in all three of the focus cities for this study: Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

One other statistic that is telling for the 1991 census year is the mobility rates; for Aboriginal people 15 per cent of the population (15 years and older) moved in the twelve month period before the census taking as compared to 16 per cent of the total Canadian population. Of the Aboriginal people who said they did move in the past year, half of them moved within the same community. For Aboriginal children ages 1 to 14, only 13 per cent had moved within the year leading up to the census. In short, Aboriginal people presently are no more mobile than the general population (Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1993).

Another difficulty with obtaining accurate demographic information concerns the range of entrenchment within the urban centre. Frideres (1993) suggests that many Aboriginal people leave

their home community more as a result of necessity than out of an attraction to the city; in short, they seek to exploit urban centres for meeting their employment, housing and education needs but maintain strong links with their home community. This observation is evident in Nagler (1971) and Gurstein (1977). Both authors present continuums that reflect the variation in levels of integration in, or commitment to, urban centres. For example, the transient or vagabond is at the low end of the commitment scale; people in this category are short term (one month) residents who are constantly in transit. The migrant or seasonal worker is the next category; this person is a longer term (six months) resident but maintains a high degree of social contact with people from their home community. The resident or transitional (two years) is more likely to be employed or engaged in an education program. The urban settler is a person who was born in the city or has lived there for more than two years and is accordingly more entrenched in the urban environment in terms of social contacts, employment, housing and use of services. The settler's ties to the reserve are minimal; they may still feel committed but only visit their home community sporadically, possibly once or twice a year (Price, 1979).

Successful urban adaptation is dependent on many socio-economic and cultural factors. These include appropriate job and housing location, and cultural adaptation, which in turn are dependent on urban societal receptivity to the Aboriginal person. In other words, the degree of racial barriers present for the individual or family are significant factors for positive urbanization. In much of the research racism is not taken into consideration, instead Aboriginal people are blamed for failed attempts. For example, Price (1979) writes:

Successful urban adaptation depends on the personality and preparedness of the individual for urban life and on the nature of the town or city that the individual migrates to. Any poorly prepared individual from a rural background will undergo cultural shock and trauma on migrating into a city, unless there is an excellent system of institutions to receive and educate that person in urban culture. This individual preparedness can be somewhat predicted according to the evolutionary level of the societal heritage of the individual Indian. There are, of course, widespread non-evolutionary elements that influence this preparedness as well, such as historical elements (e.g., length of White contact); ecological elements (e.g., urban proximity); and the urbanization of reserve life through the incorporation of reserves in nation-

wide networks of transportation, communication, education, health services, and so forth (229).

This study on Aboriginal street youth could easily focus on all of the categories as many of these youth are extremely transient, moving often between urban centres and reserve communities throughout Canada and the United States. They are also not a homogenous group: apart from the fact that these young people come from a multitude of Aboriginal cultures, they vary with respect to the bond they have with their cultural identity. Many have been wards of the state from a very young age so their ties to their home reserve were never established, others grew up in their reserve community and so their relationship is still very strong, as is their internalized experience of their cultural heritage.

Beyond the length of time and the level of entrenchment in urban life, Aboriginal people face a multitude of challenges in making the transition to the city. Cultural differences exist between Aboriginal and mainstream cultures in addition to the rural and urban contrast in lifestyle. Research also consistently shows that accessing employment, though one of the leading reasons for moving to the city, is highly difficult. Barriers of racism, lower education levels and lack of marketable employment skills for the urban environment contribute significantly to this fact. As well, mainstream policy makers and analysts have assumed that Aboriginal peoples are a homogenous culture when in fact their cultural diversity is a major stumbling block to effective urban community development. Without a sufficient level of cohesion within the urban Aboriginal community there has been a lack of institutional development and ensuing service delivery to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal people (Frideres, 1993; Nagler, 1971; Zeitoun, 1969).

A new trend in the 1980s and 1990s is the appearance of Aboriginal street youth in growing numbers (based mostly on estimates of people who work with them). Street workers, in particular ex-street persons, have experienced an incredible increase in the numbers of Aboriginal youth on the street and correspondingly a worsening of conditions for those who must survive on the urban street.

The urbanization literature addresses adult urban migration primarily and not the young people whose principal identifying factors are: they are without consistent adult supervision, they lack sufficient shelter, they must fend for a living on the street and so, inevitably, they become a part of the street culture. This study looks, with some depth, into the experience of Aboriginal youth on the streets of Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal.

The context of the study

A brief treatment of colonial history and review of general street youth research provide the macro vision of the Aboriginal street youth phenomena. This is followed by some discussion of antecedents to street life which in part describe street youth relationships with care givers and institutions (which precede or precipitate flight from supervised care). Thirdly, consequences of life on the street and fourthly services for street youth are summarily discussed. This discourse is illustrated in figure 1 to show a maldevelopment of a process circle that should be healthy. In a healthy cycle the west direction would be represented by vision, the south direction by relationships, the west by respect (and self respect) and the north direction by movement and action or appropriate solutions.

i. Macro view: Colonial history

Oral history indicates that in precontact times (and in more remote regions until quite recently) Aboriginal childhood and youth were preparatory phases for adulthood and elder status. These phases were parts of a cycle of life where children and youth learned from observation and mentorship through extended family behaviour and elder's teachings to become responsible and respectful adults. The age range in this research (14-20) would have straddled the phases of prepuberty preparation and early adulthood/parenthood. With the advent and impact of colonization many changes have taken place which have predisposed many Aboriginal families to become negative statistics in the collage of Canadian national shame.

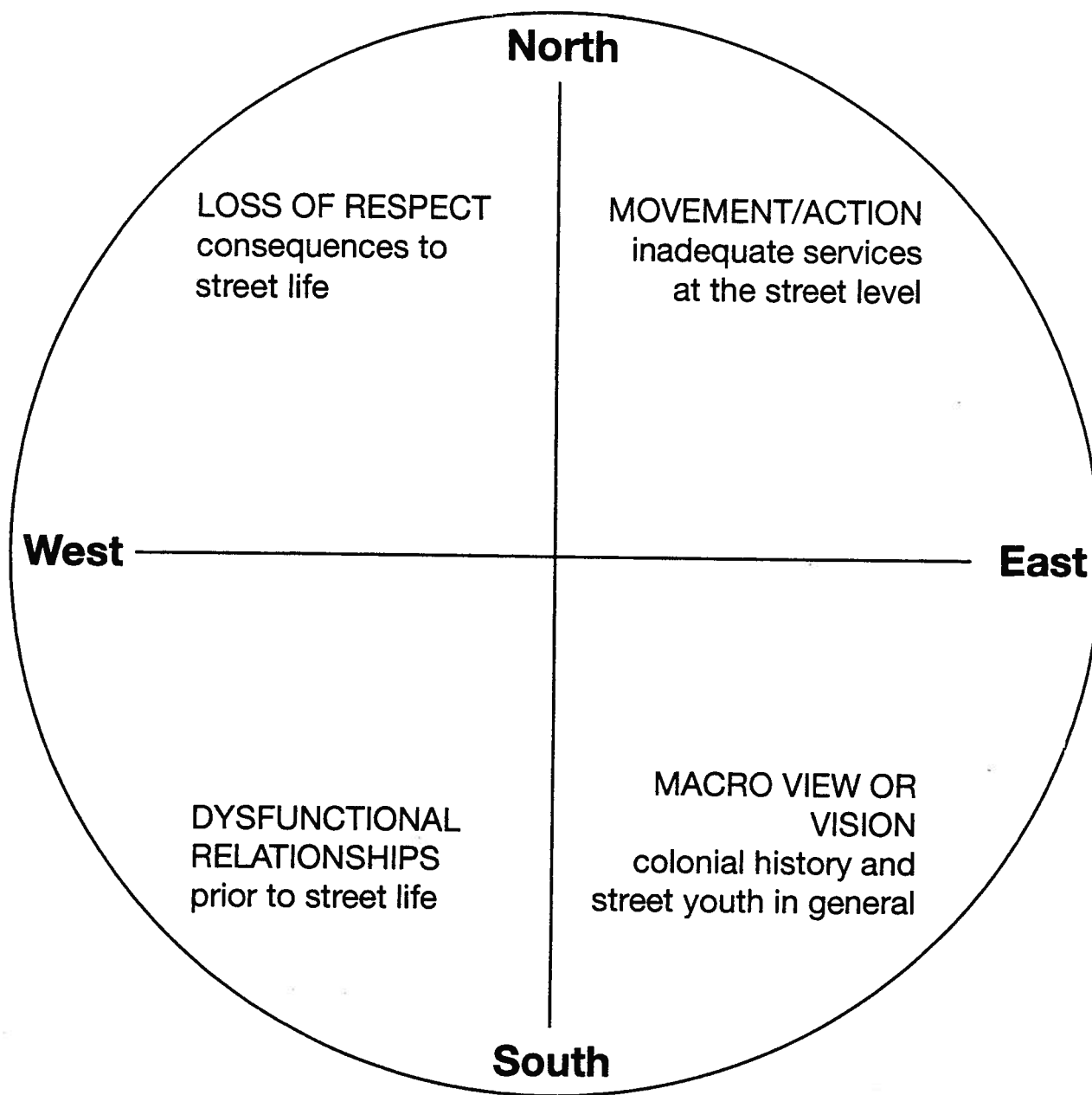


Figure 1: The progression of a negative life process of ending up on the street for Aboriginal street youth in greater than average numbers. Beginning at the east door with a macro view of colonial history (vision); at the south door with antecedents of dysfunctional relationships (relationship); at the west door with consequences in loss of respect (respect); and at the north door with inadequate street services (movement/action) (Absolon, 1993).

Contrary to popular belief Aboriginal/European relations remained reciprocal at least until the end of the eighteenth century. Aboriginal society did not instantly become dysfunctional upon contact with the European boat people. Although the force of the Christian vanguard has remained stable until today (many reserve communities are wrought with evangelical hegemony) there were long periods of interdependence produced by the fur trade and the French/British wars (Berger, 1991). In fact, this mutually beneficial era lasted 300 years (1492-1800 approximately), 100 years more than the current state of siege. A third of the way through the nineteenth century became the demarcating point for clear policy changes toward segregation. (I do not use the terms acculturation, assimilation or integration because authentic expression of these processes have been consistently made impossible as a result of racial discrimination.) We are now experiencing an interface between a 200 year segregation era and the movement toward self-determination for Aboriginal people in Canada. Researchers (Frideres, 1993; Armitage, 1995; Bolaria & Li, 1988) breakdown eras of postcontact relations in many detailed ways. For the purpose of this discussion the broader eras of precontact traditional society, interdependence, segregation, and self determination are used. It is the latter two eras respectively which have produced higher than average vulnerability for Aboriginal children and youth, and to which we look for the underlying causes and culturally appropriate solutions.

Armitage (1993 and 1995) gives an indepth historical and comparative analysis of colonial policy in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In the book Comparing the policy of Aboriginal assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand he shows how child welfare and educational assimilative policies have worked to the detriment of Aboriginal peoples and how Aboriginal self determination in these fields is attempting to correct the impact.

From the passage of the Indian Act of 1876 until the 1960s child welfare for First Nations people in Canada was dominated by the policy of assimilation, which used educational methods to change the culture and character of their children. Church-operated residential schools were the central institution used in this strategy. When the policy of assimilation was replaced by the policy of integration, the residential schools were replaced by the child welfare strategy in a second attempt to ensure

that the next generation of Indian children was different from their parents. Children separated from parents considered by child welfare authorities to be negligent or abusive were raised in foster care or adopted. In the current period of movement toward self-government many First Nations communities are taking control of their own child welfare programs to ensure that the next generation of Indian children is raised in their own communities and culture (Armitage, 1993:131).

Street youth

The street youth literature, which is gaining momentum recently, focuses on issues such as abuse, shelter, delinquency, gangs, addictions, gender, and service delivery. There is very little information on visible minority concerns in general and there is a remarkable void in research on issues specific to Aboriginal street youth.

Brannigan and Caputo (1992) offer a model that is useful in organizing the street youth phenomenon; namely, they break the issues down into: definitions, antecedents, consequences, and institutional responses to the problem (31). This categorization is used to structure the review, beginning with the issues of definition and population estimation.

Definitions and estimates

A report sponsored by the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto is most helpful to conceptualize the heterogeneous population of street youth and the issues that relate to their various categories. In this report McCullagh and Greco (1990) differentiate between five categories of youth under the umbrella term of "street kids" (ii). The first and largest group is comprised of children who are "running from...intolerable home situations"; for the most part they are running from different types of abuse or neglect. The second and smallest group is said to "run to ... adventure ... excitement and/or independence" without the consent of their parents or caregiver. The third category of street kids are called "throwaways" in the report. They are on the street as a result of parental rejection or their parents have consented to a "premature exit from parental care." The next group is "overwhelmingly represented" on the street; this group runs from government care facilities (children's aid or young offenders). This group is labelled "absconders from care" in the report. Lastly, Greco and McCullagh identify a group of youth as "curb-kids" who still may live at home or

in a government care facility but are very much involved in the street culture, they are children "of the street" as opposed to "on the street" in the words of Blunt et. al. (1992). They may run for varying lengths of time.

Marjorie Robertson (1991) focuses on the issue of choice stating runaways "choose" to be on the street whereas homeless youth are "perceived to lack access to either their original or an alternative home" (33). Additionally, Kufeldt and Nimmo (1987 and 1987a) distinguish between "runners" who leave home for extended periods of time with no intention of returning and "in and outers" who run impulsively and for a shorter duration. Still another definition of street children is the one adopted by UNICEF, namely, "those for whom the street, in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied buildings, and wasteland more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults" (Fyfe, 1985 in Blunt et al., 1992:3). This last definition is useful in that it opens discussion to the concept of a "home" that implies an entity beyond mere shelter (Bass, 1992; Belcher & DiBlasio, 1990). Baxter (1991) emphasizes the same dichotomy between "shelterlessness" and "homelessness"; she points to basic needs such as security, safety and community as integral to the concept of a home.

The population size of street youth eludes researchers because of the transient and diverse status of these people. The youth often change their living conditions as a result of so many different factors ranging from climate to employment, poverty, incarceration, impulsive lifestyles or family discord. Another important confounding variable to consider when estimating street youth populations is that the age range of the youths in most studies is approximately twelve to twenty-one years. Mistrust of adults for various reasons, including abuse and mandatory reporting of a minor in potential danger, is consistently reported in the literature. Finally, the task of estimating the size of the population on a national scale is compounded when one considers that the major urban population centres represent only a segment of the youth who would fit the definitions in this review.

Rossi's (1989) research in Chicago and Burnam and Koegel's (1989) study in Los Angeles offer different approaches to census taking among adult urban street people. Rossi divided inner city core areas into census quadrants and conducted counts of each quadrant at a specific time. Burnam and Koegel estimated population proportions at different locations around the Los Angeles area and then created a random sample that reflects the estimated proportions thus deriving a representative random sample. This latter method was used in the study of East Village in Calgary in order to ensure a representative sample (McDonald and Peressini 1992). These strategies become problematic when youth are involved for many of the reasons stated above. In Canadian youth studies, McCarthy's (1990) approach is most effective in youth populations; it involves contacting youth at a number of service agencies as well as meeting them on the street at known congregating areas and makeshift shelters throughout the city of Toronto. Few of the studies are able to claim representativeness in their sample at this time. More importantly, no studies have isolated information on the Aboriginal portion of their sample though some of the researchers have future plans of this nature.

Many questions need to be answered: Do Aboriginal adolescents experience differences in comparison to other youths living on the street? Are they treated worse by the people they come into contact with? How do they react to street workers and other mainstream services that are available to them? Are culturally appropriate services available? Reflecting on the dual research goals of finding specific information about life on the street and of analysis sensitive to the impact of structural forces, we must ask questions such as: How is the historical background and present new forms of colonization and racism socially manifest when compounded with street conditions? We don't know. This information is important at this time and has yet to be addressed in the literature.

ii. Antecedents to street life

Given the grim picture of life on, or of, the street put forth by most accounts, from academic to media perspectives, it is baffling to think that some of the young inhabitants have chosen it as the

most attractive of different options. Using the definitions given by McCullagh and Greco (1990) above, it is clear that, with the exception of "throwaways," the youth may have chosen the street over other possibilities for a place to call home. Throwaways are the only group in this configuration that seem to be on the street by someone else's will — even this premise is debatable when one considers their "choice" is between living with a rejecting adult and the possibility of finding a more accepting peer group "family" on the streets. Choice is particularly in question for Aboriginal children caught up in another culture. Further discussion on cultural displacement and adoption breakdown is presented in chapter seven.

There are a variety of analytic approaches to the street youth phenomena and each perspective sheds light on the forces that precede and influence a young person's flight to independence of this nature. For example, McCarthy (1990) offers four different approaches to explain runaway behaviour, beginning with the approach which focuses on individual pathology. The emphasis in this approach is on the psychological and behavioral disorders of the youth. Briefly, the authors adopting a psychoanalytic approach concentrate on finding dysfunction within the individual to account for their decision to live on their own. Critics fault this approach with blaming on the victim for structural inequity and social tragedy.

Another perspective McCarthy examines is the "pathological family approach." Under this heading the studies consistently find that many of the youth are on the street because it is the best option available to them. For the most part McCarthy's account filters down to "a disturbed parent-child relationship" which is usually fuelled by one or more forms of abuse — physical, mental, emotional or sexual — and may be directed at the youth themselves or another parent or sibling in their immediate environment (reflected by: Janus et al., 1987; Webber, 1991; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1990; Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987 and 1987a; McCormack, Janus and Burgess, 1986; Powers, Eckenrode and Jaklitsch, 1990; Fisher, 1989). It is this abusive or violent relationship that precipitates the youth's decision to seek refuge. This approach can also be criticized for

blaming the family for societal problems. The corollaries to this metaphorical theorem is to blame the tribe and then to blame the race.

The third approach presented is what McCarthy (1990) labels the "sociological approach." The studies under this heading focus on antecedent factors that are "societal or environmental." A downturn in the economy is one example, another may examine socio-economic backgrounds of runaways. In this case parents cannot afford to keep a young person in their care and they are encouraged to leave.

A final approach that is less prominent in the literature is called the "healthy individual approach" in McCarthy's analysis. Here the youth is considered to be psychologically hardy enough to leave a situation that is unhealthy for the sake of self-preservation. For instance, if a child is being abused in a foster home or institution, the street may be their only alternative for escape.

Of these four perspectives, the sociological is best suited for the examination of Aboriginal issues as it allows for a structural perspective which is capable of incorporating variables such as race, history, economic marginalization and government policy in the analysis, thus avoiding blaming the victims. Of the remaining three frameworks the healthy individual and the focus on family breakdown are also of use, though less so, and finally the personal pathology approach is of little use as it fosters dissecting symptoms instead of focusing on the societal structures that are the root of those symptoms. A similar caution about misdirecting research with homeless populations is voiced by Gary L. Blasi (1990) and reflected by Marybeth Shinn and Beth C. Weitzman (1990) who state,

By focusing on what is wrong with "the homeless," however, we risk following the classic steps of blaming the victim: identifying a social problem, studying those afflicted to determine how they differ from the rest of us, defining the differences as the cause of the problem, and setting up humanitarian programs to correct the differences (Ryan, 1971: 8). Efforts to identify the health and social problems of the homeless persons have distracted us from studying and countering the growth of poverty, the erosion of welfare benefits, the destruction of low-income housing, and other contributors to homelessness that are not characteristics of individual victims. The field has fallen prey to the risks of diverting attention from underlying causes and reinforcing stereotypes about the population group (2).

In an Aboriginal context, any analysis that does not account for the historical and present day structural inequities that influence Aboriginal people is prey to a similar type of error — sustaining instead of deconstructing colonial attitudes and policies. Doubtlessly, there is a need for some critical descriptive data on the exact nature of the lives of Aboriginal youth who are on the street. An analysis that relied solely on structural forces would obscure the reasons why these youth run and how they experience street life once they are there.

iii. Consequences of street life

The literature varies as to the length of time that young people spend on the street though most studies report that much of the homelessness is sporadic. McCarthy's (1990) study revealed that only 32.1 percent of his sample were on the street for six months or less and approximately 42 percent were on the street for between six months and three years. In sharp contrast a Winnipeg study reported 96 percent of their sample was on the run for six months or less in their last run. Fisher's (1989) study of runaways reported that 72 percent of the youths were away for less than three days. In the American literature there is an estimate that the average run was over six months (Kryder-Coe, Salamon and Molnar, 1991:39). Here again, Kufeldt and Nimmo's (1987; 1987a) division of the population between the runners of longer duration and the youths who are sporadically homeless or "on the run" may be useful to account for the variance in the estimates of duration on the street.

The consensus in the literature is that life on the streets is extremely harsh, and the repercussions of living there vary and are closely linked to the duration of one's existence there (Brannigan and Caputo, 1993; Webber, 1991). Most consequences result from the attempt by minimally educated, inexperienced, vulnerable (in a multitude of ways) and desperate adolescents to survive in a society that has dimensions which at once glorifies youth and then preys upon it. Needless to say, the prognosis is not good. The McCullagh and Greco study (1990) outlines a "street life profile" that includes the following nine points: lack of education, lack of conventional

employment skills, high incidence of transience, poor physical health, substance abuse, mental health problems, conflict with the law, vulnerability to violent exploitation and a dominance of peer relationships that seek to compensate for the lack of family and school relations that support most adolescents' needs for relationship (iii-iv). Though this profile has the potential to foster stereotyping — glossing over the specific in favour of generic labels — its intent is to convey an abbreviated picture of street life that can be used to give direction to a more indepth analysis of the issues.

One can look at unemployment, resulting from insufficient education and experience, and the ensuing poverty as fundamental to the reality of surviving the streets. Poverty is a force that underlies most of the other survival issues; it is also one of the prime antecedents to illegal acts such as drug selling, theft and prostitution. Consequently, this powerless population is open to a barrage of abuse from so many different sources including adults and other youths (McCarthy and Hagan, 1991; 1992a; 1992b; Webber, 1991; Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987; Lau, 1989, McCullagh and Greco, 1990).

Studies consistently examine health issues with respect to homeless youth. Among the health issues researched, the most prevalent are: physical and mental health, AIDS, substance abuse related inquiry and the interrelationships that exist between these and a host of other factors that affect one's well-being. At the most basic level, surviving on the streets without proper nutrition, shelter and medical services is in itself cause for poor health. The physical stresses of this environment are further compounded by the dangers of violent abuse perpetrated by adults and desperate youth preying on vulnerable young people — in total these phenomena inflict a heavy, and potentially fatal, toll on the physical well-being of young homeless people (Fisher, 1989; Webber, 1991).

Though careful not to label homelessness as a mental health problem in itself, there are mental health impacts of being homeless or as a result of the traumas that precede leaving home. These impacts may include various forms of abuse, family breakdown or forced separation from the parental home, as well as the daily traumas associated with living on the street. For example, major

depression, post traumatic stress disorder and suicide attempts are all more pervasive in homeless adolescents (Robertson, 1991; Janus et al., 1987; Powers, Eckenrode and Jaklitsh, 1990; Blunt et al., 1992). Some of the potential roots and self-reported symptoms are articulated by the McCullagh and Greco (1990) report:

...the childhood histories of street youth are characteristically marred with physical and sexual abuse, family dysfunction, and parental rejection. Such experiences are 'invariably accompanied by emotional abuse'. Street youth report high levels of poor self-esteem, self-worth and feelings of powerlessness. This is evidenced by high incidents of self-mutilation and suicide attempts (iii).

The threat of AIDS is a phenomenon that all sexually active adolescents must reckon with. Homeless youth are at greater risk as they have a higher prevalence of intravenous drug use and exploitation in the prostitution industry to varying degrees. Researchers also find that the threat of contracting AIDS amongst this population is further compounded by: poverty, lack of information about the nature of the disease, lower literacy rates, lack of access to sufficient health care, low self-esteem, and a low sense of self-efficacy with respect to taking steps to protect oneself when necessary (Kaliski et al., 1990; Caswell and Green, 1988; Johnston, 1992). Policy makers and service providers face the challenge of designing prevention strategies to accommodate the special needs of this high risk group.

Finally, aside from the very serious threat of AIDS resulting from intravenous drug use, the health related information focuses specifically on substance abuse as it is considered to be rampant in this group. Webber's (1991) research highlights the use of drugs as a coping tool for kids on the street. She states that,

More than typical adolescents, street kids are beset with oppressive problems, both those they bring from home and those they acquire in the street. They have more than the average need to escape. Killing the pain of their existence — getting high as a get-away — is the most compelling lure drugs offer. Addictions develop naturally out of the vulgar business of living in the street because some kids can cope with what is being done to their bodies only by being out of their minds. Drugs offer the illusion of being off the street while you are still on it Not only are street kids tied up in more complex psychological knots and practical conundrums than are average teenagers and therefore more susceptible to drugs, but they also live in an environment saturated with these hazardous substances. If alcohol and drugs

tantalize many 'normal' kids, they magnetize troubled kids chasing a magical escape (225).

Webber goes on to outline some of the predisposing factors that foster youthful addictions including: "low self-esteem, serious home or school problems, early use, a family history of addiction, parental conflict, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and physical and sexual abuse — in other words, the runaway mould" (225). In many Aboriginal communities escape through addiction is a significant social problem which has been repeatedly studied by social scientists. The pervasiveness of addictions on the street and the profile of predisposing factors offered by Webber above are factors to be examined in this study without simply dissecting symptoms but with the goal of revealing the underlying dynamic of those symptoms — addictions or otherwise.

Finally, there is research that has focused on the issues of delinquency and law-breaking in general, and more specifically, on gang culture. To some extent gang literature elucidates issues that may be applicable to Aboriginal street youth because the analysis often includes some recognition of structural dimensions of race, racism, class, and/or poverty in addition to the delinquency perspective. For example, Short (1990) presents a lucid explanation of cultural and economic marginalization, and its relationship to gang activity. Specifically, the gangs are an attempt by young people to take part in the youth culture that is not accessible to them through the "legitimate" institutions of the dominant culture. Davis (1988) echoes this perspective, labelling it "economic survivalism" (30), and highlights the "Los Angeles police's racism and brutality" (28) against black communities in their massive anti-gang campaign. Davis is critical of the clampdown on gangs as it skirts the deeper issues of racism and poverty that are at the root of gang phenomena. There is a growing body of literature that analyzes the attempts of culturally and economically marginalized youth to adapt to North American urban society through gang activity, the inter- and intra-community impacts and the institutional responses to the youths (Davis, 1988; Huff, 1989; Moore, 1985; Short, 1990; Vigil, 1983; Zatz, 1985). In this body of research may lie some important tools for

understanding Aboriginal communities in the urban environment as they face barriers similar to those faced by the black, Chicano and other ethnic minority communities of the United States.

iv. Issues of service delivery to street youth

There is no doubt that the population of street youth is replete with barriers to effective service delivery. Consider, for example, that the client population is approximately twelve to seventeen years of age and that a high proportion of them are running from some type of abusive situation, a care agency or perhaps a detainment facility — thus, there is a general mistrust of adults (who are obligated to report underage youths who they feel may be vulnerable to danger). For example, in the proposed safehouse sponsored by the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto, the policy states that "Parents and/or guardians and/or police would be informed of the youth's admission in accordance with legislative guidelines" (McCullagh and Greco, 1990:vii). Given the knowledge that they will likely be sent back to where they ran from, it is doubtful that young people would seek out such a service. Mainstream agencies which provide services that seek to provide a safe haven are criticized as often contributing to the problem of abuse. Zingaro (1987) asserts that conventional child care facilities are guilty of repeating the experience of violation through control and intrusion into the lives of the abused children they seek to help; this dynamic is compounded by practitioners "requiring model kinds of behaviour and self-disclosure in return for service" (70). A significant portion of the youth who find themselves on the street are "absconders from care" (McCullagh and Greco, 1990:ii). Specific to Aboriginal runaways is the fact that services are simply not culturally sensitive to their needs and so many flee to the streets as preferable to institutional living (Native Women's Transition Centre, 1991).

Brannigan and Caputo (1993:83-84) offer a very useful continuum of services for street youth that characterizes the increasing levels of intrusiveness and length of contact for clients who use them. The continuum begins with prevention services that have minimal contact with the youth and seek to educate them about the potential hazards of street, for example, in school presentations and

media campaigns. Crisis intervention, which is still generally short-term but more intrusive, seeks to stabilize clients who may be immersed in crisis, for instance, shelters or help lines. Of a more sustaining nature are the maintenance services which offer a place for clients to meet their basic daily needs of food and shelter (hostels, needle exchanges, and soup kitchens). Next on the continuum are the transitional services which seek to help young people get off the street. These services entail a longer-term commitment and a more intrusive relationship with the service providers — for example, longer-term shelter, literacy programs and addictions counselling. The fifth category is labelled incapacitation, which is meant to encompass incarceration by law enforcement and health officials for the sake of preventing the individual from harming themselves or others — i.e. young offenders' facilities and psychiatric wards of hospitals. And finally, the authors point to the rehabilitation type of services that are "aimed at re-integrating young people into the community" (84). These services are, for the most part, involuntary and provided by the corrections and criminal justice system, for instance, probation services and life skills programs. Alongside the above continuum the authors put forth another continuum of formality that can be applied to all of the services outlined for further descriptive value. Both of these tools of analysis are helpful to differentiate the many services that street youth can potentially come into contact with.

More concretely, of the front-line, short-term, services that do work for meeting street youths' needs most have a necessary element of access and flexibility. Namely, the services have to be offered in an accessible part of the downtown core, open twenty-four hours and offer clients a chance to meet their basic needs of shelter, food and clothing with a minimum of intrusive questioning. Also, some agencies offer counselling, support, information and referral (for issues of abuse, shelter, substance abuse, education, health, medical or legal) for those who need it. In addition to these short-term and emergency types of services, street youth also express a need for longer term services such as job training, stable housing and alternative education programs (Zingaro, 1987; Native Women's Transition Centre, 1991; McCullagh and Greco, 1990; Social Planningy

Council of Winnipeg, 1990; McDonald and Peressini, 1992; White, 1992; Bermingham, 1992; Truscott, 1992 and 1993).

Conclusions: Aboriginal street youth in the literature

Social scientists are at an early stage in the evolution of research conducted on street youth. Overall one can see a progression in attempts to derive more sophisticated and thorough studies that will suitably address the needs of this population. To date all of the research has been conducted on the population of street youth in general — none of the studies located has singled out Aboriginal youth. Accordingly, there is no information on population size, issues of racism or cultural identity, or service agency utilization by Aboriginal youth. There remains any number of significant foci for future study with Aboriginal street youth. In fact, for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' study that provided the impetus for this thesis the literature search encompassed refereed academic and popular literature, data networks (such as dissertation, sociology, psychology and social work abstracts, ERIC — Education Resources Information Centres — and the American Indian Institute), and word of mouth networking with key informants in the areas of academic and professional service delivery to Aboriginal populations, street youth, and homeless people in general. There were absolutely no studies found on Aboriginal street youth specifically. Only one video documentary, made by the National Film Board in 1988 entitled No address, which focused on homeless Aboriginal people in Montreal, was found (Obomsawin, 1988). There are other movies and documentaries based on street youth in general but nothing with an Aboriginal focus.

Other documentation of Aboriginal youth can be found by culling information from major studies. For example, in the Marlene Webber (1991) book, Street kids, there are a number of anecdotal references and verbatim personal accounts of young Aboriginal peoples lives on the street. Similarly, personal accounts can be found in Without reserve by Lynda Shorten (1991), and Inside out: An autobiography by a Native Canadian, by James Tyman (1989). These sources give the reader some insight into the pertinent issues that separate Aboriginal people from other populations. There

are sometimes graphic personal portrayals of the effects of racism, colonial government policy, destructively short-sighted child welfare policy and practice, the repercussions of the residential school system, poverty, recovery and renewal. But these accounts, though growing in their numbers, are still few and they are limited by lack of focus on the issue of homelessness or life on the street.

In the Winnipeg (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1990) and Calgary (McDonald and Peressini, 1992) studies on homeless populations there is a division that identifies ethnic origin but the authors' analyses stop with a small chart that outlines the type of ethnicity and the proportion of the total sample. This information does not break-down Aboriginal populations by cultural groups. In the Winnipeg study the authors go as far as to say that Aboriginal youth are overrepresented based on national population figures (two percent of national population versus four percent in their study). But even this information is not reliable as the study did not have a representative sample — few studies do. Brannigan and Caputo (1993) give a cursory account of the unique nature of the issues facing Aboriginal youth in their literature review section but they offer no studies to back up their remarks. These authors have future plans to focus research on Aboriginal youth populations.

One document that has emerged partly from the information in the Winnipeg study is a proposal for a safe house called Ni Tin Away Ma Gun Antat (My relative's house) for Aboriginal children and youth in the inner city (Native Women's Transition Centre, 1991). This safe house opened in 1994. This is a good example of a culturally relevant service targeting Aboriginal youth.

Other sources of information that focus on homeless Aboriginal people in general (implying adults more than youth) can be found in the form of reports and conference proceedings — for example, A place to call home: A conference on homelessness in British Columbia (Fallick, 1987), the Canadian Council on Social Development's report entitled Homelessness in Canada: The report of the national inquiry (McLaughlin, 1987), and finally New partnerships — Building for the future

(Lang-Runtz & Ahern, 1988). Though these reports offer a marginal focus on the needs of Aboriginal people, they are important for their structural perspective. They emphasize the role of issues such as poverty, self-government, and cultural differences that must be addressed by any program that seeks some form of amelioration for Aboriginal people. Specifically, the University of British Columbia conference (cited above) offers a skeletal, point form examination of some issues that contribute to homelessness. The Social Development report and the New Partnerships conference also point to structural barriers but much of the focus is on adult and rural populations as well as housing and shelter — issues less immediate to the lives of urban youth.

From all of these accounts one must attempt to glean information that offers insight into the lives of Aboriginal youth who are living on the urban streets. The question remains, in an effort to deconstruct colonial interpretations and attitudes, what in past studies is useful for an Aboriginal perspective? All of the research to date is clearly insufficient to accommodate the specific needs of Aboriginal street youth and so our approach must reflect this great lack, but also build on it. It is useful to know, firstly, that there are no other studies so this research, for the most part, must begin at the beginning. It is also useful to know that there are many Aboriginal youth living on the streets and it is very important to understand the level of desperation that brings these youth to the point of exploiting themselves, in a variety of ways, to survive. One other significant finding is that these youth are most often running "from" something to the street — we need to clearly articulate what young Aboriginal people run from. In the Ni Tin Away Ma Gun Antat (1991) proposal the authors state that a proportionally higher number of Aboriginal youth are in the child welfare system and there is a shortage of culturally appropriate services; thus, many of the Aboriginal street youth may be running from the mainstream institutions that are unable to provide services sensitive to their needs. We also know that analysis that leaves out issues of race, poverty, colonization or that overlooks the experience of life on reserves or in urban ghettos is, at best, minimally suited to our needs.

Overview of the thesis

The next chapter describes the research process. I also reflect on the methodology with emphasis on what it was like as an Aboriginal person doing ethnographic research on this difficult subject. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 form the heart of the thesis. The case studies introduce us to nine (two of them are treated as a couple in one case study) Aboriginal youth who currently live on the street in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal, and two former street youth who are street survivors from Vancouver and Winnipeg. The sixth chapter examines the patterns and themes that emerge out of these ten case studies about life on the streets. Chapter seven focuses on policy implications and the last chapter concludes the thesis.

Chapter 2. Research methodology

Chapter two describes how this study was conceptualized and lays out the methodology used to research Aboriginal street youth in the urban environment in Canada. The emphasis in this chapter is on the process by which the research received its impetus, was carried out and then interpreted. I also talk about the research's reliability and validity and about the constraints to the study. Finally, I reflect on how the research affected me as an Aboriginal person.

The conceptualization, the way which this study came about, and how it came to be done, is inextricably linked with my values as an Aboriginal person and my life experience as part of an oppressed group in Canada. Therefore, as a critical researcher, I begin a scholarly discussion on methodology with something as personal as my socialization as an Aboriginal person. Again at the end of the chapter I will come full circle and reflect on this person in this research.

Impetus of the research

An image from my childhood, which has stayed with me all of my life, explicitly places me within the framework of Aboriginality, of colonial oppression, and of the multitude of negative statistics and images that abound about Aboriginal people. Therefore, entering the world of Aboriginal street youth was for me a true case of "But for the grace of the Creator, there go I."

I am approximately eight years old, sitting in the back of a horse drawn wagon with seven of my siblings and cousins. My grandfather is in charge of the reins. My father is sitting next to him. It is a clear dark night and the stars are out in full force. I had watched with interest earlier that day as the moose carcass was cut up and carefully laid at the bottom of the wagon box and meticulously covered with pine branches, then with cardboard boxes, and finally with blankets. Now we are on our way back home from a hunting expedition under the cover of night. As I sit huddled in a blanket up behind the adults, my grandfather began to discuss, in Cree, with a distinct tinge of bitterness (this was uncharacteristic of my grandfather) that it was a crime that children had to be used to hide the game "illegally" killed in order that we could survive.

I learned that night of the confiscation of land, the laws that prohibited leaving the reserve to hunt for food, the residential schools that took away the children, the police function of social control through brutality, and the encroaching cultural values that would threaten to destroy us. I learned simple logic in the statement, "They came to my country, they should speak my language." I learned that our collective condition was because of some inherently unfair philosophy and behaviour, and not at all the way things had always been. And most importantly I learned that this was not a fault that existed within us. In forty years I have not seen evidence that any part of the revelation of that night was wrong. A critical analyst was born that night.

The term critical, Thomas (1993) states,

... describes both an activity and an ideology. As social activity, critical thinking implies a call to action that may range from modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct engagement that includes political activity (17).

Thomas's definition fits the sense of accountability that remains with me now. My experience on the reserve of watching my grandfather interact with a world that denied naturally accessible and common sense human rights — without English or any "recognized education" — with a stoic determination and dignity instilled in me the principle of systematically including a critical analysis on colonization or to at least make certain that it be allowed to emerge out of research with Aboriginal people.

The impact of my grandfather's teachings (and after that night I asked many questions for many years) have also reinforced the importance of oral transmission of holistic information, particularly in the language of the people. Hence I have insisted on leaving in as much text of the youths' stories as possible (in their way of speaking) and their centrality in this research.

The research process began inadvertently when in early January 1993 I received a call from one of the research directors of the urban perspectives sector of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples inquiring if I would be interested in applying to do research on Aboriginal street youth in major urban centres in Canada. My immediate and emphatic response was, "No." The picture that

came to mind was quantitative research, looking for numbers of youth on the street and administering a questionnaire, collating data, inputting it onto computer and placing the results into tables. This type of research on Aboriginal street youth, in my view, could not access the pain of separation and loss due to institutional intervention, of the traumatic impact of racism, of identity confusion (which most of us experience off the street) in addition to life and death survival issues. Some research, the media and a common sense visual count tells us that Aboriginal youth are overrepresented at least in the skid row prostitution industry in Canada and I saw no point in confirming that statistic. On further discussion it became evident to me that perhaps what they wanted was not incompatible with what I might be willing to do. I did, however, qualify that I would not go in and rape these children again, not even under the guise of research, and that if I did anything at all it would have to include assisting the youth to tell their own stories.

A preliminary proposal to do qualitative research on Aboriginal street youth in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal was accepted by the Commission after I had been selected from a competition. (Subsequently Toronto was dropped from the study because the research assistant became ill. I also believe the emotional impact of the research process became overwhelming in this case.) My function would be to oversee the entire study from figuring out which paradigm and mode of research would be most suitable, to the design of the study and any instruments used in the research, to designing and carrying out the training of assistants, to interpreting, reporting the data, and formulating the recommendations.

Funding was provided for a principal researcher/project manager, and later because of time constraints, for a research assistant to carry out library searches and policy examination, and for four (which later became three) research assistants to conduct the interviews with the street youth in each of the major city sites in the study. It was decided that this arrangement was necessary because this type of study could potentially be a full time job for one person for at least two years and I was employed in a tenure track faculty position with the School of Social Work, University of Victoria,

at the time the study was initiated. All persons on the research team were directly contracted through the Royal Commission. Therefore we were, each of us, private contractors. (This aspect of the study was later to have an impact on the question of researcher safety and participant selection alluded to later in the chapter).

Planning the research

The first task was to write out a budget for a study which would gather data from different constituencies on the street level, for training and travel, and for the extended time needed for writing the report. It was decided that the participants would receive a one time allowance of one hundred dollars in recognition of their need and their work with us. No notices to attract participants on the basis of this allowance were used and the subsidy was given to the youth at the closure of interviews. For practical reasons related to time constraints and to my teaching load at the University of Victoria, the decision was made to hire Aboriginal research assistants to conduct the interviewing in each of the cities and another on site in Victoria to assist with library searches.

During the planning phase I read Street kids: The tragedy of Canada's runaways (Webber, 1991) and the format of case study research was solidified. The story telling format would provide a way to assist Aboriginal youth to voice their own concerns. I decided that a training session was needed in order to combat the isolation of the research assistants, to uniformly distribute the rationale for the study and the ethical principles established by the Royal Commission, and to get to know the assistants (two of whom were not known to me before the research began). In order to minimize the possible segmenting effect that a diverse team might produce, and with a near completed literature review in hand, I led an intensive three day training session with all team members. This included senior research co-ordinators from the Commission. This took place after the design issues had been identified and the guiding questions had been formulated. I made every effort to ensure that the research method would be uniformly conveyed to the research team so that differences could emerge from the text of the interviews and not through varied process. The

training period facilitated team interaction and communication, sharing of strategies for interviewing distrustful youth, and the maintenance of cultural integrity.

In addition I visited the research sites once in the contextual information gathering stage and twice again in the interviewing stage. Telephone contact was ongoing and as needed. I stayed extensively involved with all parts of the information searches and the conceptualization of ideas for any part of the Royal Commission study to be drafted by anyone else. My main concern was to keep cultural and sociological integrity in the study. I explicitly wanted one point of view — with the exception of any research used for comparison purposes. The non-Aboriginal team member examined the literature from the perspective of a Canadian mainstream society. Subsequently I reconceptualized and edited his work from an Aboriginal perspective. All materials have been reconceptualized for the thesis.

Four sets of participants were targeted in the study.

- * The main corroborators are Aboriginal youth in the 14-20 age group who by definition live on the streets. That is to say they see street culture as a major reference point in their lives.
- * Ex-street people who were at one point "street youth" were interviewed in order to make comparisons of conditions for street youth "then" and "now," and to see the similarities and differences of experience.
- * For contextual information we interviewed two sets of parents whose children had gone to the streets. This gave us some insight as to the reasons for running from these parents' point of view, and views on strategies for repatriation and prevention.
- * Advocates in street specific agencies and programs (for example, needle exchange, street workers, sexually transmitted disease clinics, special police units, Aboriginal specific street youth programs) were interviewed for contextual information about Aboriginal utilization of services, percentage of Aboriginal youth using agency services, approximate numbers of

Aboriginal street youth in various cities, culturally appropriate services and numbers of Aboriginal street workers, and major issues for Aboriginal youth as they perceive them.

The emotional impact of reading the literature on homeless street youth, poverty, violence, and the terrible statistics of damaged and abused Aboriginal youth (in general) influenced me to include a debriefing period to take place at the end of the interviewing phase. This was planned for the beginning of July 1993 in Vancouver, British Columbia. I also asked the research assistants to keep a field journal (appendix F). I did this for two reasons: first to provide an outlet for the emotional impact of the research endeavour itself; and secondly to provide recorded details of the street environment, interview circumstances and indepth description of the participants. I felt that both the debriefing session and the journals were necessary to place the collective experience of the researchers into the research process and to bring closure to the data gathering phase. This would also be the beginning of the interpretation of the data.

Research goals

How to approach a study of Aboriginal youth on the urban streets given literature that had little information on this population was the focal question at the beginning of the study process. Therefore, the decision was made to construct a body of information out of a broadly based perspective from the point of view of the youth. The existing literature became a backdrop to the missing pieces of the puzzle. The definitions and the major characteristics of running behaviour were utilized as comparison to the experience which Aboriginal youth shared.

In this study a main goal was to contextualize Aboriginal street youth within the colonial structural environment. Many social scientists have written about the unequal social status of Aboriginal people in Canada (Frideres, 1993; Bolaria & Li, 1988; Engelstad & Bird, 1992; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993, for instance) and many more have written about the impact of this inequity (Ryan, 1971; Manuel & Posluns, 1974; Cardinal, 1977; Djao, 1983; McKague, 1991).

Freire (1974) also reminds us of the oppressor/oppressed dialectic and the social and psychological impacts of this contradiction. The opening for colonial contextualization from the case studies was facilitated by open ended questions on perceptions of marginality and questions about history and culture. I believe that Aboriginal persons facilitating the process also widened that opening. Many of the youth would say, in the interviews, that they felt more comfortable sharing with an Aboriginal person because they felt that their backgrounds and culture would be more clearly understood.

Another goal was to set carefully the course for future research endeavours and policy development with Aboriginal street youth: therefore the following overriding sociological questions guided the process:

- * What are the most significant life experiences that have impacted on the current situation of street youth?
- * What are the greatest challenges facing street youth today?
- * What are the most critical forces/institutions that influence the thinking and behaviour of street youth?
- * In what terms do street youth define their social, cultural and spiritual needs and how do they perceive the effectiveness of services available to meet those needs?
- * What or who do the street youth of today model themselves after, and what factors shape and influence this process?

To build a broad picture of the experience of youth in the study, therefore background face sheets (appendices D and E) were used to gain information as well as current living situations.

In order to access information that spoke to treaty status, Métis and Inuit street youth issues, the decision was made to try to interview status and non-status youth in Vancouver, Métis youth in Winnipeg and Inuit youth in Montreal. The goal of accessing fairly distinct Aboriginal representation in each of the cities was, for the most part, successful. This type of sampling was necessary because we wanted to know more about the physical, intra-psychic and "cultural" conditions of each of the

distinguished categories in one of the cities. In some instances we were unable to access the preconceived formula because we were dependent on street workers to select participants. Nevertheless the first criterion for selection was group identification (within a specified age range). Every effort was also made to get a fair gender balance; an age range representation; participants who were homeless versus those using shelters and other facilities; and examples of various types of running and street behaviour. It was only after the ideal combination of representation (for Royal Commission purposes) was set out in theory that the street workers were contacted. The anxiety caused by the "ideal" sample is discussed later in the chapter.

Another goal was to access information on street workers and street service utilization. Did the youth access services? If not, why not? What kinds of services were preferred and why? Questions were asked about whether the youth had contact with Aboriginal street workers. How did they feel about this topic? In this endeavour we hoped to get information on availability of Aboriginal services and whether the youth felt these were a necessity.

Finally, the goal that was foremost in mind was to impart respect for the youth in sharing knowledge about the research process, and through language, research terminology ("street youth" instead of "street kids"), and behaviour. Chrisjohn and Young (1993) write about the importance of Aboriginal persons' rights to participation in authentic research and of access to technical knowledge in the research process. In the effort to proceed with respect in the entire research process I often refer to "we" as a team of researchers through the text of this thesis, although I take full responsibility for its content.

Case study method

Social science has been criticized for its wont of producing irrelevant and conceptually flawed research in the Aboriginal community (Chrisjohn, 1986; Hampton, 1988). There is, however, a more practical and radical summation of this sentiment in the simple statement written by a mainstream social scientist,

... in a conversation with Art Solomon, a Native Elder, who asked, somewhat rhetorically, whether I would tolerate my own methods, or passively accept my interpretations, if I were a member of a Native community (Warry, 1990:61).

Art Solomon's question is a sign of the times in the Aboriginal community. The social science research industry is being held accountable as it has not been in the past. Therefore research must not only be accountable for scientific standards, it must be culturally appropriate, practical, and emancipatory.

After deciding that orality, youth telling their own stories, street culture and Aboriginal culture, and history and oppression were important and necessary components to be supported in the research, I decided to use qualitative critical case study methodology (Leenders & Erskine, 1989) incorporating an ethnographic stance (DeCastell & Walker, 1991; Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography not only provides description of a culture (as most conventional ethnography does) but allows for a particular kind of analysis and interpretation. "Critical ethnography," also, Thomas (1993) says,

... is grounded empirically in explicit prior evidence of a variety of debilitating social conditions that provide the departure point for research (33).

As stated before there is an abundance of research on the degraded social conditions, unequal treatment and marginalization of Aboriginal people in Canada. There is ample reason to believe that Aboriginal youth would suffer the consequences of generations of abuse in the present. Critical ethnography is, therefore, useful as a potential way to analyze Aboriginal street youth behaviour, not as successive acts of individualized deviance, but as a response to society's violence upon them — as an act of resistance (Thomas, 1993:51).

Thomas (1993) gives a list of six "guideposts for continual examination of research and reflection on purpose" of the research. They include ontology, topic selection, method, data analysis and interpretation, discourse and reflection (33). Ontologically, as stated above, there are structural and cultural arrangements which oppress some people but are not ordinarily visible (for example, gender, race, sexual orientation). Topic selection in this case came about by a one time opportunity

from the Royal Commission; however, it was my special interest in the field (I now work in Aboriginal child welfare research and development) which induced me to accept the opportunity. The discussion on method follows, and the data analysis and interpretation, discourse and reflection will be discussed presently.

The model most suited to the needs of the situation was a critical case study approach using descriptive/interpretive design. This method of research is characterized by specificity of focus with respect to the phenomenon or case under study, and by depth of description combined with interpretation of the data from various sources. The method is holistic and exploratory in nature and it is capable of incorporating a variety of disciplines, using a range of techniques for collection. It is "heuristic" as it seeks the illumination of otherwise unknown or little understood dynamics to the reader (Merriam, 1988; Reinharz, 1992; Leenders and Erskine, 1989). All of these traits make this model suitable to the needs of this study.

Specifically, qualitative case study methodology and critical ethnography are based in interpretation, which is particularly significant to the study of homeless Aboriginal youth as their lives express, in many ways, symptoms of structural barriers such as racism, poverty, and the impact of colonization. All these conditions are integral to any interpretation of their reality. (A structural examination would look to the structures of society, for instance, the Indian Act, the Child Welfare Act, the school system, the reserve system, and social marginalization for explanations of overrepresentation in social pathology statistics, rather than in the individual personal weakness of those involved.) That is to say that Aboriginal children are more at risk because of the way which the entire Canadian society is arranged. Blasi (1990), Shinn and Weitzman (1990) and Webber (1991) echo the need for a structural perspective to avoid blaming the survivors of marginalization and oppression.

Case study research is a method of studying social phenomena through the thorough analysis of an individual case(s). The case may be a person, a group, an episode, a process, a community,

a society or any other unit of social life. All data relevant to the case is gathered from various sources, and all available data is organized in terms of the case.

In this study the research team interviewed street youth, ex-street youth, parents of street youth, street services personnel and I have included the perceptions and recommendations of the research team in various ways. I have also taken into account street youth literature and policy that impacts on street youth. The case study method gives a unitary character to the data being studied by interrelating a variety of facts to a single case. It also provides an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details that are often overlooked with other methods. A critical ethnographic stance allows for a conceptual treatment of the data that goes beyond a positivist and/or liberal ideological stance. DeCastell and Walker (1991:18) call this getting a brain and not just an eye. For instance, by asking open-ended questions on fear, shame and anger, we were able to access information about cultural identity and the impact of racism. These dimensions are seldom sought by researchers nor are they easily quantifiable.

The case study approach offers a method that is able to focus on the complex reasons for ending up on the street and the conditions (culture) once youth are introduced into street culture. We wanted to gain insight into availability and utilization of mainstream and Aboriginal specific street services that provide on-going services and could potentially facilitate repatriation into home communities and implement prevention strategies for future generations of troubled youth.

Case study research is more complementary to the oral traditions of Aboriginal people and it offers a particularly disadvantaged population of Aboriginal youth an opportunity to give voice to their experiences and to give us insight into their lives before apprehension, experience in care or in custody, life on the run, and finally making a home on the street. We will see that some youth go into great detail about city life, reserve life, and about cultural involvement or lack thereof. They tell about positive close relationships with functional grandparents (and extended family) and they share the horrors of exploitation by adult care givers. In other words the case study offers voice to

a most powerless group. It is, then, "interpretation in context" (Merriam, 1988:10), within which the participant has the opportunity to direct the process through sharing their story.

Case study method is capable of drawing from many disciplines (Yin, 1984). As well as critical ethnography ("in their own voices," Thomas, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983/1990)) this study incorporates elements of psychological methods (the study of individual human behaviour (Merriam, 1988:25)); and sociological methods ("...attend to the constructs of society and socialization" (26)). The major strength of critical case study research in this context is the combined meaning of the experience for the youth, the researcher's interpretation and the fieldwork (16-19). The street youth project, then, has the potential of shedding light on the little known phenomena of Aboriginal street youth culture and identity.

Appendices A, B, and C contain a complete list of the questions that served as guidelines for the interviews. These questions were formulated after the research on methodology and much of the contextual/background reading was completed. They are broadly broken down into four areas:

1. Demographic information — from face sheets and from disclosed material during interviews;
2. History — personal experience at home, in care and in institutions and their impact;
3. Street life — history and present conditions, and street services utilization;
4. Future aspirations and hopes for improving present conditions.

Within these broad categories, section three guides the participant to talk about why they ran, the emotional impact of their history and present conditions on the street. The questions are open-ended so that within the context of sharing on the topics of shame, grief, and fear the participant had the opportunity to speak openly about a wide range of topics. They were able to identify abuse, exploitation, special or differential treatment on the street, racism, emotional issues such as loss, and identity and cultural issues without being directly confronted with specific questions on subjects which are hard to place into context if a direct question is asked.

Carrying out the research

The chronology of events in the research process were as follows:

- * Design of the study and literature review, preparation for training and formulating question areas;
- * Training, and site visits before the interviews were to take place;
- * Contextual information gathering — the researchers went out into the field and visited youth street services personnel — exploring the city, participating in needle vans, riding with youth detail, visiting and interviewing street workers and co-ordinators of services;
- * Interviewing — contact with the participants, street youth, ex-street youth, parents of street youth and street services workers;
- * Debriefing — healing circle and talks;
- * Writing the research report — data analysis and interpretation from transcribed interviews, use of tapes, extensive consultation with research assistants, and use of contextual material;
- * Reconceptualization of report into a thesis.

Many of these elements are discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

As a group of Aboriginal researchers the team needed to be cognizant of the precarious position that we occupied in this study. We were inquiring into issues that were very close to each of us as individuals and as Aboriginal people. At the same time we needed to avoid particular traps of social science research that can predispose the interpretation of the data. For instance, an overemphasis on the psychological characteristics could take us into a "blaming the victim" trap (Ryan, 1971), and solutions resulting from this perspective could further individualize the youth and alienate them from their reality, peers, culture and communities. Therefore a macro analysis that would take into consideration individual characteristics, history, culture and the society which has spawned street youth was critical. This approach might be expressed in the following manner:

- * To place street youth, including behaviour patterns and individual motivations, within a larger context (social structures of society);
- * To contextualize street youth personal situations within the larger socio-economic framework of urban society;
- * To stress that the institutions, agencies, legislation, government policy, etc. impact on and constrain the behaviour, motivations and social interactions/relationships of street youth. That is, people never act in a vacuum, and rarely do anything solely out of individual motivation;
- * And to use historical developments (Indian Act, Indian Affairs, urban migration, the reserve system and lack of educational and employment opportunities, other government policy [i.e. residential schools etc.]) to form the context/background of street youth behaviour.

The time lines were set as follows:

- * January - April 1993 — Design of study, library search, and training development;
- * May - June 1993 — Contextual information gathering, site visits and interviewing participants;
- * July 1993 — Debriefing;
- * September - March 1994 — Data analysis and interpretation, additional site visits in some cases, and writing the research report;
- * December 1994 - January 1995 — Revision of the research report.
- * January - August 1995 — Reconceptualization of the report as a thesis.

During the entire time from the training session in April 1993 until well into the interpretation of data, there were many telephone contacts with all of the research assistants. First there was on-going support for the research assistants while they were engaged in the interviews with the youth. On one occasion I had to stay on the phone with a research assistant as a participant was trying to forcibly enter her apartment. She had been dealing with stalking behaviour (this interview

and the person's participation in the study had to be discontinued because of extreme intoxication and threatening behaviour). On many occasions the research assistants just needed to vent feelings of despair and anguish at the conditions on the street. Secondly, there were many times when I had to check and recheck incidents reported by the youth on the tapes and to ground my interpretations.

Interpretation of the data

Perceptual description of Aboriginal youth on the street was not the goal in this research. DeCastell and Walker (1991) state that this type of recounting of culture "naturalizes, dehistoricizes, and renders seemingly unalterable, the situation that the ethnographer reports" (18). We were looking for the underlying causes for the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth on the street and the strengths present in street culture with which to build recommendations for the prevention of further suffering. The task was to conceptualize Aboriginal street youth behaviour taking into account personal histories, attitudes reflected in service utilization, racial oppression and cultural strengths (Thomas, 1993:51).

Jim Thomas (1993), for example, reveals the role of "symbolic identities" in his study on prisoners — with race as the indicator.

Racism in prisons occurs not only because of discriminatory practices, but also because one's race connotes and denotes sets of meanings that define how one "does time." The label **nigger** is more than just a hostile epithet. It also carries connotative conceptual baggage and implications for social interpretation and policy. Race becomes a metaphor that conveys pictures about how prisoners should act in dealing with the "niggers" to whom the images pertain. Racially imbued images take on the character of social myths by creating accounts, normative judgments, and actions directed toward a subordinate culture. The myths reproduce power relations by creating and consolidating icons that reinforce stigma, define societal responses, and establish the boundaries between the sacred dominant groups and profane subordinate ones (52).

Race as a concept results in the differential distribution of power and privilege and mediates how Aboriginal youth live on the street. This became evident time and again in the case studies.

In the data analysis and interpretation in this research there was always the danger of glossing over Aboriginal street youth issues by the constant comparison to mainstream street youth.

Secondly, the danger of romanticizing their uniqueness was inhibiting. The greatest obstacle, however, was the fear of descending into the extreme depths of despair, depression, hopelessness and helplessness with them. For all of these reasons the risk remains of underestimating the depth of Aboriginal street youth loss and pain, the urgency of their searching, and their craving for peace.

The analysis of street youth responses to the guiding questions was a complex task because at times there were contradictions that surfaced. Thomas (1993) states that "sometimes the gap between what the accounts described is sufficiently interesting that the accounts themselves can become the focus of analysis" (38). For example, why does Noella (Winnipeg) consistently avoid references to differential treatment? She reports that she does not perceive any differential treatment of herself in any context, in other words there is no racism (answer to direct question). Then she goes on to describe overt racist behaviour toward herself (and other Aboriginal people) in different contexts. The avoidance and denial, on the one hand, and the eventual disclosure of overt differential treatment, on the other, is a discrepancy which is of interest in this case study. Her life circumstances are very similar to the other youth in this study.

After the data collection was completed, there was, as mentioned earlier, a three day debriefing period so that the research assistants could share their experiences and perceptions. Categories, themes, similarities, differences and unique circumstances, particularly with differences in the demographics and sociology of the urban centres in question, were identified and noted. Since we were dealing with different municipal and provincial regulations, our debriefing was helpful and the sharing was integral to the analytical task.

The analysis then took shape through the use of field journals, extensive telephone contact and visits to research assistants, feedback from research assistants on drafts of the case studies and the final draft of the research report, tapes, transcripts, a literature review on street youth, newspaper articles, videos, contextual information (interviews with street services personnel), a review of policy and social work practice which involves Aboriginal street youth, and multiple visits to each city with

tours of frequented areas with research assistants and street workers in needle vans and mobile emergency services.

Primarily, the narratives spoke for themselves. There had been one common expectation between myself and those who interviewed the youth. This was before the interviews but after the training and much reading on the subject of street youth. Upon entering the research process, we as researchers each began to have our own agendas (stuff we wanted to make sure got said), and an urgency and distrust that the youth would be able to articulate what we had come to know, through our own experience or by entering the underground of street life, were urgent needs. As the interviews were completed, and the transcripts and tapes were reviewed, we realized that no one could have articulated the complexities of street life and the needs of Aboriginal street youth better than they could. They had surpassed our naive and secret presumptions about their intelligence and ultimately their needs. We unanimously agreed that their experience and maturity deserves its primacy in this study and that they deserve our respect for their tenacity and survival skills. They demonstrated pride in their survival skills and revelled in the knowledge that most of us would perish faced with their daily challenges.

Reliability and validity

In the Aboriginal street youth case study research the goal was to ensure that the findings could be recognized by the participants wherever possible by getting feedback from them. Because of street youth transient lifestyle and running behaviour, however, this was extremely difficult to obtain. In lieu of youth feedback the research assistants were repeatedly consulted on the recognizability of the youth participants in the case studies. They were satisfied that the participants were accurately described and that the youth experience, as told to them, was authentically portrayed.

Reliability is enhanced by several methods. The first is triangulation, which is using "multiple methods of data collection and analysis ... (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:172)." This research used

contextual information, open-ended interviewing of parents and advocates, indepth case studies and elements of participant observation. Anthropological, psychological and sociological analytical approaches were combined in the analysis. Detailed discussion of the underlying elements of the study, explanations of the context of the data collection, any identifiable biases toward the people being studied, and the basis for selecting participants (172) are included in the study. Finally a detailed description of the decision-making process, exactly how the study was done, how the data was collected, and the choosing of themes all become integral parts of the study (173).

Longitudinal or repeated study, or participatory methods (where the participant is involved in the research from beginning to end) used for enhancing validity were not possible because of street youth transience and monetary and time constraints. So far as possible to allow for a participant-driven process an introductory interview was included to facilitate trust building. Participant rights and our responsibilities were laid out and the research process was explained in as much detail as possible. The youth were given the opportunity to review the type of questions they would be expected to respond to and in some cases the participants took the questions away with them prior to the first taped interview. The interviewers went to the participant's environment and interviewed them in places where they felt comfortable. For instance, Etah refused to leave the street environment and reviewed the questions over several days. Dale similarly invited the interviewer into his home after the second interview. And others went to the interviewer's home after introductory interviews. The youth were offered the opportunity to review their input and a question was asked if there was anything they wanted to add which had not been directly asked or indirectly been given opportunity for. The youth were informed and offered the opportunity to review the contents of the study when a draft was completed: however, none were available when that time came.

Triangulation was used once again by utilizing three separate interviewers and more than one method of confirming data (Merriam, 1988:169). The debriefing session (which was taped)

facilitated a collective approach to creating themes and detailed feedback was sought. More than one level of peer review were in place for feedback of a technical nature. And the researcher's biases are explicitly accounted for in the last section in this chapter.

A multicas e analysis, predetermined sampling (for example, the attempt to get predominantly Métis representation from Winnipeg) and question areas, and collective determination of themes were used in order to ensure that if similar experiences began to emerge this was a result of participant dialogue and not a result of process inconsistencies. In the present critical case study analysis of Aboriginal street youth the initial purpose was to tell their stories and the more practical business of evaluating, assessing, and information gathering with respect to the concrete conditions and services for them. The ethnographic narratives were intended to be the substance for affecting policy and subsequently appropriate service delivery. Upon repeated examination of the transcripts of the tapes, the contextual information (from all sources), and the research assistant journals, there was no reason to believe that the youth were telling anything except what had actually happened to them. The narratives did not show significant inconsistencies in the outcome. The indepth "thick description" nature of case study analysis allowed for exploration of difficult topics such as the relationship of Aboriginality and street youth experiences.

Constraints

As well as the strengths of case study research listed here, this study has weaknesses that require acknowledgement. A drawback, in working with the data, of having three separate assistants to conduct the interviews with the participants with significantly different interpersonal communication styles, was noted. This condition may have resulted in a wide range of response patterns due to different abilities to gain trust and establish a comfort zone with the youth within a short time period. For instance, one interviewer encouraged uninterrupted story like sessions while guiding the story with short quietly stated question areas, whereas another interviewer actively became engaged in a question and answer periods (with frequent interruptions). The different styles

made compiling the case studies difficult and demanded the full use of taped interviews as well as transcriptions. However, the information gleaned by the process was not significantly different in content.

Another difficulty with the diversity which the team presented was the different ways of working with written materials, recorded reactions and documenting interviews with agency personnel. This ranged from extremely comprehensive, meticulous, and organized to sparse, undated, and disorganized. For instance, one research assistant interviewed (and recorded) an exhaustive list of street-related personnel and had all of them sign consent forms, while the others interviewed fewer workers with little or no documentation. (Consent forms for agency personnel were not required.) Needless to say, when one is working with thousands of pieces of information, an organized, well documented data pool is very helpful.

Sensitivity in the introductory period of the interviewing process was a critical stage in the research (Leenders & Erskine, 1989). Webber (1991), in her book Street kids: The tragedy of Canada's runaways, discusses distrust of social workers as a major obstacle to be overcome in entering into a collaborative relationship with street youth. In training the research assistants I concentrated on the interviewing process, on trust building and on developing an information base about street life from the literature review and from interviews with street services personnel. Although sensitivity is clearly an asset, and it also helped that all of the research assistants who were interviewing at the street level were Aboriginal people, we still needed people at the community (street) level who already had the trust of the youth. Potentially it could take several months or years to enter the trusted circle of people who have been repeatedly betrayed.

The distrust of authority figures (especially anyone involved with the government) by alienated street youth is well known and understandable. The interviewer first had to become somewhat comfortable with the street and its culture, secondly to gain the trust of street agency workers, and finally to begin the near impossible task of establishing a transitory but stable

relationship with the youth themselves (who are very transient in the summer). Each depended on the other.

Street workers, (some of them) themselves street survivors, who had seen occasions of futile and personal gain exploitation of street people by researchers, were reluctant to see the charade continue. They were extremely cautious about referrals. In more than one case the worker refused to allow a second researcher (myself) to meet the participant. It was decided that I would not attempt to "come along" since I was not involved in the entire interview process. Perhaps, due to this caution, we may have been referred to youth who could "handle it" — so to speak. Although there was no evidence that Etah (Vancouver) was referred by workers to other researchers, she indicated previous experience with interviews.

In addition to the primary obstacle of distrust from participants and street workers, a secondary drawback was having to depend exclusively on the street workers for referral of participants. This meant that we could not say for sure how or why particular persons were chosen for participation in the study and this aspect was not discussed in the interviews. Nor could we make sure that we did not have all the same type of street youth in each city, for example all outgoing, relatively self-assured youth who were perceived as easy to interview, or conversely tough enough to withstand a probing endeavour. It also meant that we were unable to fulfil the idyllic representational scheme that we had begun with. For instance, we could not demand four people of Métis ancestry from Winnipeg and four people of Inuit background from Montreal. While every effort was made to fulfil this goal we had to take whomever street workers provided. Male/female representation in individual cities was skewed; however, overall a close to proportional representation was achieved.

A more practical reason for choosing to go with the more conservative method of participant referral was concern for the research assistants' physical safety. The street is not an inviting place to be, even in the daytime. At night the scene is treacherous. At the best of times the street is

depressing; at its worst it is dangerous. The research assistants put themselves at considerable risk in order to become familiar with the street, to accompany street agency workers on their rounds, and to meet potential collaborators. Since private contractors are not insured under Royal Commission benefits they could not be asked to place themselves in jeopardy. As noted earlier, we had at least one instance of stalking by a would-be participant of the project.

Agency staff were, at times, reluctant to discuss their involvement, or lack thereof, with Aboriginal street youth. These agency representatives became defensive on any mention of underutilization of their service by Aboriginal youth or racism within the street youth industry. Overall, however, agency workers were co-operative and gave us great insight into youth street life and utilization of street services.

There was a problem with the original age range chosen as parameters for the research. Although we raised the age of the participants from 12 to 18 to 14 to 20 (with Travis in Winnipeg as an exception because he and Noella are treated as a couple), most are under 18 years which is under the legal age of consent in all of the provinces. This presented a problem with respect to informed consent and legal guardianship. We were informed that the participants could give consent to participate in the study (with the younger participants we also requested parental consent). Laws are in effect, however, that mandate social workers, teachers and other public and social service workers to report the abuse of a minor to criminal justice or child protection authorities.

In Manitoba, for example, The Child and Family Services Act (1985-86, c.8 — Chapter C80) statutory reporting requirements state:

Duty to report: 18(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of any other Act, subsection (1) applies when where the person has acquired the information through the discharge of professional duties or within a confidential relationship, but nothing in this subsection abrogates any privilege that may exist because of the relationship between a solicitor and the solicitor's client (22.1)

Since abuse is probable in the lives of street youth, we had to inform participants that any unreported abuse of a minor would be reported to appropriate authorities and that a child at large, known to the research assistant, would have to be reported (and in one instance it became necessary to report a runaway youth). Therefore youth may have been afraid of the repercussions of disclosure of abuse, may have been protecting a significant adult person who was abusing, or may have been afraid of pimps or drug dealers. They would ostensibly be resistant then to discussing current and on-going abuse and of being on the run. This appears to be the case particularly with the younger participants.

A drawback of a technical nature occurred because the Commission hired the persons that transcribed the taped interviews, and while this meant that I did not have to worry about this aspect of the study, a problem with this arrangement occurred. Considerable time was required to read and reread the transcripts and to check them against the tapes, because large pieces of the interviews were left out of the transcripts. Transcribers, for instance, might leave a note on the transcript, "Note: skipped part — rambles on" (Jean-Marc, p.24, transcript 2). Other times no note was left. This made the interpretation of the interviews difficult.

Other obstacles originate from monetary and time constraints which are common drawbacks in research. The writing stage, which involved ten case studies from lengthy transcriptions and hours of interview audio-tape, was a lengthy and arduous process. I decided that as much detail as possible would be left in the case study report and that every effort would be made to make the voice of the participants the focus of the study. In keeping with this goal only those issues, policies and services that were directly mentioned in the case studies were analyzed. For the report to the Royal Commission I resisted the urge to intellectualize or to treat Aboriginal street youth experience like an academic subject in favour of insisting on the primacy of Aboriginal street youth voices. The thesis incorporates a mainstream academic context into the study.

The two and a half months allotted for research assistants to do data collection in the field was insufficient for the type of agencies and quality of contact with participants required in the study. Rather six months was needed for them to gain the trust of alienated youth, to meet the challenge of exploring the terrain of the street youth, and to get interviews with street workers who are undervalued, overworked, underpaid, and who are at the same time protective of their children. The numerous agencies and government departments that touch the lives of street youth are complex, competitive and overextended — without exception. In many instances it took many telephone calls and missed appointments to get in to see a busy counsellor or co-ordinator. The time constraints were more noticeable in the relationship building and termination stages of the interviews.

Corresponding to the constraints caused by the short timeframe was the project budget. An extended budget would have afforded more time for contextual information gathering, choosing our own collaborators, extended timeframes for interviews, relationship building and closure time. Secondly, the issue of researchers spending extended periods of time with extremely destitute youth with no means to recover expenses could have been avoided. Thirdly, more large urban centres, such as Calgary and the maritime city of Halifax, could have been added.

Reflections as an Aboriginal person

A second instance from my childhood is salient in reflecting on the research process that touches on Aboriginal culture and identity. I had the opportunity to closely observe two distinctly different manifestations of cultural self-esteem within my extended family. I was raised by my parents in very close proximity (although not in the same house) to my grandparents; therefore, I had daily access to both generations. First I must add that geographically my reserve is situated too far north for the early agricultural contact with White people, and too far south to be very affected by the fur trade. Because of this location, and because of extensive racism in the area, we were pretty much left alone for a long time. My grandparents did not speak English nor had they gone to

mainstream schools. They were, however, respected pillars in the community. My mother, on the other hand, had been taken to the residential school from ages 10-16.

I began to observe, early in life, the difference in personal and cultural pride between the two generations. My grandparents exhibited a strength of character and cultural pride (in any setting) which was exemplary and nearly absent in my mother. She would instead make statements to us (children) which indicated she did not like our Indianness. Her self-esteem was poor particularly around White people. She felt inadequate. This became a constant source of pain and curiosity. Although I resolved that I must look to my grandparents for strength and simply tolerate my mother's difference, I did not know until much later in life that my mother's resocialization in residential school and subsequent domestic and very punitive, hard labour with a White family were the probable cause for our suffering. Nevertheless, observing and analyzing colonial impact vis-à-vis Aboriginal culture and identity became an early passion.

Thomas (1993) states that there is a fine line between "going native" and "going over to the other side." This was an ever present caution in the research process. "Going native" means to lose one's identity in the culture under study; "going over to the other side" means to "to give up our scientific persona and substitute the norms of the new culture for the canons of science" (48). Since I was an Aboriginal social worker in the process of research with Aboriginal street youth there was a triple affinity. First, I am professionally involved in social change primarily with Aboriginal children. Secondly, I am of the same cultural background, and thirdly I have the same societal marginal status. It helped that research assistants conducted the actual interviews and that I have always been distanced from street life.

There was, however, an interesting phenomena with my explicitly political stance. For the last twenty years of my work and studies in working directly with racism and the impact of colonization, and having been covertly (and sometimes overtly) ostracized by both mainstream and Aboriginal institutions for being critical, I was now hired because of my personal and political

perspective. I had explored the impact of research on my community. And I was cynical. When the research had begun in earnest I became frightened that, after all my intellectual and emotional exploration of Aboriginal issues (particularly with children) and critique of research paradigms, I could not do these children justice. This made an already emotionally difficult proposition near impossible. My fear was very disconcerting, after all, I was tough as nails in my own resistance to (things like) being treated like a "token Indian" in academia. For instance, "after I had acquired my graduate degree" I received a call from a sociologist to come to a class to come and tell them about the "traditional Aboriginal family." Assuming this would be the sum total of Aboriginal content in this course, I answered curtly, "You must have the wrong number, I can only discuss how it was destroyed." (In any event, I went and gave a history of colonization and racism and its impact on the family.) This and many other instances of resistance were and are valued parts of my identity as an Aboriginal person. Now I was to be on the same side of the struggle and it meant maybe nothing would change. I would rather be a street worker than engage in an act of futility.

The tension between actively working for social change and remaining "scientifically objective" was a cultural as well as a political and academic dilemma. Culturally, for me, to remain objective in an encounter is to come without spirit — without substance. You cannot be trusted. This contradiction needed to be resolved. Critical case study analysis is the reporting of the subjective experience of participants through specificity of description, and is no less "scientific" or "objective" with the explicit inclusion of the researcher's perspective or bias — politically or culturally. "Objectivity," in this sense, "simply means taking the intellectual risk of being proven demonstrably wrong" (Thomas, 1993:17). I was less afraid of the intellectual risk.

Because of the paucity of relevant information in the social sciences, the great distances between sites, and the part-time nature of the research, I found the process very isolating and emotionally arduous. The compilation of the case studies, which took countless hours of working

with tapes and transcripts, was extremely painful. I cannot say how many times I cried everytime I approached further work on the case studies. It was never easy.

As a team of Aboriginal researchers the process was equally difficult. We had to cope with the grim reality that unfolded before us in the field. This was extremely difficult emotionally. We were faced with the culmination of abuse and oppression in our own image — in our children. For many of us this experience brought back images of our own abuse and oppression in the city — in our own country. At the end of the data collection phase, we gathered in Vancouver in order to share our experiences. We first conducted a traditional healing circle with all of the research team present, we needed to debrief the sorrow, pain and helplessness that we were feeling.

We told our stories, we cried, and we supported each other. All of us experienced anguish at entering the lives of destitute Aboriginal street youth and leaving, not knowing if anything would be done in time to alleviate the suffering in the lives we had touched. One researcher stated that she simply sat down on the curb and cried a number of times. Others wrote messages of despair in their field journal. Others yet came face to face, in the voice of the youth, with their own identity and cultural issues. Some interviewers were called derogatory names by the youth which indicated their distrust in Aboriginal people who appeared to have sold out to mainstream society; that hurt deeply. Others needed to express the extreme disgust upon entering the world of the exploiter of Aboriginal children. In the end, we gained extreme respect for the survivors of Canadian society's collective abuse. Our lives were profoundly changed by our experience.

Having begun our process of healing we set upon the task of descrambling our data. Categories, differences, similarities, and trends were identified. Cities were closely scrutinized. Where were the major hot spots and why? Where were the Aboriginal ghettos? What difficulties were experienced in the field? All became a part of the final product.

Another indicator of self-identification in the research process is shown in a paper entitled "Aboriginal communities and social science research: Voyeurism in transition" (Gilchrist, 1994)

which I presented at an international conference for WUNSKA (a national network of Aboriginal social work educators). There I examine research methods vis-à-vis cultural values and history and the obstacles the practice of research presents to the Aboriginal community. In this process I had to analyze classical social science methods and juxtapose these with my values as an Aboriginal person.

Some of these cautions were taken into consideration in the street youth research context. The value free objective underlying conventional research method indicates (in an Aboriginal context) that a researcher does not show respect by acknowledging the possible sources of prejudgment or imposition of interpretation. Everyone is socialized in context and comes with attitudes and symbolism that are mediated by race, class, culture, sexual orientation, ability and gender. It is a matter of respect, integrity and accountability to identify oneself and one's position in the greater scheme of things. Ahistoricity engendered by most research does not pay homage to the ancestors or orality and obscures the totality of life experience. Individualization of subjects disregards the Aboriginal cultural value of the collective, therefore, cultural relevance is compromised. In this research I am accountable for these values. "kapītipis ē-pimohteyahk: Aboriginal street youth in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montreal" was conceptualized and carried out from the beginning with respect for the participants, for the research assistants, for myself, for the process itself, and for those who provided this opportunity.

How did this research process affect me as an Aboriginal person? It has concretized some of my cultural and political theoretical ravings about research. I know what I will and will not do, and I know why. I am further resolved to create social change, not only out there where the need is most obvious, but in our knowledge production.

Among us, traditionally, the scholars are the servants of the people. The 'People' reign supreme, by virtue of their right to approve or disapprove actions in all areas of life, and by reason of their prerogative to protect individual and tribal rights. And let the scholars spend 'their very lives' and energies to the service of the people (Costa, 1970 in La Framboise & Plake (1983)).

Chapter 3. Vancouver

The city of Vancouver is the third largest in Canada and currently has the highest real estates value in North America. It is on a peninsula, located in the southwest corner of mainland British Columbia, surrounded by Burrard Inlet, the Strait of Georgia and the Fraser River. Metropolitan Vancouver has an area of 2787 square kilometres while the city of Vancouver itself is only 114 square kilometres. The populations of Vancouver and Metropolitan Vancouver are 477,872 and 1,602,500 respectively.

The climate in Vancouver is quite mild, the summers are warm and dry and the winters are quite rainy with annual precipitation of approximately 1257.7 mm, which is mostly rain in the winter. The temperatures range from an average of 2.8 degrees celsius (27 degrees fahrenheit) in January to July temperatures that average 17.2 degrees celsius (63 fahrenheit). Vancouver attracts many people because of its mild climate and natural beauty and diversity — for transient people the climate allows them to live in relative comfort with minimal shelter (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 1988).

Major industries include: tourism, the port, natural resources (logging, mining, agriculture, fishing), manufacturing, services, finance (international banking centre and head offices for provincial industries, banks, government, and other financial institutions) and film making. It is also a major North American port so it has extensive economic ties with the other countries of the Pacific Rim (Vancouver Board of Trade).

Cox (1993) stated that the total population of people reporting Aboriginal origin in British Columbia has risen by 33% since 1986 — from 126,625 to 169,036 in 1991. Just under 80% of those people live off-reserve (Valentine, 1993). In 1991 the population of Aboriginal people was approximately 2 per cent or about 25,000 people in the city of Vancouver (Aboriginal Peoples' Survey, 1991). Now there are 42,795 people of Aboriginal decent in the city, the third highest Aboriginal urban population in the country (Valentine, 1993). There is a high density of reserves

and Aboriginal communities in and around Vancouver. The area along the mainland coast to the northwest and interior regions, up through the Fraser River valley and much of Vancouver Island is heavily populated by Aboriginal people, who have relatively easy access to the city.

The Executive Director of the Urban Representative Body of Aboriginal Nations Society (usually called URBAN Society) of Vancouver, Tim Michel stated that they represent 38 Aboriginal organizations and he estimates there are 90 organizations altogether (provincial, federal and grassroots) in Greater Vancouver area (70 in Vancouver alone). Michel believes that the Aboriginal population census statistics are incorrect and that approximately 120,000 - 150,000 live in Vancouver, North Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond and other surrounding areas (including reserves).

In Vancouver the eastside is heavily populated by Aboriginal people and other minorities. Poverty, unemployment, housing shortage, crime and high welfare tolls are concentrated in this area. Forty-eight women have died violently in the Vancouver downtown eastside in the last 11 years, seventy-five percent of whom were Aboriginal women (Huaka, 1993 a & b). A 1990 city health report stated that women in the area can expect to live nine years less than women in the whole metropolitan area (Gram, 1993).

Although the Granville Mall area of Vancouver gets most of the media attention because it is a gentrified area, and it is where the stereotypical street youth (i.e. punks and skinheads) hang out, mostly White street youth frequent the Mall. Most Aboriginal youth are situated on the eastside. "Kids in the eastside are more poverty stricken and destitute" said a director of a street youth facility.

Vancouver has an estimated 400-450 street youth, approximately 60 percent of whom are Aboriginal youth. The Social Planning Council estimated 300-400 in 1990 (Social Planning Council, Vancouver, 1990). If you add all categories it is more like 1200 (part time, entrenched, yuppie weekenders and curb kids) street youth that reside in Vancouver, particularly in the summer. Street youth in general come from everywhere in Canada (27% from lower mainland; 30% rest of B.C.; 39% elsewhere in Canada; 6% Vancouver homes according to the Social Planning Council of

Vancouver, 1990) and very few come from within the city. Missy, a former street youth from Vancouver, stated that there are a number of Aboriginal youth who are intergenerational street people. In some instances the daughter is on one street corner and the mother is on the other. Three other areas that street youth hang out at are: Downtown south consisting of several blocks around Seymour and Davie Street, Seymour Street and Richards Street ("the stroll"); Downtown eastside consisting of Hastings Avenue and Main Street, Hastings up to Victoria Street; and Mount Pleasant consisting of Broadway Avenue on either side of Fraser Street.

Case studies

The street youth in Vancouver who participated in the study were selected with the assistance of a street youth worker at Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) which is situated near the intersection of Hastings and Main in Vancouver. This district is where the skid row bars stand like worn out soldiers all in a row, and where most of hard core street people of Aboriginal ancestry spend much of their time.

Etah, Joanne, and Karen, perhaps, each present an atypical image of what we think of as street youth. They each are unique in their background circumstance, their journey into street culture, and in their current situation and levels of development. There is no evidence that the youth represented in this study from Vancouver know each other.

Etah and Joanne seem to hang out in roughly the same areas which range from the Granville Mall, the westend and less so in the eastend of Vancouver. They are highly transient and move from city to city, and they both have an exterior punk style. This is where the similarity ends. Etah is a nine year street resident who is dedicated to her lifestyle with protest determination. Serious and cautious, she more closely resembles the stereotype of "street kid," the one who has embraced the mind in perpetual survival mode — one who would find it a compromise to submit to easy street in a society that is dying of greed. Joanne, on the other hand, is a happy-go-lucky young person, a more immature two year visitor on the street, a young woman who hangs out in the downtown

Granville area with a group of teenagers and who is in transition into an independent living situation. Joanne laughs easily and does not exhibit the fatalistic outlook that is evident with Etah.

Karen is another story. She is removed from much of the youth peer related activity. She is flirting with hard core skid row life. Karen's older siblings are veterans of Vancouver's Hastings and Main district and her street peer group are older (skid row bar waiters and waitresses). Karen often "stays" at downtown hotel dwellings with friends. She disappears for weeks into the void of urban downtown poverty. Etah and Joanne do not describe this phenomenon as a main reference point. They have chosen to join a street family consisting of non-relatives who are also street youth. They are highly transient and can look after themselves. Karen who is two years younger, as far as we know, has not left Vancouver.

ETAH

It's like an instinct to a child when they're born. They get born into a world of wrath and to protect that child instinct of themselves, the innocence of themselves, they start building their walls so that all the hatred will bounce right off them and so they become very arrogant and everything becomes really lonely (p.15, transcript 2).

Etah is a 17 year old young woman born on a reserve near Calgary, Alberta. She is of Tsuu Tina ancestry and a nine year very street wise, highly transient veteran of the streets in various cities in the United States and Canada. She had just arrived from New Orleans, Louisiana, the week we made first contact. In early June 1993, when the first interviews took place, Etah was "squatting" in an abandoned house near Stanley Park in Vancouver, by the end of our dialogue she had moved to another squat, by herself, in the downtown area. She survives by dumpster diving, table scrapping and panhandling and she receives an independent living allowance from welfare.

As the street youth worker had described, Etah arrived for the first interview looking like what might be described as a typical young "punk" type person of the streets. She had pierced rings in her nose, eyebrows and several in each ear, and she wore many rings on her fingers, which were topped off with numerous bracelets and necklaces. She was carrying an army knapsack and her

clothes were very tattered and very dirty. Her long dyed green hair was shaved on the top of her head. This style, she related later, reflects her distinctiveness.

Etah is highly intelligent and needs very badly to stay in total control of her complicated life. She demands to have the guiding questions a couple of days before the actual interview so that she can think about her response. Even then, she insists that the interviewer not ask anything that is not on the sheet in front of her. In her likable and courteous manner she tells the interviewer not to put words in her mouth as she recites, in a semi-monotone but melodious voice, the events of her life. Even though Etah was nervous and spoke quite fast at the onset of the interview she became talkative, however, there remains a distinct feeling that she is not telling you everything. Perhaps she did not want to implicate those close to her.

Characteristically, she declined an invitation to go to the interviewer's house in favour of staying on her "own ground." The interviews took place in parks that she frequented and McDonald's restaurant on the Granville Mall. In this environment she seems fearless and "at home." She elegantly places her knife (her protection) on the table as she eats voraciously with her fingers and ends the feast by stocking up on the condiments available in the restaurant. During the contact for this research, however, Etah would betray a very real vulnerability. For instance, she reveals,

When I do things like this [referring to interviews with researchers], I have a way of going through things without showing much emotion, just trying to deal with the problem and then all the feelings will come out a lot later from now. So it usually works out (p.5, transcript 2).

Later on in the interview she lets slip that she uses a medical clinic for "anxiety attacks" among other things.

History

... well so I pretty much thought that I was a factory child with nineteen brothers and sisters, but I know none of them (p.7, transcript 1).

Etah is the eldest of nineteen half brothers and sisters from various combinations of blended families. She doesn't say where her mother (also Aboriginal) is from, only just that her mom had

"just run away and ended up on the reservation with my father ... and here I am." (She is referring to her status Aboriginal biological father.)

Then my mother took off a while after that and I have about 19 brothers and sisters from there on. My father got married to several different wives on his side and ended up just having them, and my mother ended up on one side with another man and just ended up having a whole bunch of kids. I have about three brothers and sisters on my mother's side and about 16 brothers and sisters on my father's side. I am kind of in the middle and I don't have any brothers or sisters that have been born of the same mother and father (p.10, transcript 1).

Etah and her mother left the reserve when Etah was five years old. After four(ish) tumultuous and mobile years (the reserve, Richmond, Maple Ridge, Edmonton, Burnaby, Vancouver) with her mother Etah, having quit school in grade six, moved into the "child in care" system for a brief period, and then onto the "freedom" of the street. There has been no contact with her mother and maternal siblings in a few years, nor has she met most of her paternal half siblings.

Etah met her father in the last two years, still a resident of the reserve. "I don't usually call him father," she qualifies her salutation, "If I wasn't doing this report" Her meetings with him are half remembered hazes of alcohol delirium. "Whenever I met him I'd get drunk for a couple of days and wake up in a different city."

On her trips to the reserve Etah has met an array of relatives on her father's side. An uncle, her grandmother and a new half sister (born May 25, 1993) are named as significant people in her life. Although the reserve does not enter as a possible place for a future home, Etah never indicated a distaste for the reserve setting or the people there, nor did she glorify them.

I know my uncle on my father's side — my father's brother, I know my grandmother, I know a lot of the uncles and aunts but I have a really hard time remembering them cause I just been to the reservation a couple of times and when I was there, there was a big full room of people. A whole bunch of people came out to me and basically said, 'Oh, I knew you when you were a baby,' she stopped and gave me a big hug and I didn't remember their names. Supposedly I met about 50 people on my father's side that I was really related to and don't know any of my mother's brothers or sisters or grandparents or any people like that except her. I know one of my sisters [on mother's side] (p. 10, transcript 1).

Although the contact with her "father's" family is fairly tentative, Etah will return to the reserve to see the new baby. This seems like a scene that will be repeated again and again until she does remember everybody's name.

On the streets

Survival is a pretty easy thing physically. Mentally, survival is pretty hard but you go it on a day by day basis, if you are patient (p.3, transcript 3).

Etah relates that the first time she ran she was five years old. "I ran all the way to the front bush ... The first time I was on the streets was when my mother left my father and she lived on the streets for a while and I was pretty lost." Etah describes her journey toward confirmed street life beginning at the age of nine with an incident in her single parent Vancouver home.

When I was about 9 years old, it was Christmas Eve and a lot of things were adding up to my anger and I had said something and a lot of things were adding up to mother's anger. I had said something and it really offended her, so my mother ... and that's basically how I got on the street. I ended up getting picked up by the police and being put back into the [foster] home for about a period of 4 weeks. After that, I got into a fight with my mother about going to school because I was really sick and so we got into a fight and I got really angry. It ended up where she phoned the police and on my way to school I got picked up by about 3 cop cars. I got put into a group home where I ran from The third group home was a very manipulating group home. I felt pretty much boxed in and really used because their children ... that they were supporting them a lot more than they were supporting us which is understandable because it was their own flesh and blood. But what wasn't understandable was the fact that they were taking on the responsibility of other lives and using the money that they got from us to support their own children. And in that way it really made me angry so I would do things to the point where it would piss them off so that they would kick me out, so that I would have to be running from the police so I can just live without being chased. They kicked me out expecting me to run back to my mother and I ended up not running back to my mother and going downtown (p.3, transcript 1).

The interim between arriving on the street and meeting her mentor "who brought me back to a squat ... " was described like this:

When I got on the streets I went pretty much from building to building, living in laundromats and eating what I could and then I met a girl and I went out to a different part of the street where I cleaned up peoples' houses because I thought it would be nice because they were letting me live with them. And I slept between there and China Creek Park on Broadway. And I lived with them for a long time and then ended up downtown and from downtown I ended up squatting and have been squatting ever since (p.1, transcript 1).

Although Etah states that she was not running from anything in particular, except that:

I did not like where I was before and I didn't like the cages that I was put in from school, I didn't like the levels that I was categorized to be, the judgement that I was given. I didn't like having the lifestyle that I had and the streets seem a little bit more free than the place that I was (p.3, transcript 1).

Etah was disillusioned with society's norms and she needed freedom. Etah does not explicitly state why she did not return to her mom. A statement later in the interview, "I had a great fear of older men," may or may not indicate a possible exacerbating factor in problems between mother and daughter.

Etah has been highly transient (or should we say, well travelled) and has experienced life on the streets in Vancouver and Victoria in British Columbia; Toronto, and Snake Island, in Ontario; Montreal, Val D'or (group home), and Amos in Quebec; from Seattle, Washington to New Orleans, Louisiana, and all points in between. Much of this travel is with friends from the street and sometimes she travels alone. She makes the method of travel sound so simple, "hitchhiking and riding the rails." Her travel wise method of keeping her head about her and relating to people on a person to person level has kept her safe.

Survival on the streets, Etah says, is not a physical matter so much as survival of the mind, as she nonchalantly describes physical survival.

Well, I dumpster dive a lot, which means that I go into dumpsters and rummage around — find what I can, leave what I can't use. I go into establishments and drink coffee and whenever somebody finishes and leaves, and they leave a little bit of food behind, I kind of swipe it, eat it, do that till I finish with my hunger. Either that or somebody will come downtown with a little bit extra money and buy me something to eat ... or I'll panhandle until I can make enough, sometimes I go down to drug street ... and get meal tickets ... I go out and get food that way ... I basically wear the same clothes for about a year and then once they've disintegrated off my body I'll find a new set of clothes somewhere — rummaging around in different dumpsters, different squats, I'll find something — wear that for another year, until they disintegrate (p.11, transcript 1).

Physical safety and warmth are a never ending preoccupation with homeless people. The city offers some refuge from the weather at strategic orifices, from which the city exhales its warm

stale exhaust, and in its decayed cavities. Etah describes the squat and some of the conditions they encounter in them in this way:

The squat is basically an abandoned building that nobody is really using, so we use it. Cause we have really pretty much no where else to go. It shelters from the rain. On the odd chance you run into a lot of people — you run into a lot of weird mistakes. But after a while you get pretty much cautious and you take precautions. Basically squat lice ... there are a lot of things going on right now at squats, like squat rats and stuff like that. I remember somebody asking me saying like, 'Somebody owns that, somebody pays money for that.' Pretty much money to me is just toilet paper so, then nobody really owns anything ... only what they got inside their heads you know. If there is something that you need you have to pay money for it. I mean there are a lot of kids out there that are on the streets that need a place to go and sleep and if it's there they are not going to do it [pay for lodging] because it's not provided for them, you know (p.6, transcript 1). I basically go between ... I've gone between more than two squats because I've travelled a lot and run into a lot of different squats and basically going to abandoned buildings, live there secure, get electricity by getting candles, getting water from jugs and bringing them back to the squat and securing it Let's see, in the United States, when I was travelling I slept a lot by the railroad tracks in a cardboard box. I went also to Arizona ... lived in a cardboard condominium which is put together with cardboard and wood, and you can basically make it into a tree house. I've slept on moving trains, I've slept on the side of the road, just basically surviving, I'll sleep in the forest like on the island. I will usually sleep by the camp fire — get a tree or a tire just put it over amongst the trees. Basically I've been into some really neat squats. They were fourteen stories high, we had keys to get in, they were so well put together — a lot of people lived there. If they tore that place down they took a lot of peoples' homes away. Squats are kind of a lot more, of a person on the street's, home than I think anybody else's home because it has a lot more emotions and a lot more feeling in a squat than any other (p.11, transcript 1). I remember one time in the winter I was living in a squat and it was really cold and I didn't have any blankets. Well, I had this bag that a place called S.K.I.D. gave to me and it had kind of a blanket in it but it wasn't really that big and I got really cold. I went out to the mall and it was opened and I walked in and I was just going in there to warm up and I got kicked out. I was really upset because I was so cold and I didn't have any money. A lot of things like that have happened and not much you can do about it except you try to do as much as you can (p.3, transcript 3).

Etah is knowledgeable about AIDS and birth control. Since leaving a two year relationship (some time ago) she says she has been celibate and she has tested negative for AIDS. In that relationship "who I was married to — not under the law" Etah became pregnant with twins. She describes the relationship and her ordeal:

He's practically the last person I got together with. A significant person I shared a great deal of my life with him and I ended up getting pregnant with him to the point where I was 5 months pregnant. I was in a town that was really alien to me and

didn't have any ID so I was also in a town called Amos where they don't really have any services for people on the street. I ended up having to live off of dry bread that we got out of the garbage and dried donuts from Tim Horton's (that they threw out) and I got really sick and lost one of the children in my stomach. The city, well the province of Quebec, decided that it would biodegrade inside my stomach so they weren't going to take it out and that really didn't make me feel comfortable and as the days passed on I knew that I would have a very hard time taking care of a child, so I moved back to Vancouver for a period of a month and gave my child away figuring that it wasn't ready to come in into this world, but it was still ... the child ... the two children that were inside my stomach were a great significance in my life as well, cause they were there, they were alive. Also, Edward took care of me when I couldn't take care of myself, didn't ask for anything in return, he didn't do anything that I didn't want him to do. And we shared a lot of life together and that's why he was a significant person in my life (p.8, transcript 1).

Etah indicates a cautionary attitude towards drugs and addiction, although she uses alcohol.

I'm pretty much drug wise ... I see a lot of people getting into drugs because it's a different reality from the reality they live in — it's kind of like a fake happiness till they can find their happiness — if they ever find their happiness (p.2, transcript 3).

In her travels Etah encounters an enormous amount of drug abuse and has herself used many drugs "when I was younger." Upon returning from her last trip to the United States (early June, 1993) she heard that three people she knew had died of heroin overdoses and five other friends had seriously overdosed. Death and dying, from drug overdose, suicide, violence and abuse related causes, are no stranger to Etah. She laments that her friend was "really sad and really angry" and relates his experience to many others on the street who don't know where to direct their rage. Etah's comment on her friend's passing goes deeper than the hopeless statement about happiness being "at least" possible in death, she completes her thoughts by extending her scathing criticism to the entire human race.

If they are dead at least they might have a chance at happiness because, you know, it's really hard to get happiness in a world as rotten as this and it's not even the world that is rotten. I'd like to say it's white trash, but I know it isn't just white trash. I think its just basically that the human race is the most dangerous species on this planet (p.14, transcript 2).

It is very likely that Etah is in the early stages of mourning for the people whom she calls her "street family." And it is also likely that a similar scenario is too familiar to Aboriginal people, far above the average of any other ethnic group, in Canada.

The massive assaults on the dignity of street youth in general, and Aboriginal street youth in particular, are but the precursors to the inevitable magnetic force of the drug addiction and suicidal behaviour on the street alluded to in Etah's story. Etah relates examples of how she is ridiculed for trying to sing for money on the streets, where catching a ride is taken to mean you are willing to sell yourself, where she's been asked to help recruit "little Aboriginal runaways" (girls) into prostitution, and about an Aboriginal male friend who became a prostitute at age 11.

We cannot appreciate the cutting edge of being pushed out of a truck in the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge, being denied a place to sleep (in a squat), or being laughed at for trying to make an honest dollar in favour of the ever forceful demand for sex.

I almost got ran over and then these other people picked me up and gave me a ride across [the bridge] because I wouldn't give him a blow job ... 'This is the United States girl, you're going to have to suck me off before you get money out of my pockets' (p.3, transcript 3).

is the reply to almost any attempt to satisfy street youth needs for survival in some legitimate manner. "They just can be so fake, lustful and greedy, they just turn into these little bugs," she states about her tormentors.

Prostitution, although Etah thought about it once and it still plays a part in her life in that she knows many people who are working in the industry, does not hold the attraction for her that it does for others. She is "not materialistic" and she sees through the promises of love and protection. To resist prostitution in a lifestyle where hooking is one ready means of survival — on a continent where the society is predatory towards young beautiful Aboriginal females — is a sign of most admirable courage. Etah evokes a sense of extreme sadness when she talks about the soul deadening effects of prostitution on the women and men she knows who are involved in the sex

industry. She describes her work in watching out for little girls, of taking them under her wing (back to her squat), with determination.

... basically [they were] asking me to be an apprentice pimp. I was really pissed off and basically I kept an eye on him to make sure he wasn't doing this. But you can't keep an eye on every single person on the street and he ended up doing it. I ended up sheltering little girls that ran away from him (p.1, transcript 3).

She says that she has been exploited "only" in that at times she has panhandled for someone, "when I was younger ... but I always got something out of it."

Etah does not refer much to contact with the criminal justice system, although she relates that she landed in jail in Louisiana for vagrancy for a couple of weeks. And she describes being beaten by the cops and being protected by a street worker, however, she does not refer to on going criminal activity or charges.

Extended street family and a sense of "home" on the street is everything to Etah. "I guess a street family is about the most loved family I think a person can have because there is understanding and there is friendship." She names sisters, brothers, a daughter, street workers, an older street (Aboriginal male) person, and her dog among her extended street family. About extended family and street culture surrounding "the family" on the street, she says:

I've never really even known them very well [her biological family] ... When I got on the street I met people that I would consider family because they were more of my family than the family that I ever had (and they were real). They were somebody that I could depend on (although I didn't) ... somebody that I could understand ... somebody that could understand me, somebody that could depend on me. We pretty much have been together for the last couple of years and we lived together, travelled together, ate together, slept together, did things ... just about everything that we do, we do together. And this is kind of like a family — the kind of family that none of us have ever really had. They're people that I pretty much know that I am going to know for the rest of my life and I would consider them more of my family than any other family that I ever had so, in that way, I call them my sister and my brother. I also have a daughter who got on the street when she was really really young — too young to take care of herself and a young girl brought her down here ... she didn't know me very well but she knew that I'd squatted and she asked me if I could take of her [the little girl]. I accepted the responsibility and I've had the responsibility for a year and a half now — taking care of her — making sure that she knows how to survive, live on the street. She basically calls me mom. I basically call her my daughter ... because she met me before I knew her, she used to watch me skate when she was really young (p.7, transcript 1).

Etah is philosophically simultaneously attached to and detached from her street family, probably because she's never sure if she'll see them again and this is an extension of her cautious attitude. "I never really say goodbye — just see you later — cannot really say forever, cannot really say never." Etah's stoicism is expressed in the statement:

I've seen a lot of people commit suicide. When I was young I use to try to commit suicide a lot. I found the good ways to die and the bad ways to die and now suicide to me just seems like an easy way out — giving up to what I've been fighting all my life — [I'm] trying to succeed in a life not death. You know if I die [this way] in this life, what am I going to do in the next? Or I mean if I die what good am I? What good am I going to do? ... to try to change the things that I hate, it's just giving up ... (p.14, transcript 2).

Learning to survive on the street has taught Etah many lessons.

When I hit the street I had a fear of being beat up. I had a fear of the unknown ... but those things I pretty much learned. I don't fear violence anymore ... pretty much driven off the unknown. I do it cautiously. I don't have much fear, but I have paranoia and as I kept saying — 'paranoia will destroy you, but until then it will keep you safe.' I see a lot of other people that are really scared around me (p.1, transcript 3).

Racism

I see a lot of racism against Natives but nobody is really racist against me [among friends on the street] unless I tell them that I am Native (p.4, transcript 2). I experience a lot of racism ... Yeah, it includes a lot of violence (p.12, transcript 2).

The two above, seemingly paradoxical, statements from Etah's interview are the parameters with which she relates a mixture of rage at the overt racism she experiences, awareness of the ignorance in mainstream intolerance for difference, a partial recognition of the dynamics of internalized racism in oppressed people, and a mature outlook on making a difference with open communication. What she is saying is that she must hide her Aboriginal background or suffer the consequences. Etah, however, being who she is does not have the luxury of self denial and hence avoidance of violent episodes is difficult. "When I see racism on the street I feel so much hatred and I usually end up confronting them on it and most likely violent things happen. How do I cope with it? That's how I cope with it."

Etah describes a street world, at least the terrain that she chooses to occupy, where racist Nazi youth are ever present. Skinheads and punks do not get along very well (as Joanne will later tell us). In Vancouver the Granville strip is shared by the two opposing forces. Etah describes many confrontations when she has to stand up for herself against White supremacist youth groups. But even some close non-Aboriginal friends with whom she travels, upon discovery that she is Aboriginal, express the "normal" hatred of Aboriginal people. They suddenly see her differently. Then there are the "ordinary" White power groups.

I don't necessarily get a lot of racism but I have to deal with a lot of racism. For instance, there's groups that come out from suburban places and come downtown and promote their hatred and go around and point people out and beat them up for no reason. It's just a game, it kind of intimidates and maybe that person [Aboriginal street youth] will turn into a Nazi. Because if you can't beat them you might as well join them (p.2, transcript 2).

The intimidation and resignation (and joining the White power groups) expressed in the above passage actually happened to Etah herself. She describes the shame she now feels when she goes to certain squats in Vancouver and she is faced with racist writings on the walls which she authored at the age of twelve.

It's just that my brother was White power — he was half Indian so it already made sense to me too. So I was shameful about that, when I was twelve, I was promoting hatred in very small ways like saying I was 'White power'... one of the squats that I go to still has writing of this on the walls (p. 17, transcript 2).

It appears that many Aboriginal youth are seduced into White power movements. Etah and other Aboriginal street youth in our case studies corroborate the recruitment of Aboriginal youth into White power groups. Membership in these racist youth groups demands the denial of Aboriginal heritage and culture and fosters self-hatred of Aboriginal identity.

I was categorized as a 'White parallel' I've seen a lot of people that are like me, as in, half Native/half White and some of them have popped out Native and some popped out White (definition of White parallel). A lot of my friends, a long time ago, were Nazis although they were Native, and they just denied the fact that they were Native (p.3, transcript 2).

Then there are those Aboriginal youth that cannot be mistaken for any other ethnic.

I have a friend named Rick who is Native-Indian and I guess after dealing with this numerous times plus everything else, he just became so angry that he just beat up everybody around him and now he is in jail (which would be good for him because he was drinking a lot during that time) (p.6, transcript 2).

The victimization and criminalization of Aboriginal youth, when they try to defend themselves or they explode past the boundaries of tolerance as a result of racist assaults, is the 1980s and 1990s version of the removal of Aboriginal children and youth from their place in the Aboriginal community. The Criminal Justice Inquiries in Manitoba (1991) and Saskatchewan (1992) remind us that racism in the schools and on the street are complemented by the racism embedded in the criminal justice system. Criminalization and delinquentization of Aboriginal youth is a systematic form of cultural genocide in Canada. It is difficult to imagine how an obviously Aboriginal child would escape racist victimization in the public school system. Fisher and Echols (1989) corroborate that racism in Vancouver schools is rampant and that multicultural solutions do not work. It is equally difficult to imagine an Aboriginal child who would passively accept, that is without rage or hopeless resignation, this racial harassment, except those who can hide their identity (an equally destructive psychological coping mechanism). It is, therefore, understandable that in some regions of Canada 7 out of 10 Aboriginal male youth between the ages of 12 and 17 will be incarcerated at least once before they are 20.

This type of institutionalization (which inevitably leads into involvement with the child welfare and criminal justice system) is the equivalent of residential schooling and the 1960s scoop by ministries of social service. The public school remains the number one breeding ground for early racist attacks on Aboriginal children. Etah recalls verbal abuse and injustice to both herself and her sister.

I got verbal abuse in a lot of ways and a lot of manipulating ways. I got asked if I needed a psychiatrist because a little boy ripped up my shoes and pissed on them and I went to school the next day in barefeet because I didn't have any shoes and because my mother didn't have enough money to buy me any shoes ... and there was no justice for that but I got told I was mentally disabled and the principal was going to help me with this everyday after school with talks. There was another time where a class was laughing and I got picked up by my hair and dragged across the

room because I was laughing My sister got slapped across the face for not reading the right words and giggling about it. Just basically unjust ... (p.11, transcript 3).

The usual response was to blame the victim. Etah punctuates her stories with "and nothing was done about that." Etah ends the dialogue on education by being thankful for the little knowledge that she has been able to use. However, she says, "But what I had to go through to get it ... I'm really pissed off about that."

Etah talks about the racism in Quebec where she experienced racism for being an English speaker.

I was living in Montreal for a period of two years and I was also living in Val d'Or and because I spoke English I got a lot of racism ... a lot of stores upped their prices on me ... and a lot of neighbours used to throw things at me and curse at me in French. Edward wouldn't let me go outside because he thought that I would get beat up or raped because I was English and later on that day I heard that somebody got burnt alive because they were English (p.15, transcript 2),

Then she goes on to describe violent racist incidents against Black people, "... they got moved out because they were black." "Les cristes d'anglais."

In comparing the United States and Canada, Etah relates, "You get a lot more racism cause people haven't accepted as much (Aboriginal people) as they have in the States." Closer to home — referring to her father she says, "My father was a very angry person, he hated White people" and it is this debilitating anger she is referring to as she goes on.

I remember I was in Winnipeg and I went into a washroom and it had all these things against Natives. Like, you know, Natives are just rubbing alcoholic drunks, you know blah, blah ... And I guess if a Native looks at that and looks down on themselves, maybe they might start drinking because of it (p.4, transcript 2). I think a lot of Native-Indians ... when they do drink too much ... they drink because we are human garbage cans to society, and there is a lot of stress, and a lot of non-understanding, a lot of ignorance which suppresses all of us Native Indians yeah, I think there is a lot of racism against them because I don't think people understand them (p.6, transcript 2).

An incident at the very onset of the interview — an old man walked by the interviewer and Etah and remarked that they should "go get their cheque" — disturbed the interviewer a great deal.

Yet Etah calmly indicated this happened to her "a couple times a day." She replies to the question

"How did that affect you when he said that rather horrible remark?"

Well, pretty much, it would have bothered me a great deal a long time ago, but now it does not affect me too much. Because I can see that he doesn't really understand me or understand where I am coming from. What I think he meant by saying that was basically that I should go and get a welfare cheque, clean up my act and get a job, clean my hair, get new clothes, live like him, be like him, be who he is — because I am not up to standards in his world, up to standards with who he is. Because I am who I am, I am a disgrace to him. It doesn't make that much of a big impression on me, as it would have done a long time ago, because I like who I am and I have clothes, I have food, I have shelter. I can walk my ground in a lot of ways that he couldn't. A long time ago I would have probably spit on him and started cursing at him but not now I just ignore him ... in the same way he ignores me (p.1, transcript 1).

Etah has joined and participated in anti-racism groups and demonstrations. She has a clear perspective that "Racism seems like pure ignorance and fear," and has become a vocal activist. Her wisdom and critical knowledge allow her to transcend the daily assaults to her psyche (because she is Aboriginal and a street person).

Culture and identity

I'm very proud to be an Aboriginal person, because that's basically who I am. I'm proud of who I am. I am a Native woman (p.4, transcript 3).

"I mean Aboriginal culture has to do with the life in you. Just a whole world into itself," Etah astutely surmises, as she refutes her paternal uncle's statement that to be Indian one must practice the culture.

There is something my uncle said, you know, 'You are not a true Indian unless you are Indian.' Like you follow the culture then you are an Indian. Even a White person can do that. To be an Indian, you have to be a true Indian. It's not a status thing, it's not a piece of paper, it's a spiritual thing, an emotional thing, a mental thing, a physical thing (p.7, transcript 3).

When asked if she practised any Aboriginal culture, she again confidently replied,

Well, I practice my own and if it corresponds with Aboriginal culture then I guess yes. A lot of things that I was told about some of the medicines that the Aboriginal people use in some ways are respected because of my great grandfather. I've heard of his ways, sometimes I'll use some of his ways and sometimes I'll use some of my own. But if I'm in his house then I'll use his [way] out of respect of him. [What did you do when you were at home?] Well, I am at home so I guess so. [Would you

practice if any kind of ceremony or service were available?] Well, if I wanted yes. And if I didn't, then I wouldn't. I've gone to drummings, I've gone to summer dances, I've gone to a lot of them, a lot of gatherings (p.4, transcript 3).

Etah demands to assert her Aboriginal identity in her own way and she is confident that she knows what that is, although that identity is clouded by circumstances in her life.

When my mother took me away from my father, I was just a baby, and she got married to a trucker who is White and they had another child. I believed that he was my father. I didn't know that I was Indian and he lied to me, my mother lied to me. I was lied to for about 5 years of my life. All the gifts that my [biological] father sent to my mother to give to me — when I was old enough to handle them — were all burnt and thrown in the garbage or pawned off. There was a big cord of his hair that was really sacred but was just thrown into the garbage as if it was garbage. There is a necklace that my mom seemingly held on to, for some odd reason, to give to me. There is necklaces, there is jewellery (of the Indian art), there is feathers, there is beads and they were all thrown out or pawned out. And the only time that I actually knew that I was actually Native-Indian was when my father came to visit me one day. They just couldn't keep it back any longer because I looked kind of different from the rest of them I was uncomfortable and I was really pissed off because I was uncomfortable and because I shouldn't be made to feel uncomfortable around my natural born family. I was really pissed off at those people that lied to me (p.14, transcript 3).

In the interview it became evident that Etah continues to feel the loss of the opportunity of cultural exposure through her paternal side of her family. They actively practice Aboriginal culture.

The effects of the estrangement from her father's side of the family is compounded by the fact that her mother did not practice any Aboriginal culture. "She distanced me in a lot of ways, she wouldn't get in the Aboriginal things but would try to push me into it" Yet Etah, in fact, exhibits many of the core characteristics of Aboriginal values. For instance, she talks about respect for the land, "nobody owns anything," spiritual inclinations of Aboriginal people, love of nature, and respect for elders as tangible values that are missing in mainstream Canadian society. Etah also reveals a comfortable sophistication, in knowing not readily known intricacies of deeply cultural knowledge and behaviour, in simply stating "I'll go to a sweat ceremony, if it's there, but I don't go too often because you have to be ready to go to one." Only a person who has an authentic connection with the values and intent of the sweat ceremony would show the respect and understanding reflected

in Etah's simple statement. Etah also expresses the need for Aboriginal street youth to have access to their history and culture in city schools.

Going to school, we need a little bit more on Aboriginal street youth and I mean this is a bilingual country, right? It's between French and English, and Aboriginal doesn't come in anywhere in there. I mean a little bit of the knowledge of who they are and where their places are So I think they need to talk a little bit more about the Aboriginal culture (p.7, transcript 3).

A strong Aboriginal identity would be hard to maintain with the daily reminders of Aboriginal conditions in the city, at least those available to Etah. She has not met any Aboriginal street workers in her travels.

I see a lot of Natives on Hastings Street, usually drunk or using heroin. Up on the Granville Mall I don't usually see very many Native street youth. I see the occasional straight youth down there, males occasionally. Females I see a lot more often, they usually work in the street prostituting. I run into a lot of Métis, a lot of half Indians and they are usually are really, really cool and some of them maybe not. There's usually a balance between them (p. 14, transcript 3).

Even so, Etah takes heart from seeing "Aboriginal people who are very proud looking" but also acknowledges the effects of internalized racism reflected in her past.

I can picture a lot of Aboriginal people disliking being Indian in school. Just because when I was younger I looked Indian, I felt disliked, you know. People used to ask me if I was Italian or Chinese. I was never really Native and Natives just seemed rather distant to the rest of the world, not really there at all. It depends on what culture they follow. If they try to be like every other person in the world then you know for sure (not liking to be Indians) (p.5, transcript 3).

It is evident that Etah is at times confused about her identity and culture. She has had little exposure to Aboriginal culture in the city, and most of her street companions are non-Aboriginal. Somehow, however, through her own personal integrity, through reflective survival of racism, and through personal memory and discovery, she has remained true to her Aboriginal persona. In a sense she takes that part of herself for granted. "A lot of people on the reserve just forget it, I'm just like that," When asked about who she would like to be like, Etah answered:

Someone I'd like to be like? I don't want to be anybody but myself. That's one thing that another school said, they said I could be anybody and I kind of wondered why they had a problem with me being me ... What's the problem with just being me (p.11, transcript 3).

Society

I just want to say that society just thrives off of stealing goodness out of things ... I can't even understand it because they are so blind (p.4, transcript 3).

Throughout the interview sessions Etah was entirely coherent and consistent with her critique of western societal values. "Everyone is so lonely," she laments. She vehemently rejects mainstream consumer madness: the sexual predatory male culture; the spiritual emptiness driven by the concrete environment and the "9 to 5" machine-like behaviour expressive of consummate greed; and above all of the school function of enforced socialization into this culture. She expresses sadness and shame for being part of a society that she rejects. "Being human is shameful in itself."

We're already unkind, untruthful, we're living in a world of lies, a world of concrete, we contradict ourselves everyday, everyone seems really destitute to what they really need, the desire of need and it's not even a need for materialistic things. It's a need for the mental, because we're basically deprived of life. We just live in our cages day to day. The sadness that I see on the streets with every single child that comes to the streets alone, trying to keep the happiness — just trying to get through another day of chemical waste, wasting another day instead of actually going out and trying to learn something and it takes him a long time before they actually come to that conclusion and accept that awareness of what's going on (p.13, transcript 2).

Etah's distrust of mainstream avenues of "help" in handling psychological problems shows in the statement:

The people I do talk to about it — it won't be a parent, it won't be a priest, it won't be a teacher, won't be social workers — won't be a priest (I just wanted to make that clear) (giggle) ... it might be an elder (p.16, transcript 2).

When asked if she uses employment services she whips back, "Employment services, I don't use because I don't think I should be a slave ... but I think I do a lot more work on the streets by myself, for other people on the street and for myself, than I do in any kind of employment" Etah believes that the compulsively structured work requirement in society is "the government's" way of controlling people. It is deadening spiritually. It is little wonder why Etah refuses educational and employment counselling. She profoundly disagrees with the ideological foundations of both. She instead would like a system of trading "something for something."

It doesn't seem right, you work, and work, and work, and then you pay taxes, and more taxes, not doing anything that I like to do. Working 9 to 5 not really doing anything except for being a machine to society (p.1, transcript 2).

Etah is self-taught. She goes to libraries and is knowledgeable about current societal and environmental issues. Would she consider going back to school? Etah replies that, "Educational services, I don't use because I can usually go to the library and educate myself a lot more than a school can probably educate me." Her answer shows how irrelevant curriculum appears to those children whose background, culture and lifestyle are not represented in school material.

I've got my grade six education ... I hated grade five and I went to many different schools, repeated the same grades. I did correspondence but it didn't work out. I was really pissed off ... I was sick of being taught like a machine, I was treated like shit. They didn't have anything to teach me except for a conservative world and a conservative place which I didn't really think that I really need any knowledge of (p.10, transcript 3).

Etah says that Aboriginal street youth need education with regard to survival on the street and especially, "How to fight the law." Preferably this education ought to be done by Aboriginal people with street experience.

Etah is almost arrogant as she answers the question: How would you prevent more Aboriginal youth from coming on to the street?

I'm not going to answer that one. I've no problem on the street. I don't think that street youth are bad, it's not the street youth. What I do think is bad is the levels between the rich, the working class, the conservatives and the poor What I can't get is something in the mind, and I can get a lot more of that than any other rich person that has money to thrive off in their destitution [of spirit], but they swim around. I don't think that there is a problem with street youth or any kind of street. If there is it's a problem that they create within their heads that they are poor, and that they need something, and it's true that they do need something, but I don't think that they're going to get it from food, I don't think that they're going to get from clothing, and I don't think that they're going to get from shelter. There's a possibility that they might get it from the culture of the Aboriginal people or the understanding of themselves in the world around them. But I don't think that there is a problem with street youth. I think that a lot of people look at them and want them off the street so that they don't have to deal with them daily, so that they don't have to walk down the street and see them, so that they don't have to go on the buses and smell them, or they don't have to look at them. If they don't have to feel their guilt with it in their heads that it actually happening or that it's actually an issue in this world. That there are actually people on the streets that have to live out of garbage or live off their scraps of things that they don't eat, the things that they don't wear, the

things that they don't need, the things that they throw out. I think that those are the people that don't want the people on the streets. I think that a lot of people that are on the streets just live and if they want to get off the streets, then they'll get off the streets. If they don't, then they won't (p.8, transcript 3).

In other words she is saying that the presence of street youth is a societal problem and that they shouldn't have to comply with being made invisible just to satisfy middle-class guilt. She wants the problem, beginning with Canadian societal values, to be solved instead of applying the band aid of more government services.

Etah consistently, as do most of the youth in this study, refused to (even indirectly through us) advise or communicate with "the government." She indicated that she didn't want to discuss anything about government people, and that she didn't really believe that they would or could do anything to relieve conditions on the street. At one point Etah, quite simply says that she would only talk to a government person face to face, and only "about themselves."

Etah is consistently defiant when asked if she would consider returning home. She starts and ends this question with "Well, I'm already at home here ... I'm pretty much at home here."

I don't consider myself poor, I pretty much consider myself the richest person on this planet because I get what I need when I want it (p.8 transcript 3).

The only time Etah shows any sense of peace is when she is talking about being with nature — mid-thought she changes her aura. When asked what would make her life easier, she says, "no buildings, just land, not so many tricks (johns), manipulations, grief, no god, no hierarchy, no class, no racism."

I once felt really alone, when I was really young and I felt so alone sometimes. I thought it was my own loneliness but I came to the conclusion that everyone was too scared to actually get together and do things ... but I don't feel lonely anymore ... I've got the trees and I've got animals that I can talk to and that's a lot better thing than to talk to a human being (p.15, transcript 2). But the idea that I have a spiritual connection with the trees and the animals and it's really depressing that I have to travel so long to get to that (p.11, transcript 2).

She is referring to the month long travel to return from Louisiana to Vancouver, more specifically to Denman Island where her soul is free.

Etah is a complex young woman: who on the one hand is a hardened street person and on the other is a brilliant critic of a society whose values she refuses to comply with; who cynically chooses a pseudonym that spells the word HATE backwards (she insisted on the spelling), and yet ultimately exhibits the unmistakable spirit of a sensitive nature loving writer in the bud. Immediate survival of the body, soul and psyche are always at the forefront of priorities for street youth. Aboriginal street youth like Etah must face the "normal" challenges of survival on the street as well as the barriers of racism and cultural starvation. It is no wonder that planning turns only to more disappointment and a fantasy of escape to some utopian existence.

I don't like planning something that hasn't happened yet. I don't like looking into something that hasn't happened yet. I can only work with day by day basis, like you know, if I want a better world, I have to be a better person and I'm doing that right now as I live for a day to day lifestyle ... experiencing and being aware of things around me. In the future I would hope that I would be living where there is no society, where there is no government, where I could just be with the land and live off the land and the land live off me — cause I'm getting really tired of the rest of it (p.12, transcript 3).

Etah, the seventeen year old young woman who is just beginning her adult life, and who repeats the phrase "when I was younger," is an old soul trapped in a young body and into a life-eroding lifestyle. With her superior survival skills, spiritual inclinations, critical societal analysis, and considerable poetic abilities, Etah is a potential asset to her street family as an advocate and street worker. It appears, however, that Etah will someday migrate permanently to her beloved islands somewhere off the coast of British Columbia — to live as a reclusive artist. In the meantime, the immediate is pressing on her mind, "Right now I have a home wherever I go." The idealism fades with,

I have a home and it's a squat and it's going to be blown up at the end of the month. I've been living there for the last four years (on and off). I'm the only person that lives there. I've got a lot of sentimental value in that place. I don't get to [give] any consent, they're just going to put a big bulldozer through my front door (p.10, transcript 3).

KAREN

The reason why I ain't on the streets no more is because I found out for myself that I have people at home that care for me and love me and don't want to see me get hurt. So, I decided to stay home (p.1, transcript 1).

Karen is a fifteen year old non-status young woman of Nis'ga/Haisla heritage, who has been on the street for two years. She is a person who spends most of her time on the streets, she spends short periods of time at home and then returns to the street. Karen's last jaunt onto the street lasted three months. She is under her parents' care but has just recently (one month ago) gone to stay with (to babysit for) an adult female friend. According to the woman she stays with it is highly probable that she will go back to the streets as soon as she is no longer in danger of being caught and brought back to parental custody. The interviewer explained the process and Karen took a couple of days to think about whether or not she would participate in the study. Karen was very hard to interview.

Karen is of small build, has long brown hair, doesn't wear make-up and is wearing reasonably clean jeans and a plain sweat shirt. Her mother told us that five out of her ten kids suffer from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Although not formally diagnosed, Karen is thought to be one of them. She talks slow and quiet and she is very shy, even with her shyness she seems vulnerable and introspective, she fidgeted and seemed very uncomfortable. Her mother relates that something profound has happened to Karen that she is not disclosing.

[Mother's statement] Two months ago Karen disappeared for three weeks. No one saw her. Adolescent Street Unit hadn't seen her for weeks, either ... not sure but ... something happened to her because Karen doesn't want to go to Granville street anymore. She ran for a while and then finally came home after that ... someone tried to 'suck' Karen into prostitution or did some trick because she was picked up drunk and put into detox (p.1, parent transcript).

Since she has been home she has been very withdrawn and scared. She is a possible survivor of gang-related abduction and a forced sex industry statistic.

The interview was held in a quiet room at the DEYAS office, the fact sheet was filled in and the interview began. Karen is extremely nervous and had a difficult time answering the open ended questions, at first she simply answered yes or no. She is definitely a person of few words. Karen

asked for breaks frequently, and a half hour into the interview, she asked if the interview could be continued on another day. Even then Karen said it was difficult for her to talk because she is a quiet person and "doesn't like to tell really personal things to people she doesn't know." The final interview was done at the interviewer's house. Karen was tired and depressed, she tried very hard to complete the process.

History

I tried to get some attention from my own mom, my brothers, some of my uncles and my sisters. I tried to get enough attention from them, but they won't even give me attention, so, I'd run ... that's it ... I have flashbacks of what my cousin has done to me, and I couldn't talk to no one about it, so I'd run (p.1, transcript 1).

Karen was born in the north coastal region of British Columbia, to a Nis'ga mother and a Haisla father, who have been married for twenty-five years. Her family moved to Vancouver when Karen was two weeks old. Therefore she identifies with Vancouver as her home. The family constellation consists of mother, father, three brothers and six sisters.

But, sometimes they [my parents] go [up North] to go visit some of their cousins or whatever up there and my mom calls up there, so ... My mom would talk to her brothers or sisters and my dad would talk to his brothers or sisters (p.6, transcript 1). Well, my family, there's 10 kids in the family, and I got three younger ones (p.3, transcript 1).

Five children and two grandchildren remain at home with the parents. Three of Karen's sisters have also been on the street for various lengths of time.

All of Karen's schooling was taken, to grade eight, in Vancouver. After being out of school for over two years, she plans to return to school in the fall of 1993.

I just don't want them [siblings] to end up like I did and my three other sisters. I hope they can do their best in school because I didn't do very good in school. I dropped out and I been out of school for almost three year now. I went to three schools. I went to Gladstone...Hastings. I graduated from elementary...and Van Tech. And that's it (p.3, transcript 1).

Karen retells the story of abuse at the hands of a male cousin, who was the favourite nephew of her parents and who lived with them, while she was living at home. This, she says was the event that resulted in her escape from home.

He'd go out during the daytime and he'd come back at night time real drunk and wait until everyone's gone to bed. Me and my two other sisters, Lois and Sarah [not real names], were sharing a room at that time, and I had a king-size bed. And Lois and them were scared of the dark that time, so they'd sleep with me and they thought they were safe that way. And when everyone was in bed, he would come upstairs and start to fondle me. He'd play with my hair first, then he wanted me to lay on top of him and he'd try and take off my pyjamas and all that. My pyjamas was a one-piece suit and he would kiss me on the cheek and all that. And when I told him ... he'd ask me if I'd tell anyone this. At the time, I said no, and I thought it was okay for him to do it. When I was 11, he was still doing it and he'd go out every night and he'd get drunk. He'd wait until everyone's in bed, he'd wait for a half-hour or so and then he'd come upstairs and try and get into my room and I always had a butter knife in the door, like wedged into the door, so he couldn't get in. Then he went into my brother Donald's room, climbed out the window, then he went onto the roof, he went around and he'd try to get into my side, bedroom, through the window. One night I couldn't sleep so I stayed up until four and finally, I realized that he was hurting me and so, when I was 13, I finally told my mom and my mom said that was not okay for him to do it, that he was hurting me. I knew at 13, it wasn't okay for him to do it. Then he'd go off to his friend's place to hide there. At the time when I was 10, I thought it was all my fault. I went to court for this and I haven't gone back to court for awhile, because I wasn't ready and I still ain't ready yet. So....I brought it to court a long time ago. And that's it. And I get flashbacks on it, and that's why I run away (p.8-9, transcript 1).

Karen did not only run from home she had people to run to, people who would protect her. She was familiar with the street through her sisters.

On the streets

I just kill time, I'd walk around. I'd go to Carnegie and all that. I'd go on Hastings and then I'd go to Granville and walk around there ... and see all my friends around Granville. That's about it (p.1, transcript 1).

Karen describes herself as a person who has been on the street off and on for two years. The longest time she spent on the street continuously was three months.

I've been on the streets for two years. I'd go home, I'd stay on ... I'd go to the streets for a week or so, then I'd go home (p.1, transcript 1) ... for food, I went down to ASU [Adolescent Street Unit] and got meal tickets, and when I didn't have a place to stay, my friends would offer me a place to stay, so I went with my friends. That's it (p.1, transcript 1).

Karen tells how she managed to get to the downtown Vancouver streets. She makes it sound so simple.

Well, my mom and them gave me spending money and I'd save it up, then I'd wait till everybody's sleeping and I'd take the bus to the SkyTrain and get off the bus and

go onto the SkyTrain and take it down to Granville or Main Street station ... I stayed in hotels with my friends (p.2, transcript 1).

Sexual abuse from her cousin was only partly instrumental in making her run, according to her mother. Alcohol abuse was also a factor. Karen however says she does not use alcohol. Karen spent time at the Youth Detention Centre for seven days at a time (2-3 times) for shoplifting.

Karen lists her sisters, friends and a male waiter at the Balmoral as significant people to her on the street. "He gave me money whenever I needed it and he gave me food. Well, he said, if I'm ever in trouble, if I ever need a place to stay, he gave me his home phone number and his pager," she says of her odd couple relationship with the much older protector. She describes an aimless existence on the streets mixed with dodging youth street workers.

Well, I would spend more time on the streets than at home [during the two years on and off the street]. Then one day, Barbara, the street worker, met me at one restaurant and she told me to phone home and tell my mom and them that I was okay, that I was still alive because they were worried ... I called home. Yes, my sisters were older than me. They were allowed in the bars because they were old enough ...one of my sisters were working in the Balmoral serving up beer. [So, your two older sisters were also down in the street at one time?] Yes, they were. [And you said that you used to just sort of hang around the Balmoral?] Yes, I'd wait until William [not real name of male friend] got off work and we'd go out for dinner or something. When I was on probation, Dave Dixon [street worker] would come to Granville and try to find me. He found me once and he brought me home and my mom called Dave Dixon to bring me straight out to the Youth Detention Centre (p.3, transcript 1). Barbara, she'd go up to Granville and try and find me, but she couldn't. She couldn't find me because I was in my friend's hotel. And the second time, Barbara went up Granville, she waited until I got out of my friend's hotel room and she sent me on a cab to go home (p.3, transcript 1). ... well, actually my mom called Dave Dixon and told Dave Dixon that my sisters went home. They were down Hastings and she told Dave Dixon, if he saw my sisters down there, to drive them home and one of my sisters were really restless, so Dave Dixon put my sister in handcuffs to bring her home. My sister didn't want to come home My friends were on welfare and they rent their rooms, hotels, for three or four months and whenever I didn't have a place for stay, they'd offer me a place to stay (p.3, transcript 1).

Karen exclusively uses the Adolescent Street Unit. She says she knows all the workers there.

They would help her.

What they did for me was, they gave me meal tickets and they gave me bus tickets. They had clothes there that people donated to Adolescent Street Unit and I can do my washing there for free. I'd talk to my social worker. I had a social worker then,

her name was Sandy Jay and she was the one I would talk to about my problems and why I didn't want to go home ... (p.4, transcript 1).

Karen relates the last encounter with her favourite Aboriginal street worker where the worker changed tactics on her. She was now going to be free to decide on her own what to do with her life. "Street worker said, she wouldn't find me and send me home because she said I was old enough and she said that I need my friends ... and I'll go home when I'm ready." Her mother appears to have followed suit where school was concerned. "Well, I now go Outreach and Aries Job Training, but I just didn't want to go back to school. And my mom said whenever I'm ready I can go back to school, but I know I will be going to school in September." This tactic seems to have worked as Karen says she will return to school. Karen is still too young to get welfare and to use employment services.

Karen, who has been sexually active since she was fourteen (excluding sexual abuse experience), is somewhat knowledgeable about sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

About AIDS, the only one I know is, the way you can get AIDS is by sharing needles and I saw commercials on TV and when I was going to Hastings Elementary, we went into some sort of class and we were talking about AIDS and pregnancy and stuff. Well, my boyfriend used condoms [for birth control] (p.4, transcript 1).

On the topic of alcohol and drugs, Karen's story differs from that of her mother. Her mother reports that alcohol is a problem in her extended family and that she has been sober for five and a half years. She believes that Karen may be involved with alcohol. Karen's version is:

Well, I never did touch drugs or alcohol, although my parents did try offering it to me. I kept on saying no to it, and I never will touch drugs or alcohol. I know it's no good for you. And they'll do a lot of damage to your brain. [What about drugs, alcohol and sniffing?] Well, I never did touch drugs. I never did touch alcohol and I never will sniff glue or whatever (p.5, transcript 1).

Karen appears to have people who protect her in different ways. This protection may be from people who know her sisters and are partial to her through them (as their younger sister). Another seems to be a fellow street youth. Again, perhaps because she has family on the street, Karen does not mention a close connection with a street youth network. Many other youth

mentioned how important mutual care giving was between what they called their street family.

Well, whenever I came down here, I'd go over to my friend's place and I'd tell him I'm going to walk around and he'd tell me to wait, because he wants to watch my back, to make sure I won't get hurt. He's only 18 (p.5, transcript 1). I feared nothing [on the street]. There was nothing to fear on the streets, because, as I said earlier, I had my back watched and whenever I didn't have my back watched, I'd look over my shoulder and nothing ... there's no one there (p.8, transcript 1).

Although Karen says that no one has tried to exploit her on the streets, "No one did try to take advantage of me or nothing," and that she has not been involved in prostitution, she relates that she knows the people who work with the two Kiddy Cars in Vancouver. It is possible that the people she describes as protectors really do not ask for anything in return. This, however, is questionable when she stays for three months at a time in an environment that is, in another street youth's words, "predatory toward Aboriginal youth."

Racism

'Ooh, look at that ugly squaw.' I was just about ready to turn back and going to slap him in the face for saying that to me (p.6, transcript 1).

When Karen was asked if she thought she received differential treatment from her workers she indicated that she did, but in a positive sense.

My social worker, she sort of treated me different than the other street kids. One winter, I went into her office and I say, I need a jacket, so she gave me a Raider's winter jacket and she said, if I ever needed anything else, just come back and ask her. Well, I felt real comfortable using Adolescent Street Unit because I knew everyone in the office and two kiddie cars went there ... I knew them too ... Yeah, I knew one Aboriginal street worker. Her name was Barbara [not her real name] and I felt real comfortable talking to her (p.5, transcript 1).

Karen reports that people look at her strangely and she seems to have an awareness of stigma attached to street youth status, especially punk style youth. Her awareness about ethnic stereotypes, however, stops there. She simply doesn't want to discuss this aspect of her life. Outside of her school experience her only reference point is her time on the street where she knows everybody.

Yes, they did [look at me strangely], because whenever I'd go into a restaurant, they'd look at me like I was a street kid and they thought I'd had my head shaved and all that, because my hair was real long ... and they thought I shaved the sides of my head, but I ... like I wanted to put my hair up in a ponytail and they realized that

I wasn't a punk kid on the street type. The way people look at kids that have their heads shaved, and I was eating in one restaurant ... I knew the people that worked there ... and whenever I go into a restaurant, they don't look at me real funny (p.6, transcript 1).

Karen only vaguely alludes to racism from "people in general" but gives no examples. She reports no violent incidents with reference to her ethnicity on the street or otherwise.

It was people in general. I really didn't get any from street people, because I knew all the street people. Well, at first, it really made me mad, for what that guy said to me, and I really didn't say anything to him....(p.7, transcript 1).

Although Karen didn't want to discuss racism, her mother said that Karen couldn't get along with White kids in "ordinary" school. The following comments seem to corroborate her mother's statement. "Elementary was easy for me, because I had a lot of friends there. Then during high school, it was hard for me, because the first week or so, I had enemies." Then at Van Tech four girls beat up on her. Even though this incident was reported to the principal and the police, Karen did not disclose any details. She still insisted that, outside of the name calling incident, ordinarily she did not experience racism.

Culture and identity

I feel quite okay about it [being an Aboriginal person]. It's just when people call me squaw and all that, I don't feel very comfortable. (p.9, transcript 1).

Karen says that she doesn't know anything about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada or the Aboriginal people in her home reserve area. She didn't learn anything in school. "No, not really. I didn't learn it in school, not at all." Her mother indicates that her daughters wanted to attend a school with Aboriginal teachers, but even the Outreach school had no Aboriginal teachers. Karen would like to have contact with her extended family on the reserve. At the moment contact is all but non-existent. "I don't go up there...and I hardly talk to them."

Karen's mother says that she does not speak her language nor did she teach her children anything about Aboriginal culture. Karen's only contact with Aboriginal culture is through urban

pow-wows in the city of Vancouver, which tend to be prairie Aboriginal culture, and from cultural activities on the street.

I just go to the Pow Wows. Like, this year, I went to the one down at Trout Lake and I learned more about my other people's culture and all. Like, I sing a lot, and I like dancing to the drum. When I was running away, I went to one down at Carnegie Centre [to the drum group] (p.9, transcript 1).

She would become more involved Aboriginal culture "if there was one near where we live." In the end Karen has little awareness of Aboriginal culture and her identity reflects this hole in her experience. It is most probable that what she sees on the street is her only reference point.

Society

We need to know about who are dealing drugs and we need to know ... we need to know about the people ... the danger down there and how easy it is to get sucked into drugs and needles and alcohol and all that (p.10, transcript 1).

Karen does not have an identification with any other locale as home except for Vancouver. And she does not have a vision about how the society, in which she lives, could be any different than it is. Her point of reference remains the Vancouver downtown eastside where she feels comfortable. Karen simply answers "I don't know" when asked what she would advise government policy makers as to what to do to prevent more Aboriginal kids from going to the street. Later she volunteers that "Drop-in centres for Native people and a safe house" are needed for Aboriginal street youth in Vancouver.

Karen seems earnest in her resolve to stay away from the downtown core of Vancouver. She believes this action will make her life better. "Trying to stay away from downtown and trying to spend more time with my sisters and my nephews ... and stay at home as much as I can." To close the interview the interviewer asked Karen, "Do you have any further comments? She answers, "Try to keep the kids away from needles, drugs and alcohol. But that'll be kind of hard for the kids."

JOANNE

When I hit the streets I was street wise, I found things by myself pretty easy, but there's people out there who can't, they just don't know, they're very naive, very

vulnerable. Like you tell them big whoppers of lies and then they'll believe you, just because they don't know (p.13, transcript 2).

Joanne is a 17 year old who has been on the streets of Vancouver for two years. In the two years that she has been on the street, she has been in Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Victoria, and at the time of the interviews in Vancouver. By the time the report was written, however, Joanne was rumoured to be somewhere in the northwestern United States. In 1992 Joanne came to Vancouver from Calgary with some street friends because the weather and the environment was "really nice and because Calgary really has nothing to offer me." Now she hangs out primarily in the Granville area of Vancouver.

Fairly easy going, Joanne agrees, after a couple of no-shows, to be interviewed at the home of the interviewer. She arrived on her skate board casually dressed. Her clothes were ragged and fairly dirty. Her beautiful face was framed in a green punker style haircut. She wears no make-up. Like Etah she is talkative, however there was more of an aura of authenticity or a child like quality about her — she is less defensive and cautious. Joanne laughs easily. She didn't seem to be holding back in her responses, in fact she talked at length about the general topics in the interview. We get a good idea about what street life is for her. As with a couple of the other youth participants, it is not necessary to add extensive commentary to her analysis. Joanne is very articulate in communicating her ideas and she has many.

On the day of the first interview the interviewer accompanied Joanne to her court appearance at the Vancouver Youth Court. She had been charged with assault and had been given a sentence of three months' probation and thirty hours of community work. Joanne now lives on income assistance and shares a rented house with six other teenage girls in the eastend of Vancouver. Much of her time is spent on the street. Survival for her means dumpster diving, table scrapping, panhandling, soup kitchens, food from friends and "some food from stores."

History

I'm not really running from anything. I'm on the street because we didn't grow up with a lot of money and I really like my mother and I just kind of wanted her to have a bit of freedom rather than have to worry about kids all the time ... my father was an alcoholic ... the abuse never came towards us, it was directed at my mother ... the excuse she was giving us was 'I'm going to wait cause I have kids, until they grow up and then I'll leave' ... I kind of figured if I leave home ... (p.1, transcript 1).

Joanne is a status Cree/Saulteaux young woman who was born in Calgary, Alberta. Her father and mother, from two different reserves in southern Saskatchewan, have lived in Calgary since before her birth. She has two siblings, a brother and a sister. Both appear to be living at home. Joanne goes back home to visit her parents every so often and calls her mom approximately every two weeks. Although she is close to aunts and cousins, contact with extended family is less frequent; however, talking with her kohkom (grandmother) is very important to her.

Joanne relates that poverty, alcoholism and family violence have been factors in family dysfunction. Although her father is "dry" now Joanne would not go to live with her family again. She likes being independent. Aside from the frequent contact with her parents and siblings by telephone, she says very little about her history, except that she did complete grade ten in Calgary. Perhaps being city people has made them more a nuclear type family with little contact with extended family.

On the streets

Some people will tell you to go home and it's a very hard thing to tell people why are they on the street in the first place? A lot of times the kids are a lot safer on the street than they are at home right. There's going to be abuse, physically, mentally, sexually or whatever ... just something that's not very healthy for them. So, you'd rather stick around to get friends on the street and take care of each other rather than go home and be treated like shit (p.6, transcript 2).

Joanne started using alcohol experimentally at the age of eleven. An older friend would have her brother buy alcohol. By junior high school Joanne was drinking before school occasionally. This escalated to every weekend and eventually when she went onto the streets, at the age of fifteen, alcohol became an everyday companion. "My only purpose in life was to panhandle and drink and

it was my quest for everyday." During this period Joanne was highly transient as shown by her statement about her journey on the street.

When I first ran away from home I went in the downtown core of Calgary. It's good if you're more conservative and not really on the street but ... I came to Vancouver for a couple of weeks, went back to Calgary, then I went to Victoria. Calgary's always been kind of like ... [always] back to Calgary ... from Vancouver I hitchhiked, all my travelling's been done by hitchhiking, I went to Calgary with this girl ... from there I hitchhiked to Ottawa by myself and it was pretty cool ... I stayed in Ottawa for only like not even a week and then I met this girl and she lived in the States and she was going up through Montreal to Vermont so she gave me a ride up to Montreal. I lived in Montreal ... and from Montreal I went to Toronto and then I went back and forth in between Montreal and Toronto a couple of times and then in Toronto I caught a plane into Calgary again to see my parents, that was after about a year and something of living on the street. Then I went back and I stayed with my parents for about a month or so and then I moved here (p.5-6, transcript 1).

Joanne hitchhiked everywhere with friends she met on the street. Some of her adventures were precarious; however, she says most of her experience on the road was adventuresome.

I wasn't really afraid of hitchhiking, the first I did it I was kind of queasy about it but I was with a friend that had done it before and I said, like ok that's cool ... my first couple of times hitchhiking were really good experiences because the people that did pick us up were really nice ... except one kind of really ... the guy that was sleazy he offered me like \$200 and \$300 if I would sleep with him and like he asked me how much money I was travelling with. He thought if I slept with him and he gave me this \$200-\$300 I should be grateful towards him because it's money right ... He was in the mentality that money can buy anything ... and you know I'm not a materialistic person as I said, and I didn't want his money right. I'd rather have my dignity and feel, you know, good about myself. I'm not saying prostitution for everyone is bad, right, for me I couldn't do it but ... but it was really cool because he didn't get physical about it. Because if he did actually get physical about it he could be charged right? ... they're not suppose to really because they can get charged with picking you up ... I don't say all of them will be perverted and saying 'Oh yeah, you've got nice tits and you've got a nice ass' type thing, but they won't touch you because they are working for this trucking firm and if they get charged then they can lose their job. Like a lot of the stuff about how you're gonna get raped or something, a lot of it is not true because a lot of people do think about the consequences of what happens when they do something to you. The hitchhiking part was not too bad, I didn't mind it at all. Just some places, like you go nuts, stuck in the middle of Saskatchewan, on the highway, nobody's picking you up, getting eaten by mosquitoes, you've got no one to talk to and it's just like ... I've got to talk to someone (p.6-8, transcript 1).

Joanne gives graphic descriptions of her survival techniques. One can understand why she would prefer Vancouver because the weather is far more palatable than other places that are

available for youth on the street. She gives an extensive description of circumstances, conditions and interpersonal relationships on the street in different cities in Canada.

When I was in Vancouver the first time, I was living on the street, I was just sleeping during the day out in the sun and that's how I stayed alive. Then from there I went to Montreal and I stayed with people that I'd met on the street. That was pretty cool, but then I had a squat of my own because ... I always met a lot of really fucked up people just because they'd been on so many drugs for a while that they didn't know what's up from down really. Some of the people I encountered were like ... 'I'm a White power anarchist, I'm a nazi anarchist.' I didn't really trust any of those people. So I squatted there, then I met a guy there too that was really nice and he was always helping me out by helping me find places to stay. Then I moved to Toronto. I paid \$75 to live in a closet in a warehouse. Now that was cool (giggle) ... the \$75 I'd get from panhandling all month. Save up whatever couple bucks here, a couple bucks there, pay my rent ... but you know I could sleep on their couch in the living room or like wherever the kitchen floor. I went back to Calgary ... I stayed with my parents or I stayed with my sister. I didn't really have to sleep on the street there because I knew people that always had apartments and they always invited me over. In Vancouver I've lived in two or three squats ... and they're really pretty cool. Like we never got charged with anything ... by staying in abandoned buildings ... like businesses around this one squat we stayed in. They didn't mind our sleeping in there because we weren't rude to anybody, we weren't into screwing anybody's work. We were just there and we'd leave in the morning and do the sun dance (giggle) we would climb off the roof. It was cool. Vancouver here too. I squatted and just lived with people. In Calgary ... I slept in a newspaper recycling bin too for a little while, cause of the warm papers you climb in and cover yourself with papers and fall asleep (p.5, transcript 2). How they're living on the street is always different, it always varies, cause it just depends on if you have a place to live for you may have a place to crash when you're on the street. But you don't have places to hang out really cause a lot of places you crash are bins and abandoned cars and abandoned buildings, alleys, dumpsters. Whatever you can find that's out of the wind and out of the rain ... doorways. I've crashed in front of the like the Orpheum. We've crashed in many different places ... in Stanley Park, in the trees. We crashed on the trees, benches and on the beach. That's where you can find us like out of the wind out of the rain. And if it's nice out, a lot of the time, when you live on the street, what I did was I'd stay awake all night because night time was the coldest time. You can keep walking so you can keep warm and then when the sun comes up during the day you sleep in the sun because you finally warm up and you can crash out and it's warm and there's people around so you don't have to worry about someone coming up and whatever ... that's what I do because remember that time it was just too cold and I tried to pull up a slab of concrete and crash. Like I've also slept right in the sky train, in Montreal ... you can do this too probably on the metro and on the subways. When it starts in the morning and you're really tired you can get on to the sky train, subway or wherever you are and you bum a transfer, you get on and you go and you go to sleep right. Because it's warm and you know you don't have too many people harassing you. Then if you get up and if your transfer's expired you can go bum another one and if you're still tired you can go back to sleep. The transfers are good for about an hour and a half so that gives you about an hour and a half ... you can sit there and you can probably crash out most of the

day. Just depends on if this guy picks on you and kicks you off or charges you or whatever they want to do with you (p.8, transcript 1).

Joanne is able to give a comparison of street life in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Shetells us that, in her experience, there are few Aboriginal street youth in Montreal.

The time I was in Montreal was about three and half to four months and in the time I was there I didn't run into very many Aboriginal street youth. The majority of the people that I've seen that were Aboriginal street people were older ... guys in their 30s, 40s, 50s bumming around. The street youth there are mostly White kids from Montreal, from Quebec, from the suburbs (p.7, transcript 1) my travels in Montreal and Toronto I went to Montreal first and that was in late summer ... the people that I encountered in Montreal, first street people, the majority of them were White French speaking Canadians. (In Montreal and Toronto) you encounter cool people along with really like asshole type people who tell you to sell whatever you own like shoes or whatever things that you need but ... I enjoyed myself ... I learned a lot about people and the attitudes towards others In Montreal there was a lot of kids that were strung out on PCP and alcohol and a lot of them were addicted to needles like they would shoot anything like the beer because it would get them drunk quicker ... a lot cheaper or they would shoot LSD like microdots ... I don't know, it was kind of insane and then a lot of their beliefs in politics got fucked up by that... a lot of them would stab you in the back because they wanted their fix or drugs, I don't know, kind of fucked (p.18, transcript 2).

Joanne also gives some insight into the social stratification of street youth, according to their definition. She sees different interest groups that engage in street survival and then there are those who dabble in street life for short periods of time, usually on weekends or in the summer.

Different kinds of street youth ... from my knowledge there is a lot of social standards too that go on ... like different creeps and like different levels of street people like as ... how long you've been on the street and ... if you sell drugs, if you prostitute. That's what they do, that's their thing and the prostitutes sort of hang out with other prostitutes, the punks hang out with just everyone I think, but there's weekend kids, summer kids. Kids that think it's cool to be living on the street because they don't have to be home at 10 o'clock, they don't have to make their bed A lot of people don't know how it is, they think it's all fun and games. Like you've got a place to go and you've got food to eat. They just kind of assume that happens (getting food and shelter) when they get on the street (p.1, transcript 1).

Joanne has experienced much death on the street. Death is a subject that comes up as she is talking about her street family, which is extremely important to her. She laughs inappropriately as she begins to describe how many of her street family have died in the last two years. Joanne mentions several male friends, some of them Aboriginal, one of them her boyfriend, who have died

in various ways. The common denominator, according to Joanne, was the stress related to life on the street, or perhaps the stressful conditions that brought them to the street.

The most significant people in my life on the street at this point are my friends and as you'd say like street family, street brothers and sisters. There's a couple of guys we call grandpa and dad — because we all like stick together ... if someone gets in trouble then everyone's there to make sure that nobody gets hurt or damaged ... if you need a place to crash and someone's got a stair wall that they've got then you can go with them ... if you're hungry, we all help each other out. If someone's got meal tickets and they're not hungry or they ate already then you know you give them away. If you got a little bit of money you give it away ... making sure that everyone's eaten and people are rested and ... everyone's pretty much got it together mentally. Like this is my family... my street family it's, some of it it's kind of dying, cause people are dying (laugh) ... The people I live with now are really cool and they're significant in my life because we're there for each other to help each other out, give each other support, talk to each other whenever you know you gotta talk about something. You can talk about anything with your street family, cause everyone's like going through the same shit they've gone through (p.10, transcript 1). They're all my brothers and a couple of them were like in their mid-20s. One of them ... just turned 25 a couple of weeks before he died. He might have died of a heroin overdose but he was not a junkie. He tried it a few times before in his life and there was just one point when he was just really stressed and he wanted something to pick him up, to take it all away right and he did it. His last words were: 'Is it good?' and then he did 'the nod', and when you do the nod, sometimes you don't pull out of it. He didn't pull out of it and he died. My other friend he was about 21, that was a couple of years ago, he hung himself cause like he had just been going through a lot of stress. He was also a Native guy, I don't know He just didn't want to deal with life any more and died — hung himself. I had a friend he was probably the same age as the first guy 25, 26 and he ended up shooting himself in the head with a crossbow. We had seen him about three weeks before this happened cause he was living in Victoria and he came in to Vancouver and partied with us ... he just didn't want to live on any more. My other friend Sean, he was probably about 20, he died in a fire that had started in the squat because he had gone drinking and then they went back to the squat and his buddy had left him at the squat when he had passed out with candles on. The candles started the curtains on fire and his body didn't burn at all but it was just all the smoke that he inhaled and he died from that. It was pretty sad because a lot of these guys were still young. But you know you go through a lot of stress, a lot of bullshit, had bad trips and think about a lot of weird things (laugh) the drugs helps too (p.11, transcript 1).

Joanne expresses profound sadness about helplessness in just watching while "friends are going down." She is aware of the characteristics of advanced drug addiction and still she tries to be a support system. She sees the pain expressed by the acts that result in death for her friends.

I feel very sad inside because my friends are dying and a lot of them are getting caught up in heroin and needles and it's kind of hard to pull them out of it ... unless they're willing to stop ... that makes me sad a lot of time because you sit there and

you talk with them right and you can see how they've changed. A lot of the times like since they started doing it, all they want all they talk about is money, money and a fix, where they're gonna get their fix, how they're gonna get their money to get their fix and you know stuff like that, how high they are, and you know, I hope I don't go in a knot or something like that Your friends are going down and there's nothing you can do and you're just standing there and you feel sad ... There is just a lot of confusion everywhere like a lot of people don't know what to do and where they're going (p.3, transcript 2).

Joanne is knowledgeable about birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Much of her awareness came through a job training course that she was involved in. Part of the curriculum included speakers from AIDS Vancouver. Close contact with street nurses and youth Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) clinics have also given Joanne a broad knowledge which she needs to protect herself. She says that she is not very sexually active and her boyfriend uses condoms.

As stated above Joanne has had a problem with alcohol abuse, the severity of which she talks about in explicit detail. "I've ended up in hospital probably four or five times from alcohol." She's tried many drugs but managed to stop at heroin. In the last while, she says, she still uses alcohol but has begun the process of involving an alcohol counsellor and using restraint that has come from watching people die of drug and alcohol abuse. Joanne describes her addiction at its height, she goes on to discuss why she discontinued using some drugs, her awareness of the disease of addiction, and her efforts to come to terms with her addictions.

You'd get up in the morning, right, and you'd saved enough the night before so you can get a couple of beers in the morning and get rid of your shakes and you feel a little bit more calm then you'd be panhandling and drink all day (p.8, transcript 2). [On use of solvents] Not any glue or any solvents ... I seen too many people huffed out and it just doesn't look like too much fun. When I did rush a few times in Montreal ... you get like a really weird out buzz for a while, but you just the biggest headache afterwards. So that's why I don't do it because it's useless paying money for like a two-minute stone just to feel like shit afterwards. That's why I don't do heroin or anything because ... you pay lots of money to puke, you feel good for a little while and then 'jones' afterwards. It's something I have no desire to do (p.9, transcript 2). Yeah, um... once you've had a problem with alcohol you're always going to have a problem with it whether you're dry or you're drunk right, you're always gonna be an alcoholic and you'll always gonna have the problem with it, it's just whether or not you're gonna deal with it ... I still drink and I don't drink as much as I used to, it's just like it's not my main goal every day, now I'm starting doing stuff

with myself now. I am afraid to drink though because of what you're capable of doing when you're drunk, you know... courage the can type thing. You go out you drink you know you're having a good time, you wake in the morning you're all boozed and bashed up ... ah, there was a party and you can kind of laugh at it, but I'm really fucking myself up right regular. People that go out and drink socially don't really do this (p.8, transcript 2). I have a drug and alcohol counsellor now and she's really cool cause she's not gonna call you down for drinking, she's just gonna ask why you drink and make you think about why you do it and what kind of feelings you're trying to hold back or whatever right. But she's really supportive in helping me try to find out things to do and helping me try to overcome the addiction (p.9, transcript 2).

Joanne ends discussion on the topic of drugs by saying, "I didn't really get into anything too heavy because of the fear of addiction. That's something I don't really want to deal with ... I don't drink everyday any more." Among other astute observations and recommendations, Joanne would like to see a recovery centre where youth could be taught to "Look within and bring the power from themselves ... live life day to day ... [instead of] using drugs and alcohol as their crutch."

Joanne knows many people in the sex industry; however, she is not directly involved in prostitution. Again, her understanding of the reasons people are in the industry is far beyond her years. She shows compassion for the women who are trapped by circumstances. Joanne is not, however, "materialistic" and she prefers her dignity to the empty promises she's been approached with. Joanne comments on the percentage of Aboriginal youth prostitutes on the eastside and in "Boystown" (the area where male prostitutes work) in Vancouver.

I've been approached once by a pimp, but he didn't push it upon me, and he didn't force me to do anything but I turned him down because I was happy with what I was doing on the street corner begging for money. Because it was kind of promises of a lavish lifestyle, you'll have clothes ... and there's nothing that I've ever really wanted. So it's just like 'No!' He's like, 'Okay, whatever,' and he walks away but I've met quite a few people that do prostitute. A lot of the boys down there are Aboriginals and like ... boys that work Boystown, the majority of them are Aboriginals. The girls that work in right downtown are mostly White and when you get down Hastings more Native females. Some of the reasons that I've talked to them about why they do it is some do it cause they're feeding their drug habit. They need their drugs to feel happy about themselves and the way they're doing — that is to prostitute. Some of them I've met a few that are trying to like give their kids a better life than welfare. A better life means for them money and that's how they're getting their money. Some I've met that just enjoy sex and so — if you're getting paid for something that you enjoy, then do it, right. That's how they look at it. Some of them are doing it out of fear ... No one is going to accept them if they just go somewhere else, right.

So like these people are accepting them into their groups — these pimps or whoever. They're accepting them, and you know people feel comfortable with that for a while. Then they want to get out of it a lot of times it's hard. I've talked to a few of the people downtown ... like the higher class girls... not higher class but, you know, the higher class people go to for prostitutes. A lot of them aren't really given money from their pimps, they're given what 20 bucks a night or something. That's what they have to buy their smokes and everything else with. But you know the pimps will buy them clothing but the only clothing that they really buy them is dress up clothing, and they don't buy them anything that they can kick around and feel comfortable in. This is pretty sad when you look at it and sometimes it's not out of choice it's because of some of these pimps ... (p.10, transcript 2).

Racism

Racism, yeah, you're going to experience it everywhere ... it makes me feel shitty ... you're thinking who the hell is this person to be telling me that I'm no good, for being myself, and everyone has no choice when they're born — as to what sex or colour they are. If you let everything get to you, you'd probably be dead by now (p.2, transcript 2).

Joanne describes being harassed in school and she jokes about being told to go back to her own country. At least the experience in school was not directed at her exclusively, she had a Pakistani friend with whom she could identify as a partner in oppression.

There was me and my sister, my cousins in the school and there wasn't too many Aboriginal people in the school. We did get a lot of harassment because we were Native and this wasn't [a long time ago] ... what, the early 80s and people still weren't really aware of too much. We just kind of said, 'Screw you if you cannot accept us for who we are then we don't really want to have anything to do with you,' and if it came down to fighting then we were there altogether fighting side by side ... Whoever had a problem with this and who we were and what we were. You know we got called 'wagon burners' and whatever else right, I've even got told once when I was in my junior high by this guy, he knew I was Native and we were all a party and ... it was my friend's party [intruders come in and refused to leave] they were like, 'Fuck you, wagon burner.' One of the guys even told me to go back to my own country. Everyone at the party laughed at him and made fun of him after that because it was just a major fuck-up on his part. But, you know, you do deal with that because I grew up in a more White neighbourhood. One of my best friends, when I was growing up, was Pakistani Indian, so both of us got a lot of flack but we didn't really care (p.11, transcript 2).

Joanne corroborates the experience of racism that Etah talks about with regard to "White power" groups and skinheads on the street in the major cities in Canada. She also tells of Aboriginal youth who have bought into the movement in order to gain acceptance. She also (as does Etah) talks about some White youth, who while they will hurl stereotypical insults will send double

messages that Aboriginal youth are also "neat" because they (Aboriginal people) were here first. Romanticism aside, it is evident that the Aboriginal street youth participants in this study must endure a constant barrage of stereotypes of Aboriginal people without the protection of adequate critical history of their people. They have no defence, in their own psyches or knowledge base, as to the reason Aboriginal people hold the position that they do in Canadian society.

... there are street people out there that are White power and I think of a lot of the Native youths ... I ran into a lot of Native youths in Toronto, I ran into a couple out here and a couple in Calgary that they are Native, but they hold a lot of the nationalist views you know they think that the only people that should be here are Natives and Whites. You run into a lot of people White people that think that they'll think you're cool because you're Native and that you were the first people here. But they're totally down on other nationalities like Orientals, Pakistani and Asians, they're totally down on them because they think of like immigrants coming over here taking all their jobs — raiding everything ... and we're going to treat our fellow White Canadians with respect by screwing everyone else because everyone else just came and they were immigrants, you know, they're no good, they've got germs, and diseases type things but if you're gonna run into racism about being Native you're gonna run into racism that's like from people that are racist against a lot of people — like everyone of colour except White ... because there are a lot of nazis and White power. White pride they don't have a problem with because White pride is not going around preaching that white is good. White pride is just going around saying that, 'I'm proud that I am White cause you got Native pride, Black pride,' or whatever right (p.1, transcript 2). Racism includes violence from weekend warriors and college university students that come down on the weekends to go to the downtown bars and hang out and to be seen, whatever, pick up people and they walk around and a lot of the time [they say] 'You're a Native and you're a lysol chugging fucking squaw ...' (p.2, transcript 2).

Joanne becomes animated when asked whether she notices any differential treatment from people on the streets. Even as she understands the enterprenurial position of seeing street youth presence as a detriment to business, she questions mainstream lack of understanding of their circumstances on the street. She indicates that it doesn't take much to trigger a string of assumptions about Aboriginals that show total ignorance about the history of Canada and of the different treatment of the Aboriginal peoples.

I think that storekeepers treat you worse than everyone else on the street because you're infringing on their business. If you're sitting around their stores then they're gonna say, 'Well, get away from here because you're scaring away our customers, you have no money.' ... they call these other laws ... vagrancy laws just for sitting around right because you have nowhere else to go to hang out except the street. I

like watching people because you know they are interesting. Ordinary people on the street treat you the same and some people treat you worse. I think it goes on social standards too, I think a lot of people with money treat you a lot worse because you're not at the same social level as them, you're not living like them, you're not thinking the same way as them. Because people that have money are more money minded — materialistic. They think more along those lines, they don't go any deeper than that you know. They might be the most intelligent person but that's something that they've learned about you know ... but when it comes down to real life you know they know nothing. They treat you a lot worse than if they're living on welfare or just living like right above the poverty line. They know how it is to struggle. They know how it is not to eat ... they know a lot of the things you're going through, whereas the people that have had money in their life have never gone through any of that so they don't know how it is, and they, you know, a lot of them take it as, 'It's not my problem, I don't have to deal with it.' They'll treat you really weird just because they've been asked 10 times that day for money right, and then they'll just lash out at you for asking them for a quarter. A lot of people tell you to sell our shoes for money to eat right. What are we going to wear on our feet? It's like, I'd rather have shoes right now because I don't want to walk around the city in my barefeet. It's not very much fun and I'm hungry and you're telling me to sell my shoes. So either way I'm fucked right? That's all you own so you don't want to. Yeah, I think that a lot of people too, on the street, walking around, treat Aboriginal street kids bad because they think that since we're Native the government has given all these handouts. We shouldn't be out on the streets asking for a meal, because we've been given this land, and we should go and work the land, or you're getting land settlements, like the government is using your land, and you've got reserves and are getting money. But you know, I don't live on the reserve. I haven't got anything from my reserve. When I was younger I got food and stuff from my parents, but I'm on my own and I've got to work for it all by myself, and a lot of people don't think that's hard. They think because you're Native you've been handed all this stuff, so go back and use it There's nothing really for me there and I don't want to (p.17-19, transcript 1).

Joanne has much experience with the stereotypical images that are common for Aboriginal people in Canadian society. She says, however, she thinks that Aboriginal street youth share in the common myths and stereotypes about street youth with all other street youth. This condition, of course, means that Aboriginal street youth endure double oppression on the street. In addition female Aboriginal youth experience sexism and discrimination on the basis of age. Joanne thinks that Aboriginal youth get the harsh stereotypical fallout from older Aboriginal street people in the city. She also adds that in the city racism is more overt because of the ethnic mix; however, in smaller towns racism is more extensive and pervasive.

Not really, I think what happens to you on the street happens to most people that are on the street. A lot of the people stereotype youth because you are Native, that

automatically you're an alcoholic, or you sniff gas or glue, that you're good for nothing, that you're always going to be drunk and bumming money. I find a lot of people add to the stereotypes of that among the older Native street people. A lot of it is like 'Urban, god-damn Indians ... fucking alcoholics, all they do is sit around the skids and do nothing, and they're not good for anything.' A lot of people do stereotype but, I find a lot of the stereotype goes towards more the older street Natives. The younger ones, some people I think would give hope to you, because they are younger and they think these older people are fucked up, and they're never going to pull themselves out of it, and they're stuck there forever, and they're more fucked up than these kids because they've done more and they drink more. I just think that what happens on the street basically happens to most people on the street, right, you get the same stereotypes because everyone is on the street together, you're on the same level. Some examples of racism is just a lot ... from store owners because, they're a straight person and you're Native. They think that you're just like everyone, you're just like drunken, you're gonna fuck them up ... their business, and all you want is money to buy your cans of Aqua Velva or Lysol In bigger cities, it's more open because there are more ethnic people everywhere in the cities. You go to smaller town and you experience a lot of racism because they're small towns and they're accustomed to having all White towns, with a black toby. But in bigger cities you're gonna experience probably less of it because there are a lot of people with ethnic backgrounds in bigger cities (p.1-2, transcript 2).

Joanne relates that racism includes violence when people choose to attack them in a racial encounter, or when Aboriginal street youth finally get fed up with the abuse and have to stand up for themselves.

My boyfriend's lived on the street too and he's Chipwayan Indian and he grew up in Saskatchewan. From talking with him, he's grown up in a very violent lifestyle. He's always been react first and think later, but he's a really nice guy. He's had a lot of trouble too, sometimes just because he's a Native and a guy ..., Since the fact that I'm a female, a lot of people won't attack me physically. They're like, 'Yeah she's a chick, so let's just sit here and yell and scream at her and call her down and hopefully we can make her cry.' With people like him, since he's a male, they'll [string of stereotypical insults], and go out and just attack him for nothing (p.7, transcript 2).

In the final analysis, Joanne expresses sadness about what's happening to Aboriginal people, "I feel sad too about what's happening with people in this country, like of the Aboriginal people, all of the drug abuse, the alcoholism " She equates many of the problems with the way Canadian society is structured and the everyday struggle of facing racist assault, at least in the Aboriginal street youth population. Joanne, however, is tough about defending herself on logical grounds against

racism. Racist ideology and its accompanying arsenal, unfortunately, do not bend in the face of logic, especially in a population of the most disenfranchised people in Canada.

... so I've no problems with being an Aboriginal person and if anybody is gonna dislike me for it then I'm gonna stand up and say, 'listen you have no right to call me down because of the way I am and for who I am... I had no choice of this when I was born, so I'm gonna make the best of it' (p.11, transcript 2).

Culture and identity

I don't feel ashamed and I don't feel bad about being an Aboriginal person, like I'm proud that I'm Aboriginal person because Aboriginal people are really strong spiritually (p.11, transcript 2).

Joanne gives the impression of being a well balanced young person where her identity is concerned. Somehow she has gathered the strength of conviction that those stereotypes do not apply to her as an Aboriginal person. Nor does she give any evidence of harbouring a blaming the victim perspective where other Aboriginal people are concerned. Joanne does refer to stories told by elders that give a critical understanding of the present social conditions of Aboriginal people. And she also indicates self-study in Aboriginal history. She identifies with the non-materialistic value of Aboriginal culture. Of this characteristic she is proud.

...if the Aboriginal peoples would look back on traditional values and stuff like that, then none of it is materialistic. It's all really spiritual and the stories, and it's really cool if you sit around and you talk with the elders and they've got rad [radical] stories about why things are the way they are. It's just the really creative ... creative ethnic group, right? (p.11, transcript 2).

Joanne indicates that Aboriginal history was sparse in school, nor did her parents offer to fill in the gaps in self knowledge that were obviously missing. Her parents probably had even less information about Aboriginal people in their education.

Ah ... no I haven't learned much about it, because in school they don't really teach you very much about the history of Aboriginal peoples. They teach you history of the White English and French peoples but not a lot about Aboriginals. They might mention a tribe here and there in history but they don't elaborate as much as they do on the history of all the Whites. So you don't learn a lot that way. My parents have never talked about it when I lived at home and I just really didn't have any of the resources before, but I think I've got them now. I read a couple books about history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada cause my uncle had a couple of them but that's it (p.11-12, transcript 2).

Joanne does not currently practice Aboriginal cultural ceremonies or go to Aboriginal events. She does though reveal a mature level of comfort and wisdom in being willing to learn more from people who are authentically qualified to teach her. And she indicates that she knows that she must be properly prepared to enter this process. Joanne would like to see more funding in providing cultural learning opportunities for street youth and people in general. Wisely, she does not think that education only for Aboriginal people will effect the transformation needed in Canada. She would like to see education for everyone.

No I don't [practice Aboriginal culture]. When I was younger we used to go to pow wows, 2 to 3 a year, and I would go and hang out and watch the dances and talk with some of the people, but right now I don't. Yes I would [practice Aboriginal culture] but I'd have to get into it and that's kind of like hard to do at times cause you say you will, but saying and doing are different a lot of the time. Yeah, I think I would if I got into it and I met someone that really knew a lot and could teach me. I'd kind of recommend more funding to help get more elder people and more people that know about spirituality and ceremonies. They know how to do them properly and they know all about them and what helps and stuff like that. I think that it would be cool if you get more funding to get some of these people in town teaching the street people about our background and where you came from, and stories and help find yourself spiritually. And if you got more people around that would help educate in that way ... average people just to become more aware...(p. 12, transcript 2).

Joanne also shows maturity in that she can look at a reserve that is in poor condition and she has still not internalized, to a great extent, the image. She can choose to dislike the conditions and this does not reflect on the human beings that she relates to on the reserve. In the next chapter we will meet Noella who tends to generalize the conditions on one reserve to all Aboriginal people and wants to dissociate herself from all that that means. Joanne is not unaffected, she gets despondent and wants to regress into an idyllic childhood where she doesn't have to be aware of the conditions of her people.

The last time I went back to the reserve was two years ago and it wasn't too bad cause I got to see my grandmother, my aunts and uncles and stuff. But a lot of the stuff out there is like really depressing because a lot of the kids all ... they've got nothing other than drinking, or yeah, shooting back the beers and just basically fucking themselves up, and not making use of themselves. Like I don't know, there's lots of dirt, lots of gravel, lots of dogs. You go into town, what's there to do in town, go to the arcade or so a lot of people are just wasting their lives away out there

doing nothing — drinking (p.19, transcript 1). I also felt sorry like cause at times when you sit back and you're thinking about things that you have to do and things that you want to do, you feel like you don't want to do it any more, you just want to go home, you feel like you want to be young again, not have any responsibilities and not have to worry about anything — only worry about who you're gonna play with and what is your mom cooking you for dinner or whatever (p.3, transcript 2).

Joanne is comfortable with relating to all street workers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, but makes a distinction when it comes to dealing with Aboriginal background, history, racism, identity and culture. Aboriginal workers are more "in tune" she says. Particularly when it comes to spirituality, Joanne says, "because White people have their own god."

For the most part it feels about the same as talking with like regular street workers, but when it comes down to stuff like about your spirituality and your background, and where you've been brought up — cause [Aboriginal workers] they know more about how you've been brought up, if you've been brought on a reserve, all the hardships that you've gone through just because of colour. They know more about that because they've gone through the same as you right, and if you want to talk about spirituality then they're more in tuned with that than other street workers (p.17, transcript 1).

Joanne appears to be on the verge of leaving the street lifestyle. She is clear about her identity, she is on income assistance and living in a place she shares with friends, and she is receiving alcohol counselling. However, she loves to travel. By the time of this writing Joanne was somewhere in the United States — gone to discover more about life on the streets — with friends.

Society

I feel sad about the way mankind is in nature ... 'what can we take, what can we build, what can we make without thinking in long term effects of what's going to happen' (p.3, transcript 2).

Joanne shows her political perspective by the role models that she lists. She is not even really specific, except for her references to the biographies of Ghandi and Malcolm X. Their perspectives and solutions reflect her vision of a better society. She ends with a tribute to her friends on the street.

I think my role models right now at this point in my life are the free thinkers out there that aren't afraid to think of what they want and to do ... to just say what they please. I admire people who are non-conformists, people that know what they're talking about and they don't bend very easily to what society tells them to do. Who

I admire? I've been learning about the works of like Ghandi and Malcolm X. I'm reading about them and what they've done, some of their ideologies and getting angry with them as in, like, to make change. You have to, like, take over the government, not really take it over, but change government, change governments in order, like, get out of the wreck that you're stuck in and have it self-governed instead of governed by a different nation or governed by a minority of people like it is nowadays. Governments right now are governed and ruled by power, money, wealth. They say that they're trying to look at social problems but a lot of the time it's just like a lot of talk for the people with the money ... 'Oh, we're doing this, we're doing that and look at the results it's bringing and a lot of times it's not really bringing useful results' ... They're going in circles so. I don't know, I admire their works cause of what they have to talk about. Malcolm X is a militant guy, it's kind of neat. I also admire my friends too, I admire them for who they are and I'm not going to let anyone shoot them down just because they fucked up — everyone fucks up. And you know you just got to live with it and the fuck ups make the person, make them who they are — you know. You can't really change it — no one's perfect (p.4, transcript 2).

Joanne says she wouldn't go back to school at the moment because she doesn't perceive that the school gives a sufficient critical perspective on the life that street youth, or youth in general, are faced with. She does not trust that the school is not a coercive tool of the government. Much of Joanne's dialogue suggests that historical educational and governmental misinformation about Aboriginal conditions and history is the reason for her distrust.

I don't believe in the instruction form of education in school — being taught. School is just a form of mind control, thought control they're telling you this happened so you know it didn't, you can't think that type thing. I don't think that because it didn't happen right. What's real is what's written in these books and sometimes you don't know if it's real or not because it just might be something that the government is giving you to make you think that it actually happened ... it's just like pretty boring because they teach you the same thing just about every year except maybe for a little bit more or something else right. It's just really repetitive and I did ten years of school (p.4, transcript 2). So you should just educate kids on the way real life is, not this school of paper, not the office building type (30 stories), suit and tie starch life, teach them about real life — about living and what goes on (p.16, transcript 2).

Environmental issues are of concern to Joanne. She shows her Aboriginal roots in the ethic of conservation.

I also feel sad about the way mankind is in human nature. Because it's just more consumption ... we are consumed with what can we take, what can we build, what can we make without thinking in long term effects of what's gonna happen, what you're gonna do with it afterwards. Man is ... I don't know, they're burning off the top layer of the earth and wrecking it all, and wrecking everything, and they're throwing all their junk out into space, when they shouldn't really be. Because it's

not for man to exploit, it's not for man to use, it's not for man to destroy. They're doing all that (p.3, transcript 2).

Joanne is impatient with middle class people ignorantly wielding their middle-class work ethic at street youth, without being cognizant of the reasons for their existence. Nor would she say anything to a government person about education on the street.

Some people think that you've lived a good life all your life because they don't think in a broader perspective that something, you know, just happened. You might have grown up in the perfect family ... functional parents and the brother and sister. Everything is all White and pretty and you've got your dog Fifi sitting by your side, you've always got food on the table and a roof over your head. A lot of people don't have stuff like that ... If you sit around and explain your situation right that let's say you're 15 or 16 years old and you don't have a place to live, you don't have a place to shower and all you're worried about right now is eating, some people are understanding (p.6, transcript 2). I don't think I'd say too much to a government person about education on the street level because most government people were brought up in middle class families where they had everything given to them ... [She would rather talk to] The people that live on the street, the people that have lived on the street ... the people that haven't sold out ... and have not gone to this white collar bureaucrat fucking stage. [These are] people that have sold out that say 'I used to be like you ... but now you know, we have to conform.' A lot more people nowadays are getting more knowledgeable. They're catching on to the lies of the government, and they're finally getting connected with other people ... sit around and talk with them and share knowledge (p.16, transcript 2).

At the end of the interview Joanne wanted to dispel a few myths about street youth and about how the media distorts some of their lifestyle. Hitch hiking, for instance, according to Joanne is not as dangerous as it is made out to be. The main point in her argument is that she does not trust the media. She blames the media also for blaming street youth for the destruction done by middle-class youth.

...like people who are not scared of picking hitchhikers because they know there's good hitchhikers out there ... The media focuses more on people's despair and pain and hurt and so like they're gonna focus more on that too with hitchhiking ... on all the people that are murdered when they're hitchhiking, and got rolled or beat or robbed or whatever (p.6, transcript 1). I just like to say that like a lot of the stuff that street people get blamed for isn't actually what they did. It was kids from the suburbs, jocks and so-called weekend warriors, that come down and destroy stuff and fucks it up and like are really rude to people and like beat up street people because they're street people and they don't have a place to live in. I don't know like we get blamed for a lot of the stuff they do just because you know they're supposedly good upstanding citizens you know because their parents work for whatever or they're going to college or the university and you know they're supposed to be upstanding

because of their social status in that sense that they're actually putting back you know into the community so ... (p.19, transcript 2).

Joanne is a highly self-educated young individual, even though at times she seems a little immature when she gives one of her little laughs. And at times her idealism shows when in child-like fashion she relates her so normal ambition, for a child of seventeen, to travel the world and visit many cultures. It is, after all, a dream shared by so many middle-class youth.

The best possible future for me right now, what would make me happy would be to be able to travel to many countries, experience what they have, see the countries cause I've only been in Canada and Montana. I've never really been to the States either, and don't really have too much of a desire to, but I'd like to check out like South American countries, Africa, Asian countries. I don't know if I'd like to go to Europe, it's not very nice, it's very touristy over there ... I don't know really I haven't really given too much thought about my future, just to be happy (p.5, transcript 2).

MISSY: Former street person

I'm back in therapy again ... I guess where I'm at today is that I have two beautiful children and a partner and a nice home. But at times there are things that come up that really really bother me inside so I need to talk about those things. I need to deal with a loss of childhood and to deal with the sexual abuse still (p.14-15, transcript 1).

Missy, a 28 year old mother of two sons and partner to an Aboriginal man, is a status Kwakwilt woman who made the difficult and complex transition off the streets of Vancouver seven and a half years ago. She presents a quiet confident image of a young woman who knows whose side she's on when she is working with the less fortunate. She is down to earth in dress and manner, and is firm and articulate in relating her story, without affectation, of being on the street, her subsequent recovery and the changes she sees as necessary to prevent more Aboriginal children from becoming entrenched on the streets of Vancouver. Missy's story speaks for itself. It needs little commentary, nor did she need prompting in the interview.

Growing up in the Vancouver downtown eastside district, torn numerous times from an addicted single parent family (with a succession of step fathers), surviving foster homes and group homes, and finally ending up on the streets at the age of thirteen, is still painful for Missy to talk about. She has three brothers, one full and two half brothers by two of the four step fathers she lists

on the face sheet before the interview. Missy started running at the age of eleven. By the time Missy became entrenched on the street at the age of thirteen, she had had a baby who died (she does not say when or by whom) and she was well into a cycle of addiction. Missy spent the next four years in entrenched street life and two more years in the struggle of getting off the street. Eight years in all. She now, after seven and a half years off the street, works with the social service system for youth who are desperately trying to follow her example.

History

... all the time that I'd been in care she hadn't made any visits, and everytime I was brought to visit her, she never showed up (p.2, transcript 1) ...I missed being a part of my family. I wanted to belong in my family and I felt like the separation had taken me from my family (p.7, transcript 1).

Missy began her journey through the child care system when she was apprehended at the tender age of two weeks, where she stayed until she was two and a half years old. Returned to her mother for one year, she then came into care briefly while her mother was in treatment. From the ages of four to seven she remained with her mom and finally was made a permanent ward of the province of British Columbia and placed in numerous White foster homes. The seven year old Missy had already suffered much under the auspices of parental custody. Child care protection was to provide no better.

Rape at three years old, which continued "by a number of men in the family" while in the care of her mother, left Missy extremely angry at her parents (her mother and one of her step dads that she took as her father) for not protecting her. The rage compounded as she met with four years of sexual abuse (ages 7-11) at the hands of her foster father.

...it was really vicious abuse...he'd hold me with guns and do all sorts of things...I was really mixed up at that age (p.2, transcripts 1).

She disclosed her abuse to her foster mother and charges were laid. Justice may have alleviated the pent up shame and bitterness; however, after pleading temporary insanity, her assailant received a six month sentence.

At the same time Missy was dealing with being informed, during one of the few "phone contacts" with her mother, that her "dad" (mentioned above) had committed suicide a few years earlier and she had never been told. "He had hung himself in my grandmother's garage and nobody told me." This had been the first contact Missy had had with her mom in almost five years. It would be her last. Even as the ministry ended phone contact with her mother, her mom died of an overdose when Missy was eleven years old.

Missy describes the interim years between her mother's death at eleven and the decision to go to the streets at age thirteen this way.

So at that time I remember thinking, 'Well, why am I letting these people take care of me?' I'd been in a foster place where I'd been abused, and then I'd been moved into this sort of high class group home...it was totally different. I'd been moved so many times to different homes at that point. From receiving homes to foster placement and temporary placement, it was always a different home and every time I moved I had to change who I was. There was a new set of rules, there was a set of the way I was to be as a person. Not one of these families were Native. I'd had a problem with wetting the bed and often I was moved because I wet the bed and because I had nightmares. And at [age] eleven the social worker said 'Well, lets put her in Maples ...' And I was really angry that they wanted to lock me up in Maples for counselling and to be seen by a psychiatrist regularly. I felt I was being locked away for what somebody else did. And I couldn't see why they wanted to lock me away and why they thought I was crazy for what had happened. So I figured I'd given the Ministry enough chances. I figured that they'd done a lousy job of looking after me and there was nobody to depend on but myself and my dreams sort of died along with my mother. I think one thing that helped me survive all those years was that I had a dream that one day she would straighten out her act and we'd live happily ever after and I'd be the best daughter in the world. So when she died that dream ended and there was nothing else to hang on to. So I went out on the street, you know. And I thought I was safer that way, looking after myself than with somebody else to look after me (pp.2-3, transcript 1).

On the streets

I was running from group homes and I was running from the ministry.... I knew if I relied on myself I'd be safer than if I let other people take care of me (p.3, transcript 1).

Missy had many reasons for entering the maze in the underbelly of Vancouver — the street world. Having lost the illusion of reuniting with her family, Missy's alienation from personal and cultural dislocation and sexual abuse intensified. She began to run and abuse drugs in an effort to

be free from "the system" and from her own pain. Missy would stay in this "alternate system" of "masked pain" for eight years (six years steady and two years off and on).

There's a lot of reasons why I ended up on the streets. I guess at age 11 is when I started to have the feelings of wanting to run and drink and use drugs (p.1, transcript 1). I guess I wanted a sense of freedom, so that's basically why. I wanted to rely on myself (p.3, transcript 1). There was a lot of grief ... I missed being a part of my family and I felt like the separation had taken me from my family. Even when I was with my family, I felt like I didn't belong. I wasn't accepted for who I was because I was raised differently ... as well as ... I missed my mother very much and I missed my step dad and I just wanted to be with them. And I'd had a baby that had died and I grieved that very much. So I felt a lot of losses. A lot of anger concerning these losses. As well as the loss of my own childhood, I felt that I'd miss out on a great deal of my childhood and I was really angry about that and I was always always really lonely. And I didn't want to be alone. I was scared to be alone. And so there was a lot of pain there (p.7, transcript 1).

The people Missy hung out with on the street were people of the street who were familiar to her.

They too were living in the downtown skid row area of Hastings street.

I had a number of new friends on the street and as well I had two uncles that lived in the area ... they lived in hotels. One uncle had been sober for a number of years and protected me and fed me and never asked me for anything in return. The other uncle who used to take care of me ... used to always try and get me to sleep with him. He'd slept with my mother and he died while I was down there. So I used to visit the one who used to look after me and never forced me to go home (p.3-4, transcript 1).

From the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s AIDS was not an issue "... so I didn't even hear the word AIDS at that time. It was basically STDs people were concerned about then. And I didn't use birth control, as well as STD precautions." There were few specific street youth services, at least that Missy knew about, or that she would approach for help. Any support that Missy would accept would have to come unconditionally and from the street itself. Missy did not have access to welfare at the young age of thirteen. Social Services was the enemy who would simply put her back into the mess she was leaving.

No, I didn't know about any street workers at that time ... being down there and I was very resistant to any sort of services. So I didn't use them and there was only one community drop in centre that I used where you could watch TV and they offered you cheap meals and laundry. The only thing that I was offered through my social worker was placement and I wouldn't accept it. So basically I didn't call very often. At the age of 16 and 17 I started receiving a little bit more services, like

clothing vouchers and bus tickets. They used to give me bus tickets ... they used to give me bus tickets back to my home town and back. And at the age of 17, they offered me underage income assistance (p.4, transcript 1) ... Depending on how things were going, sometimes I lived outside, sometimes I would just walk around all night, other times I would have friends to go to or I had a hotel room (p.9, transcript 1).

Early sexual abuse, alienation, poverty, drug addiction and the need to survive led to prostitution and drug dealing. Both hooking and selling drugs came to Missy through adult coercion absent of the "usual" promise of love and protection.

The first time I remember doing a trick I guess I was about 14 years old. I was living with my grandparents for a short time and one of my grandfather's friends would come over and sneak in the house all the time and he started abusing me. At that time, it was the first time that I had been reunited with my family after a number of years, so I was too afraid to say anything for fear that they might move me from my grandparents' house. Well anyways, this man who was abusing me ... he used to give me money. He started to give me money and he used to buy me things so I wouldn't say anything. And then... I moved out of my grandparents' house because I couldn't handle that anymore. But after a short time I went back to see this man. And he was paying me basically I think I'd seen him until I went to treatment basically [age 20]. As well I'd had a number of regulars that I'd found ... just accidental sort of walking on the street, men approaching me and then I would phone them once a week or once a month depending on how much I needed the money. Sometimes it was twice a week and I would just meet them somewhere and they would take me home. And then finally after I started to drink heavily, I wasn't getting enough money coming in and so I went out and started working on the street and I still continued to have my regulars as well at the same time (p.11, transcript 1). I used to work in the Chinatown area, anywhere from Pender and Main, along Keeffer and most of the time it was up near Princess and Hastings. If I wasn't standing on the corner, I used to hitchhike and I would hitchhike around and that's how I'd pick up my dates. When I first started working the streets, I'd known this girl for a couple of years ... she sort of showed me how to work When I first started dealing I... it wasn't something I sort of decided to do on my own, it was sort of somebody who'd come to me, 'deal these drugs and this is what you'll get for it' (p.11, transcript 1).

When the demands of drug addiction became overwhelming robbery supplemented Missy's bottomless need for drug money. "I was really addicted to cocaine and all sorts of other drugs as well as drinking very heavily." She was, however, never criminalized for her activity. This is more a statement of the acceptance of youth prostitution, particularly of Aboriginal kids (as Missy will later elaborate) by Canadian society, than cunning criminality on Missy's part.

I used to also rob people. Many of the tricks I used to rob. I used to steal wherever possible and I got tired of working the streets ... so I started dealing drugs. At first it was marijuana and then it was cocaine and other types of chemical drugs. I was never charged. I'd been under investigation a few times for theft. I'd been charged for shoplifting but the charges were dropped by the stores that I'd shoplifted at. When I was prostituting I was stopped a number of times by the police and they collected information in their little books on women who prostitute. They take your name down and your picture and put it in their book in case you go missing. But basically I was never charged with anything, I always seemed to get away with everything (p.10, transcript 1).

Missy relates that violence was a feature of her time as a prostitute, "And men would just become violent, one minute they were fairly nice and the next minute" Danger did not come exclusively from johns, it came from those whom she allowed into her lonely life as lovers. It is misogynist love-laced violence that she fears most. Missy talks about the physical violence from boyfriends in the same vein as exploitation from various sources.

I wasn't afraid of anything on the street. The only thing I ever remember being afraid of, when I was down there, was a boyfriend who was physically abusive. I had been exploited through a number of people down there. I was exploited by dealers but I was never exploited by pimps or anything like that. Pedophiles ... I was exploited by pedophiles. Basically I was preyed on by pedophiles ... and a few street people who were trying to get me into doing certain things for them ... if you have money down there you're taken advantage of if you let people I found that people who are street involved never give anything for free. There's always something they want in exchange, some sort of favours of some kind. I also had boyfriends who took advantage of me Yeah, I used to go back. I had a boyfriend who beat me severely for three years while I was down there and I kept going back all the time. I'd never charged him, I'd always protect him and make up excuses for the beatings and blame it on myself. And part of me really felt like this was what love was. My mother beat me and she, you know, beat us regularly and verbally abused us, that I thought this was all I deserved. So I kept thinking well this person loves me, that's why they're beating me. So I kept going back because it was the only sort of love that I knew. And to admit that this man didn't love me was to admit that my mother didn't love me. So I stayed in that relationship for three years and then the following relationship was abusive also. The second one wasn't as severe (beatings) but with the second one I used to fight back. With the first one I didn't. The second one, I fought back at times, not all the time, until finally I couldn't handle it anymore and I got out of that relationship (p.1-2, transcript 2).

Another characteristic of the downtown eastside of Vancouver is that the majority of prostitutes are of Aboriginal ancestry. Missy, having come from a life in numerous White foster

homes, was now just one of the many Aboriginal street youth who were submerged in the sex industry for whatever reason — for however long.

In the area I was working, downtown and Chinatown, I'd say approximately 75% were Native girls and women at that time, as well as some Native transsexuals who were working also (p.12, transcript 1).

Eventually life for Missy became a blur of drug addiction and partner abuse. She began to realize that her mother's fate would be her own if she did not do something about the disfunction in her life.

Well I think from every time... from every person who takes advantage of you ... you learn. You learn something ... and it's usually not to trust the next person so quickly. As for the boyfriends I had for beating me up and I took a good many beatings, for nothing basically, until I finally learned that it was time to get out of this situation. I was beaten until I couldn't take anymore ... and I was very scared that one of these beatings would eventually kill me if I didn't get out pretty quick so ... it took a long time for me to learn you know (p.1, transcript 2) And I was really fed up with life in general and I felt like one day I would not wake that I would die in my sleep from using too much drugs and I decided that it was time I did something about my drug and alcohol problem and as well as other issues that had been bothering me for some time (p.9, transcript 1).

Being on the street, for Missy, was sprinkled with attempts to get and keep straight opportunities. Missy would have qualified for social services as a permanent ward: involuntary protection to the age of sixteen and voluntary services, such as education and special income assistance, from age sixteen to twenty one. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty (when she went into addiction treatment) Missy began cautiously accessing services for education and employment. Still heavily street active, Missy met with inevitable failure.

I went to a Native alternative school ... until I finished grade 10 and then one of the teachers told me that the social workers were looking for me and unless I wanted to be picked up and caught that I shouldn't return to school. So I never went back to school and then at the age of 16, I approached my worker about hairdressing school. And they paid for my hairdressing school for two years off and on ... Sometimes I wouldn't make it for days, but I tried ... I never completed the courses because I didn't get enough hours (p.4, transcript 1). I used some employment services ... I used to get odd jobs delivering papers and working fire fighting camps and doing stuff like that ... (p.5, transcript 1).

During Missy's time on the street she made visits to the reserve to seek out extended family members. She made sure, however, that she retained her independence and freedom. The reserve had not been the safe haven that Missy needed so desperately.

I used to hitchhike up to my reserve and hitchhike back and I'd go up for a day or two, or a couple of weeks and return. With my family it varied, it depended on who was in my family. Anybody who has any sort of authority over me no, I won't have any contact with them. Anybody who could boss me around, no. If it was a brother or a cousin or somebody who was an aunt or an uncle, who wasn't gonna expect anything from me, I would have contact with them.

Back from the abyss

I think the big thing that changed in my life was when I had my son. I started to think about who I was as a person as well as I started to realize by seeing my son everyday that a lot of the things that had happened to me were not my fault. Just by looking at his innocent little face everyday was very reassuring for me (p.15, transcript 1).

At age nineteen Missy gave birth to her oldest son. Although she had begun navigating the slippery terrain between street culture and life off the streets one year prior to her son's birth, the transition was painfully slow. Services do not simply fling their doors open the moment one is ready to go through the mandala. She made sure, however, that her son was well cared for as she slid back and forth into escape. "I always was very responsible about who I left him with ... I didn't want him to grow up like I did ... I didn't want him to go through the pain."

I was trying to get my life together and get my own place and so I was living with friends basically and ... but I was still street active. I used to go out and go drinking in bars and stay out all night and sometimes I'd go home for a few days at a time (p.8, transcript 1).

During this time Missy was hanging out in the Main and Hastings area of Vancouver (sometimes on Granville). The catalyst in the change that Missy was experiencing came in the form of a street worker who had faith in her. She relates the story in this way.

I had a couple of friends and also one of the street workers who I'd been in contact with quite regularly and he took me out on a retreat. And I was supposed to be clean, like three days of that week while I was on this retreat and so I went on the camping trip, and it was out near the ocean on this island which was really quite nice. I took some drugs with me but not very much. So I lasted like the three or four days with just... I think barely anything anyways and I was sitting out in the

mountain and decided, you know, well maybe I should really think about treatment because a friend of mine — a boyfriend, actually, I had at the time — had suggested that. I said to the street worker 'What do you think of me going to treatment, pretty funny idea?' and he said, 'actually it's the best thing, I think, you've ever said.' So at that time we got back to Vancouver and he'd made the arrangements and it took a few months. Those, I think, were the longest months in the whole time I'd been down there, was waiting for treatment because I was pretty heavily addicted. I didn't spend very much time not under the influence of something. And then I went to treatment and basically that's when my life started to get together and I didn't go downtown anymore (p.9, transcript 1).

Missy was twenty when she went on the mountain trip and six months later she went into treatment.

I went to Round Lake Treatment Centre in Vernon. It's an Aboriginal treatment centre and I stayed there for six weeks. And basically I learned a lot about myself there, a lot about my past. They do a lot of group work ... and they do a circle session for a few hours and they also do workshops on different life skills (p.10, transcript 1).

Treatment and stable housing are not the only factors in recovery from the type of complete alienation that Missy describes. Love and support are essential to surmount the punishment for deserting the old crowd on the street. Family and friends must meet and respect the new person who is emerging. Missy was lucky she had such a friend. Retelling the pain involved in loss around recovery was painful for Missy.

... the boyfriend I've been with ... so after I was outside of ... I'd gotten out of treatment, he became verbally abusive. He was also drinking and using drugs still so we broke up (p.13, transcript 1). I really felt a loss, I felt rejected and angry ... and I kept asking myself why I'd gone through ... the treatment and all the work I'd done on myself to get this. I felt that they didn't even want to understand how come I changed and how come I went through treatment. There was also a challenge with them as well, because they used to make jokes about me going to treatment, that I'd be falling off. People used to come over with drinks — trying to give them to me. So that was really hard. It was hard to let go of them for me. But eventually I started to make new friends and there was one friend who was my best friend and stuck right by me all the way and was really proud of me and was always there to support me when I felt like I was losing it, so that was, I guess what made me hang on — was her support being there all the time. She wasn't shutting the door no matter what I did. So that was nice (p.1, transcript 1).

Life, however, does not make a point of stopping and making sure the player is strong enough to take the curves that so often get thrown to Aboriginal people in this society. Missy had

also to deal with the pain that accompanies self-search and recovery, as well as other hardships that beckon the help of drugs.

During this time I'd lost a number of people in my family due to alcoholic and drug related deaths ... just basically drinking themselves to death until they had cirrhosis or dementia. I also had one cousin a year and a half ago who was shot by the police. He had a walkman and he'd been out drinking and been in a fight and was chased by the police and they killed him (p.14, transcript 1). There's been about 10 and they all... either cirrhosis of the liver or drug overdoses ... As well as a number of deaths before those 10, there's been quite a few of suicides as well (p.15, transcript 1).

Missy's determination for removing herself from the street extended to volunteer work with support services for the downtown poor. Along with a stable living space and supportive friends, the community service helped to pave the way for a job.

Well, after I came back from treatment, I got my son back who had been staying with a friend of mine while I was in treatment, he was only a couple years old at the time, and my son came home and I started to volunteer at the youth project. I organized a big Christmas dinner for 500 people in the downtown eastside and we had all sort of Native drummers, dancers and different musicians. It turned out really really well. And then I'd done some other volunteer work for the director of the youths project, and a short time later, I'd been sitting in his office watching him sort of short list resumes, he and his co-worker at the time, and so after the dinner was all over I went in and they asked me for my resume, and I asked them, 'What for?' And they said well there's a job for a youth worker down here. So I put my resume in, kept volunteering whenever they needed me. Then I got a call for an interview ... There was about two people there that were interviewing me. I got the job which was kind of neat, although I didn't know a lot of the services that were available for kids. So they did a lot of training with me and they trained me for a couple of years themselves, just on how to do street work and how to get a hold of all the services and basically what I was supposed to do out there (p.13, transcript 1).

Even a successful job began to cause upheaval in Missy's life. Her child was not used to her going out to work and being home all evening. Stability was unfamiliar. Job and family responsibilities began to compete with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) support group meetings. Missy had to quit going to AA. But by then a new partnership was forming that was supportive to Missy's sobriety and continued growth.

Racism

And you can see it in peoples' eyes when they're looking at you like that (p.6, transcript 1).

Missy talks about experiencing racism in commercial establishments on the lower eastside of Vancouver. She connects this behaviour with being poor and being Aboriginal. The skid row bar is the only place where Aboriginal ethnicity is not a barrier to service. Here they are the majority. Here they inflict violence on each other. The business in this part of the city feeds on their pain.

I find storekeepers treat you differently. You walk through the store and all of sudden you're being followed by floor walkers because you've got a pack sack and you're Native. And you don't have very nice clothes, so obviously you're being followed because of course you might steal something. Some of the restaurants I've been to, you sit down and you order a meal and they bring you the meal and they make you pay. Yet a White person who sits right across from you orders a meal and they don't have to pay until they finish their meal and they go up to the till. Basically I think it's all racism. People don't understand that some people don't have a lot of money you know. They're living in poverty so they're treated differently (p.6, transcript 1). I often was either turned away, followed or looked upon differently. There wasn't really racism from other street people, from people who were living in the same area. There was racism from restaurant owners and waitresses and stuff ... when I walked into a department store or there was somebody that wasn't from the same background or lifestyle — was very well off — they would look at you differently. But that was about it, there was never any violence concerning racism. The only time I'd experienced any violence was from another Native person who'd raped me (p.7, transcript 1).

Missy comments on a racist phenomena in Canadian society that is underground and understood by everyone, yet is not talked about in any forum. Structurally the Canadian establishment supports Aboriginal child prostitution. In Vancouver, and even more so in Winnipeg, Aboriginal children (male and female) line the streets catering an Aboriginal sexual feast to middle class working (primarily White) married men. She watches "support" services turn a blind eye and leave the youth sex trade in tact and unquestioned.

One thing that used to bother me was that men looked at me differently. I always felt really dirty all the time, men used to look at me and undress with their eyes or try and pick me up or thinking I was just easy. That used to really bother me. I think men [mainstream] prey on Aboriginal kids. I still see them doing it today. You know I see these men who are living very very well off in different communities, high class communities, and have well paying jobs, doctors and lawyers, and you know politicians and then they still go downtown and they look for kids. And the one thing ... Native kids are targets for them. They think Native kids won't talk. If there's a rape that happens in the area it's usually done to a Native kid because they feel that Native kids won't report these things. I guess that I see these men here who

come down in the area or sometimes they even got their partner with them and they've got a baby in the back seat (car seat) and they're all trying to pick up women downtown or kids. Some of the men go down there and they just look for kids. They've got their own kids at home but they don't abuse them but they go down town and look for Native kids to sleep with and they pay them basically. The kids can't charge these men if the man has given any sort of money. Well, they can charge them but it doesn't usually get through court which you know, I know one man who was raped by another man and he was drugged at first and then raped and he tried to go report it to the police and this young guy ... he had a sore throat after this man had raped him and the man gave him ten bucks as he was getting out of his vehicle and the guy took it and went and bought a pop. He went to the police and tried to report it as a rape and they said 'Well, no, you took the ten dollars' (p.5, transcript 1).

Missy does not only blame parents and care takers, she thinks that band councils, home communities, social workers, police, the ministry and the government have a responsibility to stop the exploitation of youth on the street. She asks some big questions: Isn't it against the law for under age youth to be on the streets selling their bodies? and why aren't resources made available to take action against prostitution in the Aboriginal youth population? Missy believes this is blatant racism.

I think the kids need intervention from both the ministry and the police. How come that kids can go downtown and stay there all night and get into fights and deal drugs and work on the corner prostituting when... nobody stops them you know ... the kids can just stay there and be invisible almost from the police and the social workers and the ministry. Why are there all these police officers down there trying to intervene with the adults and nobody's doing it with the kids? How come there's only one youth car for the whole Vancouver? You know 'oh there's not that much funding,' I don't believe that, you know, when they've got how many drug squad guys out on the street every night? But they've got only two police officers available on a car for the youths in the whole of Vancouver (p.6, transcript 2)?

Culture and identity

I didn't know anything about my Native culture. I didn't know anything about what kind of a Native I was even or who my father was. There was loss of identity ... I didn't know what category I belonged to — from the White society or from the Native society, and neither one accepted me. So I felt really dirty about being Indian. I wasn't proud to be Indian (p.2, transcript 2).

Missy relates that during her stay on the streets she didn't know where she belonged. The educational system did not provide the knowledge that she needed to answer her questions about her tribal heritage or the history of her people. From a very young age her experience told her that what she saw on the streets was the only reference point for her identity. During the years that

Missy was on the street there were no Aboriginal workers in social services or on the street and there were no opportunities to experience Aboriginal culture. Of her Aboriginal identity then she says:

Very confused, I didn't know who I really was or what my reasons were for being here. I felt that I lost my family and that I'd never really belong in my family as I'd been separated for a number of years. So when I returned I felt really out of place, my schooling was above my family's. I'd go to an alternate school and I pretended I was dumb. I would put the wrong answers down on purpose because I just wanted to be accepted there as a Native student and to be smarter and to be able to do the work quickly ... I would be referred to a regular school and I didn't want that because I didn't belong in the regular school, because I was under the academic level there and above it at an alternate school. So I really didn't belong anywhere ... yet I could fake it and be White as well if I wanted to depending on how smart the person was you know. Some people could tell I was Native right off the bat and people would mistake me for Italian or something you know so it was different. I didn't belong anywhere (p.2, transcript 2). No, I didn't know very much [history]. The only thing I knew about Aboriginal people was what I learned in elementary school. When I went on a field trip to the Planetarium then I learned about the art work a bit and I learned about what type of fish Native people eat, and how to make bannock, and how the Indians picked berries (laugh), and you know how to make soap berries stuff like that. That's all I knew (p.3, transcript 2). No I didn't go to anything [Aboriginal cultural activities]. I didn't know of any sort of places to go where I could learn that ... and at home there was basically nothing. In the group homes I lived in they were all White and they were raised differently, very differently, from what Native people are raised like. Then when I was with my real family ... I didn't know about any of that either... there was just alcoholism, addictions, basically, and abuse so we never learned any of that (p.4, transcript 2).

Since Missy went into treatment at an Aboriginal treatment centre she has made great strides in coming to terms with her Aboriginality. She has learned some history and traditional culture. One has to wonder why she had to go on such a destructive path in order to gain self-respect. She makes an analogy with street services. "Why are counselling and Aboriginal culture suddenly provided 'after' youth have landed on the street? It gives kids the wrong message, if you're behaving yourself, you're doing okay in school, you're at home and you don't run away that ... you don't deserve these things."

But I think the best part of Round Lake was learning about my culture and the sweat lodges, the pipe ceremonies. That was, I think, one of the best things about Round Lake and they also do individual counselling there too (p. 10, transcript 1). Now I know more than I did ... I've travelled around to Alberta and then Saskatchewan and ... lived in those areas with Native people that live in those areas and learned a lot

from them ... how they live everyday and what they do. And I've gone out and lived out in the bush for months at a time with Cree people and hunted with them, smoked deer meat, gone hunting for moose and stuff like that (laugh). I know some about the West Coast culture — quite a bit actually. And the difference in how the people live on the West Coast and the way they lived back east in Alberta and Saskatchewan is quite different (p.3, transcript 2). ... I've participated in sweat lodges ceremonies, and I find that very powerful, as well as pipe ceremonies, and I believe in them. It's just really hard to explain I guess, how you feel when you're in those ceremonies. But it's, I guess a sense of being alive and being in touch with yourself. I live in the city so it's harder to be involved in some of those spiritual ceremonies. But I believe in them (p.4, transcript 2).

Missy has been reunited with her Aboriginal identity, as much as she has been able in the last seven and a half years. She is **still** a young woman who **still** needs to continue with personal counselling and she **still** lives in a city where full expression of Aboriginal culture is not easily accessible. Missy has begun to carve "again."

Another thing that I guess that's really important to me that I've done is start carving again. I was fortunate to get a grant for my carving tools and I looked around for somebody to teach me how to carve silver. I couldn't find anybody so I finally started carving myself. I've been learning how to do that, so that's something that brings me a lot of peace and a lot of happiness and it helps me get in touch with myself basically so it's very important for me to do that. Just for me and I'm selling it and that's nice too (p. 15, transcript 1).

This expression of Aboriginal identity and culture has brought some peace into her life. Even so, shades of her confused identity remain. "I still don't feel comfortable in really large crowds of Native people it's not that I don't belong ... it just feels very different. I've never experienced that very many times though, I guess that's why." How does Missy feel about being an Aboriginal person now?

I'm very proud to be an Aboriginal person and I wouldn't change that for the world. I'm happy with who I am and I'm happy and proud of my achievements, and even the things that happened to me when I didn't feel so good about myself, I'm sort of grateful for it because I know I've learned a lot from it. I wouldn't be as strong as I am today. I don't know, I'm so very proud of my art work. It helps get more in touch with who I am and my own spirituality, and the way I feel towards people and the world and the environment. So it's really ... you know, I'm happy with who I am (p.3, transcript 2).

Missy's identity is not exclusively composed of Aboriginal traditional cultural elements and a sense of history, it is also about being an abused child, about having been in many White foster

homes, about being the daughter of a drug addict, about having been a prostitute, about being an addict herself. When she went into treatment and began dealing with the issues of shame and guilt, she had to deal with the secondary elements of her identity. She had to take on roles which were strange and difficult with her new primary identity elements still fragile and growing. The role of partner in a functional family unit was frightening. Speaking of her new boyfriend she explains the fear involved in dealing with an absence of violence, which as she tells before, meant that she was loved.

He treated me really well and that was really hard for me because part of me wanted to run away from him because he was so nice. It scared me. I never knew what to expect basically, so I spent a number of months trying to figure out a way to end the relationship (p.13, transcript 1) ... There were a lot of things I felt shameful about. I felt shame concerning the abuse that had happened to me. I felt ashamed every time I seen a man look at me. I used to feel ashamed that I worked the streets. That I'd done these sort of things. I also felt shame for hurting the people I hurt when I was there. I tried to find a way to talk about it with my social worker and she knew a lot of what had happened to me, but it was mostly finding out when and where it happened and not really understanding why. So I always carried the shame around with me and I could never tell anybody some of the things that I felt (p.7, transcript 1) [About grief] And so this was all really hard to deal with, and stay sober at the same time. I felt like I was going to have a breakdown because I was grieving for a lot of these people. So I went to therapy again and spent a year going through therapy ... you know it still bothers me when people touch me or men just try and be a friend. They scare me, so I'm still dealing with that along with losing a lot of my family who died. So that's why I'm in therapy now [Loss of street extended family] I continued to go to work and I went to AA and any support groups and met new friends, because most of my old so-called friends had deserted and were very angry at me. A lot of my family didn't know how to take me anymore, and a lot of them sort of shut their doors on me as well. So I ended up going to AA and I go to dances and roundups at different... community centres and stuff and then it got really really busy for me (p.13, transcript 1).

Etah was right when she, in her sage way, gave us the statement that only food and shelter will not fix the problem, nor will simply hiding the street youth in holding tanks until they fall out of youth jurisdiction. Getting off the streets means a lot more than first meets the eye. Missy's institutional history, street life and recovery path can tell us much about the needs of Aboriginal street youth in general and how those needs differ from mainstream street youth.

... if people don't start taking a look at it [the street situation], we're going to see a lot more kids dying from overdoses and suicides and violent death ... There are kids

out there who are dying, we see that everyday, but I think the other thing is that government officials ... the people who are doing this research have to come down and take a look too (p.14, transcript 2).

Society

Missy, having been through the child welfare system and through the ordeals of the street, knows very well how many children end up on the street and she also knows their experience once they become entrenched in street culture. As a helper on the street, Missy is highly aware of the institutional barriers that exist for Aboriginal street youth. She has no illusions about the nature of the relationship of Aboriginal street youth to the society that surrounds them. Missy most vehemently condemns the social system that allows Aboriginal children to become abused, institutionalized, re-abused in the system, only to be victimized again in their flight to some semblance of safety.

Many times in the interviews Missy comes back to the idea of a sexually predatory society and of an entire social safety network that supports this value system. She does not buy into the idea of scarce resources or that nothing can be done to prevent the escalating phenomena of street youth. Although Missy does not express the need for a fundamental change to the system (she is still struggling to fit into this one), she thinks a lot more can be done with more resources. "They're not doing their jobs properly, you know," is her evaluation of the systems that work directly with street youth.

Yeah, you know, the Aboriginal kids end up missing out because they don't get that support, you know. And the police can make a difference too — if they do their jobs properly, you know. If they don't go around and harass the kids ... if they would go around and support the kids. Some of the kids are not even reported missing. They're not reported missing with the police so which means if the kid gets stopped when they're out there in trouble, they're not on the computer so they're not going to be held. they're just going to let them go, you know I think that the communities and the workers have got to start reporting these kids missing and follow it up. I think the social workers got to start tightening up on their jobs and doing what they're paid to do, you know. As well as all other workers. I also think that they have the time to spend to go down and look for that kid if they know where they are. Whether it's just to stop by the hotel room or if they're at a certain place every evening. They can just stop and say, "Hey, you know, if you need anything, come on in. I'd like to take you for lunch one day. And that's all that kid

(street youth) needs to give them the proper message that they're cared for And if they're already lonely, that doesn't make a good combination because they end up getting really heavily involved and there's nothing else available to them, so they're gonna stay on the street. I also think when kids get apprehended at a young age, they have to search harder to find somebody in the family to adopt these kids, you know Because a lot of kids, they're moved from home to home to home and it's different every time and a lot of these homes aren't even Native. Sometimes they go through homes all their lives and they've never come across a Native home. So they really don't know who they are, they don't know where they belong. They feel alienated, you know (p. 7-9, transcript 2).

Missy expresses the idea that resources are misplaced in the child welfare industry and that more resources need to be placed with family support and cultural revival. "I find I get really angry because it's too late when the kids are in the city and on the street, you know." She stays on the topic of preventive strategies,

Those kids are hurting inside and nobody's helping them, you know ... Why isn't counselling being provided? They have to go through victim's assistance and apply for that and it takes anywhere ... any amount of time depending on what's happening And by the time they reach the street it's too late, it's too painful inside for them to deal with, so they run away from it (p.12, transcript 2).

In the end we are left with the feeling that Missy is getting along, managing to stay true to herself, as a survivor and as an Aboriginal person. She now lives further away from rough streets of Vancouver and from the daily struggles of street life (in many ways, though the scars remain). Missy, however, commutes back to the streets and all its pain everyday to work with the children and youth who are still caught up in society's web of shame. Canadian society has not changed since Missy was a child facing its demons. New and far more dangerous challenges have appeared and services instituted for street youth, but Missy still feels that the efforts are not enough and they come "too late."

Chapter 4. Winnipeg

Winnipeg, Manitoba is the geographic centre of North America, lying midway between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. It is situated at the meeting of the Red River and the Assiniboine River and 100 kilometres north of Minnesota. The city covers a land area of 571.6 square kilometres or 3294.82 square kilometres for the metropolitan area. The climate of Winnipeg is similar to many other prairie locations: very cold in winter (January average of -18.3 C) and moderately hot in the summer (July average temperature of 19.8 C). In terms of precipitation there is, on average, 114.8 centimetres of snow and 404 millimetres of rain (Canadian Encyclopedia, 1988). The hot dry summer makes it easy for youth to be out on the street.

Winnipeg is the economic centre of the province of Manitoba containing half of the population and 68 per cent of its employees. The major employers in the city are, by industry: service, trade, manufacturing, transportation, communications and utilities, public administration and construction. In the manufacturing sector alone the range of producers is diverse including: food and beverage, metals, paper products, publishing, printing, wood, transportation equipment, chemicals, clothing, textiles and non-metallic minerals. In the city the average monthly unemployment rate for 1992 was 11.3 per cent. Housing costs were among the lowest in Canada for major cities (12th out of 15 cities and 45.6 per cent below the Canadian average). Additionally, vacancy and rental rates are moderate to below average; in short, housing is quite affordable and accessible compared to other major Canadian cities (Winnipeg 2000 Profile, 1990).

Manitoba's population of Aboriginal people was 116,200 in 1991. The census puts the population statistics for Winnipeg at 616,790 with just over 44,970 Aboriginal people living there (1991). However, a discussion paper presented to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Discussion paper, June 21-23, 1992) stated that approximately 60% of Manitoba's Aboriginal population live in Winnipeg and that the population is more likely in excess of 60,000 — most of whom live in the central and northern part of the city. Morrisette and Blacksmith (1993) also

believe that mainstream population statistics underestimate the Aboriginal population in Winnipeg. According to them Winnipeg has anywhere from 60,000-80,000 Aboriginal people within the city limits. Nearly 8,000 are between the ages of 15 and 24. The population changed dramatically between the 1981 and 1986 census, during which there was a 67 percent increase in Aboriginal population (The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1990a) for different reasons which include Bill C-31 (the reinstatement of enfranchised persons — most as a result of section 12(1)b of the Indian Act - women who married non status men) and changes in census information around ethnic identity questions. By 1986 Aboriginal people comprised 10.2 per cent of the inner city population or 4.7 per cent of the population of the total metropolitan area. Winnipeg has the highest population of Aboriginal people of any urban area in Canada (Valentine, 1993).

For the most part the reserves and Aboriginal settlements are sparsely dispersed throughout the province. Few are in close proximity to the city. Among the closest are the Brokenhead community which is 65 kilometres north east of the city, the Dakota communities which are approximately 80 kilometres west of the city and Rousseau River which is 80 kilometres to the south.

The social problems of some of northern Manitoba reserves are well publicized. For instance, the Shamattawa, Sandy Bay, White Dog reserves have had much media attention for inhalant abuse, sexual abuse and gang activity in the youth population. The impression one gets is that the reserves have had a very long history of dysfunction and degradation; this is not so. The troubles started in the mid- to late-1960s when alcohol was introduced to the communities. In just twenty odd years healthy communities were left devastated. Mixed with the erosion of traditional technologies, economies and culture, and the unrelenting racism in relation to the rest of Canada, alcohol has taken its toll on entire communities. Today's youth carry the legacy of this modern day atrocity. The casualties of this war have nowhere to flee abusive situations or to go for treatment except to the city. Many times Aboriginal families or individuals (sometimes children) from rural communities come to the city for services not provided in or to their communities. The children,

however, do not have a choice. They end up in the city because of social services apprehension or detention. Foster care and youth detention centres are, too often, not available in their regions so they are brought to the city.

When Aboriginal families arrive in the Winnipeg they come to the frontlines of the battle. At least in their communities they had each other, in Winnipeg they are isolated and they still face poverty, unemployment, social disintegration and racism. It is estimated that 85% of the Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are unemployed and on welfare rolls (McKay, 1993). "There are enormous adjustment problems for families coming from rural reserves and other than the Friendship Centre (on Magnus Avenue), Aboriginal people families get less help than those from other countries" (Refugees aided, 1993).

According to front page news paper headlines, Winnipeg is ravaged by crime (including murder), youth gang violence, prostitution and racial strife, particularly in the north and west areas of the city. The crime problem and exploitation of Aboriginal children has prompted community action. Special citizen units have sprung up to assist police to protect the ordinary person. Bear Clan Patrol, an Aboriginal, culture-based patrol who work the north end of the city, and the West End Community Patrol, who patrol the west end community, are examples of the type of efforts to take back the community. A headline in the Winnipeg Sun, on April 19, 1993 titled, "Beaten with bats and metal bars: Kids watch as gang assaults youth because 'He's Native,'" is an example of the type of violence fostered in the ghettos. In the assault fifty youth, in the 14-17 age group, watched as an eighteen year old Aboriginal youth (a visitor from The Pas, Manitoba) was clubbed, by "car loads" of non-Aboriginal youth, at 12:30 a.m. outside a dry teen nightclub (Graham, 1993; Verhaeghe, 1993).

A Winnipeg journalist describes the conditions of Winnipeg's inner-city core as "more than vaguely reminiscent of the problems of many third world cities" (Smith, 1991). Manitoba has the

highest child poverty, teen pregnancy and youth runaway statistics in the country (Morris, 1993; Flanagan, 1993). In Winnipeg these social problems are manifested in the ghettoized areas.

Lord Selkirk Park community is almost 100 percent Aboriginal and is also a major location for the city's sex trade. The majority of sex trade workers on the low track as this area is referred to, are mostly Aboriginal children, some as young as eleven years. The majority of the men who come to this area are white and middle class (Morrisette & Blacksmith, 1993).

In a proposal for a street youth safe house the Native Women's Transition Centre identified several areas of concentrated effort in the city that were frequented by Aboriginal children and street youth. Those areas are: the downtown skid row section of Main Street; the areas around the William Whyte and the Occidental Hotel; the section between the intersection of Main street and Jarvis Avenue to Salter Street; the Martha Street/Argyle area; Magnus Avenue, Manitoba Avenue, Pritchard Avenue and Gilbert Park around Railway; Tyndall, Chudley, and Magnus. In short, this is an area with boundaries that enclose St. John's Avenue on the north, Arlington on the west, Point Douglas on the East and Notre Dame Avenue on the south (Native Women's Transition Centre, 1991).

In this same proposal, the Native Women's Centre cited a 1990 Winnipeg Social Planning Council research report, "The Needs Assessment on Homeless Children and Youth," which found that:

- * runaway behaviour among all youth is a serious and growing problem in Winnipeg;
- * the average age of runaways decreases each year — at the time of their first run the average was 12 years old;
- * females run more often and for longer periods of time;
- * youth run more often if they are running from a foster home or institution;
- * one in two youth have been sexually abused;
- * one in two youth have attempted suicide;
- * three in four youth abuse alcohol and drugs;
- * one in two youth run from a home where parents abuse alcohol or drugs;

- * one in three wants to live with parents or extended family;
- * the vast majority, about 17 out of 20, are sexually active;
- * one in three had contracted a sexually transmitted disease;
- * one in five had exchanged sexual favours for shelter;
- * one in three participated in prostitution;
- * a minority, about 5 out of 20, practice safe sex;
- * three in five had put themselves at risk of contracting AIDS;
- * the general perception of services such as the police, schools and social agencies is poor;
- * having little or no trust in the above-mentioned resources, the majority of street youth use an informal network to survive (3-4).

Case studies

In the Winnipeg case studies I have decided to present Noella and Travis (the first case study) as a couple. Although this may be somewhat cumbersome, they did come to the interview together and it became evident that their relationship, street issues and their history were inextricably linked. They are both products of adoption breakdown in White homes and their current situation is entirely coloured by the apprehension of their son by social services. Noella and Travis also present a picture of life for many Aboriginal people just like them. Axle, the second collaborator in the study, is Noella's sibling. Again, I decided to allow the close relationship to be represented in the study. Not only did Axle follow his sister's footsteps in the process of adoption breakdown but he eventually landed up in the same detention facility and then on the streets of Winnipeg. They are now mother and father figures to each other as they help each other to survive mentally and physically in the westend of Winnipeg. This sibling group is an example of the experience of some family groups who are "lucky" enough to be adopted into the same home.

Jean-Marc is also a product of adoption. Although he has had a privileged middle class life with his adoptive parents, he still is very much alone on the streets of Winnipeg.

Dale is an ex-street person from the streets of Winnipeg who found a "home" in the metropolitan environment. Dale was not adopted, nor was he, strictly speaking, in care at any time during his life. He is from a traditional Aboriginal background and landed on the streets of Winnipeg for different reasons from the rest of the youth in this study. He does, however, represent a fairly large number of Aboriginal youth who leave Aboriginal communities because they cannot find the supports they need to deal with their gay identity. We know that many gay young men and lesbians migrate to cities in an effort to find a community that reflects their sexuality and shares their issues. Their common struggles with homophobia and discrimination bind them. Dale now works to prevent other gay youth from suffering the same fate as he did and going to the streets because of identity issues.

NOELLA:

Street kids, they hide their feelings, they're probably really nice, nicer than people that aren't street kids. But sometimes they hide their feelings, but when you really get to talk to them, they're really nice people (p.1, transcript 1).

Noella, a twenty year old status woman of Saulteaux ancestry, originally comes from a reserve in north central Manitoba. She currently lives in a rented apartment in Winnipeg with her partner Travis (also a street survivor from a similar background who she met three years ago) and her biological brother Axle. Noella presents herself as a quiet, conservative, in-charge "little mother" who looks after those in her environment. She speaks evenly and very quietly. Her classic attractive Aboriginal features, medium build and height, mid-length straight brown hair are complemented by her plain attire made up of a meticulously clean sweat shirt, jeans, runners and a ball type jacket. She wears no make-up. None of the over-sized tattered clothing, outlandish hair styles or make-up appeal to her. "Actually I think they're weird, the way they wear their hair and play their music,"

she says of the modern yuppie youth get-up and music. "It seems like the White ones need attention, the way they wear their hair and they dye them blue, purple, yellow, green and stuff."

Stoic in nature, Noella remained in charge of the interview, saying only what was necessary. She describes herself to a tee in the opening quotation. She was articulate and straight forward about the events of her life (only those events she chooses to disclose). Noella lives in the immediate present. There are many great gaps in the chronology she relays and her past remains in a passionless grey zone. Unlike her brother Axle who becomes involved with remembered mental images, Noella does not have the energy or the motivation to go into detail. Nor does she remember or corroborate some the significant events that Axle tells about. Understandably, Noella is preoccupied with the apprehension of yet another new born child. "He came three weeks early," she says of the baby boy taken right from the hospital by Annishnabe Child and Family Services. She is probably still dealing with postpartum emotional and physical changes. Noella had given birth on May 6th, two weeks before the interview.

Today, although the interdependent "family" constellation (Noella, Travis and Axle) are trying to straighten out their lives, they still have the street as their main reference. Street social services, soup kitchens and food banks are their source of social support.

History — Noella

I was running from my [adopted] family (p.2, transcript 1).

Born to Saulteaux parents, who still live on the reserve, Noella and Axle identified as Metis as a result of not knowing their pre-adoption background. They are "repatriated adoptees." Noella and her brother Axle were apprehended at an early age and were placed in several foster homes before they were adopted. They were placed together into an inter-racial family outside Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Noella was about four, her brother about two. No memories of the people back home on the reserve remained as they grew up. She would spend the next eight years with her adoptive family.

Noella's adopted mother died of a brain tumour when Noella was 10 years old. Her adopted father, himself a man of Aboriginal decent, sexually abused her, before and after her mother's death. "He started when I was about four." Although she disclosed to a counsellor when she was taken into detention and an investigation was initiated, for some reason the proceedings just stopped. "They started something and they just closed off the investigation or something ... I was mad." Noella began acting out overtly two years after her mother's death. Eventually, she stole her father's car and landed up on probation. "At first they gave me probation ... I breached my probation so they gave me six months in open custody." Noella's anger was now two fold: first her abuser bore no consequences for his actions against her, and secondly the court disposition placed her back in the hands of her abuser. Probation, of course, means you may go home.

Noella's anger was somewhat abated when she came into contact with her adopted cousin, on a stay "for about a year" at her adoptive aunt's house, and she discovered she was not alone. Her cousin was also an incest survivor. At least she had someone to talk to. "Yeah, [the family knew] cause I guess my [adopted] cousin stayed there and that happened to her from her dad and that's my dad's brother".

The aunt in British Columbia has remained a significant person in Noella's life. She would later state, "I'm trying to be like my aunt right now, she had a baby at sixteen, is now a hairdresser." Her mentor, along with a social worker, helped Noella locate her brother Axle after he had also run away from their adopted home and was in the same detention centre, in Regina (where she had absconded from some years earlier). Together they headed toward Manitoba, she from British Columbia and he from Saskatchewan, to find their lost heritage.

Finding her biological parents seemed disappointing to Noella. "I don't have contact with her," she says abruptly of her mother, who is a forty year old alcohol abuser who exhibits the classic manipulative and toxic behaviour of severe alcoholism.

She's an alcoholic, my mom always drinks, and she lies to me and my brother all the time ... she's just crazy (p.10, transcript 1) the way my mother is, she's so violent

when she drinks, she lies to me, she pawns off stuff to get her beer, she tries to ask me for money but I always tell her no because I know she's going to go buy beer (p.16, transcript 1).

She likes her real father, however. He too must endure the physical aggression of his daily intoxicated wife. "He's the only one who cares ... like if my mom tries to fight me, he stops her." Her analysis of her mom's behaviour is astute as she, again disdainfully notes, "She has other kids [in care] and she won't try to get them back." She doesn't blame her father.

Noella finished grade eight in Swift Current, likely in foster care or protective custody. She didn't feel protected in her adopted home or in institutional care — in her earlier life, now she is completely protected by Travis and Axle. Travis is her whole life now.

TRAVIS

I just like to be myself ... if people don't like that ... the hell with them (p.17, transcript 2).

Travis is a tall, long dark haired, muscular twenty one year old Cree male, from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan, who spent five years on the street in Regina, beginning at the age of sixteen, before coming to Winnipeg in 1991. Travis is a cross between a defiant type person, a rock n' roller and a would-be football jock (if he were into sports). He is very handsome and consciously postures being able to look after himself. Even so, he seems vulnerable, he gives the impression that he is only very loosely connected to the people in his past — his adoptive parents, his natural father and his siblings. He too, like his partner Noella, was dressed in spotless jeans, sweat shirt and runners. For the last seven months he has lived in a rented apartment with Noella and (her brother) Axle. They live in the grey zone — on welfare, jobless, in low cost housing, still using soup kitchens and free recreational services and spending most of their time on the streets Winnipeg — in the illusion of making it off of the streets.

History — Travis

I got sent away (p.4, transcript 1)

Adopted into a White family, north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, at the age of six months, Travis doesn't remember exactly how many brothers and sisters he has. He has only spoken to one of them by telephone. Ongoing "fighting" with his adopted parents, culminating in Travis pulling a knife on his adopted father, resulted in forceable removal from his home at the age of fourteen. Travis was placed into a holding unit in Prince Albert. He then was sent, when a space came available, to Ranch Ehrlo in Regina, Saskatchewan for two years. While in detention he asked the centre to help him search for his natural parents. He found out that mother had died in a fire in Edmonton, Alberta when he was seven years old and that his father lived in Regina. Although Travis has "stayed" with his natural father, "I don't consider him like my father," he says. It appears the obstacle to a meaningful relationship between the two is his father's "drinking."

On the streets — Noella

... so I didn't want to stay there anymore cause he was abusing me. I started running from home. When I got into trouble, I stole his car to get thrown into the detention centre so I didn't have to go home anymore (p.2, transcript 1).

At the age of twelve, after landing on probation for auto theft in the small town where she lived with her adopted father, Noella was placed into open custody. Determined not to return home Noella repeatedly ran from open and closed custody for a period of two years. During this time Noella began running to the streets, first in Swift Current, then in Regina. She gives few details about her whereabouts, how she fulfilled her survival needs, who she hung out with or how she got from place to place.

A lot of time is unaccounted for in her story, especially as a 12, 13 and 14 year old, then again from ages 16 to 20. It appears that she left the adopted home at age twelve, spent one year in foster homes, none of which she will talk about, and two years in detention, before going to live with her aunt in British Columbia.

In 1988, for "not even a year," Noella went to live with her adopted aunt in Vernon, British Columbia, after getting out of closed custody in Regina. She does not mention the name of the detention centre. During this year, at age sixteen, Noella had a child. The child was apprehended and is now in foster care on "the reserve" [in Manitoba] in an Aboriginal home. She doesn't say which reserve. She had gone to visit her three days before the interview. Her own baby girl being apprehended, in Vernon, soon after the birth, she set upon the bureaucratic trail, assisted by a social worker, to find her biological parents. This search brought her to Winnipeg at the age of sixteen.

Since her arrival in Winnipeg in 1989, Noella has gone to her reserve to spend time getting to know her extended family. Now, at age twenty and two babies later, she will have been on and off the street for eight years. She seems to just "stay" with people in her life because she never mentions having her own place nor does she ever say the word "home." Even with this type of tentative and unstable lifestyle Noella appears to be a shy, conservative and innocent person.

Noella seemed oddly resigned to her life state, perhaps beaten into submission by social service power and an unending cycle of poverty. Travis, Noella's partner, had accompanied her to the premature birth of their baby intoxicated and had been asked to leave. They give this and no other reason was evidence enough to result in the separation of mother and child. Later we were to receive information that would indicate possible solvent abuse and violence as primary factors in the apprehension of their son. Nevertheless, Noella believes that the apprehension occurred because of her history.

They say it's because of drinking, but sometimes I think it's because of the first baby I had, cause they took the first one and I told them that was while I was just a single mother (p.22, transcript 1).

Noella gives glimpses of her life on the street through discussion of street youth in general. Street people to her means people with "no place to stay ... It's hard to find a place to stay." "It feels embarrassing sometimes" to be called a street person, she says. She characterizes street youth behaviour as "druggies, getting stoned, drinking and maybe popping pills." Her analysis of kids on

the street exhibits a strict "blaming the victim" stance — "I think it's actually their own fault the way they live." She doesn't make the connection with her previous experience of purposeful criminal behaviour in order to escape from an intolerable situation. This shows also in her self-blame for losing her recently born baby because of a previous "record."

Noella seems very young in her outlook when she shares her experience on the street. For the most part, she seems to be only peripherally involved in any, what we might call, normal street activities. Noella declares that she won't panhandle. "No, I wouldn't do that ... I'm a little too shy." She does instead get food from food banks and soup kitchens.

Nor will she use hard drugs or hard liquor. "I always drink beer, I didn't like ... I tried hash and acid, just the normal street drugs. I used to see a lot of sniffing," she says, "down by the bar, when I used to go see my mom," warning about the extensive damage that huffing causes and that street youth ought to be warned about. "They just fry their brains and screw up their lives."

They're dangerous [drugs] ... like say a kid was going to experiment with acid for the very first time, he took too much and OD'd on it cause nobody told him about it, he thought it was cool ... Cause I had a friend she took so much acid, she took three hits, she was doing fine and she said I need to get some more acid, I said no, you're just going to overdo it, and she said she already took three and I said well maybe it was OK but not three. She went and bought another hit of acid and she OD'd. We had to put her in a hospital. She stayed for over a month ... (p.39, transcript 1).

Noella has been in treatment for alcohol abuse in The Pas, Manitoba, in the past and is currently undergoing Alcoholics Anonymous outpatient counselling as a condition to gaining permanent custody of her baby. "I don't even think I have a problem with it [alcohol], but the workers want me to do it or they'll take the baby back."

About prostitution, Noella does not claim any connection through friends or otherwise. The only incident she mentions is being asked to work for a pimp in Saskatchewan. "Yeah, I got asked in Regina, but I said no ... I was only about twelve." This sounded like a long lifeless memory. Now she never goes out alone, she is protected by her partner Travis and her brother Axle. "Travis

doesn't want me to go out and my brother doesn't want me to go alone either. If I want to go somewhere I would want one of them to come with me ... My brother is like my father."

The only fears Noella has on the street are "getting hit by a car (kids are always getting hit by cars)" and "dirty old men." Even personal violence on the street does not phase her. Casually she describes being jumped by a couple of girls, "I got in a few punches in ... you got to learn how to fight if somebody jumps you." Whatever Noella's unshared perception of her past life on the streets, she is optimistic about her progress. "I'm doing pretty good now, like before I never used to buy anything ... clothes, stuff for the house, before I didn't even care. The house was always empty."

Noella's lifestyle and attitudes are oddly reminiscent of the life of poverty and transience that is "normal" for so many Aboriginal young people in urban Canada. It bares little resemblance to the punk-type stereotype of street youth. The conditions and the primacy of survival — physically, emotionally, and spiritually — however, remain the same.

On the streets — Travis

When I was young I thought street life would be right, until I got there (p.17, transcript 1).

Travis' drift onto the streets, at the age of sixteen, was peer motivated, aided by a tentative relationship with his adopted parents and an unreliable connection with his natural father. Travis describes the shuttle between detention, jail, and his father's residence. "Yeah, then I was back on the street again ... I didn't ask much for myself." Travis does not place his adoptive parents, his natural father, any past teachers or any adult in his past on a significant persons list. Instead he places one of his detention peers as one of the people in his extended family on the streets, along with his partner Noella and their baby son. Although Travis seems to have positive contact with his adopted family and he says that this [adopted] family has forgiven him for past indiscretions, he did not tell them that Noella and he had had a baby, nor did he tell them that their baby was

apprehended. The level of real communication about issues in his life is superficial. He and Noella are essentially alone in their struggle.

Travis describes street life as simply a proposition of "this is the way it is." Although Travis states, "I don't like authority," he betrays his caution and his submission to symbols of power and authority when he says of their social worker, "Well, she's a worker," conceding that whatever she decides is beyond his control. He expresses powerlessness again when he comments on possible changes for street people. He says, "I don't know, some people just don't have any choice."

Travis is very interesting, in much the same way as Noella, in that the streets have not made them callous. When we asked Travis if there was anything in his life that he was ashamed of he replied, "What I've done to my parents ... and things I've done on the street" (robbery, vandalism, group criminal activity) like when he recalls breaking an old woman's arm in a robbery. Travis also is vague about the past except to say that he gets sad, "when you talk about the past." Travis is unique because of all the participants he does not recall any deaths of anyone that was close to him on the street.

Racism — Noella and Travis

But I think he did it because I was an Indian (p.41, transcript 1).

Noella persisted throughout the dialogue to exhibit an ambivalence toward any criticism of the status quo. This included any open-ended questions that may have given her an opportunity to make reference to discrimination on the basis of her status as a street person, her ethnicity or the colour of her skin. Only once did she actually say that her Indianness was possibly the cause of discriminatory treatment.

I was at Eaton's Place, me and Travis were looking at things and a security guard grabs me, and I said, 'What are you doing? I've seen you steal something,' and I said, 'Fuck you, I didn't steal anything. I don't even steal.' He said, 'Yeah, open your jacket.' I opened it and he didn't find anything ... I think he did it because I was an Indian (p.41, transcript 1).

Otherwise Noella simply answers no to any reference to rude treatment in any context or of knowing about racism against anybody else. "I don't hang out on the streets, I stay home and mind my own business." Yet she has lived in Regina, which is called the "Alabama of the North."

Noella relates that she feels comfortable speaking with social workers (street or otherwise), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. She notices no difference between the way they treat her and the way they treat others. The interviewer noticed Noella's high level of comfort at the office belonging to SKY street services where they met. There was, however, an invisible line that differentiated the area where Aboriginal youth congregated and where the White youth hung out. Noella tells about positive favouritism toward her in her school, where she achieved her grade nine. "I was always the youngest one, they always called me baby." She also recalls a bus driver who gave her a package of cigarettes out of the blue.

Noella, along with her comfort in relation to White people, makes clear distinctions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. "They probably stay with their own kind of people, like White people," she says of White street youth. She also generalizes that Aboriginal street youth dress differently than White street youth. "I think most Natives I see all have long hair, and wear jeans, t-shirts, and jackets ... pretty casual." Of the reserve environment she says,

I hate the reserve, it just sucks, nothing to do, no excitement, I stayed with my cousins I don't like the girls there, they all have bad names [reputations] because they sleep around, they were all talking Saulteaux and I can't. I felt like a dork ... just average reserve girls (p.12-13, transcript 1).

Certainly Noella's continued good relationship with her adopted extended family, her lack of Aboriginal historical knowledge and her own mild-mannered personality have contributed to her perceptions of herself as an Aboriginal woman and of the society which impacts on her as a street person.

Travis, also, simply answers "No," or answers in vague terms to any questions on topics such as self-concept, experiences of discrimination on the street, or overt racism in school. He does mention gang violence and adds, "Mostly it's ganging up ... all over ... it mostly happens to White

people." And he comments on treatment by social services saying, "They haven't given us a chance ... There should be a law against that ... I'm still thinking of taking them to court." He is referring to an Aboriginal child and family services agency. Any negative experience that he chooses to disclose is meted out by his own people.

Culture and identity — Noella and Travis

Noella: At first I didn't like it [about being Aboriginal] cause I grew up in a White home. When I found my parents I liked it because I learned about my background (p.35, transcript 1).

Noella presents a complex dilemma in her views of Aboriginal people in general. One can only assume that the negative images she carries of reserves and the distinct differences that she notices are internalized as part of her own self-image. She reports that she didn't learn anything about Aboriginal people in school. "When I went to the reserve that was the first time, it was really different. They're not as rich as White people — the reserve is so dumpy ... I hate the reserve." She concedes that kids are well cared for; however, the standards of cleanliness and behaviour that she is accustomed to are not evident to her. Her voice changes and becomes tinged with disgust.

They treat kids pretty good, most of them, but some of them are, some of the kids are really bad, they swear, they fight, and they're really dirty (p.35, transcript 1).

Noella has had no exposure to traditional Aboriginal culture and confuses the Christian wake of her great grandmother with Aboriginal culture. However, she once spoke the language of her people.

They told me before I got taken away that I learned to talk Saulteaux, but I lost all that. I don't talk any more ... I met all of my relatives, most of my relatives talk Saulteaux ... most of my cousins are all my age ... Everyone says I look like my mom (p.35, transcript 1).

Elsewhere in the interview, Noella makes a statement about an "old" street person where she exhibits respect and responsibility for the elderly. Again her voice and facial expression changes to an innocent, deeply caring picture as she relates the circumstances of the gentleman in question.

Yeah, the kids can take care of themselves, not all the old people can cause... by my house there's a old man, he sleeps in the apartment doorway and I told him the next

time I get money I'm gonna go over there and give that man five bucks to go buy something for himself, cause I always see him and I always feel very bad. Just like the old people can't take of themselves but the street kids can, so you should take care of the old people (p.18, transcript 1).

This reflects the Aboriginal cultural characteristic of holding elders in high esteem and is contrary to the ageism reflected in mainstream society. Noella also identifies an awareness that there is a culture that makes a person distinctly Aboriginal in the statement about her Aboriginal adopted father. "He acts like he's White." Again, one can only assume that she does not act like this.

Noella states that "One of my goals was to find my natural parents... the other is to live here" [Winnipeg]. About these accomplishments she feels success, even so she says, "I wouldn't stay over night at home on the reserve at my parents ... but I would stay at my cousins. This is understandable considering the destructive behaviour of her mother. And in the end she wants to attend an "all Native school."

It seems that Noella's self-image and her perceptions of reserve life would improve with an accurate critical education in Aboriginal history in Canada, with exposure to authentic traditional culture, and with contact with Alanon counselling (so that she could more effectively cope with her mother's alcoholism). In the meantime Noella laughs as she says that Chuck Norris is one of her role models and "I wish he was my father." It is still a White image she sees as the only worthy father figure and protector for her.

Travis has had no contact with extended family on the reserve after his mother died. He visited his grandmother, aunt, and cousins once in five years. Like Noella, Travis doesn't like reserves. Travis answers "I like it" when he was asked how he felt about being Aboriginal. His knowledge of Aboriginal history is limited to the grade school version of social studies. He comments no further. Travis has been to a pow wow and has been involved in a sweet grass ceremony in an alcohol rehab centre. Of the rest he says, "Well there is some stuff that I don't believe in — like the medicine."

Who are Travis' role models? "Admire most? Nobody." He states that the best possible future for him is to be left alone to live his lifestyle "if I had a job." He thinks he has the experience to be able to be a street counsellor,

I could tell them what drugs are bad for you ... just tell people to stay away from that sniffing ... so far since I've been here I've seen a lot of wrecked bodies up there on Beach Street where people sniff downstairs in the backrooms and that stuff just makes me sick (p.19, transcript 2).

He sees himself as a former street person right now.

Politically Travis is definite about whose side he's on in the sovereignty issue and the much publicized gambling controversy in Saskatchewan. He includes himself in the statements, "We should be able to have self-government ... well, we should be entitled to it because it was our land ... The casino bit, I think the government is too scared that we'll make too much money." On a personal level, Travis does not know if he is status or not. He has no knowledge of his rights or where to access the information.

Society — Noella and Travis

Noella and Travis make no remarks (with the exception of Travis' self government comment) that would indicate that they disagree with any part of the Canadian status quo in relation to Aboriginal people or any other issue for that matter. Perhaps Noella is being cautious about relating any sign of "rebellion" against a system that has taken two of her children. Except for her comment on mainstream male behaviour toward females on the street, she is uncritical.

Perverts ... there's lots, they're everywhere, dirty old men, even by the bus depot, when you go there ... men standing around. They'll whistle or something ... they'll ask you to come and drink with them (p.31, transcript 1).

Travis simply answers "sick!" on the topic.

Noella and Travis spend their lives trying to fulfil the prescribed conditions in order to get the two children back. Noella states, "I'm mad at the social workers." And Travis reacts to the constant surveillance which they live under. "It pisses me off." When asked what would make her life easier, Noella confides wistfully:

We are going to AA and Travis and I go to parenting classes at Mount Carmel house (p.12, transcript 1) supposed to get the baby back on June 15 (p.23, transcript 1). [I want] To get my baby back, I'd want to go finish at least up to grade 10, cause I want ... I want to finish school, take care of [baby girl's name]. [About having more children] Yeah, when I get older I want to have more children (p.38, transcript 1).

Travis states that he needs a job above all else. "I just need a trade." Once again Noella emphasizes that she wants to be like her adoptive auntie.

She had a baby when she was 16 and when she was 17 she finished school and then she took a hairdressing course and she started buying equipment and she set up a business. That's why I want to be like her (p.24, transcript 1).

What would Noella advise a government person to do for street youth in Winnipeg? Noella makes a strong start in answering the question and mid-thought her resolve fades away.

I think I would put my foot down and just tell them straight I really don't know what I'd say, I probably would just shut right up if they were sitting right beside me (p.41, transcript 1).

Her last advice was to "Put them [street youth] in a group home, cause it's dangerous out there." The dangers she refers to remain, for the most part, untold. We are left to guess about the kinds of dangers she is referring to and if she is a survivor of any of them. Travis thinks that street youth need to stay in school, that they need safe houses and drop-in centres. He blames family alcoholism and abusive lifestyles (violence against women) for the resistance of street youth.

The normality of life on the fringe of a wealthy society — of the greyness that is not only bearable but a staple diet — is haunting throughout the interviews with Noella and Travis. No extremes in violence, crime, drug abuse, hunger, illness, homelessness or alienation; no profound criticisms of conditions on the street or the society that spawns them; no fancy dreams of a utopian future exist for this young family. Only the immediate problem of getting back their child and fulfilling the conditions that will insure a speedy reunion are important. What is more haunting is the possibility that they are simply being realistic about their life conditions and the prospects of truly entering mainstream society or indeed Aboriginal society.

As evidence of their relative progression off the street Noella offers, "I never used to buy things for the apartment." Although they are trying and Noella says "I think Travis and I will be good parents," the deck is stacked against them, both as a relationship and in getting off the street. Both survivors of adoption, sexual abuse, street life, racism, and current warriors against the system, even Aboriginal agencies are destructive to their attempts to make a go of their shattered lives. They are a fragile unit, precariously sitting on the ledge of a forty story life support system, as it were. Twenty stories to fall, with the wrong move, and twenty stories up to reach the roof — an extraordinary hard climb before they reach safety — out of the reach of the street and of the "social support system."

AXLE

Most of my life I felt alone (p.26, transcript 1).

Axle is an eighteen year old male of Saulteaux ancestry who is the biological brother to Noella (also in this study). Axle is a 5'8" tall, laid back type of person with a medium complexion, who exudes a sense of playfulness and optimism in the interview and in his relations with the Sky street services environment. At one point he jokingly acts out a mock radio broadcast "We are coming to you from MacDonald's," and he chose the pseudonym Axle in the same light hearted way. Although he seems shy, he is a person who would "talk back" if he felt imposed upon.

Axle came to the interview dressed casually and clean in his Sunday best. He wore his medium brown hair in a conservative, just below the ear, style. His voice is deep and smooth and he is articulate in his communication. He laughs easily in the interview. Axle was eager to be interviewed first because he wanted to tell his story and secondly he needed the money to get back to the reserve to go on a fire fighting job.

It appears that Noella is the eldest of six siblings, Axle is the second born. They have two other brothers and two sisters in their biological family. All are or have been in foster homes or adopted. Mother and father live together on an undisclosed reserve in central Manitoba. Unlike

his sister Noella, Axle finds hope in finding his biological family, however dysfunctional Noella's description makes them out to be. "At the time she gave me something to live for," he said of his natural mother, even though he indicates there's some things about her he doesn't like. He looks forward to one day making his home on the reserve. "Actually, that's all I want," he says about the prospect of going home, "... just as long as I was with them all."

At the time of the interview Axle lived with his sister Noella and her partner Travis in a rented apartment. They are each other's protection and family in the urban environment. They still have the street as their main reference and use street services almost exclusively. Axle has many friends that make their living on the streets, and although he watches out for some young women working the streets "so they don't get into trouble," he is trying desperately to "get back on track." The journey is difficult without adequate food and housing, which exceeds even the need for adequate mental and physical health, education and jobs. His mild and optimistic exterior does not betray the story that is to unfold.

History

I would say I'm one of the lucky ones. I found my real family... I would say it's a boost. It gives me something to work for (p.12, transcript 1).

It is unclear if Noella and Axle were adopted at the same time. Axle thinks he was adopted at the age of three or four and he said that he remembers something of life on the reserve before his apprehension. Noella, who is two years older, relates that she was adopted at three or four. It is possible that they were adopted into the same adoptive home at different times. It is most probable that they were adopted together at somewhere between the ages of two and five years old, in which case, Axle would have been two years old at the time of adoption. The adoptive family consisted of an Aboriginal father and a non-Aboriginal mother, with two natural children — a girl and a boy. The family moved a number of times, from Swift Current, to Regina, Edmonton and finally to a small town in Manitoba.

As stated in Noella's story, the adopted mother died of a brain tumour in 1984. Axle would have been eight years old. He harboured a great deal of anger toward his adoptive father because he knew about the abuse that his sister was suffering. "It bothered me a lot," he related, "I felt like killing him." The anger and unhappiness he felt in the adoptive home led to extensive running behaviour, apprehension, foster care and detention.

With his sister gone, during his time in open and closed custody and in foster homes, Axle became very self-destructive and suicidal. He simply didn't want to live anymore. Axle says that he and his friends were not only into drugs and alcohol and petty crime, they were highly self-destructive as a well.

Most of my friends, we all have something wrong ... we did something to ourselves, maybe try to hang ourselves ... did a suicide attempt (p.24, transcript 1).

It was while Axle was in closed custody in Regina that their adoptive aunt, who Noella was living with at the time in British Columbia, found out that Axle was in custody. Noella phoned him with the news that she had found their natural parents in Manitoba. He then left Regina to come to Winnipeg in 1992. On his way to Winnipeg he stopped in Brandon, Manitoba and asked some Aboriginal people in the bus depot if they had knowledge of his biological family. By coincidence, Axle met one of his cousins, who then took him in under his wing and took him to the reserve to meet his family.

On the streets

They told me that my mom was murdered, that my dad murdered my mom and my grandma, that they were drinkers and that my dad was in jail... at my young age I could believe anything ... That's the reason I was on the street. I thought we were survivors (pp.22-23, transcript 1).

Approximately two years after his sister left the adoptive home Axle began running at the age of twelve or thirteen. He was searching for a happier place, he says.

I kept on running away ... staying out with friends ... they'd stay with me ... we always did the same thing — running away. I was running away from badness ... just to get myself happier (p. 3, transcript 1).

He was the only Aboriginal boy among the "escape club." They would run together, staying at each other's houses, drinking alcohol heavily, landing in the drunk tank and starting over. This activity gradually escalated to renting hotel rooms and finally, after being apprehended, he spent time in youth detention centres and in a "million foster homes." He stayed in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homes, in urban and rural settings. Axle remembers a couple of foster homes that he liked — he liked the attention. But he had to keep running or he would eventually be sent back to his adoptive home. "I did run away because I didn't want to live with our father."

Eventually Axle had to leave Regina because by this time his extensive running behaviour, drug abuse, criminal activity and suicidal behaviour had begun to give authorities the idea that he was "crazy." "I had to go to another place, because they thought I was crazy." Numerous suicide attempts (by hanging, wrist slashing, taking pills) and suicide threats resulted in Axle almost dying several times. After one incident he was unconscious in the hospital for four days. After a near miss with his life Axle began to think that his best revenge was to stay alive. He figured that no one would care if he died.

I didn't like the people ... at the time I thought it was a good thing, I thought it was a good thing for me to do, then when I was thinking maybe people are thinking, I thought maybe how was it going to be like, it's just going to be like, 'Oh, that's just another dead kid. Oh, that's nothing whatever.' I was thinking, yeah... so I thought I would bug them if I stayed alive (p.25, transcript 1).

Of this time period, Axle relates that he was extremely depressed and lonely. It was a call for help. The help came in the form of news about his biological family. They were alive.

Axle identifies his destructive behaviour, depression and street involvement as results of being told, at the age of about five, that his father had murdered his mother and grandmother, and that his father was in jail (quotation above). He claims that his adoptive parents and the social workers had told him the "bunch of crock." Certainly this was Axle's understanding during his growing years. "It made me ... That's the reason I was on the street, that's the reason I was on my own. At the time I felt like killing myself." Noella makes no reference to this revelation. Whether

she knew or not is unknown. What is certain is that Axle was lonely and angered by his adopted father's abuse of his sister.

Axle has been in Winnipeg for one year. He lives peripherally on the street. At least he has a place to stay with his sister. He cites high rental costs compared with welfare rates as the reason for his not being on his own. Social workers have been working with Axle in order to assist him with education and getting into the workforce. Axle, however, knows that he must continue his recovery from drug addiction, get his living conditions stable, get to know his family and work on his mental health. "I'm not ready. I'm trying to get myself stable, like the way I'm living ... before I add another thing." It has only been a year since he has been repatriated. He is still in the honeymoon stage and he is fragile.

Axle thinks that his street family is his best day to day support at the moment. "Street people probably care most for each other." His sister is his mother right now, she is the one who looks after things. We have been told by Noella that her brother is one of her protectors on the street, he is like her father. Significant people on the street, for Axle, are the people at Sky, a street youth agency. He is comfortable in the environment and he gets the support he needs when he's down. He said that they are like his brothers and sisters. "They would be like my family, while I'm here and while they're open."

Drugs and alcohol have played a big part in Axle's life since he started running. "I had a lot of help for my drug problem. I had a problem with smoking dope ... They put me in treatment ... I used to do hard drugs LSD, snorting cocaine, etc. It totally ruined my life. My family helped me — to kick it. They helped me to get into different activities." During this time crime became a way to pay for his drug habit. "I used to steal."

Axle has friends on the street who are working in the sex trade. "I have a quite a few friends who are prostitutes, I go there with a friend just to watch them so they don't get into any kind of trouble" [by writing down licence plate numbers]. He does not allude to further involvement.

Although he says he can't say their names he seems to accept the "way they live." Axle gave no critique of the system, no horror stories of incidents, just a casual comment. One gets the impression that he is careful about revealing too much about criminal behaviour. He wants to give a good impression, he wants to stay clean.

Axle speaks in general terms about his life on the street. He has not done any extensive travel or exploration of street life in any other cities. His street life is driven by poverty and reconnection with his family — and not by the adventure of it — nor is he running from institutions any longer: "... and I've got one year still ... I got one more year out of my life so I'm finally living? (p.12, transcript 2). Axle doesn't see himself as out of the woods yet. He thinks it will take him one year to set himself up in his own place, get a job or go back to school. He is still on hold until his life really begins. The experience on the street has been valuable for Axle. He believes that he has learned "to be tough, to have respect, and to get along ... to have confidence." He also wants people to know that "no matter how bad a person lived or how bad their life was they can get it back on track." He must believe.

Racism

I get mad at the government because those [Aboriginal] people that are on the street should have their jobs ... the governments' ... there's been enough of their life taken. I had seventeen years taken from me (p.12, transcript 2).

Axle does not talk about racism at all. He stays in the immediate. He feels absolutely comfortable in his relations with street workers of any ethnic origin. He says that people "used to" treat him badly — probably referring to his time of his destructive behaviour. He does, however, not make an association of any of this bad treatment with his ethnicity.

They're just like brothers — It's like you were never on the street ... like the other day I was feeling down ... feels comfortable using street services. Other people — I'm treated better ... they used to treat me bad and now they treat me better [because he feels better about himself]. Security guards give me a hard time 'What are you doing in here?' ... they think they have some kind of power over the shopping centre (p.6, transcript 1).

Axle gives a hint of knowing that Aboriginal people on the street should be getting more than they are. He says, "they're not getting what they deserve ... some people are getting their lives ruined, destroyed, wasted because there's nobody there to help them." Again he seems to allude to knowledge of the precursors of their condition, he believes that more helpers would alleviate the condition. This indicates internalized oppression, in that he would not question the present circumstances of Aboriginal people. He then would likely attribute those assumed weaknesses to himself.

Although Axle criticises child and family services, welfare and the police for inadequate service, no racial connotation is present (that is overt). It is only that they are too tough, and they don't give enough money to survive.

Culture and identity

"That's all that I want ... as long as I'm with my relatives ... that's what I'm shooting for right now (p.20, transcript 1).

Axle is totally preoccupied in the reunification process, everything else is secondary. He seems to have no awareness of Aboriginal culture (or at least he doesn't discuss this explicitly), ceremonies, or any values that might be different from his life at the moment. He gives no evidence of having learned any history of Aboriginal people. This absence of awareness may be attributed to his trauma of believing that his biological family were dead and in jail. He subsequently would find a new world where he now had parents, siblings and an extended family — a place where he belongs. Finding a place within this world would naturally take precedence over the esoteric values of culture, in the immediate. He does, however, want to learn "his" language and everything that he's missed.

To get my life back together, to get back what I missed, try to get my language back too ... and try to get my image the way I want it to be ... Yeah, the respect ... stuff like that. Try to get everything ... just everything that's missing from me right now. I like ... I would rather stay somewhere else but... just the years that I've missed ... just the years that I missed with my family the way I should have been ... I'd say there's a couple of my aunties and there's a couple of my uncles and a couple of my cousins yeah, they tried to help me but ... they came at various emotional times

when I couldn't get along cause I was gone so long ... like I just got back with my family not too long ago, my real family, and I can't tell which people are helping ... want to help and which people don't (p.8-9, transcript 2).

Axle is still learning to navigate the new universe. He doesn't know who his allies are. This makes him vulnerable to disappointment.

Society

My main interest is to get my life together ... to get back what I missed (p.8, transcript 2).

When asked what would be the best possible future for him, Axle replies that he just wishes that people in general would be nicer, that welfare rates would be higher, and that the government would get Aboriginal people off the streets. The best possible future, he thinks, is to get married — have kids and not lose them. He wants a normal family. Again, Axle demonstrates the preoccupation with the immediacy of his problem, as does his sister Noella in her interview. Both do not have the luxury of philosophical dialogue about Aboriginal existence in Canada. This is the world of the truly disenfranchised — the adopted — those whose relationship to their adoptive parents have disintegrated.

Axle persists (at times when he wants to relate something directly to anyone who will listen, he talks directly to the tape recorder).

... I would say that the government ... the people ... whoever is in charge of this place of Winnipeg or so, they should see all the people that are on the street ... they should see how they live, they should see the stuff that they're plugging in their veins and inhaling and stuff like that ... see how they keep themselves warm at night and they should start opening their eyes and not being so blind (p.5, transcript 2).

His idealism makes him think that "seeing" would result in changes. "It's out there but it's hidden, but I guess, and kind of shoved aside and forgotten."

He thinks that street youth should have a housing development that "they" should run, that "they" could pay the rent and have some self-determination. In a round about way Axle demonstrates that government people don't have the experience that is necessary to produce the

solutions. This corroborates the feelings of most of the street youth who were participants in the research.

At the end of the interview Axle took the opportunity (when the question was asked if there was something he wanted to add, something he had not had an opportunity to talk about) to show his subversive side. He tries a number of times to express that (at times he is interrupted by the interviewer) he thinks that the time is coming where the tables will be turned on the people that have wronged him in an institutional sense.

There's a couple of things that I like to say, actually, that goes for the people that did ... They should have thought about what they did, like how they wrecked people's families apart and took their kids away and stuff like that. To think about how they would feel if it was the other way around ... if their kids were taken away, or even them. I wonder how they would feel and how that they wouldn't be in the spot that they are today and if it was the other way around and if I were in their spot. They should try for about a week and see if they can last that long to do that, to try to get themselves fed and everything else ... Yeah, have a thing to test their skills — like our skills to see if they can do it, and see how long they like it cause maybe someday they'll end up like that ... Soon that will turn around (p.11, transcript 2).

On the other hand he has an idealized image about how things could be and he doesn't believe the image is possible. And still Axle's playful character comes through when he refers to Walt Disney's limitations.

I'll bet you if the way I would want this to be, it would be so nice, it would be perfect. It's too much of a dream. I don't even think that Walt Disney could make it into a movie of this (p.13, transcript 2).

He also reveals that he has been involved in the fundamentalist religion movement on the reserve. "It's good ... actually that would probably be the thing that got me up a little bit ... I went there a couple times ... those are the people, I know for sure, that care."

At the end of the interview, Axle wants to dispel a myth about street people.

I would say the people on the street, they don't act that bad, if they do act that bad is because the stories are put wrong ... they're probably doing something right ... in the newspaper or whatever the cops say something bad that makes it really bad ... Exaggerated, yeah (p.10, transcript 2).

In the end Axle defends street people against the press. After all, as a street person, he is not so bad.

JEAN-MARC

I act like a kid. I think I'm interesting. I'm never going to grow up ... I'm never getting old ... I'm going to stay young until I die (p.2, transcript 2).

Jean-Marc is a dark, thin, over six foot tall eighteen year old male from a Metis background, who first began exploring the streets of Winnipeg at the age of eleven. By the age of thirteen the street was a firm reference point in his life. His one set of punk style clothes were ripped, ragged and dirty. He is proud of his appearance though. His explanation of his "mongolian scalp lock" hair style showed his desire to differentiate himself from others in his environment. At times he wore a black baseball cap which had the beak severely curled up and the word "INJUN" written across the front in large white letters. Even his hat had an "attitude" and set him apart. His generic ethnic facial features and sophisticated behaviour would often have people mistake him for Italian or Portuguese.

Jean-Marc has an amicable character, a very handsome face and a theatrical low voice (he has done some acting on film). His vocabulary and demeanour betray his middle-class upbringing. He takes charge in the westend deli where the interview takes place. He gets along well with everyone, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, street people and middle class business people. He's an animated talker about his adventures on the street. He describes himself as "Totally solo, I've always been solo." Jean-Marc is currently homeless but survives on welfare and doing the "couch tour," as he calls it. He finds a place to sleep with friends and will "only break into a place if it is 40 below ... then I sleep in a stairwell." Jean-Marc relates that he has been "free of hard drugs for nine months" and he has now begun the process of finding his Aboriginal biological roots.

History

I was fed, I had clothing, I had toys and all that stuff but ... I had no idea who my biological parents were (p.8, transcript 1).

Jean-Marc was born to an Aboriginal mother and Scottish father. All Jean-Marc was told about his biological mother was that she was an eighteen year old university student, who gave him

up for adoption when he was one and a half years old. His father, he says, was not aware of his existence. "I guess she didn't tell him ... My father does not know I exist." He was adopted into a "fairly upper middle class" Jewish home, where he stayed until the age of thirteen. Jean-Marc distinguishes himself from other Aboriginal street youth by saying that he had everything and that his drift to the streets contained an element of choice.

Comparatively speaking, I had more than they did cause you know I'm talking about people whose parents ... welfare mothers and single parents and such (p.12, transcript 1).

Even so, he describes a life of alienation starting with peer racial harassment in elementary school, identity confusion and adoption breakdown. The element of choice disappeared with a violent knife attack involving his only adopted brother during a quarrel with his adopted father, at the age of thirteen. He had to leave home.

Jean-Marc was placed in the Manitoba Youth Centre where he became labelled as "psychologically disturbed." His entry into a world of institutionalization and criminalization had begun. The range of experiences gained in protective and rehabilitative custody were: "the Penguin Building in P13 in the psycho centre ... strapped down ... pumped full of dope"; foster homes; level four group home for psychiatric "problems"; seventeen charges ranging from possession of illegal drugs to armed robbery (youth offender and adult); incarceration in both youth detention to the penitentiary (eight months); and to this day on-going psychiatric visits. (Jean-Marc's early psychiatric label would later come in handy, today he can readily access welfare because of the label. He has a history.) Later he would say, "I learned a lot in jail."

Jean-Marc names racial harassment in school (ages 5-8) as a catalyst in the process that would lead to adoption breakdown.

I came running home, 'I'm a Paki, mom, I'm a Paki.' First thing she said to me is, 'First of all it's Pakistani,' and then she started to tell me cause she took Native studies in university and such and she'd tell me basically, like they're very anti-racist and the reason I found out later, a lot later on, was that they adopted me as opposed to adopting a Jewish child is because they felt sorry for Native kids who were not getting adopted Which I think is a very poor excuse to adopt a kid cause it kind

of screwed me up but ... I thought it was, you know ... she explained to me what Nativity was ... what being Aboriginal meant, but first you know ... basically she told me the way I could understand it at 8 years old, that I should be proud that I was there. I remember the next day, I planned out, I took my garbage mitts, soaked them full of water and went to the front door of the school cause I'd been used to leaving early and running home from school through the back door and hiding in the school somewhere till all the goons left. Putting on these gloves and shoving them into the snow bank and then I went to school just grinning cause I knew what was gonna happen. I knew they were going to bug me Tuesday afternoon at 3:30 and I go WHACK!, hit him right on the side of the head with these frozen mitts and I said, "I'm an Indian you *!#* (pp.6-7, transcript 1).

After being told of his adoption Jean-Marc's increasing curiosity about his biological parents hurt his mother. In the meantime, Jean-Marc noticed a dissimilarity between himself and his adoptive family. To get relief from the widening gulf from them, he began hanging out with kids downtown. Peer pressure took hold. He and his friends began engaging in petty crime. "I did break and enter with these kids." When he was caught his parents would not support him.

Basically my parents told me 'We're not even going to go to court. It's all up to you, you'll have to find yourself a lawyer' (p.13, transcript 1).

The life that followed Jean-Marc's removal from his adopted parents' home was a far cry from the comfortable middle-class setting that included trips abroad. He lists the United States, France, Great Britain, Ireland and Amsterdam as places that they visited as a family. After receiving the proof he needed that his parents would reject him, "It just like ... I mean it was a reason for them to finally say, 'Get the fuck out of the house or else' ... I didn't want to be there anyway." Jean-Marc entered a life of drugs, crime, detrimental relationships, incarceration and street life.

The only other incident that Jean-Marc mentions under the topic of shame, that might have added to his building anger, was that during his time in school he was approached sexually by a teacher at age 13, and though Jean-Marc got away, he was so ashamed of it he never told anybody. Later in the interview he mentions this same teacher.

... a while later it was like ... isn't this guy your teacher in the paper ... one year in jail for child molestation, which pisses me off cause me if I get nailed for robbing somebody ... or just say for breaking and entering ... I'll get five years. If these guys get charged with sexual molesting a small boy ... he didn't do any time, he got a year

suspended sentence and probation and he had to go to counselling. It's like, fuck, the guy should be shot you know (p.1, transcript 2).

Perhaps there is more hidden shame in Jean-Marc's past. His psychiatrist has suggested that possibly Jean-Marc had been abused in some way before he was adopted. His self-destructive behaviour indicates many psychological problems that remain to be resolved. Now he is trying to get back in school, stay off of drugs and out of jail — or, in other words — get his life together.

On the streets

I was hanging out there and they made me feel like I was more welcome there. I know people would think it's a lot less of a safe environment. Well my environment was safe ... it wasn't me. It makes me think it's got to be hereditary (p.10, transcript 1).

While Jean-Marc would boast of Seattle, New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles and Vancouver as street stops before returning to Winnipeg in late 1992, his drift to the street was gradual. He gives few details of the life he led in the group homes and institutions, except to say that he watched a lot of television. He comments that Edgewood House in Winnipeg was a really good place to be. "That's when I was out of the house (age 13). So I was in foster homes, in and out ... and I started going through lots of changes."

One of the changes Jean-Marc talks about was a life of crime. "We used to rob people left and right." In one particular instance where "the charges were robbery and attempted murder," his adopted mother assisted him to go to his adopted grandfather's (dad's dad) home in Seattle, Washington. At age sixteen he was a fugitive from justice. He was, however, with someone who loved him. "Oh my dad's dad loves me. Loves me more than any other person in the family cause I'm real to him." The reprieve was to last for four months. He ended up on the streets of Seattle. "I didn't know what to do cause I lived on the street in Seattle. Scary street to be on."

Jean Marc ended up in Matsqui prison, in British Columbia, for "a string of armed robberies," which he did alone. Now Jean-Marc is attempting to discontinue his life of crime.

I mean, I've tried it and I've noticed I either end up in jail or in debt every single time. I've done lots of crimes and I end up in jail so I'm not good at it, so I

panhandle on the street, if I need money I'll borrow from friends and make sure to pay them back (p.4, transcript 1).

Jean-Marc is vague about his movement to the various cities that he claims to have lived in. He was, understandably, involved in much drug abuse and crime. "I was drunk all the time. I was into like pills, valium" Elsewhere in the interviews he mentions, "See Vancouver is the hub of the heroin trade ... I started doing heroin and coke." He kicked heroin at the Vancouver Detox Centre and was tested negative for AIDS. Jean-Marc was involved in the sale of drugs in Vancouver, but again insisted, "I'm not really good at selling dope ... I'd get caught ninety percent of the time. Sometimes I like to escape — I smoke drugs but I don't freebase anymore" Jean-Marc says he watched out for prostitutes on the low track [where the cheap hookers work] in Winnipeg,

I used to live at the William Hotel I used to ... watch over a few girls that were doing it on a low track, Fields and Main (inaudible) building they don't have any pimps you have to rely on people like I mean friends who go out and will watch a place to make sure we you know ... whoever's picking up ... make sure it's not a bad trick (p.3, transcript 1).

He does not mention ever living off the avails of prostitution himself. He, in no uncertain terms, describes pimps as "leeches and people I despise."

Although Jean-Marc has had many friends in gang activity he does not find this life appealing "because I knew if I got into a bike gang, it's pretty hard to get out." He seems to have extensive knowledge of gang culture in the United States and was once approached to become an initiate by a "striker." A striker is a person who kills for the gang and "part of his being a striker was to recruit people that he knew were solid." Jean Marc was able to resist owning "his own Harley" in favour of staying "solo." Likewise guns are not an option in his life. "If I carried a weapon it would just make me want to use it."

Jean-Marc describes a three year on and off relationship with an Aboriginal girl that resulted in a knife inflicted scar on his jugular vein and in a baby who was eventually given up for adoption. "It was a weird fighting love-hate relationship."

I've been hurt quite a bit. My ex-old lady, we had a child together and then I went to jail. When I got back it's like she had thrown my kid to the dogs basically. She was drinking ... she didn't really try. Lost the kid to adoption which is the worst possible thing that could happen, cause I was adopted. My son won't know who I am. I was in jail at the time and I couldn't sign the birth certificate so there's no way in the world. I mean I'd love to try get his full name but who knows when some people adopt a child who's a year and a half old, they might want to change his name ... I look care of him for eight months (p.33, transcript 1).

"She," he relates, "lived on the street, her background was more a reserve lifestyle I was really dependent on that relationship." Although it was not clear, it appears that Jean-Marc was still with the same woman when she had another baby girl, possibly from another man (while he was in jail again), who was also taken by social services. The separation from both children affected Jean-Marc deeply. In the interview he rarely showed much depth of emotion except when speaking of his son and the adoption. "He's the spitting image of me, only he has more hair."

Though Jean-Marc eventually had to leave the relationship, he is not so sure that even now he wouldn't give it another try even against his own better judgement. Much of the preceding relationship took place in Vancouver. This is what he was running from when he returned to Winnipeg in the winter of 1992.

Watching her go down wasn't good for me ... Cause she's gonna fall, you know, no matter how much I love her, I can't let her drag me down to drown with her (p.36, transcript 1).

However, by September 1993 Jean-Marc was back in Vancouver — his ambivalence about this relationship indicates that perhaps he would be back in a situation that threatens to destroy him.

Jean-Marc talked rapidly accompanied with frequent lively gestures or facial expressions. During the interviews, however, the dialogue was scattered and shallow, particularly when tracing his steps from place to place. The only details of street life occur in between incarcerations. Jean-Marc's dialogue about street youth and street life is cryptic and puzzling. His philosophy about the risks and danger of the street is stated as "a street person's got to realize that pain goes away and death is inevitable. There's not too much they can fear or else it's gonna eat you alive." Jean-Marc echoes Etah's message that "Survival for us is in the mind not in the body."

We learn more by the lessons that Jean-Marc has learned during his time on the street.

I've finally learned to respect myself. I finally learned to treat people the way I wanted to be treated myself. Finally learned that number one person in life is me. I finally learned how to look at somebody and in two minutes of conversation know what they're made of, know whether I want to know them, whether I don't want to know them. I've learned how to, you know, instead of stealing cars or anything ... how to walk by a car that's running, the window down and go and still walk on, cause I just don't want to do it, that is I don't want to do the time for a stupid fuckin' silly car you know ... I've learned self-control, I've learned to drink and be merry but not get so fucking shit drunk I don't know what I'm doing ... like drug and alcohol and charges. I've learned so much from the experience on the street, I've learned from my mistakes. I remember talking about street people who do the same mistake over and over again. But there are a lot of street people out there and on the other side of the coin that know more than me ... (p.9, transcript 2).

He goes on to talk about a worker in a group home whom he holds as a role model.

Like I mean T. S. when he worked and using the street, he was like you know ... really down and out worst than me you know ... and now he's a care worker in Edgewood group home and like he's done the same things I'm still doing ... I don't say I have a great place to stay you know ... and I still drink you know ... but I've also learned that ... the first thing you do is weigh the option, money for food ... I've learned that even if it's Chinese noodles, spaghetti sauce or just Chinese noodles or whatever ... I always keep something around ... that's another thing I've learned, is how to know who to trust (p.10, transcript 2).

Jean-Marc talks of going back to school. "I'm getting a bit older now and it's time for me to reevaluate myself." The interviewer, however, felt that Jean-Marc might spend more time in his current lifestyle, especially with his being openly approached by frequent offers of cocaine from street buddies. For, even though Jean-Marc was able to resist this day, his gregarious and affable street personality did not completely appease his "in-betweenness." Even as a solo, he both enjoys and needs people and their company.

Racism

... it doesn't matter, you know, I'm not a racist ... like can that be my mother? That's always in the back of my mind you know (p.8, transcript 2).

Even though Jean-Marc claims to be confused about his own identity he is matter-a-factly introspective about the impact of racism on the identity of the Aboriginal people in his life.

Speaking about his ex-girlfriend, who was brought up on the reserve, he says:

That's pretty comparative to a lot of Native people like my ex-girlfriend ... she was brought up on the reserve ... taught — 'you're Native so you're lower class' She's from Ojibway culture and that caused her a lot of grief and she's going through it you know. She was taught that being an Indian was something to be ashamed of... if you really want to change anything you have to know how people really feel Identity crisis, you know, not being proud of who you are. I'm not saying I was really proud of who I was. I was just sort of like, I'm not a Paki at least. So I still had a bad idea towards it (p.7, transcript 1).

Continual harassment at school made him sensitive to internalized oppression. "I thought I was a Paki until I was eight." With bitterness, he describes feeling "alienated" in a "waspy neighbourhood" and school.

Jean-Marc recalls a couple of harsh incidents with the police: one where they wouldn't believe his Jewish name and middle-class address, and another where the police were extremely physically abusive.

I say, 'Go get a warrant' ... Sure enough BOOT and then they grabbed me and hoofed me right in the nuts ... 'get down you fucking Indian or we'll fucking kill you'.... Yeah I've experienced racism with police officers (p.18, transcript 1).

For this reason he believes that there should be "Native awareness" provided for all police officers.

Jean-Marc also has a critical opinion of affirmative action in the recruitment of Aboriginal police officers.

They've got a lot of these police officers who are Native graduated, but then again, that's the token minority they're graduating. These guys may have not been the best on the force .. just the fact of the colour of their skin ... they're getting a job on the force (p.19, transcript 2).

The extreme incidence of overt racism and his experience with alienation at school did not influence Jean-Marc's lack of critical comments about this treatment. "We have a saying," he says, "Well I'm a street kid and I know street life but I'm White, you know. Why should there be barriers, that is a barrier in a way you know — being Native." Jean-Marc notices that he is also subject to

the colour line, in reverse, when in the company of Aboriginal people in the northend of Winnipeg.

I've noticed that I'm being ostracized in places, because I'm lighter skinned and everyone else is full blooded and they start talking Cree and I can't understand them (p.30, transcript 2).

People cross the street when he is walking down the street, kick him out of waiting rooms but he rationalizes "look at me." He does not attribute the idea that these actions might in any way be related to racism. He blames their reactions on his height, his torn up clothing style, or upon his hair cut.

Not so much as racism as it is the way I look, cause racism is a broad term Prejudism against the fact of my haircut, the fact that my jeans were all ripped. The reason for that cause these are the only fucking jeans I own. I can't afford to wash my jeans you know... cause when I get money I want to eat ... I've got to live with whatever I've got, but I experience that ... (p.18, transcript 1).

Perhaps the reactions are a little of both.

Culture and identity

[How do you feel about being Aboriginal?] Confused ... confused. I don't know what I am ... I'd like to know what I am ... but I don't know what I am (p.25, transcript 2).

"I hope you don't mind that I have a Jewish last name," Jean-Marc says apologetically at the onset of the interviews as if to disqualify himself as an Aboriginal person (for the purposes of this research). Jean-Marc is a regular participant in the westend "granola belt" hippy-type culture in Winnipeg and performs rap music with a band at an alternative club. He knows everyone. He advises on exactly what bagels are best to buy. It is life in relation to the larger society that is more problematic for him. It's in that world that he is asked to identify himself culturally and that causes confusion. For twelve and a half years Jean-Marc lived with a Jewish family. Contradictions in his adoptive parents' values and the expression of their culture made him start to question.

And we'd go on Saturdays and try and learn all this stuff, I mean my mom is pretty hypocritical about it cause once she went through the whole ordeal of ... I call it an ordeal because you've got the passover plate and the horseradish and the parsley and the reading of the Torah ... Lord King of the Universe, a toast which was grape juice

because they don't drink. Then after like about 45 minutes we're getting hungry, of course. Mom brings out a baked ham. Honest it's like I wanted to burn my yammicka (p.31, transcript 1).

He goes on, "My mom is a really cool person but she's just slightly eccentric." Along with noticing inconsistencies in beliefs versus behaviour, "Judaism, which is hogwash to me ... it works for some people okay, I mean true Hasidic Jews." Jean-Marc felt that there was favouritism expressed by his adopted father. "Yeah, he was real proud of his son ... I was the black sheep. His son looked like them, liked the same music etc..." Jean-Marc began to demand attention, even if it was negative attention. The philosophical questions and the intra-familial problems combined to alienate Jean-Marc from his adopted culture and his family. "The Jewish way is to shun you," he says of his permanent removal from their environment. He does not attend important cultural holidays or family functions, although he maintains some contact. "My dad, he's the one who hates me ... I was disowned." Jean-Marc laments, "If they'd been more supportive of my interests." Jean-Marc feels uncomfortable in the company of his Jewish adoptive parents and in the company of "real Indians." This indicates that Jean-Marc is really caught between two cultures, two world views — he feels uncomfortable in both. It is no wonder that he would choose the relative ease of the street, where he says, "The street person sees a little bit of escape from the fact that where they are at" and "I can honestly say I don't have any enemies."

"I don't believe in God," he says, although he indicates occasionally doing his form of offering in an Aboriginal way.

Once in a while I'll take a cigarette out of the package If I've got one and I'll break it up and throw it in the garbage, that's my idea of trying to get back to the earth (p. 25, transcript 2).

"I didn't say I believed in it, I said it seemed like the most reasonable," he quickly qualifies. He has learned what he knows of Aboriginal philosophy during his eight month stay in the penitentiary. "I've done smudges you know and went to meetings in jail." Jean-Marc again betrays some fragment

of "insider" information when he says of his former girlfriend, "I kind of think she put medicine on me."

Jean-Marc indicates in a round about way that he knows something about the structural arrangement of Aboriginal status in Canada.

Being an Indian is kinda confusing ... The government makes a difference between non-status Indians and FBI's (full blooded Indians) (p.30, transcript 1).

He does not, however, know how it works.

My mother was Native, I don't think she has to be full blooded, do you? Bill C-31 — as long as the father was Native then you're eligible but if the mother was Native you also get it [status], I don't know. (p.39, transcript 1) You know getting my status isn't the reason I want to find my mother cause status to me, I mean, I treat people equally ... I don't really think it's so great that Indians get status ... there are some who have it and abuse it (p.40, transcript 1).

His knowledge is limited, but he does think that injustice exists toward Aboriginal people. In his own way Jean-Marc expresses that self-determination is a good goal.

... these laws, you're telling these people — you've got your reservations, but you've got to stick by our laws while you're in there. Even Indians don't kill people ... don't approve of thievery Violence — I think the White man's way got in there ... The violence wasn't there before, it was usually wars against tribes and there's always been war in civilization wherever he's [man] been (p.26, transcript 2).

"Indians are so patient ... too too patient" is his lament. "I think there should be totally free expression of culture ... but not from a book ... not from a piece of paper." He quickly adds that "I wouldn't like to see the White government looking over it to make sure it's all cool."

Off the record Jean-Marc impressed the interviewer with his version of Aboriginal philosophy and giving back to the earth. His belief system is a complex mixture of Aboriginal thought, western philosophy and a professed agnosticism.

I control my own destiny, if I make a mistake I'm gonna pay for it, I can't blame nobody else for it. I atone for my own sins you know, I'm gonna deal with it ... that's me (p.28, transcript 1).

In the final analysis, Jean-Marc's self-image as a street person is not questionable.

I wouldn't describe a street person as negative because I am one of them, I'd put myself down (p.2, transcript 1).

Society

You do what you can (on tape only).

Jean-Marc is basically uncritical of the society he lives in. He simply doesn't fit into the Freedom 55 commercial yet. (This is the middle-class Canadian dream of retiring with comfort at the age of fifty-five which is a popular finance commercial on television today.) He regrets, sometimes, that he doesn't have the education he could have had by now. On the street he classifies people into bums, pimps and prostitutes, those who learn from their mistakes and those who don't, drug addicts, and criminals. He basically doesn't have an analysis of why they are there or how their lives could be improved. His immaturity shows repeatedly, "I can't wait till I get older, then I'll have a reason for being crazy."

The man-child in a 6'5" eighteen year old body, who never wants to grow up, who really wants to know who he is, for whom the street represents a place where "people look like me," for the time being, continues on his "chosen" path on the street.

Fear on the street? ... nothing. Pain goes away ... like your skin grows back, death is inevitable ... I mean if that's going to happen — I guess maybe something I fear would be surviving the holocaust cause if I was the only survivor there'd be lots of toys to play with but no one to play with me. I've always overcome that fear by meeting people right away ... so there is really no fear now on the street with that (p.24, transcript 2).

DALE: Former street person

I've never leaned towards what society demands that a man be ... I've never given in to that role that men play in society. I've never identified with that, so I can cry whenever I want, I can laugh whenever I want, I can hug somebody whenever I want, because I have those emotions in me. I think that comes from ... a feminine side but ... I think that men are allowed to do that also. There's no rule or law or anything saying that we can't do that you know ... I've never felt that I was wrong ever, ever, ever (p.22, transcript 1).

Dale is a twenty-eight year-old gay Aboriginal male who is from a Cree community in northern Manitoba. He is a tall 5'10" slender person, who wears his beautiful waist-long black hair down most of the time. He is an age-conscious person who works out everyday to keep his body in the best possible shape. His very dark, attractive complexion lends an exotic appearance when

he goes out in drag. Dale's attire, speech and social behaviour were studied and meticulous. This added a pleasant quality to Dale's slightly accented, low voice.

Dale met the interviewer, for the first time, after a workout at a community gym, so he was dressed in fresh casual workout attire. For the second visit, Dale invited the interviewer to his house. The interview took place as Dale sat posturing in front of the mirror, in a teddy, curling his long hair. He was entirely comfortable and happy with himself and eager to share his entire experience as a gay Aboriginal male who had been on the streets of Winnipeg. "I don't want to be a woman, I like being a man ... I have no problems — qualms — about speaking about my life." He was a gracious host as he showed the interviewer around his spotless and homey abode. Dale is an actor/writer who also works occasionally for the Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre doing workshops on gay sexuality and AIDS prevention. He survived living on the streets of Winnipeg for five years and now lives on welfare, when he isn't working. He lives in a gay co-operative household he fondly calls home. "I don't have a place to stay, I have a home."

History

Feeling uncomfortable about my sexuality was the main thing, cause I couldn't live my life openly there, you know, as a gay man on the reserve (p.11, transcript 1).

Dale's mother and father live on a reserve adjacent to a fairly large town in northwestern Manitoba. They have been married for forty-six years and have managed to keep their family together through alcoholism, domestic violence, child neglect and the normal poverty that besets many Aboriginal families in the Canadian north. They belong to a strong, cohesive, extended family, in which Dale plays the devoted uncle to many nieces and nephews. One other brother lives in Winnipeg. He is also gay identified. Dale does not speak of him much. They don't live together, however, there was no indication that the brother is on the street in Winnipeg. The rest of the family continue to reside in the north.

Well ... my parents were actively alcoholic, when I was growing, [they were] fighting and abusive to us and stuff like that. We weren't well cared for because my parents were always drunk, passed out or whatever. So somebody had to build a fire,

somebody had to cook us food, somebody had to wash our clothes, somebody had to do all that stuff, so when we got a certain age we started to learn to do those things ourselves because nobody else would do them for us ... and the funny thing about us is we never had curfews or stuff like that, nobody never reprimanded us for being out late Or bedtime or things like that because it was just you know the normal, cause all the kids stayed out till twelve. It was very poor, it was very tragic when I see the pictures of us as kids, the way we were dressed, the house we lived in ...the poverty — it was incredible. It was isolated when I was growing up but not anymore it's grown so much ... then all it had was travel roads, bush and bush and bush. I went through the whole gambit like alcoholic parents and you know abusive parents, sniffing and drinking and being exceptionally abused and all that stuff (p. 7-8, transcript 1). I'm from a large family yes and there was only so much attention I guess, you could receive from your parents ... but my parents were there as much as they could be, but when it came time for me to leave I had to for my own sanity — not my parents' but my own sanity (p.3, transcript 1).

Dale tells of strong traditional grandparents, strong willed women who ran the roost, and a father who is a product of the residential school system. He describes his dad as a quiet person who quit drinking "at about fifty." Although Dale blames the boarding school system for his father's subdued personality, he admires his parents' wisdom and traditional knowledge. In 1987 the family was struck by tragedy. One of Dale's brothers committed suicide. Dale does not talk about any other loss of family.

Dale's early adult life as a gay male on the reserve was miserable. He began abusing alcohol and he gradually sank into suicidal depression. He was forced to live in the closet. The only way to find a community where he would be accepted was to leave the north and his family to come to the city. This he did in 1981.

On the streets

... I couldn't deal with my sexuality in a positive way when I lived on the reserve ... it wasn't accepted and my mental state and my emotional state, as a teenager growing up, was very unstable and I felt very suicidal, very angry and depressed all the time so I had to leave there in order to survive. Another factor that had me go on the street was my alcoholism ... to find other people that drank the way I did (p.2, transcript 1).

The first time Dale went to the big city of Winnipeg was to see a psychiatrist at the age of fifteen. He had had a nervous breakdown. "I had a nervous breakdown when I was about fifteen,

and I thought people were out to kill me." Over a period of a year Dale made the decision to relocate to Winnipeg. At sixteen he moved onto the streets in earnest.

Dale describes being on the street as not having a home and "living the life that you have to live because of all those factors that affect your life." He means that people suffer different street conditions because of various kinds of victimization that they bring to the street with them. For instance, Dale faced harsh discrimination particular to gay people in a homophobic society.

...You know they taunt me and they make really crude remarks and they swear at me and throw things at me ... I've always thought that man fears what man does not know and I think a lot of homophobia could stem from ignorance of the subject (p.2, transcript 2).

And the discriminatory behaviour he describes was from the Aboriginal community. Others, male and female, suffer greatly because of a sexual abuse background. Dale, then, had the burden of the multiple oppression of race, class and sexual orientation. Poverty, alcoholism and homelessness were simply pre-conditions as well as by-products of street life.

I guess experiencing everything that's out there when you don't have a home base or a job or you're uneducated ... I guess in simpler terms the street is not having a home base, not having anywhere to shower on a regular basis, not having anywhere to eat on a regular basis, nowhere to sleep on a regular basis. That's running the streets (p.1, transcript 1). I've been beaten up, I've been robbed you know, I've been raped, you know everything, everything in the book that could possibly happen to people ... you know I've been out in the winter time on the streets, I've been out you know in falling rain ... I've gone hungry for days at a time (p.18, transcript 1). Yeah, of course, in my life, I think, I've run the whole gambit of being gay like being beaten because I was gay, being verbally attacked because I was gay, sexually abused because I was gay you know all of those things. I think it isn't a typical experience of a gay man but that was my experience. Some of the gay men that I talked with have had that experience (p.11, transcript 1).

Dale says that AIDS was just beginning to make the news when he came out in the city. Therefore he knew to protect himself. One wonders if Dale can be absolutely safe because of the rape he talks about. When Dale sobered up at the age of twenty, he began going to workshops and eventually began to conduct workshops himself. Dale would then provide the support and a role model for gay Aboriginal youth, that he lacked when he came onto the scene.

I came out in the days when AIDS was a really big thing, so right from the start when I came out it was like prevention ... I think in that sense we knew right from the start that it was dangerous to have sex with anybody without being protected and I think that drove me more to protect myself ... No, not actual workshops, they were just pamphlets, booklets, people talking to us. When I sobered up, I started taking workshops then on safe sex and the prevention of STDs and AIDS and eventually started doing workshops on safe sex and sexuality ... They were free a lot of times and a lot of times I was paid honorariums to do workshops you know ... And to participate in panels and stuff (p.5, transcript 1).

In talking about shame, Dale relates the intense suffering he experienced because of being raped, about being a prostitute, about homophobic harassment, about being uneducated and unemployed. With no one to talk to about the experience of shame from many sources, he remained alone.

... a lot of times I think that's where shame enters... is that I'm a man and this isn't supposed to happen. There are a lot of things we can't talk about, like men don't get raped and ... feeling that emotion ... of terror, and you know hurt and shame ... I'd have to be able to vocalize it. My demon, in a sense. I have to feel that somebody cares enough to comfort me and say that you'll get through this, and I'm here to listen to you and talk about it (p.36, transcript 1). I was a prostitute and when you sleep with 300 pound dirty unclean White men It was a very shameful part of my life. Sitting at a bar at 12:00 p.m. on a workday, it's very shameful. Being uneducated and trying for a job and having no experience brought a lot of shame to me too ... being beaten because you are a gay ... to being called down in public in front of a lot of people ... a lot of shame (p.19, transcript 1). Yes, yes, for a lot of years I went out dressed as a woman and I ran the streets looking like a woman and my hair was dyed and I wore these outrageous outfits, and so I guess it gave cause for people to look. Oh, definitely, [I did it] for attention. I outgrew that phase fast (p.10, transcript 1).

During his time as a prostitute, Dale became a "master manipulator" as a survival mechanism. His cross dressing was one way to be up front and ahead of the game. Dale related that he outgrew the outrageous flaunting stage as he was becoming comfortable with himself. Now he still cross dresses, but in a gentler fashion and because he simply likes it.

Although Dale was an alcoholic, he was safe from hard drugs. His strict church-going Catholic upbringing was the buffer he clung to.

My experience wasn't any different from any other person's, except for the fact that I never did hard drugs, I was never ever into drugs ever ever ever (p. 7, transcript 1). It was like the devil's ... it was the extreme because I was brought up Catholic, my parents were church going people and drugs were always the things that were going

to kill you, they're really harmful and so I was always wary of them, and what it did to people on the reserve that were using them ... I thought, 'Well, I never want to be like that so I'll stick to drinking,' you know. I never attempted to shoot up. I smoked dope of course, you know, I did at that time, but it was very infrequently. There is the danger of falling into the trap of alcoholism and drug abuse ... I think because those are so readily accessible in the [sex] trade, as a bargaining tool (p.7, transcript 1).

Out of Darkness

I was one of the lucky ones because I've met so many people that have guided me along the way. So you know I've been blessed in that sense (p.33, transcript 1).

Dale quit cold turkey while he was on the street, he sobered up at age twenty. After two weeks he went to the Alcohol Foundation of Manitoba to ask for residential treatment and they turned him down. They wanted him to take an outpatient program. They thought he had his "head screwed on tight." Dale felt too fragile. "It was two weeks after I quit drinking, I wasn't in any shape to live." He then turned to the Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre and joined a group called New Freedom.

Like twenty was the mark when a lot of shit going on in my life that changed and my ideas and my views about life changed because it was the time I sobered up. I started going to meetings at a group called New Freedom on Sergeant and Banning. It was a gay group and I'm generally thankful that that group was there because it was good for me. Because as a gay man I hadn't dealt with that full extent of my sexuality. A lot of my drinking was attributed to the fact that I wouldn't talk about my sexuality. I couldn't talk about my sexuality, so when I went in. There was openly gay atmosphere and that these people were comfortable and sober being gay. I had a sponsor and there was another gay Native man there (p.6, transcript 1).

At the Gay Community Centre Dale received the support he needed. He not only could express his experience as a gay Aboriginal man, but he found the community that he had been craving since he left home. And he found some mentors to help him build the self-confidence he needed to feel like he belonged somewhere — anywhere. Dale says that he entered his first real relationship after he stopped abusing alcohol.

There's two people that I really care about and they're peers of mine that have taught me a lot about life. They are two men I met along the way. One of them was really influential in my sobering up and maintaining my sobriety and then the other has taught me about all the mannerisms and the fine points of relating with other people (p.2, transcript 1).

Many of the street services that exist today would have been before Dale's time. The only services left to him were child and family services, provincial welfare, the Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre and psychiatric services. As in the case of Jean-Marc, the psychiatric label legitimated financial services. Once you have the label, getting welfare is relatively easy.

I hung out there a lot and learned a lot — for which I'm really thankful for — this place that they have and I eventually started working there ... the project was the Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre ... Yeah, and they were youth and they spoke of what their feelings as gay people growing up. We had meetings and stuff, it was really wonderful. There was also a support group for the youth and that was really beneficial I think in getting an idea of what it was to be gay (p.4, transcript 1). ... so because when I sobered up — the street life — I didn't want anymore. So I worked towards a place in my life where I could live a quiet city life, yeah, because those are things that society smiles upon. You know it's just live your life quietly and speak your truth quietly and go to work and pay your bills. I've struggled to do that and I am still struggling to do that ... obtain some peace of mind ... peace of mind in my life. I have a home ... a base on which to build and I value that. That's the basic structure in my life, that's what keeps me together — if I have something to fall back on. I always have a home to come home to, I always have a place to shower, I always have a place to eat because I struggle to maintain those amenities (p.18, transcript 1).

Safety is an issue for Dale even when he is not on the street. He is still a cross-dresser and he is openly gay, therefore he is vulnerable to gay bashing. He says that Winnipeg is especially bad in this respect. He has learned to be cautious.

Street wise, yeah. Because like for me I'm not scared to go anywhere. I have no fear of going anywhere by myself like that's no problem but the thing is that there's a lot of places I chose not to go by myself you know because I just don't feel comfortable in those settings (p.24, transcript 1).

Dale's recovery has entailed counselling for trauma, alcohol treatment, and sexuality counselling. Personal growth, a stable home, a long-term relationship, positive relations with his extended family and an accepting community have been the main stays of his continued sobriety and stability. Dale seems happy and he is looking forward to continued growth in many areas of his life. His story demonstrates that specific services need to exist for gay Aboriginal youth, both at the reserve level and in urban centres. He has become a much needed role model for gay Aboriginal males.

I've adopted a family in the gay community ... because I don't have that from my family, I can't run to my parents, I can't run to my brothers and sisters for help because they have no understanding of what my life is like or what my sexuality is about or what you know goes in my life... because they can't relate to it because they are heterosexual people (p.6, transcript 2). I've incorporated a lot of stuff in my life that to make a base for my spirituality and you know and my beliefs in our creator and I've adopted a lot of Native beliefs, I've adopted a lot of my own ideas ... and I think that works for me in a way to make me a whole person. I think that's what I strive for in my life is to be a whole person (p.28, transcript 2).

Racism

I think I experience racism everyday ... if I took the time to write down all the racism that I had in my day you know, I could write a book about racism. I could write a book about racism and sexism (p.13, transcript 1).

Dale gives mixed messages when he talks about racism. On the one hand he feels that there is a lot of racism, and on the other he gives the impression that he wants only to be acceptable in the society that discriminates against him on the basis of colour. He begins by saying that he doesn't think that people stare at him for any other reason than because he has long hair, and ends by giving examples of discriminatory behaviour against him that are very overt. He could mean that his personal strength is strong enough to transcend the insult.

I think the only reason people would stare is because you know I have waist length black hair you know, other than that there's nothing outstanding about ... different about me. But it has taken a lot of years to learn that I'm not different from anybody else you know. It's taken a lot of years to cultivate it (p.10, transcript 1).

Dale indicates that he felt an acute lack of social graces because of a poor reserve background. He sounds like he has a lot of internalized racism as well. Dale seems to say that the social graces he lacks are White ways of doing things, and not simply polite ways (even in his own culture) of doing things. This would be the case since his departure from the street also meant an introduction into the White gay and lesbian culture. This is the place he would fit in with his gay identity. But, since he came from a Northern community where Aboriginal ways of being predominate, he would feel ill at ease in the southern middle-class gay community that was "more educated" than himself. He would become self-conscious about being unsophisticated in his ways in an urban setting.

I think growing up we didn't have people that came in and said, 'Well, this is the way life is supposed to be lived, this is the way you have to answer in places and certain people, this is what you talk about and all those things. This is how you sit at the dinner table' ... all of those things were never taught to us. And we were never taught to be, I shouldn't say for anybody else but for myself, and I always felt that I was lacking in social graces amongst other people. I think that drew me into a shell more. You know made me drink more and stuff because I always felt that I'd never fit anywhere (p.3, transcript 1).

Dale admits that he felt ashamed of being of Aboriginal origin. "Yeah definitely. I was not always as educated as the White people or I always felt in fear you know." Again, this shame is in relation to his relative lack of education. The examples of racism he gives in the foregoing dialogue would likely also facilitate self-hatred as an Aboriginal person.

Ok, you go to the store, there's three people there, two of them are White and I'm Native, the two White people get served first ... Or they throw your change at you — like if you don't like that job then you shouldn't be here if you're throwing change at people. A lot of time I'll throw it right back at them. Rude behaviour, yeah, another thing, it's in the gestures, it's in the eyes, it's in the body language, you're standing at an elevator with somebody and I'll kind of move to the corner so that I don't have to be close to this person (p.13, transcript 1).

Dale gives some examples of stereotypic images of Aboriginal women that he has been privy to as a male in a racist and sexist environment. He goes on to explain how Christianity has helped to alienate Aboriginal people from each other — he is talking about the separation of straight and gay people in the Aboriginal community. The imposed values of Christianity is a form of racism.

I think like ... the red hot blooded squaw or something like that ... and the long black flowing hair and the brown copper tone skin and the high cheek bones and things that are erotic things to people Native people because you've always been bold and beautiful ... Sexual — there are so many fallacies I guess about Native sexuality that as writers one of our jobs is to bring that back the Native love story. And I think that's another thing that Christianity does to us is it alienates us from each other. So it teaches us through their teachings to differentiate what is normal and what isn't ... And there are a lot of celebrated gay Native people out there, that people don't know are gay ... Cause again we ... through advertising and through publicity that's something that would bring shame to the community, so let's not discuss that part. (p.24, transcript 2).

Dale talks about the mixture of racism and homophobia that is a constant threat to his well being in Winnipeg. He says, however, he still feels more fear in the homophobic Aboriginal community. He makes a most saddening revelation of intra-group homophobic violence in

Winnipeg. In the same breath Dale reveals that Aboriginal males do engage in covert homosexual activities in the anonymity of the city.

One of the things that I really see, I think, and this is a sad fact but I really find it to be true a lot of times. If you get beaten and robbed or raped one time this year, it'll probably be by a Native guy, that's especially in Manitoba. That is a sad fact ... a sad observation that I've made myself. Because every time I've been beaten or robbed or raped, it's been by a Native man. In the urban community then it's a sad fact ... I am weary of being in the Aboriginal community, the whole Aboriginal community because I don't feel safe in that community (p.23, transcript 1). Yeah, I've talked with a lot guys that are Native men that come in from out of town and stuff and have sexual relations with them or have a relationship with them for the weekend and stuff like that (p.7, transcript 2).

Dale ends his dialogue on differential treatment by stating that his ethnicity is a barrier in intimate long-term relationships with White men.

And with a White person, my experience has been with a White person that a lot of stuff comes out — like, 'How would my family react to you? What would they say?' and stuff like that — it's not so much the Christianity, it's just racism (p. 24, transcript 2). Like again, you know, Christianity plays a real important part in our sexuality and our sexual conditioning as Native people. That's what I regret. I believe a lot in the Christian beliefs. I think of all of that stuff and work it into my spiritual life but there's a lot of stuff that I don't agree with (p.18, transcript 2).

Culture and identity

I love being Native ... I love it ... you know I think it's beautiful, there's such a history and there's such a culture and the language that I speak is beautiful. It flows off the tongue so well and it's beautiful to listen to when you hear it. For myself to be able to speak that and also the traditional teachings and the dance and the music and all that stuff — it's beautiful. The extended family, I think it's one of the best scripts that we have. Just being able to live with all our family — not just one person (p.25, transcript 1).

Dale does not tell of early cultural alienation or identity confusion as an Aboriginal person. He speaks his language, he has a strong extended family system and he says that his grandmother was a medicine woman. Dale has a good relationship with his parents: they have visited him in his home. He has had the benefit of great influence by grandparents who were traditional (although Catholic). Dale speaks fondly of cultural teachings in his value system. It is the influence of Christianity that he repeatedly and strenuously criticizes. Dale has been, in the past, ashamed of being Aboriginal; however, as stated in the previous section, this shame, as he calls it, is more of

a condition of feeling socio-economically and behaviorally different. This is an important difference, since Dale continues to aspire to fit in perfectly.

Dale presents as a person who is very comfortable and knowledgeable in his culture and at the same time feels inadequate in mainstream culture. This mild form of alienation is a product of Dale's separation from the Aboriginal community with respect to his homosexuality. His home community at best "tolerated" his difference. There was no opportunity to express himself on an equal footing with others. In the urban setting the Aboriginal community is dangerous to him. He doesn't feel physically safe in the Aboriginal community.

Thinking about it, I really felt a lot of frustration and a lot of stress and a lot of mental anxiety towards my sexuality and so I had to leave there in order to pursue or to get an idea of what it was to be gay because there was no role model, there was no counselling factors, there was nothing, nobody ever talked about it, it was never a topic of discussion (p.11, transcript 1). Yeah, one other thing that's really good I think was with gay men — we're very up front together about our sexuality, and I think that's one of the thing that drives us ... dealing and learning about it and trying to come to terms and understand why we are the way we are (p. 21, transcript 1).

Dale's experience with a psychologist in Winnipeg at the age of fifteen brought home the double alienation which he continues to deal with in his present day struggle to survive in the urban community. The psychologist didn't understand Aboriginal experience, of living on the reserve, of poverty, of Aboriginal ways of thinking — "the experience," nor did he ever say anything about the fact that Dale might be gay. "Not at all cause he never said anything."

... he was just an old fat little bald Jewish man and he would sit there and he'd ask me really dumb dumb dumb questions, and they were because none of them ever ever had anything to do with my sexuality ... I guess I had some sort of a nervous breakdown ... he says, 'it's just stress' He was very stupid like this man had no idea, I guess, what our lives were like. He had not an inkling of what it was to be a Native gay man or what it was to be Native on the reserve and growing in that environment. He had no idea because he sat in his closed stuffy room at the health centre for the rest of his life and he didn't go anywhere beyond that (p.9, transcript 1).

Dale mourns the loss of position that gay people have suffered in the Aboriginal community. Traditionally, he said they held an honoured position and could contribute their skills meaningfully. He indicates that he has read extensively about the history of sexual diversity in North American

Aboriginal society. He cites Fancy Dancer by P.N. Warren; Spirit in the Flesh by W.L. Williams; Living in the Spirit and A Gay American Indian Anthology among the books he has studied.

As a gay Native man, a lot of people don't understand, we have a history, that we have culture, we have dance, we have ceremonies, we have all those things, and we're gifted people, we're gifted story tellers, we're gifted readers, we're gifted spiritualists, we're gifted medicine people in our tribes. Long time ago, before the onset of Christianity, we had our places in the tribe. I think what's really important for gay Native men is reclaiming that spirituality, reclaiming those gifts that have been taken away from us since Christianity came into effect. And I think like people always ask would you dance in a pow wow as a woman and they mean it as a joke. To me it's not a joke because I would not dance, I would not be allowed to dance in a pow wow with the other men as a woman, because if you go back into history you will see that we did not dance with the tribe. We had our tribe set off aside from the main tribe. We had a place where all the gay and us few people lived. And because it was sacred ... we were sacred people it's not because we were shunned or anything it's because we were sacred and we could only enter certain ceremonies (p.24-25, transcript 1). I've never felt a part of that community because I didn't you know again traditionally we weren't part of it. We had our little tribes, like in modern times ... we have our little tribes set away from them (p.23, transcript 1).

Dale takes exception to the suggestion of the interviewer that gay people in Aboriginal society were called "two spirit" people. He suggests that even if one has predominant characteristics of the opposite sex, people in Aboriginal society accepted them. Dale shows how inextricably linked are various facets of his identity as a gay Aboriginal male.

I can take offense to that because everybody has two spirits. Every man, woman and child has two spirits and those spirits there is a man and a woman. And I think we have chosen to adopt it because like the term is nice, it's fine and dandy. People always ask 'What do you mean by two spirits?' and I think it's because we work as gay men to balance that male and female side of our beings we're more aware of those both sides. Whereas a straight man would only work on the masculine side and whereas a straight woman would only work on the feminine side. And we're working both sides, and to be comfortable with that ... (p.15, transcript 1). People always ask me how I define myself and I think that I'm a gay Native that identifies me. The thing is that I would like to be known as a Native writer, I would like to be known as a Native actor, Native artist ... not just gay but just Native ... like I'm perfectly happy with that but the thing is that I'm not in the closet about it... if somebody asks I tell them yes I am gay, like that's no problem, but the thing is that I have to think about how it will affect my career, as an artist. And how people react to that because I choose not to live my life in a closet because a lot of times it drew me to a suicidal attempt (p.25, transcript 2).

Dale gives the Catholic Church credit for instilling homophobic values in the Aboriginal community. He also thinks the lack of ongoing exposure to gay discrimination in the media and on the streets saves northern Aboriginal communities from truly integrating these values. He finds isolated northern communities more humane.

One of the big things of being gay — it's getting back to our roots to our culture, and going back to where we came from, and understanding where our spiritualities lie. A lot of the Native community has been influenced by you know Christianity and their beliefs in that way ... in the Bible there's a lot of stuff like that says that you know two men lying together, you would burn in hell and stuff like that ... One of the gifts my granny instilled in me in a way was to always respect people regardless of who they were or what they were. I've always believed that if the creator made people different, he made people different for a reason and maybe that difference gives them power. As you go further up north from where we are and the more isolated communities are, I think the level of acceptance for gay and lesbian people is more so than the reserve where I came from They're so isolated from any kind of major outlet for information on gay and lesbian people, and society's abuse on homosexuality. I don't think they've had that belief to hate people instilled in them that strongly. Whereas in my reserve it's like you know that you have no business being on this earth is their belief (p.1, transcript 2). I believe you know that everybody has a gift in them you know and I think the level of acceptance in those more isolated places comes from ... those gay people abilities to share their gift with the community ... whereas we were never in our community, we were never allowed to show our gifts to people... (p.2, transcript 2). If somebody shuns me in the Native community I automatically know that there is something wrong with their spirituality" (p.26, transcript 2).

Dale talks about the difficulty of two Aboriginal people being in a gay relationship. People are usually socialized in the small intolerant places that he described earlier. He says that Christianity, racism, alcoholism, homophobia and past physical and emotional abuse make a relationship within an ostracised group extremely difficult. Dale himself has enough to deal with "trying to deal with that stuff in my life is such a painful thing a lot of times."

Dale finds Aboriginal language to be extremely important. He is very proud to be bilingual, but he feels most comfortable in his own language.

It's a beautiful language and I think — you know — of times in my life when I was hurting and struggling in my life somebody came and spoke to me in Cree and I always felt so much more reassured, so much more stronger. Like they say in Cree you know in my language you know, it's so much more expressive, so much more you know down to earth. It doesn't have pretence you know, it's a beautiful language and spoken and spirituality.(p.26, transcript 1). I think our language life is

expressed so much more clearly and so much more strongly ... if anything just retain our language, that's a very important facet of our existence ... it's something that's being lost (p.25, transcript 1). I still have an accent you know and I'm very proud of it that I have learned Cree, especially being Native, I'm very well spoken in English but I've learned English and it's always been one of my strong points ... to be bilingual and so I've never had a problem expressing my ideas because I'm well read, well travelled. So I've never had a problem relating to other people especially White people because I speak the language just as well as they do (p.27, transcript 1).

Even those facets of the Aboriginal culture that Dale is good at and is proud of he finds blocked in the urban Aboriginal community. For instance, he says that it is taboo to speak Cree in public in Winnipeg (or even in Aboriginal organizations). The interviewer concurred with this perception. "That's one thing that I miss the most in living in the city... it's not hearing people speak Cree cause it's very taboo, you know." For the love of his culture and language, Dale advises the complete reclamation of Aboriginal culture in any effort in providing policy, service or prevention.

... especially sitting with the old people. I love sitting with old people and asking them about the stories because they are fascinating. They're wonderful stories and they have a lot of stuff in there that teaches us how to walk in this life. I think for us I think the most important job we have as Native people is to reclaim everything that was stolen from us, everything, every aspect of being Native. There are so many beautiful things out there and people don't see them any more. Especially affection and caring for one another ... was taken from us. I can't ... I can be affectionate with my parents now but that's taken twenty-five years to learn (p.23, transcript 2). To retain the language and the culture and especially history you know. Because that's where we came from and what we are moving towards — our future. We learn from all those things that our history has taught us ... and that shouldn't be denied. It should be put up front and say look, this is what happened and this is what will not happen, and this is what will happen, we have to look back on this and there are so many wonderful stories to be told, I'm an artist, a performing artist, I'm an actor and also a writer so there are wonderful stories to be told in our history. So when we go into our future from our past there are lessons to be taught as we're going along. I think that's what my parents gave me — are the lessons — that they've learned in their walk in their life ... Wonderful stories, about the land, and you know, medicines and the trickster (p.27, transcript 1).

Society

Yeah, because the basis for my sobriety is my honesty and my trust in people. I also trust people and I won't lie to people about how I feel about any given subject. I won't lie to people about how I feel because I am ... I work at being honest with everybody that I come into contact with. So I have no problems no qualms about you know... speaking about my life (p.20, transcript 1).

Dale seems to have a rather shallow knowledge about the system that pushes youth to the street, only in one instance he says, "you're fifteen and being abused by your father." Instead he is preoccupied with proper White behaviour. Dale seems to equate crime and swearing with simple bad manners at the same level with saying please and thank you. He says street kids should be taught morals and the virtues of honesty.

Teach them manners — ask to borrow things, don't steal, don't swear — it isn't proper social behaviour ... Always say please and thank you when you ask for things, and all those things that I've never been taught Teach it to them because they've never been taught (p.37, transcript 1).

If he were the counsellor he is in danger of duplicating the behaviour of the insensitive psychiatrist who didn't respond to him appropriately. He wants as much as possible to aspire to "proper mainstream behaviour." He does, however, have a strong Aboriginal identity to fall back on. Most street youth do not. Dale's only criticism is that social services don't give social workers enough time to work with street youth and that foster care is a legalized form of slavery. He says that street youth should have a safe house.

Dale later goes on to discuss sexual identity and prostitution, in light of preventing more youth from prostituting. Identity, he relates, as a woman or a man is perverted in the act of selling one's body. This kind of body alienation compounds all of the other problems that street youth have to deal with.

I think a lot of prostitutes go out and have no idea what their sexuality is like, that's really sad but they have no idea about sexuality, they go out there and they put out every night. How do I feel as a woman? How do I feel as a man? How do I feel about using my body sexually? I don't think a lot of that comes into play because you're nothing sexually, you are not practising your sexuality. But a lot of time ... it's just I'm here and I'm providing a service ... It's like a business office, it's like a store you go in and you buy your merchandise ... it's thrown away (p.36, transcript 1).

When asked what would make his life easier Dale replies, "A million dollars would make my life wonderful." He goes on to discuss the conditions that would further enhance his life.

What would make my life wonderful is a really good steady relationship, a good steady job ... A steady relationship I think is something that I crave because I'm a

very affectionate person, I have a lot of love to give. I think I do a lot of that to my street group because of youth down there but like physical affection is something that I crave. I had real image problems from a lot of years in my life... because I didn't like the way my body looked, so I worked to improve on my body — the physical aspects and emotional wellbeing (p.29, transcript 1).

Except for disliking the negative image of gay people on the television media, Dale remains very uncritical of mainstream society. He strives and he is content.

I think the world now is going to be the perfect place and all that but I think in my life I strive now to be fair to people, to be fair to everybody that comes into my life because I think that everybody that comes into everybody's life is there to teach them a lesson ... to teach them something and they learn something from that person also (p.19, transcript 2).

Chapter 5. Montreal

In 1992 Montreal celebrated 350 years since the city was founded. It is the world's third largest francophone community with a population of 3.1 million in the metropolitan area and 1,018,000 in the Montreal urban community (387,245 or 13.3% are 10-19 years) (1991 census) — 44,645 are Aboriginal people in the metropolitan area. The National Council of Canada, in a comparison of urbanization statistics, states that Quebec has had a 70% increase in urbanization from 1986 to 1991. Quebec's total population of Aboriginal peoples in 1991 was 137,615, an increase from 80,940 in 1986 (Native Council of Canada (NCC), 1993:14).

Just outside the city of Montreal are the large Aboriginal communities of Kahnawake and Kanesatake — Aboriginal settlements are sparse throughout the rest of the province. The island of Montreal and two adjacent islands that form the metropolitan area contain 29 municipalities (the metropolitan area contains over 100 municipalities) and approximately 35 cultural communities. Though French is the official first language, a significant percentage of the population speaks English and a multitude of other languages (Moving to Montreal, 1992-93).

The city is also considered to be the economic, social and cultural capital of the province of Quebec, although Quebec City is the official capital of the province. Situated at the junction of the Saint Lawrence and Ottawa rivers in the southwest region of the province, the city covers a land base of 490 square kilometres (3508 square kilometres for the metropolitan area).

With respect to climate, Montreal has four very distinct seasons with a January average temperature of -9.7 degrees celsius and a July average of 26.4 degrees celsius. The winters experience heavy snowfall of 200 centimetres on average from approximately December to March.

Montreal is the "economic motor of Quebec"; it is also a major international industrial, commercial and financial centre. Twenty seven per cent of the population of Quebec lives in the city and 38 per cent of the people are employed there. It is economically diverse with a large manufacturing sector that includes: transportation equipment, electrical and electronics, food,

clothing and pharmaceuticals. The main employment sectors in the city are: manufacturing, construction, transport and communications, commerce, financial services, public administration and culture (Canadian Encyclopedia, 1988).

Though the cost of living is lower than in most large Canadian cities, the unemployment rate was 13.2 per cent in 1992. Housing is more accessible in this city as there are lower rental rates and higher availability than most large cities in Canada (City of Montreal Annual Report, 1992).

Even with the apparent prosperity of Montreal there are 615,000 people in Montreal who live in poor households, 15,000 homeless people, one-third under 21. At least 20 agencies in Montreal provide food and/or shelter to the homeless. Among them are the Old Rentry Mission, L'Accueil Bonneau, Benedict Labre House and St Michael's Mission (Abley, 1993). Many of the city's foodbanks are not accessible to homeless street youth because of an address requirement.

The Inuit population in Canada is estimated at 35,000 with a 3.1 percent average annual birth rate — three times the national average. Inuit youth are experiencing a particularly harsh reality with extreme rapid change and infiltration of inhalants and drugs into their communities. Youth population under 18 years of age ranges from 50-60 percent. Unemployment is 30-45 percent for youth 15-24. Joblessness, loss of traditional economy and boredom plagues the youth making the southern cities look attractive (Sarkadi, u.d.). Some sources liken Aboriginal people moving down into the cities for any number of reasons from social breakdown to environmental devastation as refugees in our own country. Others express that Aboriginal people who have relocated into urban areas do not get the consideration and services that international refugees receive when they enter our borders. An article in the Winnipeg Sun on March 2, 1993, "Refugees aided more than Natives: Activist," stated that:

There are enormous adjustment problems for families coming from rural reserves and other than the Friendship Centre, Aboriginal families get less help than those from other countries (Refugees aided, 1993:3).

This is particularly so with Aboriginal people in northern Quebec who do not speak French.

The elders of the northern communities are grounded in traditional culture. The parents, having had the benefit of traditional upbringing and having lived through the first phase of rapid "modernization" and its degrading effects, know how to handle what's to come. The children, some of them results of much of the destruction of the northern economy and culture, don't know where they've come from and don't know where they are going. They come to the city, experience culture shock, as well as excited exploration of the big city lights and night life. Although the ones who stay enjoy the city, it remains a thorn in their cultural side. The youth crave continued contact of extended family and home lifestyle but become seduced into fast lane behaviour.

Montreal was a difficult city in which to find Inuit street youth, first because the city layout has many districts, islands and municipalities. The police (Division 25) stated that the many districts make street youth hard to find. There are more places to hide. Secondly, language barriers make Montreal inaccessible to street youth who do not have adequate French language skills. In the case studies those who have been on the streets of Montreal speak of discrimination against English-speaking people, especially visible minorities, Aboriginal and immigrated peoples. There has also been backlash toward Aboriginal people after the Oka crisis of 1990.

Districts are, in some cases, broken down by linguistic group. For instance the south shore is a predominantly English community while Henri Bourgain, another side of Montreal, is strictly Francophone. This makes for a city whose services are not centrally located as they are in Vancouver. Some serve French people only. The Native Friendship Centre, which ought to be accessible for all Aboriginal people, did not have services for street youth or many specific activities for youth at all.

In 1985 the Gazette reported that there were 5,000 young prostitutes in the city; by 1993 their the numbers have risen to an estimated 8,000 young women working the streets of Montreal (Leger, u.d.). Most of the youth prostitution and exploitation of youth is underground and rumours

of gang run youth bawdy houses and mafia type import/export of young people for the sex industry abound. The research assistant wrote in her field journal,

Last week I went to visit an agency called Passages. It is a house for prostitutes to go if they want to leave the streets. I met with a worker and two street workers, both of them were French, so the third translated. The three of them all agreed that there were hardly any First Nations kids that they ran into ... The workers had seen two Inuit (they thought) girls working, but I was unable to have contact with them because there was an underground ring that involved very violent pimps, bikers and also some Asian men. It was much too dangerous to try and infiltrate (research assistant journal).

The Dans la Rue street van travels daily to street youth haunts in the city to distribute food, blankets and support to young homeless people. It stops at Atwater Avenue and Ste. Catherine Street, Peel and Ste. Catherine Street, Parc Lafontaine (a well known male prostitution district), Amherst and Ontario Street (a favourite spot for transvestites), Clark street and Ste. Catherine's, and St. Denis and Rene Levesque Boulevard.

The population estimates of street youth varied widely. Dans la Rue estimated 10-15,000 visits in a year, the Salvation Army estimated 500 street youth, while En Marge stated it was impossible to estimate. En Marge stated that they served 303 different youth in 1992. The percentage estimates of Aboriginal youth were much lower than in other cities and none reported serving Inuit youth (that they knew of). The large discrepancy in the estimates given by the agencies are most likely due to Dans la Rue's inclusion of all people, such as prostitutes, strippers, drug dealers, who make their living on the street. A large portion of those are included in the 8000 cited above. Nevertheless, most agencies simply would not hazard a guess as to the numbers of Aboriginal youth on the streets of Montreal and very few knew of any Inuit youth on the street. They usually came down south to go into detention. One worker estimated about 10% Aboriginal youth used their emergency street services. This estimate would include Inuit youth who are on the run from detention centres.

Case studies

We met Natasha and Charnelle in Shawbridge Detention Centre through a Passages worker who knew they were there. We decided to interview these two young women who were in active custody partly because this gave us an opportunity to gain insight into the environment of youth holding units and running behavior from institutions. The second reason was we could not locate, by any means, any Inuit street youth age 12-18 on the streets of Montreal. Agency personnel, researchers and youth collaborators all corroborate that the only Inuit street people (that they knew of) in Montreal are between the ages of 30 and 50. It is also said that Inuit youth who get into trouble are sent back up North very quickly. Inuit people come down from the north to access services such as medical, dental, surgical, foster home, detention, employment, and education. Natasha speaks of Inuit youth who are fairly middle class (going to school, working etc.) and live at home and other older young people who have their own apartment. Both of the participants in Montreal are at the lower age parameters that we set for the case study project.

NATASHA

I can never make up my own choice. I've been living like this forever. Everyday people say you have to do this ... like if you ask me, what do I want? I don't know what I want, but people keep telling me what to do ... And now I can't even make up my own mind what to do ... I'm not in control of my life ... I don't know what to do with my life, I just don't know (p.50, transcript 1).

Natasha is a fifteen year old "going on thirty-five" female of Cree/Inuit ancestry from the Chibougaumo area near James Bay, Quebec. She is an attractive (in an innocent type of way) 5'4" young woman of medium build who sports a shaven head in a Mohawk style. Natasha's creamy sallow light brown skin adds a dramatic effect to the sullen mood that she carries around with her. Natasha does not wear make-up. In contrast Natasha's voice is clear and lilting, this could be the voice of a young, bright and happy child. She wore institutional regiment clothing made up of track pants and sweat shirt and black "cheap Chinese slippers."

Natasha was interviewed, first in a pleasant upstairs reading room that let the light in via skylights, at Shawbridge Youth Detention Centre, where she had been for "two years, six months and twenty days" (excluding the time she spends on the run). The second interview took place in her room which had a depressing atmosphere. The second interview reflected the same emotional tone as the environment. Natasha talked a lot about death.

The youth workers indicated that Natasha wouldn't talk much and that she was a time bomb waiting to go off. One of the statements proved to be inaccurate. After a few minutes she talked non-stop. Natasha related much of her story in the third person, as if the issues she talked about were someone else's. This very well could be because of strict provincial disclosure of abuse laws. We warned the participants that if they disclosed to us any abuse that was unreported we would be obliged to report such to the relevant authorities.

Major factors in Natasha's off and on, hot and cold presentation during the interviews were her extreme hostility, depression and confusion about her life circumstances. Natasha had a fear of looking a person straight in the eye — she was not friendly at all, unless it was on her terms. With her peers Natasha was hostile — she always got into fights — and she would get possessive about the interviewer whenever other people were around them. Natasha seemed totally unstimulated rather than mentally unstable. The interviewer observed that Natasha was slow and lethargic; however, she was intelligent in her dialogue. She may be affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. It is more likely that her slowness is drug and alcohol induced or that depression was getting the best of her. Her rebelliousness saves her from complete hopelessness.

Natasha had been at Shawbridge since she was caught two weeks prior to the interviews. She had returned from a two month AWOL on the streets in Montreal and Quebec City. Her preoccupation right now is to leave Shawbridge and to be reunited with her mother.

History

I could of moved up back up north instead of coming back to Montreal, I just didn't think there was any way out of it ... out of my stepfather's touching me all

the time. The only way out was just don't go home. (p.37, transcript 1). Well my stepfather used to molest me at home, so I never really stayed home ... I didn't like my stepfather and my father had remained up north (p.20, transcript 1).

Natasha is the youngest of nine children; she has two brothers and six sisters. Her parents separated when she was very young. Her father moved away to another location in Quebec, remarried and started a family. Since then there has been no contact between father and daughter. It appears that Natasha's mother moved to Montreal and left her children with the grandparents on the reserve two years before Natasha came to Montreal. During her time alone in Montreal, Natasha's mother met and began living with a young Black man.

Natasha's mother, a woman in her late thirties, has a history of instability in her life. Alcohol and drug abuse and sporadic employment have been a lifestyle. She has recently returned to school; however, she is still heavily involved in dealing drugs. She was very stoned when she met the interviewer. She was sarcastic and asked what she was going to be paid for allowing her daughter to be interviewed. The interviewer had to call her bluff, saying that there was some misunderstanding about payment for services and that the interview would not work for anyone involved. At this point the mom said that she agreed that Natasha could be interviewed. Natasha's sixteen year old sister (who also lives in Montreal) also came to the introductory meeting and was extremely restless, she was currently in the process of moving into her own place with her partner and her six month old baby. She was Natasha's predecessor in many of the life events, past and present, including being a past resident of Shawbridge herself.

Natasha came to Montreal to visit her mother for the summer in 1991. It was decided that Natasha would stay in Montreal and go to school. Natasha describes the way she came to be in Montreal.

I came by myself. I rode down on the bus ... and I ride the bus when I want to go back home. It would take me a whole day to get up North ... It makes a few stops ... between Montreal and Val d'Or where we go for lunch and we go to Val d'Or and I have to change buses and I get another bus and I go and stop some more and then we have supper ... you're sitting there and you want to move around and you kind of have to sit there, then you want to have a cigarette so you go into the

washroom and sneak a cigarette there and that kind of thing (p.3, transcript 1). [I came here] two years ago. But the first year I was in Montreal I just looked around in Montreal and I found out how to ... how the city was made out. But two years ago that's when I started hanging around and last year is when I started living on the street ... like day to day all the time ... Well one day I decided I wanted to stay in Montreal cause I found it more exciting and there was more interesting places to hang out cause on the reserve there's hardly anything there except a store, gas station and another store. Like clothing stores that I found in Montreal — really fascinating. It had buildings and street lights and arcades and you can get liquor anywhere and my mother used to live downtown. They [siblings] come back to visit my mother. My sister lives here also, she doesn't live with my mother and my school is finished in June so I came from up North and my mother asked me to come back to Montreal for the whole summer. So I get to Montreal and then we go back up North again. So one day I decided I wanted to stay. I wanted to come back to Montreal cause I love the city and it was something new. They had video arcades and all sort of stuff and I said, 'Mom, I want to stay here' ... and she said that she would find me a school to enrol me in (p.2, transcript 1).

Natasha would soon be leaving Shawbridge because she has stayed in the institution for the maximum amount of time that they can keep her. She will be returning to her mother who, by September, had moved into subsidized housing in a suburb of Montreal. Natasha does not know her biological father who appears to live in the north. She has recently initiated telephone contact with him. A visit was discussed sometime in the future.

On the streets

A street person is somebody who doesn't talk about their feelings ... and they don't know how to talk about themselves and they don't know where to go except for the street and getting high. Cause when you're high you don't care about anything and you don't, I guess, have to talk about anything. Getting high ... takes away all your feelings, all your emotions and your cares. I mean you don't care about anything when you're high and everything. (p.1, transcript 1).

Natasha is a person who is in institutional care. She is running from institutional care. Her time on the streets consists of time away from detention, on the run. She considers herself a two year veteran of the streets. Natasha says that she is a street person because of her stepfather's action. Some time in the first year of Natasha's stay in Montreal the stepfather began to molest her. She began to stay away from home. Natasha takes part responsibility for her extended stay in Shawbridge but says she hates her existence there. Mother and daughter have yet to deal with the sexual abuse that precipitated many of the problems that face them.

I think it's my stepfather's [fault]. I probably wouldn't be here or be living on the streets if it wasn't for him, it's all his fault. It could have been my fault but I just wanted to get out of here so badly and I shouldn't of, I don't know (p.49, transcript 1). Yeah, I feel much closer to my mom when she broke up with my step father. I never really spoke to my mother about what had happened and I don't want to tell my mother what happened cause she's gonna say it's my fault ... it's because she would blame me, because she blamed my sister cause I saw my stepfather abusing my sister in the middle of the night while my mother was away. I saw him go to her bed and heard her crying ... We slept in the living room and that's where it always happened and she finally told my mother after a month, cause she couldn't fight him anymore (p.33-34, transcript 1). That's why I never told my mother, I never said anything about it because I didn't want her to blame me for it, cause I knew it wasn't my fault (p.21, transcript 1) ... the first time he did it [to me], I never went back home, I always stayed out, really out of the house ... I was twelve or thirteen. Well, at first, no [did not tell anybody]. I started talking about it more when I came to AA meetings and my judge knows, my social worker knows now ... Paul [a worker] told me that my mother knows and she's working with the judge. Well, I hate my mother, you know, cause she never said anything about it when I was talking to her on the phone (pp.20-21, transcript 1).

Natasha talks little of the interim period between her molestation and finally ending up in Shawbridge for an extended period of time. The only thing she says is that she crashed a car and subsequently she kept running from institutional care. It appears that Natasha has been institutionalized as a result of her abuse and because her mother has been unable to stabilize her home life. Her sister had also been in Shawbridge for behaviour resulting from molestation in the same home. Although institutional care should protect Natasha, it is an alienating experience.

But when I first came here it was because of the car, I crashed a car by myself, I got placed in a group home and I never really liked anybody in there and I got into trouble and they brought me here. And I got stuck here and it was about a week into it and I went AWOL so then they brought me back here and then they found out that I had problems at home so they kept me. Like I was here for one year for throwing rocks at a moving vehicle and after that I kept on running away and running away from here all the time (p.19, transcript 1).

We learn about street life from Natasha through her descriptions of what a street person is, what she perceives as motivating factors of being on the street, and how street youth cope with the trauma for being societal fugitives. Natasha identifies street youth by "the silent characteristic." She says:

Yeah that's it ... nobody is gonna say why are you here for ... nobody is gonna say or why did you run away from home, nobody is gonna ask you why you're taking

drugs you know, they just sit there and they ask us if we need a place to stay or have anything to share... if we just need any kind of protection (p.1, transcript 1). But most kids ... most females get raped, molested or sexually abused but also males, boys too get molested or are being raped by their fathers or their stepfathers or they're being beaten by their fathers and that's why they live on the streets (p.22, transcript 1). Like, let's say I was molested, but other people, other girls might be molested that's why they live on the streets and they get high to forget about everything. I mean there has to be a reason for a kid to be living on the streets and getting high. Okay, let's say you meet this little boy, and you say, 'Why are you taking drugs?' and he'll just say, 'I don't know.' ... It's just funny and yet he seems like ... you have to have a reason for why you're taking drugs ... And, cause it happens to me a lot and people say to me, 'Why are you taking drugs?' and I finally found out why I take drugs, it's because I just forget about everything. One day, I was on the street and I saw everybody getting high and I'm sitting there, I wasn't high at all but I was going to and I didn't want to talk about my feelings, but eventually somebody came around and offered me some mescaline and I realized when I got stoned, I was thinking it's true, I don't want to talk about my feelings cause I don't care, I don't have to talk about anything (p.24, transcript 1). [Question whether she know any Aboriginal street youth in Montreal]. ... not that I know of... there's only a few that come down every once and a while but those Native people are more like rockers and they have their own apartments but they go to Pops [Director of Dans la Rue street youth van], you know. But they don't hang around the street, they don't have the money to ... they just have their apartments and they get welfare so ... they can pay for their apartment but they can get food from Pops, so I don't know if they're really street people (p.10, transcript 1).

Throughout the introductory period and the two lengthy interviews for this study Natasha showed a hatred for the institution that bordered on psychosis. When the dialogue brought her back to awareness of her incarceration she would become agitated and desperate. The interviewer would proceed by disclosing similar experiences and Natasha would settle down somewhat and continue to describe her attempts to escape. She related that being on the run was exciting. It was exhilarating to be on the outside. Her lengthy monologue on institutional life and running are enlightening as to the deadening effect of long term closed custody on her and the danger involved in the escape behaviour.

... it was me and my girlfriend and we ran up the hill [mountain] and all we had were these little slippers that we got because we're not allowed to wear shoes in the detention centre ... and it was hard and it was foggy and it was really cold. It was the middle of the night and these slippers have no grip and there's a lot of leaves and ... when you put your foot on the rocks there was mud on the rocks and so you fall and like there's this huge hole of trees and stuff all down there. It was really scary and we got to the top and then... we got all bruises around our ankles and it was all swollen and cut ... Yeah, it did hurt a lot and then when you got scratches from

branches also we were walking in the woods and my friend got a branch and she let it go and she was holding on to it and she let it go and it went right into my eye. I was pulling and I was slipping and falling on the ground. On the highway we saw the patrol cars from the detention centre and the country cops looking for us and they were going up and down. It was foggy and we stayed up on the mountain for about an hour to watch it, to see if they would go away. As we sat there it got foggier and foggier and because you're all the way at the top of the mountain and when we looked down on the highway we couldn't see anything at all. We couldn't even see our hands right in front of our faces. It was really scary. It took about half an hour to go up there and we stayed there for about half an hour, it took us another 45 minutes to get down because the hill was way down on the other side and it goes right straight to the train tracks. When we went down we kept on slipping and slipping and we tried to grab a tree, so you don't fall down more. The tree is so slippery and so your hands don't stay on and when your socks are soaked and the slippers are cheap ... No, but it was kind of fun, cause I like fun things, I like the attention, I like the excitement, and it was great to be out of there. It was nice to do something to get out of this place ... Yeah, we had to plan it or you get caught. I had planned it before a couple of months before but it didn't work at all ... I stole a screw driver from the workshop and I took it home and I tried putting it in but the screw driver didn't fit, so I went back to school the next day and I got another screw driver and I took it back and it fit. I took the bars off my windows. I'd go at separate times and I took the whole bars off my windows and stuck it under my mattress and I closed the blinds and I closed my light ... and you can't see the bars are off or on ... and the last round around campus is around twelve o'clock at night for the whole night so then in the morning they go home and when the security group comes up for the day, so I knew what time that they switched their shift. Sometimes they go around campus and they stop at different houses because they have to lock the doors and make sure nobody comes in and tries to steal ... The night I was gonna go they screwed us up because they go from the garage to the house in the back to the gym, then they go all the way to the school then they go back around the garage area. But this time they went to the duplex then they went to the garage, and it was getting late, and it was almost eleven thirty We were just standing there. We were ready to go ... and we had the sheets ready in the windows ... all dressed in black ... [the night lady came in]. We just pretended that we were sleeping and she closed the door, she didn't say anything So we said, 'screw it' because I thought she knew, so I pulled down the sheets, and was about to go out when the security passes by and ... he was looking at me, like I took all my stuff back in. Then ... 'Let's just run out, let's just go out the door run, run, run.' Because the last time, I just ran out the door and it was easier. She goes, 'No, no, no, don't do it.' It was her first time, you know, she was too scared. So we got caught and the security came. They search me and they brought me to the QR [Quiet Room] and I'm claustrophobic so they stuck me in QR. It's a small room with no windows or anything and they locked the door. I was telling them, 'I can't be in here.' I can't cause I'm claustrophobic and I get scared and I get sick. Yeah, I get panicky and so when I went back to my room they stuck the bars back on the window but they got different screws ... totally different screws you can't get a screw driver for that anywhere in the workshop. I was put on assist for trying to take off from the centre. On assist is a three-day program or it can last for five days or it can last for a month. It sort of depends on your behaviour so you stay in your room, you don't have a dresser, you only have sheets and blankets. That's all in your room, you have

nothing to do. You don't have a clock you have nothing in your room at all. All they give to do is paperwork and more paperwork ... just to keep yourself busy ... but sometimes at night they stop giving me paperwork, so I can just sit there and you don't do nothing. You just start screaming like that, and you just feel the shifts, and you have an extra day in your room. It can last for a long time. If you start behaving really well you're allowed to get out of your room. But if you can pass a whole shift without arguing, screaming, fighting or anything like that you get out sooner. But it depends sometimes three days for fighting. [I have been there] Five, six or seven times ... Yeah, but it's fun when you have a roommate cause ... you can get to still talk to them and ... they have books. When you're on assist the lights go out at eight thirty. I have no idea why we have that stupid rule (p.16-18, transcript 1).

While Natasha seems facetious at times about her escapades the pent up rage is a tangible feature of her being. She expresses a helpless and destructive anger at the system that keeps her prisoner. On being caught she says, "I was just walking around the mall and somebody called the cops ... I really don't know who called the cops on me." If she knew who it was, she says she would try to kill them. "I'm very angry."

When escape is successful Natasha is free. Free to survive on the streets of Montreal, free to mask her pain in drug abuse, free to find people who she feels protect her from a world that does not understand her. Natasha talks about panhandling and deals with the myth that street youth simply use the money they garner from people to buy drugs (most of the people in this study reiterate this fact). She says that anything other than food is secondary.

Some people just look at you when I say, 'Give me some money.' They just look at me like I want to buy drugs or some people will pity me, and they'll give me money some times, or they'll just look at me and walk away. That really pisses me off. Some times when we panhandle on the street, I just feel like standing up and saying, 'Look I'm not going to use this money for drugs at all or alcohol, I need this money for food' (p.31, transcript 1). Sometimes though ... you know what I hate is ... sometimes when you have the money and you're starving to death, or when you have to pan for money and you're starving to death, but people think that you're just a bum and you're just gonna use this money for drugs and for alcohol, you know. But my money that I always get, I always spend it on food, and if I have a little bit left afterwards I use it on whatever else I want to buy, mescaline or whatever, but food always comes first. But when I do get money from the people, I don't know what to do with the money, cause sometimes I keep it and then sometimes I give it away after I've had enough to eat, and after I bought whatever I wanted (p.13, transcript 1).

Natasha is cautious about the services that she uses on the street. She pretty well sticks to street food vans and street youth hostels "who won't call the cops." Natasha talks about some of the services she is familiar with and feels comfortable using. In her dialogue we begin to recognize that Natasha, as in the case of Karen in Vancouver, seems to have at least two people on the street, a street worker and a peer on the street, who protect her (in each case the protectors are male). She gives examples getting help or giving support, while she is on the run, both by agencies and by individuals.

I don't remember what it's called either, but it's just like a food van just like Pops. You can just go there and get some food, but I don't like to use that one. I always like to use Pops because there's more room in it (the van). The other one didn't have much room at all, like half of it in the back was an office and there's only about four feet and everybody is crammed in there. Only about nine people can eat in there. The first one I ever found out was Pops and that's the one I always used. I didn't have no place to stay, and so I go to Pops and I say to him, 'I've no place to stay, nowhere to sleep,' and he showed me a place called Inmage. I stayed there for three days, but after three weeks or two weeks at Inmage I went to Quebec City with some of my friends. We took a car and they have a place Cactus in Quebec City (pp.8-10, transcript 1). Yeah, Pops was helpful, cause they gave you food and everything, and you can get clean syringes, and you can sometimes get food and clothes from them. They'll give you sandwiches to take off the bus with you. When sometimes you go to the other services, when you're on the street, they usually call the cops on you, and they don't give you any food they just let you sleep there. At Inmage I found it was helpful cause they would call Shawbridge where I was supposed to be at and they let them know that I was okay and that was the only thing they would do. The cops weren't allowed to come into the centre. So they would give me food and I was able to wash my clothes, and I was able to take a shower, and I was just able to hang out there (p.7, transcript 1). On the street? Pops, I trust him a lot cause he helped me a lot, he was always talking to me to go back up North (p. 4, transcript 1). Like I have a street brother, you know, somebody that I consider to be my good friend. We share things and we look out for each other (p.4, transcript 1). Danger ... yes, I also protect him from any kind of danger also. But most of the time when I want to protect him I was really stoned, and I still tried though. Because one day I was walking around town with my friend and there was a whole bunch of guys that wanted to beat him up. I saw everybody was pushing him around, so I came around and I just grabbed him, and I just pulled him over and we started walking. I was just saying to him, 'Let's go, let's go,'... I knew if I said anything it wouldn't make any sense and I just had to get him out of that situation. He's 17 and right now he's using drugs. He can only speak French ... and when I'm out on the street I just speak French to him so I can catch up and correct all my French (p.6, transcript 1).

According to her testimony Natasha survives on the street with protection from her "street brothers" and by utilizing street youth services intelligently (in a street wise sense). For instance, she says that during the winter months the institution offers protection from the winter weather.

In the winter, I get caught and I spend my whole winter in the centre, and when summer comes I get out. It's like a standard thing in the winter time, everybody gets caught. All my friends get caught and they're here. I'd stay out of Montreal for a while and go to Quebec City for a while, and then come back to Montreal. When I get out, I go AWOL and that's why I go to Quebec City. Then I spend some time there and by the time I come back to Montreal everybody has stopped looking for me (p.14, transcript 1).

Lest we get the impression that all is well for Natasha once she gets out of her intolerable constraints, into the exhilaration of the hunt, and the wild lifestyle of the streets, she reminds us that no matter where she is she is plagued with confusion and fatigue with regard to her life circumstances. She is too young to have to live in the harsh environment of the streets, even with the anaesthetic effects of illegal drugs. The institution is confining and life with a mother who has not yet acknowledged her abuse is crazy making. Natasha becomes suicidal. Although she mentions only one example in the following quotation, she indicates throughout the interview how close suicidal thoughts are to her in everyday life. She feels invisible. "Nobody really is listening," she says of all of the adults in her life.

I was kinda sick of living on the streets, cause when you live on the street too long, you get tired, you're depressed, you feel like committing suicide. I've tried that, yeah, of course I've tried that. I have the scars here. When I got caught I was in the lock up unit. I was sick of everything, sick of being on the streets, sick of being locked up, sick of everything. I was sick of my world, sick of my mother, she didn't know what the fuck was happening. I never really wanted to die, I just wanted more attention. I never really thought about it [on tape — not in the transcript — extensive dialogue missing]. I did it here, when I was in Shawbridge, when I was put on assist. I was there for a few days and I'd tried with a piece of glass and they found me and they stitched me up and everything. But I guess that I really didn't really want to die, I just wanted the attention. I just didn't feel very good about myself at all. I didn't feel like I was going anywhere and I wasn't happy being here. Now I feel good, I feel better, I'm happier cause I'm gonna be going home soon (p.34-35, transcript 1). I used to feel like that a lot, I used to always want to hurt myself, but now I find it's not worth hurting myself (p.43, transcript 1).

Youth detention centres are conscientious about disseminating information on birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Natasha says she is still a virgin but always carries a condom just in case and she knows not to share needles with anyone.

When I came back from AWOL they brought me to the doctor and they did a check-up on me and said everything was okay. I got my AIDS test there, and I got my blood pressure, but my blood pressure is too low. You know, I wasn't getting enough iron and vitamins and stuff (p.18, transcript 1). [Cactus] I just go there to get syringes and I always use my own syringe, I never share with anybody else and I always get a new one after I finish with it. I break off the tip and I just throw it away in the sewer, in the garbage or something but I never, I never share my needles with anybody (p.8, transcript 1).

As shown by the previous comment, the level of comfort in discussing drug use and protection from HIV due to intravenous drug use is high. Drug abuse is the normal escape for hurting children. While alcohol use is often a peer group activity, the harder drugs are offered to young street youth. Often, as Dale (former street youth from Winnipeg) indicates, they are offered as a bargaining tool for favours that will later be collected. Natasha indicates the effects of her alcohol and drug abuse. The extreme symptoms that she talks about are probably due to abuse combined with poor mental health and lack of proper nutrition.

People that don't live on the street, they don't know anything, but they give me drugs and a little bit of food and they just want to be your friend. It's something like 'you look after me and I'll look after you later.' Yeah, so they can get something from you. So they can use me (p.5, transcript 1). My friends give me the stuff ... they talk to me and they give me mescaline. They gave me everything I would maybe need and they helped me find a place to sleep (p.4, transcript 1). Well, I don't shake that much anymore, but I used to shake more like this — my hands. I couldn't hold anything in my hand without having it shake and my voice was lazy. The staff said it was because of the drugs that I was taking. It's getting better, and I still have it, but I don't have it that much (p. 19, transcript 1).

Natasha is now attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the attempt to confront her problems. She likes the chance to speak out in the confidential atmosphere of the support group. Natasha indicates some change in her attitudes toward drug use and peer group activity. Whether or not she continues to work on personal growth when she leaves the institution will depend on her relationship with her mother. Should the fragile reunion fail, her sobriety will hinge on her return

to the north, to her father or to her grandparents. Luckily, Natasha knows exactly what her choices are (as we will see by later dialogue).

I used to consider them friends because they used to give me mescaline and acid, but I realized when I grew up more they weren't my friends at all (p.5, transcript 1). The first time I came here (Alcoholics Anonymous) I didn't have to say anything at all. Everything that is said in the AA group is confidential, it doesn't go out. So far, nobody said anything and that's pretty good. And they always talk about different topics, like boyfriend's sexual abuse, beatings, or they talk about shame, they talk about guilt, or sometimes they talk about rape. Sometimes they talk about abuse and they talk about abuse in their homes. If you want to talk, you can talk whenever you feel like it. (p.29, transcript 1).

Survival on the streets often makes street youth susceptible to the "easy" money of the prostitution industry. It is not like they have to search for the opportunity. They are approached on a regular basis. Natasha tells of an incident of being approached to work on the street for two pimps. "Do you want to keep on living on the street? Do you always want to be a bum? You don't have to live on the street, you can have beautiful things ... I'm going to make you a woman." She declined the offer. That being the case, it was disconcerting to hear a fifteen year old actually include prostitution in the same sentence as job opportunities. She said that she was too young to have a social insurance number, that jobs at MacDonald's or in a day job agency were not possible. In the same breath she mentioned prostitution as a possibility and quickly retracted the statement to say that she had done it once of her own free will and that she wouldn't do it again. At the time she was thirteen or fourteen.

Any kinds of jobs? Well ... uh, prostitution but I only did that once in my life, and I never ever want to do it again cause, I don't have a pimp and I'd never want to do that again in my life. I just did it by myself cause I needed money. I didn't have no place to go and so this guy comes along and asked me to go into his car and I just jerked off this guy for \$20 ... and after that I just went to MacDonald's and got some chips ... (p.13, transcript 1).

Contrast this account with the complexity of getting a legitimate job.

... there's a place I was going to go to but I came too late. You have to be there at five o'clock in the morning, and you can work through the whole day like cleaning pots and mopping floors, sweeping floors and wiping counters and all that stuff. You get \$20 at the end of the day. I was too late and so I just never bothered going back again. I was gonna work for MacDonald's but I don't have a social insurance card

at all ... I have to wait till I'm sixteen and right now I'm in the process of starting the application. I have to get permission from my mother. Yeah, they gave me a temporary card, and I also have my status card and a birth certificate. I'm not sure exactly how long it's gonna take to get me that card though (p.11-12, transcript 1).

Later Natasha is to retell of the shame that the one act of survival had on her. "I felt so ashamed, I felt disgusting, I felt like committing suicide, I felt dirty, I tried to forget about it." One still has to wonder, however, how safe Natasha is from entering into a prostitution lifestyle when she so nonchalantly drops the phrase "cause I don't have a pimp" in the passage above and has to deal with the effects of the triple oppression that is her legacy. And Natasha is exposed to the lifestyle even in some of the street services she chooses to use.

Passages, I went there a couple of times. They were pretty nice and they let me hang out there. Passages is a centre for some of the hookers on the street, if they want to get off the street for a while or permanently. Yeah, I found them nice but I didn't want to stay there too long because I'm a minor and after twenty four hours they can call the cops. I only went there a couple of times to visit or to go eat or to change my clothes or a for place to sleep ... (p.8, transcript 1).

It appears that Natasha has been exposed to the street life in its harshest form. She does not admit to being absolutely involved but she tells of the presence of drug dealers, prostitutes, johns, poverty, panhandling, drug abuse, exploitation and street violence in her time on the street. In the present, Natasha is biding her time, waiting to go home to her mother. Even so she gives every indication, with a couple days to wait for her release, that she would run instantly if she had half a chance.

When I get to home you know, I'll be more free. Cause this place is driving me up the wall. It drives me crazy. I can't believe it. Maybe a control officer would be okay, cause they come check on you every night to make sure that you're in bed on time, and that's how they help you get off the streets (p.49, transcript 1).

The day after the last interview Natasha was about to leave Shawbridge. They had kept her beyond the legal limit that the law provides. "They can't keep me anymore ... I'm just trying to go home, trying to stay out of trouble ... and stay clean."

Racism

I don't understand why people are so racist against Natives (p.36, transcript 1) ... if somebody needs help then and has been left on the street, there's a lot of people who can be there to help you but that they're racist (p.1, transcript 1).

In her opening statement about Aboriginal street youth Natasha concludes that everyone in a position to help is racist. It appears that Natasha is subjected to ongoing racism. She perceives that her Aboriginal ethnicity is a salient feature of her interpersonal relationships on and off the streets. Although Natasha makes only one reference to herself as being "White Peace." "I'm White Peace now so I can get out." [A group of kids who are proud of being White but believe that others should be proud too.] She does mention a feeling of danger in the presence of skinheads.

Most people on the street don't know I'm Native. They think I'm either Chinese or Greek, and some of them like Indians. On the street, punks, some of them I know that I am Indian and they don't care. Either you're part of the punks or you're part of the skinheads. Punks don't like skinheads, so skinheads and punks don't mix very much. The group I hang out with is mostly punks. I don't hang around much with skinheads, but I know a couple of other friends who are skinheads. The first time I met a skinhead I was fucking scared shitless. He just picked me up and he just slammed me against a wall. But skinheads are cleaner than punks, punks are really dirty. How do I feel about that? Scared, because you never know if they're gonna kill you or if they're gonna rip you off for whatever you've got. But most of the skinheads I know are nice to talk to (p.32, transcript 1).

Natasha tells us about the stereotypes of Aboriginal people that were aimed at her in school and are ever present on the street. She feels that people just don't understand the conditions that have affected Aboriginal people and that mainstream people need to begin to talk with Aboriginal individuals in order to gain more awareness.

There was lots of racism when I was a kid, when I was younger in school in Montreal. I failed so much when I was a kid. Kids used to make fun of me cause I was Indian. My teachers didn't really like me. I was more like alone all the time. People never really wanted to talk to me because I looked different. Because when I was a kid I had much darker skin and I guess I had an accent. Not that much people ever paid attention to me ... [on tape, not in the transcript]. People on the streets, if they saw that I was Native they would say I was just one of those drunken Indians and I couldn't keep a job and I was a rotten runaway and I was always stealing and things like that (p.36, transcript 1). I've seen a lot of people who are racist. Some of them say, 'You fuckin Native,' and walk away. I feel like, why are people so racist, you know. Just like this one person I was talking to, 'I'm Native you know,' and they say, 'Okay I have to go.' Why be so ignorant? That's stupid

cause he got along with me before ... why be racist because of colour? I just find that so stupid. I used to be racist of Blacks because my stepfather molested me. But when I came across other Black people and I found them nice. Because one Black person is like this I don't think all of them are the same [on tape, not in transcript]. They [people in general] probably need Indian people to talk to that understand what they're [Aboriginal people] going through and people that listen too ... Because they don't understand really Native people. Like some of the social workers they just don't understand and they don't know anything about our background (p.45, transcript 1).

Natasha does not go into detail on the subject of differential treatment. She does indicate that racism is a phenomena that she simply does not understand. With respect to street services on the street, however, she makes repeated references that she feels more at ease relating to Aboriginal workers because they know what other Aboriginal people have had to go through. Natasha does not understand why Aboriginal people do not want to talk about their feelings.

She [Aboriginal worker] was okay, cause she spoke Cree also ... It was better cause we have most things in common cause we're Indian, and we know how to communicate. But ... like Barry [friend], he's White so he doesn't know very much about Indians ... Well cause they've [Aboriginal people] never had a family where you talk about their feelings, like at night you don't talk about it, why did he do this and why did you feel this and ... why are you angry ... Yeah, I'd say it would be better if they had a social centre for kids where Indian workers should be working there, so the kids would feel more comfortable with another Indian worker instead of speaking to a White female, you know. Cause there's lot of Indian little girls and that they don't talk very much you know And that's quite common with a lot of Indian kids ... Well some of them are alcoholics — most of them are alcoholics — their parents. I think, they should have like a Alcoholics Anonymous up North to make them try to help them to stop drinking ... They have nothing — absolutely nothing.

Culture and identity

I feel proud to be Native. I don't see why people should be racist about other people (p.36, transcript 1).

Natasha presents a very interesting picture of a young woman who has been brought up in a very esoteric type of traditional Aboriginal environment rich with myth and ceremony and close to nature. She has had extensive influence from her grandparents and she is highly respectful towards them. "Yeah, the wisest people I know are my grandmother and my grandfather. Because they know a lot more than I do about their culture and about their environment where they're living

in." Her wish is to go home for a visit and to go camping with her grandparents. On the other hand, Natasha, a very intelligent and articulate person, sings, she speaks English, French and Cree, and she has lived in the urban environment, in institutions and on the street. There is an other sidedness about her. In this urban environment she is angry, injured and destructive; when she begins to relate stories about the spirits and mysteries in her culture she becomes involved, bright and positive.

Natasha's identity as an Aboriginal person, while seemingly intact, is in a state of tension. She expresses rage and sorrow about racism, she wants to go home and yet her mother lives in the city and she loves the big city excitement. "I don't feel Native anymore cause I can speak English now and I can speak pretty good French. I just don't know, I just feel White." She says this is due to the fact that "in the last couple of years since I've been at Shawbridge, I've been around a lot of White people, it's mostly White ... White, White, White."

In school, Natasha says, she did not learn anything about Aboriginal history or her culture. Her attitude, in telling about this omission, was openly hostile. "History, no, it was mostly about Romans and Vikings," she makes an expression of disgust. "The only other things was Christopher Columbus and Christians." The invisibility that results from the overt racism that Natasha describes and the lack of Aboriginal presence in the school curriculum would have profound effect on a child who is estranged from family, community and culture.

Natasha gets extremely confusing messages from her traditional grandparents, whom she idealizes, and from an addicted mother struggling to straighten out her life, whom she desperately wants to go home to. Her mother told the interviewer that all the Aboriginal people her kids had contact with were no-good and a bad influence and that she didn't want her kids hanging around Aboriginal people. She would let Natasha hang around those Aboriginal people who had an education, but she didn't know any.

Natasha expresses great sorrow about the socio-economic state of her reserve environment, the lack of opportunity and stimulating activities for youth, and the extensive abuse of alcohol. Natasha retells of attending funerals of people who died in senseless alcohol related deaths. Unlike Noella (Winnipeg participant), who has little general knowledge of life on the reserve and who sees few redeeming qualities of the people there, Natasha recognizes the lack of opportunity and of services up north. She also says that not all people live in poverty and dysfunction. Natasha indicates also that she knows that there are reasons buried in the past that explain the conditions experienced by her people. The difference is that Natasha still identifies favourably with her community — culturally and spiritually — but she dislikes the lack of opportunity.

And, I was there and I was crying cause it was hopeless, there's nothing — anything for Indian people up North, to help them stop drinking or like Alcoholics Anonymous ... (p.27-28, transcript 1). Nothing was really going on there up North. Kids weren't allowed to stay out after nine o'clock. The cops up North are Indians, so they go around all around the reserve looking for the kids. Like after nine, if they get caught after nine, they just grab you as you're walking along the roads and they bring them back home, and they get a fine for it ... (p.3, transcript 1). Yeah, but sometimes, some of them are okay, some of them have good money, they have good houses, they don't drink, they just drink at parties and stuff like that. But other families, the kids are starving because the father is beating up on the mother, and they're beating the kids, and they spend all their money on their alcohol. Which is disgusting (p.29, transcript 1). I think it's because a long time ago we didn't have an Indian school, priests and nuns or anything so people just felt a loss when they didn't know who to talk to (p.45, transcript 1).

When the subject of Aboriginal culture surfaces Natasha begins to tell stories, she takes on a different aura and becomes very esoteric. After a lengthy session of Natasha telling Aboriginal stories, she says that "No White man has ever heard or seen any of this Indian stuff, I don't know why." Excerpts of her stories shows the extent of Natasha's belief in the spiritual elements of her culture.

... there was a little hawk, a little Indian bird. If you stop and he'll come to you and he'll talk to you. If you're a good person, he'll give you good power — magic. If you are bad person, he'll give you evil power ... And then there's this big gust of wind, and he started walking back. All of a sudden somebody, a small person, said something to him. He said that if you stayed there you're a good person and I'll give you good powers and I believe in it, cause it's my culture. I believe that nobody would go around telling stupid stories like that [for nothing]. There was one time at

the reserve a long time ago, my aunt was sitting with my grandmother in the kitchen and they had peas on the stove and my uncle was in the kitchen. He looked out the window and he saw a little little person walking and he thought it was a little kid in the middle of the night. He looked out and he saw somebody walking and walking around, and he ran out and he started trying to get this little person, but then he disappeared by that time. But it was in the winter time and he saw the tracks of little little feet — but wide. You could tell he was wearing moccasins, because moccasins sometimes make tracks like that. It was really small feet but wide, like babies' feet, but wide, very wide. There was nobody with that type of feet at all. There's another time my brother Dave ... All of a sudden, a big, big, big giant came in his dream, and he was taller than a tree and he was walking around, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM. He was just looking and he said, 'Holy mackerel.' He didn't know where to hide. The giant he was just looking for somebody, you know, and the next day when he woke up, he heard somebody died and that the police were trying to figure out how he died. He was only like twenty or something. I don't know, they have no idea how he died, probably had a heart attack. His sister and my sister Tina had the same dream. And my grandmother said, 'It's probably, it's cause the big giant was looking for somebody and the giant was really there, and when he saw somebody he was going to grab and when the person saw him the person died of heart attack.' This happens to me, it happens to my sister Tina and it happens to my brother and at night sometimes when we sleep ... feels it go like a spirit walking around him the whole night. It happens here in Montreal and up North or whatever, but the spirit was walking around at night. I told this to my grandmother and my grandfather, and my grandfather said, 'If you panic too much, it's like it's the soul that comes over you, then your soul is going to be captured by a beast and you have no way to go to heaven right now," or whatever. Me, it doesn't happen that way with me. Sometimes it doesn't always happen, but when I go to bed some times and try fall asleep, I feel my bed shake. I just feel like the bed is shaking, if I open my eyes, it's still shaking, if I get up, it's still shaking my bed all the time, not all the time but it happens like once every six months, but I never told anybody really, but I only told my brother (pp.38-39, transcript 1).

Natasha feels confused about her identity (demonstrated in her vacillation between feeling White and also feeling proud to be Aboriginal) but she is firm about what she sees as Aboriginal culture. She says the difference between White people's way and the Aboriginal way is, "Well, the Native way is very, very spiritual." She doesn't understand racism and wants a safe environment. She would like to go back to the old way and she would bring up her children in this environment.

Yeah, I want them to grow in a safe environment place where there's no alcohol and no kinds of abuse and that's why we have the curfew at 9 o'clock. A lot of times, the kids ... that's the reason why they leave the reserve and they go to Montreal (p.39, transcript 1).

When Natasha was asked to give an opinion on how to revive and preserve Aboriginal culture she answers that language is one of the critical elements, that every effort must be made to

save it. "I don't know, there's a lot of Indians that can't speak Cree or their own language anymore ... I mean teach them to speak" Natasha is trilingual and feels that language is important. Secondly she believes that elders must be approached to teach people the traditional ways. Her third comment indicates a protectionist stance whereby she thinks that any influence of White culture ought to be minimized.

I'd buy a big piece of land but there wouldn't be any White people, we would allow White tourists but we don't allow White people to live there because as soon as White people live there everything becomes White, White, White and White (p.39, transcript 1).

Back in the present, when asked how she could make her life better, Natasha replied, "Go back up North and live with my grandmother and my grandfather ... I love to go up North to go visit my father." She's not sure that she would feel fulfilled up North but this seems to be the lesser of two evils. Natasha seems genuinely unsettled about what is best for her. Ideally she should reunite with her mother, now that her stepfather is out of the home, but her mother continues to abuse drugs and live an unstable life style. Going back to her grandparents is not entirely unpalatable; however, she hates the reserve. There is nothing to do for a young woman who has been around. Natasha leaves open the possibility of exploring a relationship with her father.

Cause I never seen my father in my life and I just start talking to him a couple of weeks ago — no, last week. I found out his address from my mother so I sent him a picture and I stuffed it in my letter, and I put my phone number and address here and I sent it up North. He got it and he phoned me and I said, 'Oh, my God, I haven't seen you for so long.' I told him I wanted to go visit him for his birthday and stuff like that ... I forgot. I don't have my letter anymore. But I am going, I am fifteen years old now and I can go up and see him. Yeah, he said he was going to try to get me out but I'd have to do my part too ... He'll just help me get out of here (p.43, transcript 1).

The bright lights of the city beckon to Natasha in equal force to her need to go back up north where she identifies. This assimilating alienating phenomena — the choice between the urban wasteland and marginalized rural racism and poverty — is the fiercest modern dilemma that confronts Aboriginal youth from Aboriginal communities. Urban Aboriginal youth in dysfunctional

settings have no tangible choice. Natasha demonstrates the dilemma clearly in the following statement.

Yeah ... now I feel I belong here. I don't know. I'm not sure. I'm lost between the Whites and the Indians. I'd still like to live in Montreal but I find that it's not a very good place for me, but I'd like to go up North too so, I don't know (p.43, transcript 1).

Society

Yeah, there's a lot, there's a lot of those [perverts] on the streets right now, people driving in their cars, looking at you, chasing after you with their cars (p.23, transcript 1)

Unlike other street youth participants in this study, Natasha is very much preoccupied with her institutionalization and getting out, and not about removed philosophical arguments about what is wrong with urban society. How would she fix things? At first she simply says "I don't know" to a question about how she would advise the government to improve conditions for street youth. There seems to be an unwritten, unspoken code of not speaking to any authority, especially the government, about anything. Certainly, other case study participants indicated this phenomena, especially in the younger age group. Natasha, however, does corroborate the views of many of the participants about the street youth environment being over run with sexual predators.

I was going down to Cactus and there was this long road, it's like downtown, but there's like a little street and it's all black. There's hardly any lights. So I was walking on there and I saw a car, and somebody was looking at me in the car so I started walking away. He started waving at me and calling to me and I just kept on walking and I got to Cactus. I thought the car was gone, so I started walking right down town street. He was right at the corner of the street, and he's waving me over. I just wanted to see what he was going to do, so I opened the door but I didn't go in. I didn't sit in ... never in my life. He goes, 'I'll give you as much money as you want if you get in and you jerk me off,' and I go, 'No' and I just closed the door and I left. I think it's so stupid, how he would want to touch a fifteen year old and he's like sixty years old (p.23, transcript 1).

Natasha comments on the child care system and the way children get lost in the maze of laws, programs and workers. She sees the value of having one primary worker who would at least have a vested interest in tracing the developments of the child who is having difficulties in life. She

seems to indicate in different places in the interview that she means social workers from home communities.

I mean this poor kid always getting into trouble and you know you can't keep your nose clean ... they switch you to different places and you never stay in one place for very long. Like I'm a bag of potatoes or something. Like if I say if a new kid comes to the system, they should always have a social worker stick with them, stay with them until we get out of the system so they know what's really going on with them. Cause most of them are really tired of being exchanged by the social workers and changing lawyers and they change people and blah blah blah. What they don't change is the judges. You should really have somebody like a social worker that stays with you, like know what's going with you everyday ... Because judges don't stay with you, the only time you know they see you is when you go to court. All they do is repeat whatever is on your file and they don't know who you are, they don't know how you're like. They don't know anything about you at all (p.48, transcript 1).

Going home is the one thing that Natasha is looking forward to and she wants only to get out of the institution, off the street and into a "normal" life. She describes, almost like a fantasy, the life she will begin as soon as she gets out.

First when I get out I'll have to help my mother move ...Yeah, cause my stepfather is not living there any more, and so I feel safer about staying there and I find it easier to relate to my mother ... Yeah, as long as I get out of here, as long as I get to go home ... I'd end up changing my lifestyle, I would dress the way I wanted to dress. I would go to school. I wouldn't hang around with friends that I hang out with. I'd live in a different area and I'd just become a different person ... I'd like to wear the ruffles on my blouse. I'd grow my hair long and I'd start wearing some make-up. That type of thing. I'd stop taking drugs and I'd stop drinking and I'd quit smoking and I'd just listen to my mother more and go to school (p.34, transcript 1).

Natasha does not have a clear vision of her future as an working adult. She does want a normal life, to go to school, get a job, with marriage and children, and simply to love life. As we have heard from her, she would like to return to a traditional lifestyle somewhere where children are safe. Natasha, once again, becomes sullen and she expresses gloom about the real world within which she must navigate. Like many kids she is uncertain about how she will achieve the things that she dreams about in a complex modern world.

I don't know what to do with my life. I don't know ... I don't know I guess get a job, I have no idea ... I never thought about going to school, I never liked it very much and I was never very good at it (p.50, transcript 1).

At the end of the last interview the interviewer asked what Natasha thought would actually happen. Natasha said, "I don't know, drugs are in my system, I need them, I'll probably die young." "She was looking at me very frankly and right in the eyes," said the interviewer. Natasha, by November 1993, had gone AWOL and was reportedly in bad trouble of some kind — she was found on prostitution strip. She was then placed into very strict detention centre (Jean Sauve Detention Centre). Shawbridge is nothing compared to this place.

CHARNELLE

I like doing things like running around. Just hanging around having a good time. I'm a very hyper girl. That's me (p.9, transcript 1).

Charnelle is a thirteen year old girl of Inuit ancestry who was born in Frobisher Bay, Quebec. She is 5'7" tall and weighs about 140 pounds, she looks like an 18 year old. "They think I'm older but I'm not," she says. Charnelle has accented Inuit features, a very dark pretty face (due to African American heritage, see history) with slanted brown eyes, and long straight dark hair usually tied up in a pony tail (she wears bangs). She doesn't wear make-up. At each interview she wore the modern day teen fashion — made up of big baggy jeans, t-shirt and Reeboks.

Charnelle is basically a very friendly and optimistic person who knows what she wants and is very direct in her expression. This directness can seem abrasive at times. This may be the reason that her primary worker doesn't like her at all. Charnelle is a synchronized swimmer and very much into sports of all kinds, and shows considerable artistic abilities. She draws very well. Charnelle is very intelligent and achieves at least an 80% average in her grade eight class; however, school bores her. Charnelle is trilingual — English, French and she understands her own language. Someday she wants to be a marine biologist.

We had interviewed Charnelle in June 1993 and due to technical difficulties we needed to reschedule an interview with her in November later in the year. In June Charnelle was at Shawbridge Detention Centre. She had run away, been recaptured, sent to Jean Sauve Detention Centre and now was in a group home. The second interview took place at the group home. A

casual atmosphere permeated the house which had a cozy kitchen, a pooltable downstairs, a large back yard, basketball hoops in the yard, a piano in the living room where the workers coming on shift brought videos for the evening's entertainment. Charnelle's room was pleasantly decorated around a bed, a dresser with a large mirror and a desk.

Charnelle is a very today type of person. Even with her sunny disposition her situation depresses her, and at times she can become listless. She wants nothing more than to go home where someone loves her, but she does not harbour any deep-seated anger that we could detect from the interview. This young girl is very different from Natasha, who we met in the last case study.

History

I think I'm related to almost everybody. There's lots and lots of people (p.27, transcript 1).

Charnelle, her sisters and her mother left Frobisher Bay and moved down to Montreal when Charnelle was too small to remember (possibly at age 4). Her father stayed in the North. Her parents separated but never divorced. Her father now lives in Cape Dorsett, Quebec within another family. When Charnelle is home she lives with her mother and two sisters, ages 14 and 16, who have "never been in trouble." Charnelle lists one brother on her face sheet. He is a young man who has informally stayed with them for years but is not legally adopted. Both Charnelle's parents identify as Inuit. Her father is full Inuit, while her mother has African American ancestry. Her maternal grandfather was a African American man from Montana, who died when she was six years old.

Charnelle does not clearly remember her own father whom she has not seen in 6 years. He has not spoken with her in over a year — she is bitter about this.

I don't know. I haven't spoken to him for a couple of years. Like he called ... I think it was last year for my birthday. He wished me Happy Birthday. He's a man that says something, but doesn't do it. All talk but no action. I haven't spoken to him for the longest time. My birthday is coming up in February, he's probably not going to call me or send me a card even. He hasn't sent me a card for I don't know

how long. He hasn't written a letter. He hasn't called. I don't really talk to him. I don't really like him for that, but I can't say I don't like him, because I don't know him. I hate him, when he heard I was in Jean Sauve he had the nerve to tell my mom, 'I want her home' (p.25, transcript 1).

There is some animosity toward the father, from mother and daughter. They speak harshly about his current lifestyle with his family, consisting of five children (mostly adopted). "She's a witch," Charnelle says of her father's partner, "she tried to kill him." She does not indicate at any time that he abuses alcohol. In fact, later in the interview she seems to indicate that he does not use alcohol or at least he helped to instill caution about alcohol abuse in his daughter.

Charnelle hasn't been back to Frobisher Bay for six years although her mother went home for a visit in the past year. Her memories of the place, however, are pleasant. She remembers skiing and sliding down the mountain with her cousins. She has many relatives there.

My cousins. I have so many cousins. God, it's weird. I have cousins up there. They all live around the same community ... My cousin lived up the road in one of the buildings and one of my cousins lived up the road in one of the other buildings. I think I'm related to almost everybody. There's lots and lots of people (p.27, transcript 1).

So how did she end up at Shawbridge and later at the group home? Charnelle attended Rosemount High School in Montreal, but was not allowed to return because she missed too much school. Also she went AWOL from home, she was sent to Luchene Shelter, where she ran "very often." "They got tired of it and put me in Jean Sauve [Jean Sauve is a strict detention centre] for a month, I got out and they put me in another shelter, again I AWOLed ... and then they put me in Shawbridge." In September 1993 she was sent to the group home, where she will stay until her release in February 1994.

On the streets

I'm just there. Just walk around, but not really a street person (p.3, transcript 1).

Charnelle began staying away from home at age twelve, she began staying over with older male friends (ages 16 and 18), one of whom lives on his own. The first jaunt lasted twelve days. Her mother reported her missing. In the meantime Charnelle's friends fed her, while she just hung

out. Sometimes she would go to a family friend's house to eat. Charnelle fits into the "in and out" category of runaways. She, in effect, lives at home — with varying lengths of absences. She does not use food banks, she did not live in squats, or panhandle, neither did she qualify for welfare because she was too young. It appears that mother and daughter had a communication problem which they have since begun to deal with. "I wasn't getting along with my mom, because like we weren't talking too often and now we're talking almost every day. She asks what I'm doing. It's getting good between me and my mom."

Charnelle's behavior is a mixture of seeking adventure and a call for attention. She describes her flight to freedom in this way:

I AWOLed from Luchene Shelter after I AWOLed from home. They put me in Luchene Shelter, so I AWOLed very often... so they put me in Jean Sauve for a month, then I got out. They put me in [another detention centre] and then I AWOLed from [there] and they put me in Jean Suave again, then they put me in Shawbridge" (p.3, transcript 1).

Charnelle's outward behavior began as peer motivated attempts at freedom. To her going missing is just a teen thing to do. "This generation is more mature, they mature faster. Most of my friends are like me. Two of my best friends were at Shawbridge with me — the same age. That's what's happening," she adds matter-of-factly. Another reason may be that she had experienced sexual abuse as a young child.

Yeah, when I was living with my mom's boyfriend. My mom's boyfriend, he molested me and my sister, but I never really got raped by anything entering anything. He was touching me more ... [I felt] Uncomfortable. I used to cry, but now he's in jail ... I told my social worker and then I told my mom about it. We went to court and he went to jail. I don't know when he's coming out. He went to jail for five years ... When I do think about it, I tell my mom. She tries to get me to talk about it more. Then I talk about it a bit, but I don't think about things like that. I hardly ever think about it because I don't remember it too well. I was young (pp.34-35, transcript 1).

The fact that her mother supported her at the time of the crime and thereafter, and the fact that she saw that the perpetrator experienced consequences for his action, have allowed her to move on with her life.

Charnelle's life right now is, however, made of running and institutional care. On her face sheet she filled out all of the categories which show social service institutional care she has used in the last year (see appendix D, question 10). During her time away from home and away from detention she hangs out with friends and downtown on the streets. Although her life is not as harrowing and survival-oriented as some of the street youth we have met in this study, the potential for serious life-long or life-threatening consequences await her at every corner.

Charnelle tells of the strong pressures for engaging in sexual activity. "Guys here is sex, sex, sex." In an era where AIDS is a real possibility, this is dangerous enough. But when she tells about a guy who pulled a gun on her and insisted on sex, that is a different matter.

He took the gun out and he said, 'If you don't have sex with me I'm going to kill you.' And I said, 'You can kill me because I'm not going to have sex with you.' He said, 'Yeah, yeah.' He goes like this, shoots to the door. It went out right through the door (p.29, transcript 1).

Charnelle was on the pill but couldn't remember to take them regularly, now she uses condoms with no problems, she indicates that she knows the dangers of STD's [sexually transmitted disease] and AIDS. "... no venereal disease or anything or HIV or any of those nasty STDs. I don't like those."

Charnelle is young and doesn't talk extensively about drug abuse in her network of friends. She admits to experimentation.

I used to take drugs, nothing bad, just like weed. I tried and I used to take it if I could get some. But not anymore. I don't feel good like that. And I don't take anything else because it really rips up your life (pp.8-9, transcript 1).

She indicates that her mother talks with her children about drug abuse and that she can have fun without drugs. Later in the interview she laments about general Aboriginal alcohol abuse by saying she wonders why they don't have parents like hers. "I was brought up not to drink, so when I see these people, I say, 'How come their moms couldn't be like mine?' or 'How come their fathers couldn't be like mine?' I don't think it's good to drink ... it's weird."

When we asked if anything happened to her that she thinks might not have happened to other youth on the street she replied,

Nope. Because I heard that lots of people get put out on the street for prostitution. People make them for drugs. I never went on the street for prostitution. I never sold drugs. I might of took drugs, but I never sold any ... because I don't really want to get in trouble (p.9, transcript 1).

Charnelle does not talk about crime in a familiar way. When asked about shame, guilt and anger she answers like a child with little but early teen concerns to worry about. Her greatest shame is having slept with her girlfriend's boyfriend. She has a distinct lack of rage and shame that is likely a reflection of the support Charnelle received in her abuse case and her mother's concerned involvement in her welfare. Charnelle shows an intelligent note of caution in her dealings on the street. Contact with street workers, outside of her primary worker, has been minimal. She does not know any Aboriginal street workers.

Even though Charnelle has not had experience with death in her immediate peer group on the street or in the detention centres she has known sadness at the suicide of her mother's ex-boyfriend and a twenty year old cousin in the last year. She has fond memories of her cousin.

I didn't really know my cousin, but he, when he came down to go to the hospital or something, I met him when he stayed at my house. I really liked this guy because he was really funny. We played basketball together. He played basketball with my friends. He was so funny because he was really beating us. He was a nice guy and when I found out he died, I was, like, oh my God. I was, like, really freaking out because I didn't really know him. What I've seen him to be, he's a really nice guy (p.31, transcript 1).

The prognosis for Charnelle's repatriation and likelihood that she will stay off the street is good. At least she has begun to talk with her mother and is taking responsibility for her behavior. She has begun to make plans for behavioral guidelines when she returns home and she has weekend home visits. And mother and daughter are attending weekly meetings with a counsellor to help them communicate.

Me and mom went to an interview on Thursday with my social worker and made rules for me if I go home on weekends because my mom works on weekends, because usually on Fridays I go out ... to a dance. I'm fighting to be home back by one after a dance. And if I don't go to a dance, I have to be home by 11. And I have to eat first and do my chores first. Saturdays, I have to be home by supper, have to eat, have to do my chores and then I can go out until 11. On Sundays, my mom doesn't like me going out at all because I have to get ready to go back. But

if I do go, I have to be back by 3 or something like that ... It's what I got to live with it. But I think it will be good for me because when I go home I can listen more. Usually, I don't really listen to my mom and I don't really listen to my curfew, and now I think I should just listen. Would be better for me. ... Oh gosh, it makes me feel responsible. I would say I do something like, 'I'm not supposed to do this. I should call my mom.' It so different now because usually I don't call my mom, I don't think about my mom and now it's like, 'I should call my mom, I should go home, oh my God, what time is it? Am I going to be late? Is my mom going to scream at me? Oh my God, I better go home now.' It's weird (p.12, transcript 1).

Charnelle is doing everything she can to get her mother's trust back. "I want to get out," she says of the group home. Although Charnelle and Natasha know each other they are like day and night. Natasha is a victim to drugs, doesn't trust her mother, cannot communicate with her mom nor does she have her support. Natasha has the added difficulties of so much rage to deal with and severe depression about her institutionalization. Charnelle is antsy about getting out in February 1994 and going back to school but there is a feeling of hope and love that is evident in her voice. Charnelle had matured in a span of four months and had developed a realistic view about her future.

I've calmed down. I don't get into as much fights and I don't talk to many people that get me in trouble. And the people that I used to talk to that got me in trouble, don't get into trouble or if they do, they don't call me very much any more. I don't speak to them any more (p.4, transcript 1).

The interview ended pleasantly with Charnelle and a group home worker driving the interviewer back home.

Racism

They mistake me for a black person. Hey negro! (on tape only).

Charnelle talks extensively about the racism manifested in her life. She does not tell of dramatic confrontations in squats or life threatening encounters with police or skinheads; she does however, give us insight of the everyday experience of a young child at school and on the street. The normality of racial harassment and the silent coping with self-esteem murder is frightening. And out of the participants in this study, Charnelle is the lucky one. She has the invisible protection of caring from her mom. As stated before, Charnelle has mixed heritage, Inuit and African American (although she does not explicitly say so, her Black heritage may be Jamaican). As a result of this she

experiences racial harassment on both accounts, first for being African American because her dark skin is a prominent feature. Secondly, she is also visibly Inuit and this is how she ultimately identifies. Most of her friends though are African American. This is where she feels most comfortable in the city. (There are few Inuit youth in Montreal.) Charnelle indicates that her dark colour is also an issue when she is with Aboriginal people. "Because I'm so dark and my mom's dark, it's like these people are looking at me. It's weird because I'm not around too many Aboriginal people."

Shopkeepers in particular manifest the suspicion of "coloured" people in this society. All of the participants report negative reactions, ranging from mild to harsh, from the commercial sector. Some of the abusive behavior is meted out to street youth in general because of poor hygiene and ragged clothing, but in the perception of Aboriginal youth racial factors play a large part.

They keep following me around because most of my friends are Black and they keep a good watch on them too. Usually the stores that don't make you put the bags at the cash tell us to put our bags at the cash. They think that all Black people steal and all that. They really don't understand ... (pp.10-11, transcript 1).

She believes this constant surveillance is racism.

Charnelle told us about racial harassment in school in 1990 when the Oka crisis was brewing in Quebec. She became subject to name calling and threatening behavior from fellow students in a Montreal elementary school. She goes on to explain the kind of stereotypes that she has to put up with and how they affect her.

When I was in grade school. When the Oka or Kanawakae was happening and that siege was happening. People in my school knew I was Native and they started calling me names. 'You Native this, you Native that. It's all your fault that this has stirred up,' and something about becoming a real troublemaker (p.15, transcript 1). Once in a while [at school] I tell them I'm Native and they say, 'Oh, they kind of look funny,' but I don't really notice those things. They shouldn't bother me but it does ... [How does that make you feel?] Uncomfortable, makes me want to go, 'Oh, don't you do that to me. It's not my fault.' People are ignorant, very ignorant, gosh it's disgusting. All we're trying to do is save our land. Usually, let's say me and my friends are sitting around talking about Inuits and Indians and all those things that, saying how White people are trying to portray Inuits and Indians, because White people saying that Inuit live in igloos. And if you say that we lived in houses, they'll be like, 'I thought you lived in igloos.' And if they find out we have microwaves,

we make jokes about it. 'Yeah, we have microwaves in our igloo, and Hydro Quebec pays for our Hydro'... we make a big thing out of it. People feel so weird after it (p.15, transcript 1).

When asked how she copes with stereotypes she says,

Usually, I just punch them out. But now, whenever anybody comes up to me, I try to talk to them and I try tell them it's not because I'm Inuit, it's not because of anything, people are just trying to be racist. You know, just walk away and not say anything (p.16, transcript 1).

Although Charnelle is later to tell us that she has no role models, she demonstrates in the following passage that she distinguishes between hero worship and adopting ordinary role models that make one believe in the inherent abilities of one's own people, that Aboriginal people can do anything they set out to do. Charnelle articulates the mainstream images that Aboriginal children have to surmount in their quest for self-esteem. She astutely tells us how important it is to have role models in the professions and in the mainstream media.

I'd like to be a marine biologist. Because they don't think that Natives are smart, right? They don't think that Natives can do anything, they don't think they're smart enough even to be a teacher. I know a couple of Natives that are a lot smarter than most White people ... I think that they got somewhere in their life, and the White people don't see this. They just see the poor little Inuit boy sitting on the corner with his father pissed drunk in the bar. That's all they see. Yeah, because, like what most White people see is drunk Natives and they think that's all they do, and that's why they're all bums and they say that they're never going to get anywhere in life, but there are some Natives that are in movies. There are some Natives that are lawyers. There's some Natives that are doctors. They don't see those people. All they see is the people that are drunk ... They're just there because they live here. They don't see the people that are successful (pp.23-24, transcript 1).

Charnelle discusses how she doesn't know enough Aboriginal history and what she does know is not very complementary to Aboriginal people. "I know that we traded our lives for alcohol and all that," she says of the impression that is reenforced by her social studies courses in school. She also has difficulty in finding Aboriginal history written from an Aboriginal perspective — by Aboriginal people.

I don't really know too much about Aboriginal history or Inuit history because I can't find any books about it. Because usually I go to the library, there's White history, there's European history, there's Spanish history, all this other history except for Aboriginal history. Maybe they don't think that it's important (p.17, transcript 1).

She wants to read the real truth written by Aboriginal people. Charnelle talks about land appropriation and unjust treatment of her people.

Certainly not the White people because they'll say they didn't do this and that, but if the Native people were to, they'd write everything bad. Like the White people bringing over alcohol for when they trade. All these, first, were little dinky things. Because in the past ... I've read a couple of things that they sold furs, like, I don't know, a pile of furs for one rifle. I think that White people really cheated them out of what they could have gotten, what they should have gotten. Yeah, I don't think that they're being taken seriously because remember the thing about the golf course? It's their land, right? So, they want a golf course, they should put it somewhere else because a golf course, there's so many around. A golf course? What's that going to do to the world? They need that land to make houses ... but the White people don't take them seriously. They just keep on pushing them out. I don't think that's good (p.21-22, transcript 1).

Charnelle alludes to Aboriginal alcoholism being a result of bad treatment in Canadian society. She thinks Aboriginal people abuse alcohol in order to feel better about themselves; however, she says that individual responsibility is also a part of the problem.

I think they drink because White man introduced it to them and they drink and it makes them feel good. So, they drink and when they don't drink, they feel weird, so they keep drinking and drinking and they get to the point where they have to drink and they have to have a beer and they have to try to get one. So, I think it's part of the White man's fault, but the other part would be the Inuit's fault or the Indian's fault, because they're taking it and drinking it and making their life out of it. If we didn't have alcohol, it wouldn't be as bad. It's both of their faults (p.22, transcript 1).

Charnelle shows intelligence and courage in dealing with the pressure of stereotypes, cultural racism and the burden to defend Aboriginal struggles depicted in the media. It is a wonder that she does not exhibit a great amount of self-hatred. She does, however, feel different talking to Aboriginal workers, "because I'm so used to talking to White people. It's weird. I don't really talk to Native people because I don't really know too many." On the other hand, she says, "Native people are a lot more understanding." She, like other youth in the study, feels like Aboriginal people "know what we've been through." She admits some shame when she sees drunk Aboriginal people on the street. "What most White people see are drunk Natives." Some evidence of

internalized racism surfaces when she refers to her colour in a hushed sort of way. "She has the colour also," she says about her aunt at one point in the interview.

Charnelle also begins to share that in the detention centre youth from all cultures come together and begin to understand that all people are alike in some ways. She likes the experience of getting to know other people's culture. Charnelle corroborates that there are mixed messages for her as an Aboriginal person in that she is subject to racial stereotypes and yet somewhere in the message the perpetrators also want to give some respect to First Nations because they were here first. Even this small confused measure of respect would enhance the self esteem of healthier Aboriginal children. For others it makes for angry youth. Charnelle indicates just how much mainstream ignorance of Aboriginal issues and history hurts her by her answer to a question we asked each participant. [Is there anything you want to talk about that you don't think we covered?] She answers "Not really except ..."

Like kids ... people say they live in igloos, they live in tents, they live in teepees, they dance around the fire going ah, ah, ah like that? They shouldn't think about that. They should just think about they're the same people as that. They live in the same place, they have the same clothes, they eat the same food, except for some things may be different ... And they don't see the person. And they might just say all these people are troublemakers and they don't care. People in Shawbridge, they care. Because they don't like prejudice. They're not prejudiced at all. They like every kind of faith. And people say they don't like the Jamaican, they don't like Haitians because of their colour, but I don't think that's right. But when it comes to Native people, they think that they're really, really powerful, because you were here first ... but in Shawbridge you live with them and you can learn how they talk and ... you could see how friendly they are (p.40, transcript 1).

Culture and identity

I don't feel any different as any other person. If I'm happy, then I feel happy. It doesn't feel weird. The fact that I'm Inuit, I say it with pride. I say I'm Inuit and I'm happy to be one (p.16, transcript 1).

Although Charnelle identifies as Inuit and her personal self-esteem is intact, she seems culturally estranged. She has superficial contact with Aboriginal people through her mother's attendance at functions at the Montreal Friendship Centre and she remains uncomfortable with Aboriginal people (who are not from up north). Charnelle hangs out with Black youth in Montreal

and says that her discomfort around Aboriginal people is due to lack of contact. "I was brought up around White people and Black people," she says. "I'm proud and should be happy, even if I'm Native we could be friends. It's hard for me ... I can't talk because I'm shy." Only once she mentions that her reticence around Aboriginal people may be because of her darkness and the attention that gets.

Her mother speaks Inuktitut and works in Montreal translating for people who come from the north to receive services. Charnelle understands her language and she could probably speak if she had to. In their home, they use sweet grass on a regular basis and they get regular shipments of dried caribou meat from the north. She identifies this unique food as part of her culture.

Yes, most kids I know, eat — like White food. I was brought up on Inuit food. By the time I ate this kind of meat and that kind of meat, I'll start grossing out. I think I'm different in that way (p.19, transcript 1).

Charnelle recognizes that there are significant cultural differences in world view and in the expression of interpersonal relationships. She indicates that she appreciates the difference and identifies more with the basis of equality in Aboriginal philosophy. The first difference that directly affects her as a youth in the city is peer pressure to engage in sexual activity. She contrasts the pressure to have sex down south to up north. "It's good up there because they don't, they're not introducing you to guys pushing you to have sex like that kind of thing."

A Native community would all know each other. They wouldn't, like, reject each other, but in a White community, if you don't like what they dress, if you don't like their food, if you don't like the way they're living, like, if there's a poor part of town and there's a rich part of town, you wouldn't like them because they're poor or rich. And most of them are hypocrites, because, like, they say something and then they go and say something else, then the other person tells the first thing and they don't admit to it ... In the Native community, if you say something about somebody, you say it straight to their face, because you all know each other because you're almost all related. So there's some differences because White people think they're all it. They're up there, they're superior, and in the Native community, they're all equal. Yep, that's what happens when you're superior. We all come from the same blood (p.42, transcript 1) ... People in the city don't know that, that's why. That's what's good about the Native culture. They have a completely different culture than the White people or the Black people, because they don't sit around the fire going ah, ah, ah all their lives. They don't live in teepees, they don't live in igloos. But they still keep their language, yeah. Most people do. Like, the French people, the English

people ... but when you find out what their food is like, it's really weird, because, like, 'They eat that!?' (p.15, transcript 1).

Like Natasha, Charnelle speaks of esoteric beliefs that exist within her family — within her culture. They do not simply rely on what is known with the ordinary senses. Dreams are meaningful. This indicates attitudes that exhibit unconscious cultural traits and extensive use of intuitive faculties.

My mom had this dream about a month ago. Before she went to Frobisher Bay, because the reason why she went up there was because my cousin committed suicide and she had a dream that two of her friends committed suicide, but she didn't know who. The next day she found out her ex-boyfriend, Johnny, committed suicide. And my cousin committed suicide, so ... (p.31, transcript 1).

So although Charnelle appears not to have much contact with the outward symbols of her culture, her identification is based on lived expression of culture. Charnelle does not have extensive influence from her grandparents. There appears to be a falling out in the family that is not discussed. Her mother talks to her sister in Frobisher Bay, but that is the extent of contact with family. Her mother occasionally visits the north but doesn't want to live there. Once in awhile they get visitors from back home. Charnelle craves more contact with extended family and elders up north. She wants to find out more about her history and she wants to become involved, when she get older, in helping down south (like her mom).

As can be seen in this case study, Charnelle exhibits a balance in her personal self-esteem. She has a good self-concept and does not over-identify or denigrate Aboriginal role models, she admires them but also believes she too could become successful.

I think myself that if I'm different than this person or that person, I'm different. If I'm the same as that person, I'm the same. Why can't I be the same as any other person? I can have a good education. I could become anything I want to, like anybody else. So, I just think that way, so I don't need any role models Native actors? They're good actors just like any other actors and something special about them because they're Native and not too many Natives pursue what they want to be, like, they want to be an actor. They may just say, I want to be an actor, and they'll go and do it. I admire them, because you don't really know how they got there. I don't really envy or admire too much people. I just do what I do. I'm not the type of person who judge people just by what they do. I judge people by their personality. If their personality is good, I admire them a lot (pp.37-39, transcript 1).

In the end, Charnelle appreciates her culture and states that "We need our traditions." She would like to see people learn to appreciate each other's culture and learn from each other.

Society

Adults? Some adults are really sick persons. I don't know too many people, any adults or who are ... kind of a nice person. Sometimes you see them when they're slightly nice (p.38, transcript 1).

Charnelle does not show overt rejection of mainstream values and cultural expression; however she says that she doesn't like the contradictory messages that she gets from adults about drug abuse. She indicates that adults preach that youth are not supposed to drink and then they use many types of drugs. About street youth, Charnelle's attitude is "that's just the way it is now-a-days."

Except for the friends I have. They're 13, 12 and they do all those things. Because this generation is more mature. They mature faster, so ... Most of my friends are like me. Two of my best friends were at Shawbridge with me — the same age. That what's happening (p.30, transcript 1).

Charnelle believes that youth go to the street to find excitement and freedom to experience life.

I don't think that people will be able to keep them off the streets because they'll be going back to drugs, booze, freedom and parties. They think that's all the fun. They're living in the fast lane. They're not like going to school and learning and then having fun afterward. They just have to party, party, party (p.33-34, transcript 1).

Charnelle does concede that youth on the street have problems and that they need help. Her solution is to send them back to group homes or wherever they came from. We get the message that Charnelle herself goes to the street to find freedom and that her home situation is not a threatening place to go back to.

They have problems and they don't want to deal with them so they just leave and take drugs. They should try to help them. Tell them to go to the Pops or something. They usually go to Pops, and at Pops they should have somebody there saying they should go back and that it would be better. I think they have that, but I'm not sure. But it will be better if people started telling them that they should go back home and straighten out their life ... or back to their group home or Shawbridge or home, because people worry about them and I realized that when my mom called the police to say that I was AWOL (p.36, transcript 1).

What should youth do if they are being abused? Charnelle reflects her experience once again. She advises youth to talk to a social worker and to press charges against their assailant. She cannot imagine a child not having the support she had when she was going through her court case.

I think that they should go and talk to somebody and ask their social worker to go into some sort of place, you know, with a foster family, or in a shelter or in a group home so that they get help. Try to get the person that's bothering them or raping them or whatever to get into jail and try to get the person to talk about it and see if they want to press charges or whatever (p.34, transcript 1). They should tell the police that they're being molested or raped. They could talk to a friend's parents. They could talk to a friend or their aunt. They could talk to almost everybody (p.36, transcript 1).

Charnelle expresses the need for alternatives to detention or jail for youth who have problems. She also believes that jails for adults, without proper treatment, do little to rehabilitate sexual abusers. She doubts that molesters get help in jails.

Kids ... people in the jails... they think that jail makes them better. It just makes them go crazier ... In the jails, they don't help you. They don't help you talk about your problems. They put you into a, like, psychiatrist. They don't help you at all. Like, if a rapist goes out and rapes people, then goes to jail, comes out 20 years later, he's most likely going to do it again because he didn't get help. People might have beat him, really beat him because he raped children, but that doesn't mean he'll go out and not do it again. When I was at Rosemont High School, my moral education teacher told me that they don't let the people talk about their problems — about why they did it. They don't give them any help, people who molest people. The people in jail won't give them any help so that they can stop doing it. They're just there to do their time. So they stay there for 20 years, they're going out and doing it again. The jails should have something like a psychiatrist for people who rape people and try to get them on the right track so they don't rape people anymore (p.34, transcript 1).

When asked what she would advise a government person to do to help youth on the street and to prevent more youth from ending up on the street, we received straightforward answers without the strong resistance that we noticed in other participants. Charnelle would like to see efforts in job creation, affordable housing, youth detox centres, safe houses for youth, community centres and more services on the street. She intersperses her answers with requests for more cultural activities and recognition of Aboriginal rights.

I'd try to tell them, to ask if they could put more services for Aboriginal people. Like, if they could help them find jobs and places that aren't very expensive to stay. Different kinds of things, but I'd most likely try and get more services for Aboriginal people because there's lots of services for Black people, White people, all kinds of people, but I don't really see too many for Native people. And they don't really talk about Native people so often ... Like, community centres, pow wows. They should have lots more of these things because we need our traditions because they just came here, like, Christopher Columbus came here. He discovered us. If he didn't come here, we'd still have our traditions. But now, since they came, we have microwaves, we have all this stuff and they don't let us really do too much, like pow wows or having ceremonies or ... They don't think it's important, but it is, because we need to fish, because usually in Newfoundland, they have international places to fish. They should make part of it or most of it for us so that we can keep fishing and we can keep hunting, that's what I want, things that would be fun (p.20, transcript 1). I'd try to get him [a government person] to get more places like community centres, places where they can sleep, places where they can get good food, clothes, money, all those kind of things. And somewhere where they could talk to people, where the people would understand and not just sit there and yeah, yeah, yeah, just listening to them, not doing anything about it. They should get a place where people could do something about it, like, you tell them something and tell them you want to go here, you want to go there. Instead of just telling them, 'Oh, wait it out, wait it out,' because you don't like the group home that you're in that's helping you and you don't like the way they're helping you. Just wait it out maybe a couple of days or couple of weeks and if it's really, really miserable for the person. I think that they should try to get them to make it feel better like putting culture into activities at a community centre, activities at school – put them in a good school (p.32, transcript 1).

How might she do this? She feels that a lot of education is needed and that political action will make the difference.

Write to the government and get a whole bunch of signatures from a whole bunch of people. Try to get them to know that people want to work and that other people doesn't want them to succeed. I think that would get their attention. And then send more and more letters, and have more and more people talk about it (p.32, transcript 1).

For the present Charnelle wants to return to the loving home of her mother. She feels that she can stay out of trouble and try to influence her friends to do the same.

I just want to go home ... [Will it be different?] I think so because all the people that used to get me trouble are in Shawbridge or in group homes themselves and they want to get out also so ... I don't think there's any more trouble (p.31, transcript 1). I'd try to get more of my friends out of trouble and I'm trying to get my friend not to, like, get into the trouble with the cops or whatever. I'm going to try and get my friends on the right track (p.39, transcript 1).

Charnelle still believes in the system, it has not failed her. She believes in herself. She is a survivor.

I think that I could be a lot of things, because I have talent. I can sing and I can draw. I'm a nice person. I'm good with children and I'm smart, so I can probably become lots of things. If I want to do something, all I have to do is keep my mind set on it then I could do it. Because I'm the type of person, if I want to do something, I really go for it. So, I could probably become anything I want.

Chapter 6. Life on the street

In chapter six I discuss implications arising from the case studies by pulling out themes which recur in the interviews and that are salient to life on the street. The summation follows under the major headings of: the guiding questions; research revisited; street culture and myths about Aboriginal street youth; and street youth needs. The first section connects the content in the case studies with the questions that were identified at the onset of the research. The second piece juxtaposes Aboriginal street youth experience with the substance of the literature on street youth in general. The third part speaks to the specificity of street youth culture as shown in the case studies and also discusses what the youth perceive as societal myths about them and their environment. The fourth and last section in the chapter examines the lives of Aboriginal street youth encompassing four types of needs: survival needs (food, clothing, shelter); safety needs (protection from society, from police, from care givers); self-esteem and intellectual integrity needs (mental health, education, employment); and spiritual needs (culture, tradition, creativity).

The guiding questions (introduced in chapter 2)

1. What are the most significant life experiences that have impacted on the current situation of street youth? The significant life experiences might be categorized under the heading of antecedents for going to the street — removal from parental and extended family community, institutionalization, criminalization at an early age, adoption breakdown, foster care alienation, extreme poverty of family, racial harassment in schools, alcohol and drugs abuse in family of origin, death of parent(s), violence, and child abuse. There are the multiple and overlapping reasons for Aboriginal youth overrepresentation on the streets. As explained, the participants in this study were referred by street workers. Therefore there was no prior knowledge of who were from adoption breakdown or foster care settings. Eight of the eleven participants went to the street by way of state care. Three (Karen, Joanne and Dale) had not been institutionalized. Their primary causes for running to the urban setting were poverty, possible Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (in Karen's case), and sexual orientation.

Rage, shame, invalidation, homophobia, predatory behaviour (toward them) and exploitation, separation and loss, cultural shame and alienation all impact on Aboriginal street youth self-concept and contribute to the struggle negatively to staying alive. The death of street family and extended family are a major force in street youth lives.

2. What are the greatest challenges facing street youth today? The challenges are made up of the consequences of being on the street and imply multiple oppression: hunger, shelterlessness, daily racism, sexism and homophobia in all forms, violence and exploitation, physical and mental health problems, lack of relevant re-entry education, lack of training and joblessness, drug and alcohol addiction and the availability of new and stronger drugs, lack of culturally appropriate and sociologically similar counselling (much more than cultural insensitivity and marginalization — counsellors who do not know their circumstances and background), despair, depression, grief and suicidal thoughts. The danger of AIDS, rootlessness, the search for biological, cultural and racial identity and dignity, escape from institutional care, and the desperate yearning to go home are the intangible challenges that await street youth every waking moment. With recession and a trend toward more conservative social policy, one of the greatest long range challenges is hope in the future.

3. What are the most critical forces/institutions that influence the thinking and behaviour of street youth? The forces which impact on Aboriginal children on the streets are elaborated in chapter seven. The Young Offenders Act, foster care policy and practice, adoption and all its surrounding issues from obscured identity to sexual abuse, repatriation, and reconnection with natural parents are frontline institutions that directly impact on Aboriginal street youth. Indirectly youth are affected in their collective ignorance about their Aboriginal rights and through an educational system and school policy which ignore racial harassment. Many of the impacts result in youth who are resistant to education and training and who resist street services which are designed to help them.

Most of the participants agreed that services which would help families stay together in their communities are the primary focus of need. Services for addictions, family violence and child abuse/neglect are missing. Employment for young adults and their parents are the most needed in order to facilitate healthy families. When asked what would prevent youth from coming to the urban streets, the answers led to community solutions.

4. In what terms do street youth define their social, cultural and spiritual needs and how do they perceive the effectiveness of services available to meet those needs? Aboriginal street youth's social, cultural and spiritual needs are defined as: adequate survival needs, return to birth community, need for extended family, eradication of racism, acceptance from the mainstream community, culture revival, contact with elders, language retention and development, a sense of history, cultural relevance in street services, and respect for their person, skills, and integrity. The overall sense was that street youth do not see their needs being met by the existing services on the street. They experience constant hunger and they lack clean and safe long-term housing facilities. Hostel services on the street have a vastly inadequate number of spaces in comparison to the need on the street. Aboriginal youth are forced to compete for space with the growing numbers of mainstream youth in an environment that is culturally and racially different for them. (It is very tempting to say hostile to them.)

Getting off the street is difficult with extremely few role models such as street workers, police, judges, social workers, foster parents and detention workers. Aboriginal street youth do not perceive that their experience as Aboriginal people is understood.

5. What or who do the street youth of today model themselves after, and what factors shape and influence this process? There are strong indications that Aboriginal street youth do not have clearly defined role models except for those among them who are surviving well, at least not from our definition of role model. Whom do they admire? For the most part, street youth admire each

other and sometimes those who have done what they see as nonconformist deeds. While some have indicated their grandparents are significant, most have lost faith in the adult world and its values.

More specifically the case studies reflected, in addition to poverty and dangers in the street environment experienced by all other street youth, evidence of identity confusion, extensive impacts from racism, disillusionment with mainstream education and child welfare, and the need for culturally appropriate services. Multiple levels of abuse and oppression made recovery more difficult, particularly in the absence of culturally relevant treatment and retraining. Missy tells us clearly that the only time she was able to respond to education and treatment was in Aboriginal programs. Even then (at that time) she likely didn't receive a critical education. Her road to recovery was very long — and she was one of the lucky ones. Most of the youth had difficulty in identifying with mainstream values, culture and services.

Research revisited

It is helpful to compare Aboriginal youth experience indicated by the case studies with current social science definitions of street youth behaviour. Why do Aboriginal youth run to the street? This question is examined from several perspectives. Of the five reasons that McCullagh and Greco (1990) give for running to the street — running from an intolerable situation, running to adventure, throwaways, absconders from care, and curb kids — the youth in this study might fit into two main categories. The vast majority would be escaping an intolerable environment, and two could broadly be described as absconding from care. While Missy, Etah, Jean Marc, Noella, Travis, and Axle fit into the definition of escaping an intolerable situation, they were also absconding from care. They entered street life by way of foster and adoptive parents. These are in-care alternatives to Aboriginal parents, extended family or other Aboriginal resources. And as the Safe Home Steering Committee (Native Women's Transition Centre, 1991) of Winnipeg have articulated, when culturally appropriate treatment and services are not available, and racial marginalization is the norm in

detention services, even Natasha and Charnelle could be described as escaping an environment which would further alienate them. Legally they were absconders from care.

Mainstream labels for running behaviour, definitions of choice, and antecedents are inadequate when variables of colonially-determined policy, culture, and race are added to the equation. As demonstrated in the examples above, definitions are dependent on a viewpoint. For example, the term "throwaways" has at its base a rejecting parent. This situation is not necessarily present when foster care or adoption breakdown occurs because of abuse or cultural alienation. An Aboriginal child in a cross-racial and cross-cultural setting becomes rejected, from their mainstream reference point along with being displaced from a home and family, when a breakdown occurs. They lose everything in one culture and they have not had the opportunity to gain a footing in the other. From the stories presented in this study it has become evident that the term "throwaways" lacks the cultural dimension that the adoption breakdown survivors and other in-care experience. In fact, Aboriginal children become "cultural throwaways," "absconders from care" as well as "runners from an intolerable situation" if they run from abusive mainstream alternative care givers.

In cases such as those given above, and there are many, the element of "choice," as Robertson (1991) presents, is also in question. Many avoid capture because they would be returned, as in the case of Noella, to be abused once again. Did she "choose" to leave by stealing a car in order to be removed from her adoptive home? Her brother Axel "chose" the same route out. Dale on the other hand claims to have gone to the street by choice. But the lack of support and services for him and the abuse due to his identity as a gay person left suicide as a choice. And Dale was leaving a culturally same community. Similarly, McCarthy's (1990) four categories of individual pathology, pathological family, sociological approach, and healthy individual approach are blurred and can all apply to most situations of Aboriginal runners to the street.

All of the participants in the case studies were running away from harm and not to adventure or any utopian dream. The various definitions of the "street youth" offered by the collaborators give

us clues as to their perception of street life, street youth and current meanings of this culture. "No place to sleep," "no money," "no food," "don't tell their feelings," and "they don't understand" were the common themes. These subjective definitions have little to do with the common definition "a young person without responsible supervision," or definitions that are indicative of types of running behaviour. The causes for ending up on the street, the age distinctions, or even the different ways of surviving are absent in the self-defined meaning. Their definition indicates only absolute necessity — it indicates lack of survival resources, appropriate treatment, cultural recognition and racial dignity.

The participants — Etah, Karen, Joanne, Missy, Noella, Travis, Axle, Jean-Marc, Dale, Natasha and Charnelle — have brought to light some of the conditions that Aboriginal street youth experience prior to street life. They have illuminated some of the alienation in their lives and some of the degradation that characterizes street existence. The motivating factors for Aboriginal youth taking on street life are often embedded in at least five types of identifiable behaviour (while on the street) which came to the fore in this research.

1. Incarcerated children or children in substitute care — escaping from detention, social services foster homes and group homes. Research states that youth placed in care, in particular facilities that use isolation, are more likely to run (Kufeldt, 1991:41; Webber, 1991:242). Shawbridge is one of those institutions. With the high numbers of Aboriginal children in care and criminalized by the Youth Offenders Act, the trend of running to the streets is likely to keep on rising. Youth like Natasha and Charnelle want to go home to family.
2. "Normal" poor or those just staying on the street like Noella/Travis, Axle and Karen characterize these marginalized youth. An Aboriginal social service worker in Winnipeg reported that there is pressure to conform to a marginal lifestyle in order to be accepted. "At times, it is unclear who is actually an ex-street person as there is a lot of pull on Native

people to practice that lifestyle." Another street worker said, "Comparing mainstream street youth to First Nations street youth, it seems that identity problems for Native youth are expressed by their more conservative dress styles. To fit into the Main Street scene especially means less calling attention to one's wardrobe. Except for Karen, all are White adoption breakdown survivors.

3. Alternative community seekers are those like Joanne, Jean- Marc, and Dale who cannot get their needs met in their home environment. For Joanne poverty and violence at home makes the street community a viable alternative. Jean-Marc feels more at home on the street where his identity is less in jeopardy. Dale seeks a community where his sexual orientation is accepted and services are available.
4. Radical counterculture and home substitution characterizes Etah's life on the street. She has found the family and community that she never had and she does not have to conform to a society which she despises.
5. Occupational crime and/or pathological abuse of drugs — prostitution, heavy addiction and occupational crime are many times the only means of survival, particularly for those youth like Missy. She was sexually abused from an early age, in and out of the child care system. Her Aboriginal identity and self-esteem were non-existent. She gave up on the system.

Street culture and myths about Aboriginal street youth

The culture adopted on the street is indicative of the undesirable conditions youth are seeking to replace. Next to partnership (in securing and sharing food, clothing, blankets, and a space to sleep), physical safety and the need for affection and community were essential components for survival. The shared duty of keeping the body alive and physical safety on the street are critical. Entrenched in street culture, Etah offers insight of foraging for a living and the nuances of secrecy surrounding one's real name or age, and of teaching and protecting the younger ones. All of the youth allude to fighting for each other, watching out for prostitutes, safety in numbers, and the

danger of violence and exploitation. Distrust and caution are necessary features of safety — not only street generated violence, but from middle-class youth and the "helping" professions. Sharing and protecting one another is a means of seeing the next day.

The means to replace love, family ties, and community are expressed in extended family adoption on the street. For example, some participants spoke of calling older Aboriginal people "dad" or "mother." Etah talks about her adopted daughter and Noella and Axle think of each other as mother and father figures. For others, abusive relationships, with lovers or pimps, become a distorted substitute for the affection lacking in their lives. The culture is a collage of learning necessary survival skills, mutual protection, and kinship. Some seek family and community to augment a sense of belonging and others seek to kill the pain of alienation and shame.

The youth in the study want people to know that there are myths about street youth culture that need to be dispelled. Panhandling is a necessary means of subsistence and shelter, contrary to the popular belief that street youth habitually use panning money to buy drugs. In fact, the chances are that youth who panhandle are not, currently or ever, in the sex industry nor are they necessarily abusing drugs, and it is their way of holding on to some semblance of dignity. As Joanne and others aptly note, the middle-class work ethic gets thrown at them without regard to the issues they are facing in a society where competition for jobs is fierce and street youth don't have even the barest resources needed to compete. They are rudely told to sell their meagre belongings in order to have food and shelter, while the excess of middle-class suburbia is flaunted in their face. (Middle-class men would rather see them on a street corner selling their bodies than to give them a dollar.) In short, alternatives are far more degrading and dangerous than sticking out one's hand to ask for money.

Squats are real homes to the youth who need them and not just empty buildings haphazardly occupied by mindless young hooligans. These homes are valued "even more," as a participant said, than a residence one takes for granted. A squat can also be safer than begging for a place to stay

with a stranger or joining a party in order to secure a bed. The safest alternative is a safe house or independent living unit, but these spaces are extremely limited in most cities, particularly Aboriginal specific hostels. In Winnipeg an Aboriginal safe house has just opened its doors to 16 residents. This gesture from Winnipeg is commendable, but considering the large Aboriginal street youth population in Winnipeg, 16 beds seems inadequate.

Not all street youth chronically abuse alcohol or drugs. Most have used and experimented, but among the people we interviewed some did not use drugs at all, and most had alcohol and drug use under control. Many had come to a point where they were involved with an alcohol counsellor. This trend is due to extensive addictions counselling at the street level in recent years. Aboriginal street youth are equated with the "drunken Indian" image and are thought to be dull and drug-ravaged young people. In fact, they are highly intelligent and cognizant of the contradictions in Canadian society: beginning with mixed messages from adults around alcohol consumption. Particularly obvious to them are sexual predatory behaviour by White, middle-class men versus moralistic standards set for women, families and street youth. All participants, particularly Missy, made comments about male predatory behaviour aimed at them. Environmental destruction caused by societal greed seems reprehensible and deepens their distrust for mainstream values and services. Etah speaks to a society of lonely people driven by material gain and mindless linear corporate behaviour. Aboriginal street youth see through the rhetoric of multiculturalism to the racist values inherent in Canadian society. Their critique is more severe, more honest, and more experience-based than any middle-class sociologist or politically-correct social movement. And why wouldn't their analysis be more astute? Their very lives are the embodiment of all of the contradictions in western "civilization."

The media, they say, blame street youth for the crime and violence perpetuated by "weekend warriors," college kids, and middle-class suburban youth acting out against the system or using Aboriginal street youth as scapegoats for their anger and racist venting. Weekends become a barrage

of racial harassment. Without exception the youth we interviewed had experienced stereotypical name calling — awful names which attacked their identity as Aboriginal people.

The media also portrays how dangerous hitchhiking is, that teenagers are in danger of getting killed by truckers for example, or conversely that street youth are dangerous. The more transient participants travelled freely and told of many positive experiences on the road. The "sleazy" propositions which are common for them are simply inconveniences to be tolerated.

There is a myth that street youth are all sexually active, in fact, many of the youth indicated that they were not sexually active and when they were, it was within a meaningful relationship. Whether we had a particularly mature group of people in each of the cities is not known. In any case all of the youth indicated they were knowledgeable about sexually transmitted diseases and birth control. All of the participants indicated knowledge about AIDS transmission and correspondingly spoke of taking precaution with needles and safe sex (under normal conditions). HIV and AIDS education seems to be paying off.

Another myth is that street youth are sexually sophisticated. Aboriginal street youth are seen as sex objects. Even though youth are knowledgeable about sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, or they may be prostituting, it does not necessarily mean that they are mature about their sexuality. Dale talked about the fact that males or females, whether gay or straight, who have not had the opportunity to develop normally — those who have experienced incest, molestation, rape, and constant harassment about being recruited into the sex industry — may be very immature when it comes to their sexuality. They may have misinformation about what to expect from a sexual relationship which are manifestations of the distortions in their sexual development.

Yet another myth is that only White men victimize Aboriginal youth. Participants in Vancouver and Winnipeg explicitly stated that Aboriginal male involvement in perpetuating sexual violence upon street youth is becoming more common in the cities (as it is in rural areas). This phenomena is not surprising since patriarchal culture has been imposed on Aboriginal peoples, and

the sex/pornography industries, which reinforce and legitimize the power differential between men and women, are unrelenting socialization factors in western culture. Gender dominance and predatory behaviour are probably the only arenas in which White and Aboriginal males enjoy power equity. Since degradation of women and children, particularly those of Aboriginal descent, is considered a right by White males, they are not held accountable by Canadian society. Neither family nor the criminal justice system deter the long lines of middle-class males waiting for an Aboriginal child to have sex with. Why wouldn't Aboriginal males be attracted to join this bastion of power? Only through the authentic recovery of Aboriginal values associated with respect and protection of children will this type of collusion end.

A most pernicious myth is that Aboriginal youth are going to the streets because of massive neglect and abuse due to alcoholism; that Aboriginal parents don't care for their children; that parents simply don't try to keep youth off drugs and off the street. A corollary to this version of reality is that residential schooling in the past (and loss of parenting skills) is the cause of massive child apprehensions. While there are some very dysfunctional families who are immersed in prostitution and drugs, the majority are not. Many alienating factors described in this research originated from mainstream care-giving institutions like foster parents, adoptive parents, and detention centres. Mainstream institutions such as schooling, the criminal justice system, and social welfare were also implicated.

Another misconception is that all Aboriginal youth who are on the street are culturally alienated. Although many factors surrounding street life inhibit the development of a healthy cultural identity, some of the youth we met exhibited healthy attitudes and behaviour with regard to their culture (Dale and Natasha for example). Some of them speak their language, practice their traditions and through contact with extended family continue to grow as Aboriginal people in an urban environment. They remain strong even though they suffer racism and inappropriate service delivery in the city. Street workers and police personnel have stated that youth who have been through

White foster homes and adoption breakdown have pronounced problems with self-esteem and identity issues. "Aboriginal youth who have been adopted by non-Native families especially are the worst off. These youth seem to have the most problems," said a street worker in Vancouver. Children who have had cultural experience and continued support do not necessarily exhibit identity confusion.

Street youth needs on the street

The four areas of need discussed in this section were chosen because they were a recurring themes in the case studies. They are similar to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and provide us with a framework for analysis. In our conception, however, they are different. In Maslow's model the needs are presented as a descending or ascending order needs where one could not experience the succeeding need fulfilment until a more fundamental one is completed. The street youth spoke of their needs in a more circular or spiral conception — that is, none was more important than the other. Absolutes are uncommon on the streets of the urban centres involved in this study. How much food and what kind is sufficient for survival? What is adequate shelter? Pain is another example; the primary importance of killing the psychological or spiritual pain of living on the street, or the memories of why one is on the street, may override the need to eat at any given time. "Survival is of the mind not the body." From this perspective all of the need categories are not more or less, in value or importance, but qualitatively different. The circular and interrelated qualities of our needs paradigm can best be conveyed in the image of a circle as follows in figure 2.

Street youth, for the most part, cannot depend on a family or adult caregivers to help them fulfil all of the needs listed in figure 2. They rely on themselves, their friends on the street and a handful of street services (this research has shown that they use very few of the services offered for a number of reasons including lack of trust and cultural inappropriateness). Many of the youth we have spoken with have "fallen through the cracks" so many times that they come to the realization that they can't trust any of the people who are supposed to be protecting or caring for them. The

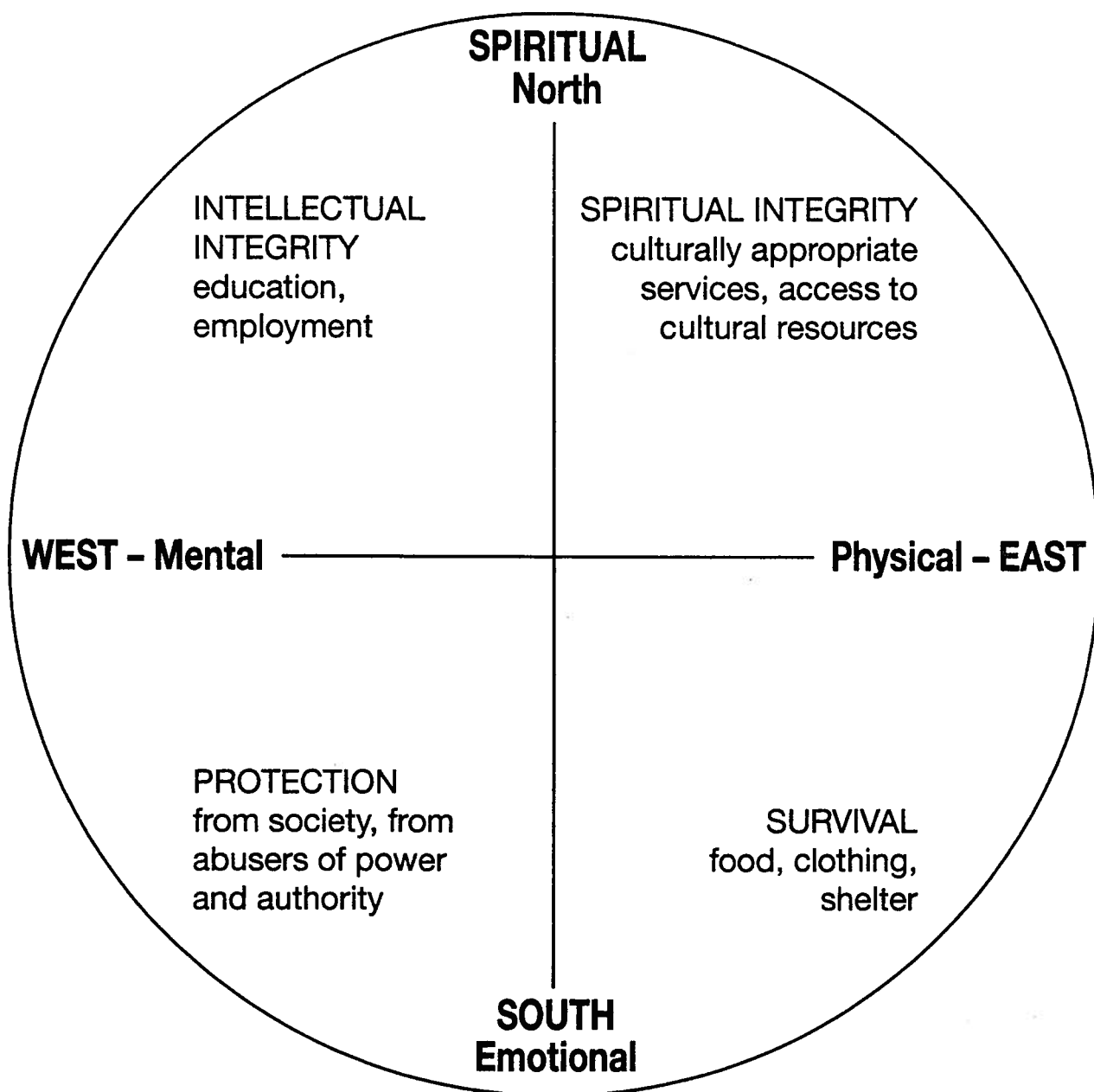


Figure 2: Four need categories beginning at the east door with survival (physical); at the south door with protection (emotional); at the west door with intellectual integrity (mental); and at the north door with spiritual integrity (spirit) (Absolon, 1993). Additionally, there is the social safety net that, by nature of the fact that they are on the street, has been ineffective in their lives.

institutions that set out to be agents of care and protection, the social safety net, are often experienced as agents of control by these young clients who they seek to "help."

Given that street youth lack the security and direction that others get from a stable family, they are vulnerable to the whims of a society that will prey on its weak and defenceless. Fundamental to North American culture are the ethics of individualism, exploitation and ownership that, on the street, translate into a drug and sex trade that festers twenty-four hours a day. On the street there is a commodity market of human flesh that is fuelled by "poverty, sexism and male violence" (Webber, 1991: 133). Kufeldt and Nimmo (1987) reiterate this tone emphasizing the fact that the youth are essentially treated as "disposable" children as they are a product of the culture of capitalism and disposable consumerism (157). For Aboriginal youth racism is yet another of the major structural impacts that have shaped generations of their families and communities and have ultimately steered them to a life in the streets.

The desperation of trying to fulfil simple survival needs with limited education and job skills is what drives these young people to break the law or exploit themselves in a variety of dangerous and oppressive livelihoods. Beyond mere survival there are the needs of protection from this society and, at times, from those entrusted with the protection of its most vulnerable members. In addition youth also must strive for a level of mental health and self-esteem that enables them to continue surviving the hardships of their predicament with the potential of some day creating something better for themselves. Finally, and closely related to their esteem and mental health, Aboriginal street youth have a need to nurture their sense of spiritual integrity, possibly one that will incorporate a cultural element rooted in their Aboriginal identity.

i. Survival — food, clothing, shelter

The act of physical survival involves finding enough food, clothing and shelter to stay alive. Money is a guarantee of all three but in the midst of poverty it is a rare commodity. Poverty is a fact of life for Aboriginal street youth. Some youth get involved in illegal or dangerous activities such as prostitution, the drug trade, robbery or theft to earn money; others will work at demeaning, low paying jobs, some will panhandle, one youth we met sang on the street corner to earn her money

in a way that allowed her to maintain some degree of self-respect. Social assistance is another option available to some of the youth but not without obstacles for those under the age of majority. For example, in British Columbia youth under the age of 19 are eligible for financial assistance, but it is dependent on the discretion of the financial aid worker who must assess their situation because they are considered to be an exception under the Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act (GAIN Act). In cases where youth are under the age of 17, they are referred to a social worker who must try to contact their parents in order to review their ability to help with the support of their child. As well, financial aid workers often do not have sufficient time to make a thorough assessment of the young person's needs. Clearly, the resources available to help these young people meet their most basic needs are not readily accessible and they come conditional upon making significant contact with the child welfare system and/or one's family — both options that a runaway may want to avoid (Community Panel, Family and Children's Services Legislation Review in British Columbia, 1992:72). Similar discretionary policies exist in other provinces for young people between the ages of 16 and 19.

In general, adolescence is a vulnerable age range in terms of our social safety net as young people are not eligible for much of the service offered — namely welfare, employment and education services — except under special categories. The gaps in the safety net account for much of the 18.3 per cent of children under the age of 18 who were living in poverty in 1991 (National Council of Welfare, 1993). Additionally, one must consider that there is a general sense of resentment, frustration, anger and mistrust of the "system" that has failed many of these young people. So it is not surprising that they rarely speak of any form of financial assistance as it is not easily accessible to them. Even if they access the welfare income they need, they will live well below the poverty line if they don't supplement it with illegal earnings. As the table below illustrates, there is an enormous gap between the welfare rates in various provinces and the poverty line of the respective provincial economies.

Table III. 1992 Welfare Incomes (Canada, Welfare Incomes 1992).

Province	Total Income *	Poverty Line
Quebec	\$ 6,186	\$ 15,175
Ontario	8,395	15,175
Manitoba	7,098	15,175
British Columbia	6,500	15,175

*Rates for Single Employable Person

Needless to say, single people who depend on welfare assistance are insufficiently supported to meet even their basic needs of shelter, food and clothing.

Street family as safety net

In the absence of money or the likelihood of sufficient financial assistance in the foreseeable future, street youth use a variety of creative resources to ensure their own and their peers' survival. In fact, in reviewing the interview responses given by the participants in this study it becomes apparent that the street family is a much more reliable safety net than the welfare system for these people. Repeatedly, there is a strong ethic of familial support expressed by the youths we interviewed; it is clear that when on the street "families" of peers develop and become a more dependable replacement for the biological or adoptive families, foster families, group homes, or detention centres they have left behind. This point is clearly stated by Joanne:

The most significant people in my life on the street at this point are my friends and as you'd say like street family — street brothers and sisters. ... we all stick together... if someone gets in trouble then everyone's there to make sure that nobody gets hurt or damaged ... if you need a place to crash and someone's got a stair well ... then you can go with them... if you're hungry we all help each other out. If someone's got meal tickets and they're not hungry or they ate already then you know you give them away. If you got a little bit of money you give it away ... making sure everyone's eaten and people are rested (p. 10, transcript 1).

To obtain food, young people do anything from "dumpster diving" (searching through garbage bins of restaurants and food stores) and obtaining food tickets from emergency services, to eating at soup kitchens or getting food from food banks. They also ensure food by sharing with

friends or stealing it if they have to. In 1990, 38 per cent of the 590,000 people who regularly used food banks were children under 18 — even though this age group was only 25 per cent of the total population (Library of Parliament, 1993:9).

Clothing is the only form of ownership for some of the young people we spoke with. One girl spoke with disbelief about a person who suggested she sell her shoes to get food, conveying in the interview that her shoes were her most valuable and practical material possession. For those whose lives were the least stable clothing could be obtained, like food, from dumpster bins occasionally stealing it, sometimes from friends, or maybe from an emergency service agency. Though some of the youth came to interviews reasonably well groomed, others clearly had (or chose not to access) sparse resources to obtain and care for their clothing — in these cases they simply wore their clothing until it literally disintegrated beyond use and then they would find something to replace it wherever they could.

Shelter is also integral to survival; for street youth the range of shelter is immense and ideally fulfils at least two basic criteria: that it is warm and dry. With these criteria as a minimal standard the abodes of these people range from park benches, to cardboard boxes and trees at one end, to abandoned vehicles and buildings, to an immense variety of arrangements that entail some form of shared rental accommodation with friends including warehouses, studios, apartments and houses. Even for those who obtain social assistance they express a basic incongruity between rental market affordability and availability in major urban centres and the allowable housing stipend they receive. In short the shelter that is accessible to these people is the cheapest and usually the worst in the housing market.

One other significant aspect of survival is health; though homeless youth are more likely to need health services, they also face greater barriers to getting service including administrative barriers, lack of information about their rights and the services available, and ignorance or insensitivity of service providers. Specifically, some of the health problems faced by street youth

include: sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, depression, suicide, substance abuse, pregnancy, violence related injuries and poor nutrition. In the street level economy of the sex and drug trade these health problems are rampant. As well, one must consider that among street youth there is a pervasive use of drugs as painkillers and aids for escaping the bleakness of life on the street. One must also consider the impact of the rage these young people feel and how it is expressed in violence against themselves and others when it eventually boils over. Still, the lifestyle of adolescents on the street is not conducive to the bureaucratic nature of most health services. This system is often experienced as a series of barriers to street youth who are not in the practice of making and keeping appointments, who often do not want or cannot get parental consent or who may have literacy issues that motivate them to avoid any form of paper work. These are only a sampling of the issues service deliverers must be aware of. Though they are a significant part of survival on the street, a comprehensive look at health issues is beyond the scope of this discussion as the issues are wide ranging.

Services

On a short-term, crisis-oriented basis there are street services that meet most of the basic needs that street youth may have. These services include: safe houses, emergency child welfare and protection services, multi-service hostels and mobile street services. Often these services provide some combination of food, shelter, clothing, bus fare, health information and service, referral services, a telephone, a washroom facility, and sometimes counselling. This variety of store front emergency services are ideally flexible, non-judgemental and reasonably safe. They are usually under the mandate of the ministry of social services, the police force, church organizations or private non-governmental organizations in each of the provinces. In general the youth in our study used only one or two of these types of services even though they were aware of others. On a long-term basis the alternatives for street youth include: foster homes, open and closed custody options — group homes, detention centres, nature retreat facilities — and going back to live with one's family.

The question one has to ask is why they consistently want to leave these types of longer term options in favour of surviving on the street? In the end, the youth are on the street because of the failure of our society to provide for their most basic needs at a time in their lives that is most critical.

ii. Safety — protection from institutions, caretakers, police, society

The ensurance of physical safety is another area of need that is central to the lives of street youth. Without question, the downtown core of any large urban centre in North America is a potentially dangerous place to be for anyone, especially at night — more so for young people without proper shelter or other basic survival resources. On their own, these young people are vulnerable to a host of potentially dangerous situations. Additionally, the youth who are living on the street have in common the fact that most of them are running from some form of abuse or violence suffered at the hands of an adult caregiver. For example, Manitoba has the highest per capita number of teenage runaways and missing children in Canada; most of them are living in Winnipeg which has been called "the runaway capital of Canada" (Bergman, 1990). In a Social Planning Council (1990) study of street youth in Winnipeg (over half of the 127 youth interviewed were Aboriginal) 73 per cent of the youth who left placements and 78 per cent of the youth who left home gave as a reason that they were running away to escape situations they found intolerable. The essence of "escape" may best be defined by ex-street youth Missy who felt that the street was the best possible solution when compared to her life at the mercy of a string of inept caregivers and institutions:

I figured I'd given the ministry enough chances they'd done a lousy job of looking after me and there was nobody to depend on but myself... I went out on the street ... I was safer that way, looking after myself than with somebody else looking after me.

Young people on the street are also entitled to protection, from society in general, by the police; but what recourse do they have if they experience violence at the hands of the police? This is in fact the case for more than one of the participants we interviewed (for example, Etah and Jean Marc both have experienced police violence). Further, given that many of the youths are on the run

from authority figures who have abused their positions of power, one has to ask how likely is it that these young people will seek the help of police officers who hold a high degree of status, power and authority in any community? In short, police officers, who are middle-class male in the majority, are the street level arbiters of a "justice" in the mainstream culture that sees Aboriginal people who live on the street as the losers in the game. Research and documentation of the systemic discrimination and over representation that Aboriginal people experience in the justice system is significant. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Manitoba Justice Inquiry, and the Saskatchewan Justice Inquiry are recent examples of fullscale inquiries (Province of Manitoba, 1991; Province of Saskatchewan, 1992). These studies and others document the destructive clash of cultures and racism that feeds the pervasive racial oppression experienced by Aboriginal people daily. Given the substance of Aboriginal people's historical experience with the security forces that are supposed to protect them, it is clear that any person, especially a person who holds very low status within the community (such as a young, alienated, homeless, poor person), would be apprehensive about using this service.

iii. Self-esteem and intellectual integrity — mental health, jobs, education, critical history, tribal self-esteem,

In the course of interviews, both Jean-Marc and Etah made the same statement: survival on the streets is survival of the mind not the body. Though basic physical survival and safety are precursors for mental health development, these youths have learned repeatedly that they sometimes need to protect their self-esteem and integrity by starving or sleeping in precarious conditions.

There is a lethal chain reaction that is at play in the lives of many street youth; the chain begins with poverty. Statistics show that among the unattached individuals under the age of 25 the poverty rate is 40 per cent (Webber, 1991; Library of Parliament, 1993). Without money and resources young people cannot always afford to eat healthy food, but a diet that is nutritionally deficient cannot sustain physical health. Also, without sufficient nutrition and physical health young people experience developmental barriers such as learning disabilities which, in turn, negatively

affect their ability to do well in school. Without at least high school education the chances of getting a job are low. The education levels of young people living on their own are also below average simply by virtue of the fact that it is extremely difficult to fend for one's survival and attend school regularly in the absence of a secure home base. Though the exact statistic for Aboriginal street youth is unknown, front line street workers state that illiteracy rates are higher among this group, perhaps simply because of the disruptive lives they lead or because of the negative educational experiences conveyed by most of them.

The next links in the lethal chain we are discussing are poverty and crime. Having little chance of getting meaningful work leads some people to live with degrading levels of poverty; for others who wish to rise above the oppression of poverty, they must find other ways of getting the money and resources they need to live — often this means breaking the law. This chain is particularly potent in the lives of Aboriginal street youth who may not only lack the education levels required by the labour market but who also face racism-induced barriers to employment.

Education

The majority of services on the street pertain to the first two categories of need discussed above, namely, survival needs and protection needs. At best there is some short-term crisis intervention counselling or information and referral services available from storefront agencies for finding employment and education. One successful type of street education strategy that has worked is the Beat the Street literacy program developed in 1985 out of Toronto's Frontier College. This program focuses on increasing the functional literacy of street youth through peer tutoring. In short, the students learn from other youth who are in the same predicament but one step ahead of them in terms of their literacy skills. The material used to teach the students are very practical examples from the street — a phone book, an arcade game, a street sign, a bad date sheet. This program is extremely successful as it offers practical, meaningful, accessible and flexible service.

Most of the youths interviewed conveyed negative experiences in the elementary and high schools that they were exposed to. All of them expressed some recommendation that there be more culturally appropriate educational services available to them. Most of them simply did not want to take part in the education system as it was such a bad experience for them. These young people are exposed to racism not only in the education system but also on a daily basis in the streets and they do not have sufficient defenses to protect themselves from it — namely, they lack a critical history of colonization. This is one of the main differences that sets Aboriginal youth apart from other street youth — they have lower racial self-esteem because of the overt racism that they are exposed to daily. Those who expressed some cultural pride or critical historical understanding were self-taught as this information is essentially suppressed in mainstream education institutions. Lacking critical information they cannot begin to respect their cultures as they have not been taught how their culture was systematically downgraded in the first place. In short, many continue to carry and act out the extreme shame that has burdened generations of Aboriginal people.

Employment

In April of 1993 the youth unemployment rates included: 26.1 per cent in Atlantic Canada, 18.8 per cent in Central Canada and 16.0 per cent in Western Canada (Library of Parliament, 1993:11). Additionally, for Aboriginal people 15 years and older, the unemployment rate in 1991 was 24.6 per cent in contrast to 10.2 per cent for the general population in Canada (Statistics Canada No. 93-324; Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1991). The Aboriginal Peoples Survey also found that 16.3 per cent of the respondents cited "being Aboriginal" as a barrier to employment — in short, just over 1 in 6 Aboriginal people felt that racism was a barrier to getting work. Other significant barriers included lack of jobs available, skills/jobs mismatched, lack of child care and lack of information (Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 1991). Again, these statistics focus on the age range from fifteen years and over; though they are not specific to the street youth in our study they do shed light onto the employment realities faced by youth and Aboriginal people. Frankly, the employment picture is

bleak for young people who have low education and few work skills; the choices left for them include exploiting themselves in the sex trade, running drugs or other illegal activities or taking minimum wage jobs with no future. Natasha genuinely expresses this dilemma; in speaking about education and employment, she talks about job opportunities at MacDonald's, a water slide and prostitution in the same conversation:

I never thought about going to school, I never liked it very much and I was never very good at it. [About a job] ... there's a place I was going to go to but I came too late and you have to be there at five o'clock in the morning and you can work through the whole day like cleaning pots and mopping floors, sweeping floors and wiping counters and all that stuff. A place for street kids and you can clean up ... both places and you get \$20 at the end of the day. I was gonna go there, but I was too late and I just never bothered going back again. I was gonna work for MacDonald's but, I don't have a social insurance card at all. Yeah, I have to wait till I'm sixteen and right now I'm in the process of starting the application, I have to get permission from my mother. So when we went to the water slides one day at St-Jérôme, there's also an office there where I went with one of the workers to apply and to get all the paperwork in order for my application for a social insurance card. Yeah, they gave me a temporary card and I also have my status card and a birth certificate and I'm not sure exactly how long it's gonna take to get me that card though. [Other jobs?] Well, uh ... prostitution but I only did that once in my life and I never ever want to do it again cause I don't have a pimp and I'd never want to do that again in my life. I just did it by myself cause I needed money and I didn't have no place to go and so this guy comes along and ask me to go into his car and I just jerked off this guy for twenty bucks and I got the twenty bucks and after that I just went to MacDonald's and got some chips. Sometimes though ... you know what I hate is when you have the money and you're starving to death or when you have to pan for money and you're starving to death but people think that you're just a bum and you're just gonna use this money for drugs and for alcohol you know... but my money that I always get ... I always spend it on food ... and if I have a little bit left afterwards I use it on whatever else I want to buy ... mescaline or whatever but food always comes first but when I do get money from the people I don't know what to do with the money cause sometimes I keep it and then sometimes I give it away after I've had enough to eat and after I bought whatever I wanted (p.11-13, transcript 1).

In the last part of this quotation Natasha sheds light on the desperation of hunger that pushes other young people like herself to do humiliating and shameful acts simply to survive. It is this same sense of desperation that also drives young people to break the law. Natasha's statements poignantly illustrate many of the issues that face young people trying to find legitimate work, including the age barriers, lack of experience and education. Other barriers affecting access to employment for street

youth include: the instability of their living situations, emotional problems, medical problems, psychiatric problems, criminal records, addictions and family dysfunction. Accordingly, street youth need a more comprehensive approach to service delivery with respect to their employment needs because of the complex of issues they face daily. This means that front line workers need to take a more holistic approach to working with this client group to help them access a variety of other services (housing, financial, legal, mental health, medical) in order to insure equal opportunity in employment (Wojick, 1986:227-235).

iv. Spiritual integrity — cultural aspects, tradition, spiritual nurturance, healing

A consistent theme from our interviews with the young Aboriginal people we met was a lack of culturally appropriate services in existence for them. As well, the participants repeatedly spoke of a turning point that they experienced as a result of using a service that is sensitive to their cultural history and experience and is staffed by people who can understand, and provide insight into, their lives. Regardless of the type of service — a school for Aboriginal adolescents, an Aboriginal alcohol and drug treatment centre, or maybe a counsellor at a Friendship Centre — it is often the first time that many Aboriginal people are able to put the generations of suffering that they have witnessed and endured into a historical context. With this new information they are able to release some of the burden of personal shame and blaming that they have carried for so long. Additionally, racism — at the hands of institutions, groups or individuals — serves as a constant reminder and reinforcer of the shame and confusion they live with. For example, very few of these youths were taught about their tribal heritage or the historical experience of their culture in their education experiences and they felt a significant lack as a result. Most of the Aboriginal street youth we spoke with relay experiences of moderate to extreme racism and misinformation in the education system (see Missy and Karen for examples). Ironically, young people are only exposed to more culturally suitable learning and counselling opportunities when they act out in the mainstream systems that are unable to accommodate them — this is a damaging and circuitous route to having their needs met. Missy's

conception of this phenomenon focuses on the issue of who deserves appropriate services (counselling and Aboriginal culture). Specifically, she feels the message we give to youth is if they do okay in school, live at home and stay out of trouble they don't deserve to get the services they need. "Why are counselling and Aboriginal culture suddenly provided 'after' youth have landed on the street? It gives kids the wrong message, if you're behaving yourself, you're doing okay in school, you're at home and you don't run away that ... you don't deserve these things." Another destructive force for many of these young people was that they were adopted into White homes thus making it highly problematic to integrate a positive cultural identity as they become caught between two cultures — alienated from both. Adolescence is a time to integrate a healthy sense of identity — a developmental milestone that is difficult for youth from the most secure environments. The issues of identity formation are substantially more challenging for Aboriginal youth who must also endure the barriers of racism that reduced their cultural heritage to a source of shameful pain. Jean Marc was given up for adoption at the age of one-and-a-half. In his experience racism was expressed through omission and ignorance, but it was also overtly expressed by his adoptive family in their attitude that they were rescuing him from his Aboriginal community, and that they adopted him because they felt sorry for Aboriginal children. Jean Marc is only one of thousands of Aboriginal children and youth who have lost contact with their cultural heritage by way of the adoption system. Aboriginal child and family service agencies are one way that Aboriginal communities can implement adoption and child protection practices that are staffed by Aboriginal people who are critically educated and insightful about the culture of the communities where they practice in positions such as counsellors, protection workers or advocates.

Learning identity

Identity is not a traditional or other artifact of Aboriginal culture: it is learned and socialized behaviour. Aboriginal street kids live in a world that has, in various ways, closed access to self-respect as an Aboriginal person. The educational system does not give them a critical view of why

the sociology of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is so bleak, why nations are just now becoming strong and are reemerging as viable self-determining communities, including those that exist in urban centres. Aboriginal cultural renaissance is only beginning to make cultural ceremony accessible; however, it will be the dance of the two, critical history and cultural revival, that will place Aboriginal cultural in its rightful place — back at the centre of Aboriginal life. Policy, treatment, counselling, repatriation, street services, whatever one wants to call the acts of reaching out to street youth, must take their whole person into consideration. For example, services must have explicit elements of literacy issues beginning with an accurate critical history, including stories from elders and Aboriginal academics. The only way to heal the disillusionment of being on the street through no fault of one's own, through the colour of one's skin, through dysfunctional communities and families, through identity confusion, is by developing a critical consciousness of the history which has created all of these phenomena. How can this be done? One example could be a film, widely distributed — to schools, treatment centres, band offices, video stores — depicting the structural history of Canada accurately. This version would show the external reality in the steps, the major policies, and the results of colonization. It would also include the processes of internalization of the images fostered by the Canadian version of history and the psychological treatment of the impacts of colonization and racism. Finally, it would be important to highlight the continued resistance to colonization and the contributions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The combination of material would validate Aboriginal experience in Canada and provide role models to facilitate cultural and racial self-esteem for youth.

In the case study narratives there emerged a ghost-like quality about Aboriginal youth experience on the street. Through insufficient resources and services, ignorance of their background, and non-recognition (in treatment and counselling) of their racial and cultural marginalization, Aboriginal street youth are rendered transparent. More specifically, they enter the doors of street services with enormous long-term problems related to cultural identity and community dislocation,

trauma from racism and abuse, and the need for continuity in their lives and then they leave in the same way. They have no opportunity to deal with the real issues in their lives — no one understands. This is reminiscent of the experience of abused European women in the early nineteenth century when most of their problems were thought to be a figment of their imagination. Women of that time did not have access to professionals who would understand their lives. The society did not support a perspective that would make their issues visible. The case studies speak for themselves and they indicate that we are too silent about the deeper issues of Aboriginal street life existence. We must break the silence on the combined impact of poverty, colonial policy, cultural marginalization, and racism.

Much research is needed in many areas of Aboriginal youth life on and off the streets. For instance, mental and physical health issues are minimally mentioned in this study. Research is needed with respect to street youth and pregnancy, youth with AIDS, suicide attempts, fetal alcohol and fetal inhalant syndrome, depression, mental illness, children in care who also have babies who are taken into care, advanced drug abuse damage, and identity problems. We need further in-depth research on the relationship between the entire criminal justice system (laws, courts, police and detention centres), adoption breakdown, permanent wardship, family poverty and dysfunction and street youth. Focused research is needed on the impacts of racism on cultural identity; on the long term effects of exposure to predatory behaviour and exploitation on street youth re-entry to Aboriginal communities; on sexual orientation, street life and repatriation; and on street youth, AIDS and community support. We need research on intervention with street youth which utilizes Aboriginal cultural ceremonies such as talking circles, healing ceremonies, naming ceremonies, sweats, vision quests, winter dances, potlatches, give-aways, feasts, and sentencing circles. In this endeavour participatory action research is the more practical method since it will bring results as one is learning more about street youth culture and needs.

Chapter 7. Policy implications

The purpose of this chapter is to give hope to the reader in the form of problem definition and recommendation of solutions. What are the policy implications of the case studies? The insights from the youth are mature, comprehensive, and holistic in nature. The youth tell us straight out what changes need to take place. The policy implications are explored under the headings of survival, addictions, exploitation, justice, in care, education, racism, and culture. First the issue of Aboriginal street youth must be seen in its global context.

The underlying assumption of this research was that the dysfunction manifested in personal alienation, loss of Aboriginal identity, addiction of all kinds, sexual abuse, prostitution, violence, crime, teen pregnancy, family breakdown, governmental dependency, poverty, and lack of resources and services experienced by Aboriginal families in greater numbers than the national average in Canada is the legacy of colonization and racism. We are not alone in our distress. The Canadian Press reported that three hundred million Indigenous people in 70 countries globally are subject to human rights abuse (May 12, 1993). Canadian Aboriginal street youth fit into this category. There are an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 street youth in Canada (McCullagh & Greco, 1990) — and agency personnel (in this study) estimate Aboriginal street youth to range from 40% to 70% (exception of Montreal 10%) of the total street youth population. These estimates show that Aboriginal youth and children are vastly over-represented on the streets of Canada.

The rights accorded to children are set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989. The stories told by the participants in this study show that all of their rights are contravened. For example, survival rights, protection from exploitation and denial of cultural rights are clearly and uniformly absent. The secondary abuse of our children is expressed in the continued rage, distrust, fear, disgust, sense of powerlessness, lack of access to their history and culture, and trauma from the impact of racism that they continue to face on a daily basis.

Aboriginal street youth are not alone in the contravention of many of their rights. McCullagh and Greco (1990) show that vast numbers of mainstream street youth in Canada, whose survival needs are in jeopardy, are in danger of being exploited on the street in the same way as Aboriginal youth. Street youth in general, however, do not share in the impacts of colonization (except to benefit in positive discrimination vis-a-vis Aboriginal people); and while mainstream youth and Aboriginal youth share in the generic stereotypes of street people, they do not share in the racial attacks heaped on Aboriginal youth. In the race and culture categories of abuse Aboriginal youth have more in common with their non-street counterparts. In a draft report regarding a survey of needs of Aboriginal street youth presented to the Social Services Department, the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee found that the key areas identified by Aboriginal youth were: 1) inadequate educational preparation, 2) misuse of alcohol and drugs, 3) lack of cultural identity, 4) lack of culturally sensitive services, 5) racism and discrimination, 6) feelings of isolation and apathy, 7) poverty and 8) limited family and community supports (March 17, 1993).

Survival

Under the heading survival and development the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that:

Survival rights might include nutrition, adequate standard of living and access to medical services. These are the basic rights that ensure that a child may quite simply live, but as such they are only necessary, not sufficient (2).

Survival for street youth means panhandling for money for food, prostitution, robbery, theft, conning would-be exploiters, and soup kitchens. A place to sleep can be virtually anywhere or with anyone where shelter from the elements is the primary consideration.

The types of services that currently exist for street youth fall into the categories as shown in Table IV. The services remain disjointed and youth either fall through the cracks in the system, they simply become immune to the manipulation and control of mainstream service delivery, or they avoid services because of racism and cultural irrelevance.

Table IV. Services for youth by type of service, duration of contact, intervention strategy and example of service (Brannigan & Caputo, 1993:83-84).

Type of Service	Contract	Service	Examples
Prevention	Minimal length	Education	Media and school presentations
Crisis Intervention	Short term	Stabilize crisis	Shelters or hotlines
Maintenance	Ongoing/ intermittent	Meeting basic daily needs	Hostels and needle exchange; soup kitchen
Transitional	Longer term	Help to get off street	Addictions counsel; literacy program; long term shelter
Incapacitation	Various lengths	Incarceration; prevention from self harm or harming society	Young offenders facilities; psychwards
Rehabilitative	Various lengths	Involuntary reintegration into community	Corrections and CJ system; probation; life skills

In a report, on homelessness in British Columbia, titled "A Place Called Home," Fallick (1987) states,

The youth who led the workshop advocated a legitimate participatory role for youth in determining strategies to assist young people, rather than having a pre-determined system imposed on them. The recognition that this involves better communication among all concerned groups, and more effective involvement by youth was raised in connection with the view expressed that communities have given over the caring component to the state or the "state." The "system" is not working for troubled youth (32).

In addition, age and wardship based accessibility to emergency shelters were deemed to be inadequate to the needs in the youth population. These views were expressed by most of the participants in the case studies.

Safe houses provide temporary safety and survival services, such as food, clothing, shelter, until realistic long term planning are required. Street youth need to be protected from being placed back into abusive situations. Safe houses must begin immediate treatment of abuse, grief and

separation issues. The common response regarding non-disclosure of pain and suffering to anyone in the street services environment is indicative of the need for immediate treatment, counselling, and repatriation assistance that takes the whole person into consideration. Kufeldt (1991) writes that, "Unfortunately, in the exigencies of the crisis event, there is a tendency to overlook the feelings of grief and loss associated with separation" (44). In addition to separation issues, the experience of trauma from sexism, racism, poverty, grief and loss from violent death and suicide of family, friends, peers, and street family are evident in all of the Aboriginal street youth in this case study. Emergency services must make a circle of healing that is culture-based and deals with profound trauma.

Holistic treatment in services needs to include treatment, out reach services and prevention strategies. As a Winnipeg advocate stated, "When kids come down from the reserves and are placed in a setting here, there's something we're missing. We need to ensure their feelings of safety. The systems are too big. There are kids from all over the place. We need community- oriented services." The Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (1994) recommendation #3 have included this feature in their proposal. They stated that:

A transition program should be developed to assist reserve youth to overcome the culture shock once they arrive in the city and provide them with strategies to resist the lures of the street life.

Aboriginal street workers should be employed to assist young people on the street. These workers should not only be Aboriginal, but young and be someone with whom the youth can relate. This work should be supplemented with a drop-in centre for Aboriginal youth (6).

The last point is supported by many of the participants that, while cultural relevance is indicated as very important, racial similarity is also highly recommended. This is expressed as the common historical impact of colonization, racism and reservation background. In other words, "Aboriginal people know what we're going through, they know our background, they know about reserves and they have experienced trauma similar to ours." Similar experience is extended to mean

that a worker must also have street experience. Etah said, "Make sure they don't get people who have just textbook knowledge ... [that they] have some experience."

Housing is a major stumbling block for youth because of discrimination in housing for young people in general. This discrimination is compounded for Aboriginal youth due to racism. Aboriginal youth need a place to eat, sleep and to have a shower. They need an address and telephone number, in order to be eligible for welfare or to go for job interviews. Stable affordable housing is key to enhancing the life chances of Aboriginal youth in the city. Participants have addressed this issue in their recommendations in proposing that co-op housing be part of rehabilitation and recovery. They need places where they can pay rent, have decision-making power and build on the mutual caring that street youth exhibit. This recommendation speaks to legally extending the autonomy already exercised in the street environment.

To be fair, we have seen that some street services (see appendices) are doing as good a job as they can with little resources and very high demand, and at the time of this research Winnipeg, Vancouver and Calgary had proposals for safe houses. For the most part the capacity of any facility proposed for street youth range from 6-16 spaces. Blasi (1990) puts the dilemma of numbers into perspective,

From the perspective of a homeless mother and child, even if 'The Number' is two, homelessness is a tragedy of grave proportions. From a public policy perspective, whether a community has 5000 or 50,000 homeless persons is of marginal interest if there are only 500 shelter beds and no programs for assisting people out of homelessness (209).

With an estimated 600-900 child prostitutes in Vancouver eastside alone (Bellett, 1995), Blasi's pessimism is warranted where Aboriginal street youth are concerned.

Estimates of street youth in need of safe houses far outweigh the proposal capacities and existing services are losing funding and closing their doors faster than proposals are being written. In any event most proposals indicate an age range of 16-18 as criteria for admittance. Where do 10-16 year olds go for help? It is increasingly this group of Aboriginal youth that are showing up in

street youth statistics and who are represented in Bellett's (1995) numbers in Vancouver. Natasha and Charnelle are examples.

Addictions

Addictions have enjoyed a long standing prominent place in rural Aboriginal communities and an even longer one in the urban centres. Not very long ago addiction was primarily an adult concern, and pockets of heavily addicted homeless skid row older youth (20-25 years) provided the stereotype of addicted Aboriginal people living on the streets in urban centres. Now Aboriginal youth are heavily implicated in statistics of alcohol, drug and inhalant abuse (See statistics of Vancouver needle exchange in Appendix G). Vancouver Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) statistics show that Aboriginal children are 60% higher than Aboriginal people in the total client base to access services from needle exchange services. An Adolescent Street Unit (ASU) worker in Vancouver gave us examples of addicted Aboriginal youth.

One girl's sad story: She was an Aboriginal young woman who was adopted by a non-Native family. She started using drugs at the age of 11 and she died May 28, 1993 of a heroin overdose. The heroin came from the current lot which is being sold 'pure and uncut.' It is powerful, potent and deadly. Another girl, 14 years old, whose liver is shot, who started drinking at 10 years old, will probably not live very long (Vancouver).

The need for Aboriginal detoxification units to fit the needs of Aboriginal youth in city was expressed. These facilities ought to refer to longer term culturally appropriate treatment facilities that are equipped to handle all of the issues that Aboriginal youth face on the street and in the greater community, particularly abuse issues and trauma issues such as racism, within a stimulating cultural environment.

Vancouver had an influx of particularly potent heroin in 1993 which resulted in an escalated number of overdoses and deaths. Most participants in this study know friends who have died recently of drug overdose. This means that street services must take grief and loss into consideration in addiction counselling.

Winnipeg has a heavy problem with inhalant abuse in a very young Aboriginal population. They have city blocks that are known as "huffer's row" in the northend ghetto. Presently these children have to be shipped away to treatment centres outside the city and sometimes outside the province. The Winnipeg parents interviewed say the problem of sniffing is "very severe," even in the older Aboriginal population and they believe that legislation is needed to prosecute people who sell inhalants for the purposes of sniffing. There are an estimated 300 sniffers in Winnipeg (in the northend, westend and central city combined). But a Winnipeg father contends that, "I wouldn't go back to the reserve because it's worse than the city, it's worse, they're sniffing gas and lots of kids are dying. On the reserve it's much worse, alcohol is much worse." He says that he couldn't remember that there was drinking on the reserve a long time ago, then the problem was in the city. His response about sniffing being just as bad or worse in some reserve communities is supported by numerous items in the media such as the Shamatawa and Davis Inlet tragedies.

Parents in Vancouver and Winnipeg spoke of the need for education on symptoms of drug abuse in youth and information on fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal inhalant syndrome. They indicated a need for support groups and support services for parents whose children are involved on the street. These sentiments were echoed by the participants, only they emphasized the need for addiction rehabilitation and prevention services at the reserve level as well.

Service personnel in this research pointed to the need for wilderness camp treatment for Aboriginal street youth who abuse inhalants. Wilderness detoxification works best because of the highly addictive ingredients and psychological addiction of inhalants. An Aboriginal street worker added that these facilities would ideally be run by rural Aboriginal communities and tribal councils, where youth would have access to learning traditional cultural technologies and survival skills, ceremonies and where workers would provide healthy role models. Karen in Vancouver is the only participant who has used inhalants to any great extent, although others have experimented with them. The youth in this research, however, have voiced their concern for the provision of inhalant

abuse services and for wilderness camp treatment. Missy also reported that her journey off the street began with a wilderness retreat.

Missy and Dale provide insight into the long term implications of addiction recovery and leaving the street. We can see that drug addiction treatment with persons who also have abuse trauma, attachment problems, confused culture identity, and racial alienation is a very complex process. Housing, education, job training, relationship stability, self concept, and employment all play crucial roles in recovery and yet these elements have a good chance of being sabotaged from many angles. Alcohol and drug addiction treatment must consider the long-term implications of multiple abuse trauma and triggers for sliding back into addiction and street life. Twenty-eight day treatment programs (regular adult programming) cannot address addiction issues and the types of trauma described by participants in the study. The proposed Aboriginal youth detoxification centre to be instituted in Vancouver will have a stay period of one week (Bellett, 1995).

Studies show that patterns of substance abuse in family and peer groups make Aboriginal children more vulnerable to substance abuse (Gfellner and Hundleby, 1991 for instance), that urban Aboriginal youth "may be in greater jeopardy" than their mainstream peers due to lack of family support and mainstream marginalization (Gfellner, 1991), and that drug and alcohol abuse is positively correlated with youth suicide (Minore et al., 1991). These studies are an example of the wealth of academic information on youth addictions, more importantly they show the complexity of substance abuse in Aboriginal youth.

Recovering addicts experience more psychic pain when they are sober. They do not have the aid of the drug to shield them from the realities of their lives. Culturally-based recovery programs which are prepared to rebuild a strong Aboriginal identity (Hughes and Sasson, 1990), to demythify the historical oppression of Aboriginal peoples, and to recognize racism as triggers to undoing sobriety provide a sturdy base to build upon. The base, however, must be linked to independent living transition, education and job training which are crucial to efforts to assist street

youth in leave the streets. These people are young and many have Aboriginal status which includes the right to education, and they have the time to be channelled into meaningful occupations and artistic endeavours. Missy and Dale are excellent examples of this potential.

Charnelle recommended that access to Alanon, Alateen and Alcoholics Anonymous at the reserve and community level would help youth struggling with alcohol and drug use. This points to policy formation that targets the youth population, rural and urban.

Exploitation:

Article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) deals with exploitation and stipulations on treatment of exploited children.

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sex abuse. For these purposes States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent: a) the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; b) the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; c) the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials (10).

The first priority for Aboriginal children and youth is the elimination and prevention of abuse by state legislated care takers because this predisposes them to escape to the street. Kufeldt (1991) calls for a re-evaluation of the child welfare policy and service delivery systems from which a child is more likely to run or to end up on the street. For many Aboriginal youth prostitution on the street is simply an extension of the abuse experienced at the hands of care givers where they are socialized to exchange sex for recognition.

All of the collaborators agree that Canadian society is predatory toward youth, and increasingly so toward much younger children (Etah, Missy, Dale, Natasha, Morrisette & Blacksmith, 1993; parents, and numerous agency personnel). According to a Vancouver Sun article (Bellett, 1995), cited earlier, a director of an eastside street youth service estimated 1000 child prostitutes in Vancouver — 600 to 900 on the eastside alone (based on their statistics). In particular, Aboriginal children and youth are the target population in this area. The fact that this large estimate (printed

in the media) is significantly larger than those we get from other street personnel indicates that child prostitution is for the most part underground and is a very significant problem.

Aboriginal youth and children are continually propositioned everywhere they go in the urban environment. They are not safe at home, in care, in school yards (some of them prostitute out of school yards in ever decreasing age groups), or on the streets. Gang-related abuse, cult (ritual) abuse and organized crime is on the rise with younger populations. "Predators should be held accountable — don't allow 'men' to buy our children," is how one Aboriginal street worker expressed her concern. Law reform is required in policy and practice to remove youth and children from the sex industry. A concerted multilevel effort must come from the entire community to bring Canadian law in line with the Convention. The Aboriginal community, having inherited the problem of youth prostitution in extremely high numbers, must examine just how much the Aboriginal male population have taken on the socialization of misogyny and sexual predatory behaviour (see Missy and Dale — about Aboriginal abuse of youth and gay males).

This brings us to the related issue of AIDS in the Aboriginal community (Bellett, 1993). In February of 1993 there were 30,000 persons infected with the AIDS virus in Canada (Mickleburgh, 1993). In December of 1992, 28 Aboriginal males, in British Columbia alone, were reported to have AIDS by the AIDS Update Quarterly Report (Rekart and Chan 1992). The Province reported, on April 22, 1993, that on the streets of Vancouver downtown eastside there were 20 cases of women with AIDS, many of them Aboriginal (Easton, 1993). These were women who had been tested in jail or detox. With an estimated 400-500 women in British Columbia with HIV we can assume that Aboriginal representation is fairly high. There is no way of knowing how many go undetected, particularly with transient youth. A 1990 study of street people in Vancouver showed a 50% higher rate of HIV infection for Aboriginal people, and an Ontario study estimated that 1 in 212 Aboriginal people (5 times the national average) to be HIV positive in eleven northern Aboriginal communities

(Aubry, 1993). Unprotected sexual contact (and rape) and intravenous drug use are breeding grounds of the virus. Street youth are exposed to these conditions on the street.

Healing Our Spirit B.C. First Nations AIDS Society, an organization set up in Vancouver to reduce and prevent the spread of AIDS in the Aboriginal population, identified the need for more front line workers (they presently have only one and a half workers for the whole of Vancouver, the half is designated for an Aboriginal person) and "an absolute need for an adolescent treatment centre for Aboriginal youth." Aboriginal youth are at risk although as previously stated they have education readily available on the streets.

Justice

The child also has to be assured 'protection' — not only from the violation of the above [survival and development] rights, but also from all kinds of exploitation and cruelty, arbitrary separation from family, and abuses in the justice and penal systems ... Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Document 1(2).

Most of the participants have had negative contact with the criminal justice system in the city. Some reported excessive force which they perceived as racially motivated. Institutionally the Young Offenders Act and the Criminal Justice System are guilty of victimizing youth for petty property crimes, particularly in small communities adjacent to reserves (LaPraire, 1988). This is where children come into care and eventually into the cities into detention centres. The law must shift from protection of property to the best interests of the child. Sentencing circles, restitution, and community case planning are warranted with a population where violent crimes are not usual (particularly with the younger age group).

Criminalization of Aboriginal youth is the 1980s and 1990s current practice of genocide in the massive removal of children from their families and communities. Police harassment and inappropriate sentencing are one form of racism in the system and the underutilization of the Alternative Measures Program (AMP) is another. The latter is an alternative to incarceration for young offenders. In Saskatchewan, where Aboriginal youth make up at least 95% of inmates in Kilborn Hall (a provincial detention centre in Saskatoon), AMP is used only 30% of the time for

Aboriginal youth compared to a much higher rate for non-Aboriginal youth. They make up 70% of the youth charged and sentenced in the province (Report of the Saskatchewan Indian Justice Review Committee, 1992). Aboriginal female youth are also disproportionately charged and sentenced although at a lower rate. Kilborn Hall's population composition drastically changed from predominantly mainstream youth to near 100% Aboriginal inmates when the Young Offenders Act came into effect in 1985.

In Saskatchewan an Aboriginal male has a 70% chance of being incarcerated (from the age of 12) before they are 20. This represents only those who are convicted and does not take into consideration those who experience police harassment without conviction. A system of youth against police is set up. And when 7 out of 10 of one's peer group are talking about experiences with the criminal justice system, one becomes an outsider if one has not had at least one detention experience. Peer pressure to commit petty crime and to identify with the majority becomes incorporated with a macho male image (and may even be incorporated into Aboriginal identity issues). The cycle is perpetuated by negative police involvement with Aboriginal youth and with adolescent male behaviour patterns of rebellion. This cycle needs to be interrupted and eliminated.

In a research report entitled "Aboriginal youth/police relations in Saskatoon's inner city," Marlene Larocque (1993) summarizes the urban youth/police relationship in this way.

When talking to youth about policing, it is difficult to avoid the role of Justice and the Young Offenders Act. Many youth cannot focus just on Police intervention, but tie in jail, courts, and youth facilities ... This response indicates that youth come to shape their perception of police as an "arrest and charge" agency. The scenario is clear, it becomes a cycle of crime, arrest, charge, court and finally punishment. It is not to our advantage as a society to continually punish our youth without taking into consideration the causes of their behaviour. This only creates more anger which creates more crime, self hate, and negative behaviour. The answer to this can only be found in the exploration of alternative measures and the shift from punishment to healing. Society must begin to deal with the root problems not just the symptoms (17).

Street workers expressed the need for more Aboriginal city police to work with Aboriginal youth, particularly with prostitution and drug related areas. While most of the youth prostitution industry

in Vancouver is Aboriginal, there are no Aboriginal police working with the Kiddie Car Unit which is in charge of getting these youth off the streets. In Winnipeg the situation is much more grim. Additionally, drug trafficking is known to be a problem at inner city schools. As well as more police, workers indicated that the police department should step up racism and cultural awareness.

Aboriginal justice inquiries conducted in many of the provinces (Province of Manitoba, 1991; Province of Saskatchewan, 1992 for instance) have recommended the recognition of the Aboriginal right to establish our own justice systems as part of the inherent right to self-government (Gardner-O'Toole, 1989-93). Aboriginal jurisdiction over urban Aboriginal population may be the only answer which would give Aboriginal children and youth the immediate and concentrated attention that is required to cease the exploitation of Aboriginal children in far greater numbers than their mainstream counterparts.

In Care

A study conducted by Kufeldt (1991) stated that running behaviour was three times higher in institutions that used lock up facilities and in general children in care are more likely to run. However, she writes, "We ignore the fact that some may be running from ill treatment or abuse in our institutions. We fail to distinguish between these and other youngsters who are running because of attachment related problems" (44). How, why, for what purpose, and for how long a child ends up in state run facilities (including foster and adoption homes) needs to be critically examined.

The rhetoric of "the best interests of the child" as practised in provincial child welfare systems does not conform with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). For example, the arbitrary removal of children from their culture and community is against the Convention. The following statement also mentions the right of children to remain within the Aboriginal community.

According to article 3, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. In connection with the various provisions of the Convention, the best interests of the child are referred to or further specified by reference to his or her family ties, continuity in the upbringing and the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background (Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989): Human Rights of the Child, Doc. 3).

The focus must change to support families with a wellness model and/or extended family care that are culture based.

A January 1992 consultation paper (Province of British Columbia, 1992:78-103) for the legislative review of the Family and Child Services Act gives some insight into current policy directions of the provinces represented in this research. For instance, Manitoba and Quebec have extensive lists on the topic of rights of the child and rights of families, British Columbia has no listings on either topic. Again, in the area of "provisions for Natives," whereby Aboriginal communities have significant involvement in the apprehension of an Aboriginal child, British Columbia and Quebec have no provisions listed. Alberta and Ontario have the most comprehensive provisions. Ontario has the most inclusive and meaningful set of stipulations that would insure cultural continuity for a child in care of the province.

- * Native heritage is to be taken into account when considering a child's best interests (s. 27, 43 and 130).
- * Bands and communities are to sit on boards of agencies and on Residential Placement Advisory committees (s. 13 and 34); participate in placement hearings (s. 36); have party status in protection hearings (s. 39); apply for access and restraining orders (s. 54 and 76); receive notices and copies of assessment reports (s. 50 and 60); and provide services under agreements with the Minister or as a designated children's aid society (s. 193 and 194).
- * Customary care is recognized (s. 191) and may be subsidized (s. 195). Service providers must consult regularly with bands on specified matters (s. 196).

In the current Aboriginal child welfare take over movement (in some areas this is called "off loading" of the problem) there are several issues that present barriers to implementing wellness and prevention as a primary focus. In addition to struggles pertaining to jurisdictional issues currently being debated, two conditions closer to home are problematic. One, funding formulae based on the number of children taken into care fundamentally opposes Aboriginal philosophy and the need

for prevention based strategies. Secondly, barriers to extended family care in the form of reduced foster payment rates is discriminatory. Section 23 of the Saskatchewan Family Services Act, for example, provides for application by an interested party (relatives on reserve) to provide care to a child. The rates, however, are capped at approximately \$270 per month per child. The same child would draw up to \$1000 (and in certain circumstances) or more per child off reserve. (It is okay for mainstream foster parents to make a living off of Aboriginal children, but not so for people on reserve.) Etah in particular resented being a pawn in her foster family's income. She felt that they did not care for her and they used the money to provide luxuries to their own children.

Although the parents interviewed in Vancouver received some support to improve their conditions, still the criteria for helping them was counter-productive to a family staying together. For instance, they said that the band would not provide money for daycare or trade school funding so that both parents could improve their lives although they were willing. Social services was willing to provide some support for the mother to attend daycare training but it was contingent on being classified as a single mother. Her husband had to stay at home.

Parents also said that treatment, counselling, education and training for parents of street youth is needed so that the youth are not ashamed of them. Employment programs for adults like an adult Native Youth Job Corps were suggested. Trade training programs for older adults is not a priority for band funding. "They need to put more money into educational funding for all Native people and daycare for educational purposes."

Care and protection of Aboriginal children must revert to Aboriginal nations. This includes the functions of self-determined child and family legislation, policy making and service delivery protocols. Services need to be available to rural and urban Aboriginal communities. Consistently participants have stated that non-Aboriginal personnel are not equipped personally, politically or professionally to deal with identity confusion, cultural reawakening, or issues of separation and loss in a way that is supportive to Aboriginal cultures. Human services education does not prepare

practitioners or policy decision makers to adequately serve or accurately access the needs of Aboriginal families or communities. Careerism, research and social worker mandate (power relations) play a part in the distance maintained between practitioner and client on the street. In the case study process we heard many times that social workers did not really care and that a "career" was the most important thing.

Participants demand less research and politics and more immediate and concrete action on the street level. "People who run band government and mainstream government should come down here and actually take a look at what the kids have to live in," is how Missy explained the situation. She is sceptical about government statements about the lack of funding. She looks around at the misuse of money in society and simply says, "There's enough money out there." Missy raises the topic of social work practice with street youth. She thinks that social workers need smaller case loads and more time to spend with children in care. She indicates that children and youth simply become lost — in the system — and lost to the Aboriginal community. Participants have told of being moved in and out of many homes, detention centres, and group homes. The provincial government and its agents must be accountable for children within its jurisdiction.

Children removed for delinquency or Young Offender's Act issues and placed in lock up facilities are at risk of entering a cycle of running, criminalization and abuse at the hands of the child welfare system. They are very different from children who are removed from parental custody because of abuse or neglect in the home. If the child is in eminent danger then, and only then, should they be removed and placed with extended family. Even then it is the abuser that should be removed and not the child. We have heard the stories of youth currently caught up in the young offenders system. Both young women felt that they were there because of someone else's action — namely their abusers. Alternatives must be found for youth who act out because of trauma.

The lack of jobs and a sustainable economic base are missing in urban and rural Aboriginal communities. When the participants looked back upon their own experience and made

recommendation for prevention strategies, they said that Aboriginal people need jobs and services at the community level. All of the participants in this study who were removed from their family felt that they were punished for something they had no control over and all of them, who were old enough to remember, simply wanted to return to family. Those who were adopted eventually sought repatriation.

Many of the participants had been temporary wards, permanent wards or adoptees. These youth suffered identity confusion and repatriation problems. Support groups for permanent wards and ex-adoptees and a national Aboriginal youth hotline are needed to support their search for identity and belonging. The National Kids Help Line (1-800-668-6868) provides counselling on everything but homework and it has a data base on all services in Canada, and an Operation Go Home (1-800-668-4663) provides bus tickets to send runaways home. Neither organization has statistics on Aboriginal use of the service. One counsellor said that they received calls from Aboriginal children who wanted to discuss living on the reserve. We are told by the participants in this study that, without exception, mainstream workers do not have enough information about life on the reserve or identity issues, therefore an Aboriginal specific hotline is indicated. A comprehensive hotline such as the United States National Child Help Hotline (1-800-422-4453) out of Utah provides a three in one touch tone service: 1) for children under 16; 2) for parents; 3) for research and information. In this vein tracking systems by provincial and band workers must be created to prevent children from disappearing into a void. Missy has been there and now she watches youth going through the same thing — only in greater numbers.

Education

The history of the Aboriginal educational legacy vis-a-vis the Canadian state has been much criticized for its mismanagement and negative impact on a people (for example Barman et al., 1986 & 1987; Kirkness and Selkirk Bowman, 1992; Cardinal, 1977). According to Kufeldt (1991), "After the family the school is the most important and most impactful for young people" (46). She states

that the school is not only a place of learning but socialization and a testing ground for social behaviour. Keufeldt is calling for "diversion of some high quality social services to the school milieu" (46). According to most of the participants the school is also a place of degradation for them as Aboriginal students. Not only is the history of Aboriginal people in Canada absent or romanticized but racism mediates their entire experience. These problems are aside from ordinary childhood and youth problems that have to do with growing up. This legacy would instill a deep sense of alienation from a people who sit at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and who are perceived to be a constant burden on the state.

The school yard is also a breeding ground for bigots who abuse Aboriginal children with isolation, violence, insults and stereotypic images. Teachers and school administration, void of a critical analysis of the colonization of Aboriginal people and its impact, do not understand the psychological and socio-cultural barriers of their students. With Noella as an exception, the collaborators in this study could not tolerate the educational environment.

Even without the socio-economic barriers school became intolerable for Jean-Marc, as we have seen in his story. He was subjected to insults and violence because of his mild Aboriginal features. One can only imagine what happens with children with pronounced Aboriginal features, accents, low self-esteem, and poor clothing and nutrition. If there is trouble at home, even if that trouble is simply unemployment, the school would quickly become unbearable. The adult world denies or minimizes the trauma and humiliation that children and youth suffer at the hands of a compulsory institution which denies that racism in schools is rampant. The shame involved is evident in that many of the youth took the opportunity to talk about their ordeal in schools under the topic of shame and anger. None of the street youth workers mentioned incidents in the school environment. One must wonder if they were ever told of the shameful events.

McFarlane (1993:70) describes George Manuel's struggles in the early 1960's in his appeals for Indian controlled school boards and Indian content in curriculum because of discrimination

embedded in the entire school experience for Aboriginal children. In 1977 Harold Cardinal wrote about youth experience in his book The Rebirth of Canada's Indians about the high rate of school dropout of Aboriginal youth.

Why not? There was nothing for them in those (provincial) schools. In many instances, they had to face a really racist set-up where they were looked down upon both by their white classmates and by their white teachers. They were under constant, and often heavy, pressure simply because they were Indian (194).

Still in 1989 Frank and Echols write of the same, maybe even worse, racist degradation of Aboriginal children in the urban school environment in their research entitled Evaluation report on the Vancouver School Board's Race Relations Policy. In this research the youth have repeatedly stated that the lack of an accurate Aboriginal history and relevant curriculum, and peer harrasement were common experiences in schooling. Yet Kehoe and Echols (1994) advocate "A policy of 'least change' on the part of the home and school should be followed because it will increase the likelihood of change actually taking place" (63). They use, as an example, a Hawaiian based program which raises scores on standardized tests for low socio-economic status children. The central features used are: 1) a culturally compatable, small group classroom organization; 2) interaction patterns between teacher-child and child-child which are based on a thorough knowledge of cultural differences and similarities; and 3) a set of social reinforcement and social control techniques which are grounded in cultural understanding (72). No mention of critical history, curriculum relevance or racism as barriers in schools. Multicultural solutions alone cannot provide the empowerment necessary to reconcile Aboriginal children and youth with a system which alienates them.

All participants stated that they did not know their own history. Fostered children and ex-adoptees in particular did not know their heritage. School curriculum did not reflect Aboriginal history or culture. The National Indian Brotherhood's policy paper, Indian Control of Indian Education (1973) stated that,

Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Indian child

who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian person (In Cardinal, 1977:66).

One of the "forces that shape" Aboriginal youth is our collective history of colonization, another is racism. Current researchers and policy makers refuse to recognize these elements in their work.

Most participants flatly stated that they would not return to school and that anything that resembles the irrelevant material, the control exercised in the educational system and the personal abuse simply strengthened their resolve. Positive examples of band controlled and culturally based education in the various provinces are set out by Kirkness and Selkirk Bowman (1992) in First Nations and Schools: Triumphs and Struggles. They quote a young woman who feels she is gaining a positive identity through her experience in an urban Aboriginal separate school, she also echoes street youth experience with racism in urban school environments.

Olivia Mercredi, a 16-year-old grade 10 pupil, said that after her first month at Children of the Earth High School her confidence and pride as a native person have been renewed Ms. Mercredi, a cousin of Ovide Mercredi, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, says she doesn't even mind riding two buses every morning to get to the school. She says she was the victim of racism at Elmwood High, a mostly-white, suburban school in northeast Winnipeg 'People would call us stupid Indians ... Here it is better. I never learned my native language — but I'm learning it now' (Roberts, 1991 in Kirkness & Selkirk Bowman, 1992:84).

Children of the Earth High School, the first funded by the provincial education department in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is the first of its kind in Canada. Many of the participants said they would consider returning to an all Aboriginal school such as the one in Winnipeg if they could.

There are also some alternative schools that exist for Aboriginal youth if the public school system is not able to accommodate their needs. These extremely rare institutions are an attempt to create an environment that promotes expressions of Aboriginal culture while fulfilling the provincial regulations from the conventional education system. For Missy the refreshing significance of such a school is clear in the following quotation:

...I'd go to an alternative school and I pretended I was dumb. I would put the wrong answers down on purpose because I just wanted to be accepted there as a Native student and to be smarter and to be able to do the work quickly ... I would be

referred to a regular school and I didn't want that because I didn't belong in the regular school, because I was under the academic level there and above it at an alternative school, so I really didn't belong anywhere.

These words poignantly express Missy's experience of being caught between two cultures within the education system. Undoubtedly, she craves the cultural sensitivity and supportive environment for her identity development and feeling of acceptance, but these feelings are overshadowed by the jurisdictional issues of the larger institutions. Missy's words also point to the fact that some alternative schools have the effect of stigmatizing Aboriginal youth as the schools may provide a lower academic standard than other public high schools; they are also a place for students who are considered to be problem children in the mainstream. It is for this reason that some Aboriginal youth prefer to have these services offered within the mainstream as they have the opportunity to learn with their peers, Aboriginal and non; in this way they avoid being outcast and yet their cultural difference is positively validated in a setting they are comfortable with.

Whether service is provided within the mainstream system or at an alternative school, it should be in a racism free environment; it should also provide a culturally appropriate learning environment, and it should teach Aboriginal youth a critical history of their culture in order to reverse the effects of the racism experienced by the students in the past.

Some of the youth felt adversely affected by the inequities and irrelevance involved in job training strategies. Joanne in particular describes racist and sexist treatment in a job opportunities program where she was enrolled. The youth in this research have identified many multi-level barriers in the educational system. Unless the entire educating system (including job training) becomes aware and confronts the reality that Aboriginal youth face, we simply will perpetuate a system which unequally distributes power, and dropout rates will continue to soar in urban schools.

Racism

The guiding questions (appendix B) for the case studies made only one direct reference to the word racism (question 12, Do you experience a lot of racism on the street?) and this question

was placed strategically (after they would normally have had an opportunity to speak to the issue in the questions on differential treatment) in order to discuss the idea of racial marginalization with the participants who may, for various reasons, want to avoid the issue. Most of the participants provided many examples of racism in their lives long before question 12 came up. Noella was an exception. Although the narratives in this research are permeated with racism and marginalization so that a special category seems not to be warranted, there are points that need to be highlighted.

In the case studies racism emerged as an everyday experience everywhere. Harassment started in the school environment and permeated all of their lives. It means surviving verbal abuse, stereotypes, cultural alienation and violence because of the colour of their skin. The street offers fertile grounds for White supremacy and racial hatred expressed in White power and skin head movements. These are acts of commission. More subtly, participants are subject to racism in acts of omission in the lack of accurate history and culturally appropriate services. Street youth experience personal racism in confronting bigotry on the street. They experience cultural racism in cultural degradation, identity confusion and culturally inappropriate treatment and service delivery. And they are products of institutional racism in their collective removal from natural families and systematic criminalization in the criminal justice system by legislated policy. It is the legislated racism in policy and practice which holds Aboriginal street youth exactly where they are.

Racism in policy and practice are not measured by their intent to do harm but by the impact which they have on those affected. The combination of policy to remove personal, cultural and institutional racism would be ideal for street youth. Eradication of personal racism can only be achieved by mass compulsory critical education and racism awareness. There is little chance that this education would reach the street anytime soon (this is not to say that it is not needed).

The external barriers manifest in the lack of housing and job opportunities and services on the streets (for the street youth), in urban Aboriginal communities (for their parents) and on reserves. The subtlest form, however, is the internal or intrapsychic barriers which denies self-respect and

respect for the ancestors. Aboriginal people in general, and street youth in particular, need to know that the descent to the socio-economic bottom of the world hierarchy of nations was a gradual process involving disease, the undermining of spiritual life, betrayed alliances, land appropriation, segregation, starvation, cultural genocide, residential schooling, underemployment, poverty, massive child removal and criminalization of Aboriginal people by assimilative legislation.

We need to know that we are not alone. It is not just Joanne, not just Kanewake, not just Nova Scotia, not just Canada, and most of all it is not just Aboriginal people. Colonization is a global phenomenon. India, Asia, Africa, South America, Australia and New Zealand are partners in colonisation impact. We face the same challenge: to achieve decolonization. It is our right to know, to be without the stereotypes, to work and achieve, to be politicized, and to be whole psychically and culturally. Street youth have questioned the assumptions of mainstream society and with their voices they have pleaded with us (mainstream and Aboriginal) to listen, to respect their wisdom, to learn from their experience, to heed their warnings, and to utilize their expertise.

Culture

Identity is regarding oneself as sharing characteristics with another, it is learned and socialized behaviour. Culture is the sum total of inner learned values and outer expression of those values. Etah gives a definition of Aboriginal culture. "I mean Aboriginal culture has to do with the life in you. Just a whole world unto itself. It's not a status thing, it's not a piece of paper, it's a spiritual thing, an emotional thing, a mental thing, a physical thing." Although Etah has explained the concept most eloquently, the youth in this study have demonstrated the lived process in many ways: some by pride and outward expression, some by their desperate search, and others by their resistance. Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) speaks to the right of every Aboriginal child to enjoy a positive cultural identity.

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community or with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own

religion, or to use his or her own language. In addition the Convention acknowledges that society must be specially vigilant to ensure that the rights of minority children and indigenous children to their language and culture are respected (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Document (1989:1(2))).

We have ample evidence that the rights to culture are contravened to a large degree even when Aboriginal youth have had a supportive cultural background and totally when the person has been in foster care or has been adopted into White homes from an early age. The Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (1994) has embedded the spirit of the Convention in their proposal for a safe house for Aboriginal street youth in that city.

A safe house for Aboriginal youth should be established, for temporary housing needs. It should have a special emphasis on ensuring that traditional values are respected by having an elder live in residence, providing healing circles, talking circles, and life skills. Since traditional values and teachings are an essential part of building a strong self identity, it is imperative that Aboriginal people staff this agency (Draft report, recommendation #3, p. 6).

Aboriginal street kids live in a world that has, in various ways, closed access to self respect as an Aboriginal person. This is true especially for children who have been placed in White homes and have experienced racism, perhaps only in the form of racial stereotyping of Aboriginal people, within that family. As a result their identity becomes confused and they will be angry at both their own culture and mainstream society because they don't fit into either one. Cultural identity mediated by racism (and in the case of foster children and adoptees — isolation) produces at least four levels of identification with one's ethnic group. Table V gives a visual image of this phenomena and the corresponding meanings. The levels of cultural identity shown here are socialized and depend on the amount and quality of support for authentic Aboriginal cultural expression. The cultural categories are not exclusive, they are simply indicators of socialization and may also mean the degree of racism experienced. A person can have shades of different levels and can change with learning and support.

The participants show the variations in support for their Aboriginal identity. For example, Karen shows characteristics of alienation from both mainstream and Aboriginal values. Noella,

Table V. Cultural identity variations

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> A W </div> </div> <div> <p style="margin: 0;">Alienated</p> </div> </div>	<p>1) the alienated person cannot identify with either mainstream or Aboriginal values or culture. They are confused and very angry and cope with self-destructive behaviour;</p>
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> A W </div> </div> <div> <p style="margin: 0;">Over-identified with White culture</p> </div> </div>	<p>2) the over-identified person, on the mainstream side, rejects Aboriginal values and culture. They usually exhibit a lot of internalized racism and avoid Aboriginal contact;</p>
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> A W </div> </div> <div> <p style="margin: 0;">Over-identified with Aboriginal culture</p> </div> </div>	<p>3) the over-identified person, on the Aboriginal side, rejects mainstream values and culture entirely. They usually withdraw from mainstream society and exhibit elements of dislike for mainstream society and people, and will avoid contact;</p>
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> A W </div> </div> <div> <p style="margin: 0;">Bicultural or comfortable in both environments</p> </div> </div>	<p>4) the bicultural person has integrated Aboriginal values and culture and is comfortable with their identity as an Aboriginal person but can operate in both cultures comfortably. This person can practice traditional culture or not. They often, but not necessarily, can speak an Aboriginal language and they have been brought up with Aboriginal values.</p>

**** A means Aboriginal culture; W means Western culture.** This does not negate the fact that both Aboriginal and Western cultures have many ethnic groups with distinct cultural expressions (Tukukino, 1988).

Travis, Axle and Jean Marc over-identify with mainstream identity and have difficulty with Aboriginal identity. They have difficulty in the Aboriginal environment. Etah and Natasha are both very angry at mainstream society and try to stay within an Aboriginal framework in the interview (although Natasha at one point said, "I just feel White.") Joanne, Charnelle, Dale and Missy appear to have the most comfort with their Aboriginal identity and are able to exist in mainstream environments equally as comfortably, although Dale is still anxious to behave correctly in mainstream culture and Missy and Charnelle still have trouble in Aboriginal crowds. Certainly Dale and Charnelle have had the most influence from their extended family, although they have other issues that also mediate

their identities. Dale has trouble in the Aboriginal environment with his identity as a gay person and Charnelle must deal with her African American identity vis-a-vis the Aboriginal community.

The point of this discussion is to show that with culturally appropriate treatment and education and a supportive environment (which they all want), youth can gain insight into their tribal background and cultural richness. Those persons who have strong support for their cultural identity have less difficulty dealing with racism in the greater society. Street youth policy, research, practice and services must take into consideration the Aboriginal culture within the tribal territory that is affected, for in Canada Aboriginal cultures are many and they have widely varied expression. Colonization has affected us for different lengths of time and in different ways. On the eastern seaboard colonization impact started in earnest in the 1600s, around the Great Lakes in the 1700s, the plains territories in the early 1800s, and on the western most territories in the mid-to-late 1800s (MacFarlane, 1993:19). And sometimes the northern regions across the continent have gone unaffected seriously until two decades ago. To say that one solution would apply to all nations in all regions would be to repeat past mistakes. Kirkness and Selkirk (1992) summarize this sentiment by saying,

It is, therefore, the challenge to today's peoples to correct the situation created over three hundred years of attempted assimilation. To achieve this, the First Nations children of today must know their past, their true history, in order to understand the present and plan for the future. First Nations cultures must once again be respected and the traditional values must again be held in high esteem (103).

Conclusion

In summary, there are many policy implications arising from the issues that have surfaced in the case studies in this research. I have touched on survival, addictions, exploitation, justice, in care, education, racism, and culture. Each topic is intertwined and complex, and yet from a policy vantage point they still leave the youth out there on the street. This is so because this research is about youth living on the street, their survival issues on the street, services which help them cope with street conditions and helping systems which potentially could help them get off the streets.

Ideally these youth should never be seen outside their extended Aboriginal systems. For an Aboriginal person without their extended family does not really exist. They have no reference point. Public policy directions that will assist Aboriginal street youth to reconnect with their communities and further, to prevent more children from being lured to or escaping to the street must first keep in mind the importance of kinship values.

Bass (1992) gives some valuable insights into serious concerns for researchers, policy makers and service providers, to keep in mind. She raises a number of questions about the many street youth who do not access street services for various reasons. Therefore what kind of outreach services are indicated? Street youth have long-term needs when they show up at short-term emergency shelters. How can both be served adequately? What kinds of long-term facilities are needed to meet long-term problems? How can social support systems be built in for youth leaving child care facilities (foster care, street services, transitional settings)? Are distinct programs needed for runaways, homeless youth, and those leaving state legislated facilities? Are separate services indicated for younger street children and older street youth? And finally, what kinds of staff (professions, qualifications, experience) ought to work in street youth facilities? The case studies have surfaced just a little more of the iceberg. Perhaps it is enough to build a base for further dialogue and research about the specific needs of Aboriginal street youth. Certainly street youth participation in further discussion on policy directions and service provisions is highly indicated.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

The case studies of Aboriginal street youth indicate that Aboriginal street youth are not enjoying the basic human rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). And yet this study is not about victimization. It is about survival. The youth interviewed (some to a lesser degree) are proud of their survival skills and intelligence. They feel experienced in life; they feel mature and well travelled; and they make intelligent use of different systems such as street culture and mainstream services. Hearing their stories, therefore, is the celebration of the will to live and the courage to once again trust that research will enhance the life chances of youth such as themselves who are truly dispossessed in their own homeland.

Mainstream society, Aboriginal communities and governments must quickly face the realization that the new generation of youth that is leaving the Aboriginal community, by whatever means, is living a hyper reality. They live in a world where violence is embedded in their videos games, television programs, movies and peer activity. They have ready access to powerful drugs and weapons of many kinds, and increasingly gangs provide the need for relationship and power. They live in a society where their image in relation to the society is degraded by increased child pornography and prostitution, and at the same time where fatal diseases wait on every corner if they follow that image. They live in environments where child abuse mediates their development and where supports for healthy racial and cultural identity are scarce commodities. Finally, the children live in a society where technology transmits the socio-economic differential directly into the living rooms of their poor homes. The Aboriginal community must come to terms with this realization because they are out of touch with what these youth are all about. Street youth are living and navigating circumstances that only decades ago were unheard of. The dangers do not only affect the wayward child, they affect all children and youth who walk the urban street — children and youth who go to school. The point is, we have to catch up with street youth; we need to enter the

self-determination era equipped with the tools to bring back our children — back from the abysmal impact of colonization.

The task will not be an easy one and half way reforms will not do. Considering that Aboriginal people, as a whole, still face major obstacles in Canada, the success for social change in the Aboriginal street youth population depends in part on social reconstruction in the whole. York (1989) writes,

Aboriginal people continue to face more hostility than any other ethnic group in Canada. The Canadian Human Rights Commission, in its annual report issued in the spring of 1989, concluded that discrimination against native people is at the top of the list of human rights abuses in Canada today. 'The situation faced by Canada's native peoples is, in many ways, a national tragedy,' the commission reported. 'The grand promise of equality of opportunity that forms the central purpose of the Canadian Human Rights Act stands in stark contrast to the conditions in which many native people live' (268).

To ensure authentic transformation, coalitions need to be formed between urban and rural Aboriginal communities to safeguard rights of the Aboriginal child, family and community. We must create an environment for these children to come home to — or self-determination could mean that we too will create a class system where street youth are the bottom of the pyramid. Etah, an eight year veteran of the streets, reminds us cryptically, that if we don't do something — if we don't wake up — there will be more and more youth coming onto the streets.

We have read the stories of those who have agreed to share their experience with us; but there are those who are not represented in this study. These young people must be acknowledged. Whether by the constraints described in the methodology section or by some other form of exclusion, we have missed youth who represent some of the most damaged and incapacitated people in Canada (although we heard about them). They are:

- * very young runaways (for instance there were two 12 year old boys living in empty buildings in Winnipeg who were living under cover so they became inaccessible);
- * sniffers (in most cities there are groups of children who hang out in "huffers row");

- * underage prostitutes, male or female, with or without pimps (for instance in Winnipeg there are street corners where groups of 8-10 children age 9-12 work right out in the open);
- * gang members or survivors of gang abduction (particularly Winnipeg has a problem with gang activity, O'Connor, 1993; Flanagan, 1993); "About 21 gangs exist in the city of Winnipeg although this is an unofficial estimate, even the police now notice the increase of gang activity. The Police Chief has attributed the cause to increased poverty";
- * heavily addicted alcohol and drug addicts;
- * in special categories (for instance, skinheads or white power groups, and satanic cults);
- * underground houses of exploitation where very young youth are being held (for instance those mentioned in Winnipeg, Vancouver and Montreal); "Native young women are especially recruited by South Asian gangs or others to be prostitutes or to be on drugs";
- * any youth in connection with fire arms and weapons;
- * Metis under-represented, possibly because of Bill C-31 and referral method;
- * Inuit youth are underrepresented, because of older population in Montreal;
- * Lastly we have no way of knowing how many Aboriginal street youth have died on the street through substance abuse, murder, and suicide.

It is to the last group that I dedicate the stories in this study.

The introduction to the study presented three reasons why we are unique peoples in Canada and introduced a macro approach against which to view the present experience of Aboriginal street youth. This focus brought us to the conclusion that Aboriginal street youth experience far greater impacts, from our collective dispossession, the marginalization of our unique world view expressed in our various cultures, and colonial policy and racism, than was previously imagined. By placing Aboriginal street youth in the larger context of mainstream society and the urban environment, and by highlighting the role of current and historical legislation impacts, we have been able to access a holistic view of their lives.

Canada is ranked as one of the best countries in the world to live in based on statistics indicative of a desirable lifestyle. Ironically Canada is also ranked second in the western world for child poverty and child poverty is a fact of life for many, particularly Aboriginal children. Statistics show that 15% of Canadian children live in poverty; 1.2 million children age one to six live in poverty; that Canada is second only to the United States in the murder of young children; and that Canada ranks third in the world (Australia and Norway have more) of youth (age 15-24) suicide (Laidlaw Foundation, 1993). We have no way of knowing if Aboriginal children are accurately enumerated in these statistics. However, since poverty line and unemployed statistics do not include the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Aboriginal reservations, we can safely assume that these statistics do not accurately reflect what is happening in Aboriginal communities.

On a positive note, we have gained insight into the lives of Aboriginal street youth. And those of us who have had the honour of working with them and who have heard their stories of survival have come to respect them immensely. As we respect our elders so ought we respect our youth. Canadian governments have the responsibility to correct the impact of colonization reflected in the harsh reality of Aboriginal street youth. Aboriginal self-determination has inherited the responsibility to reflect the primary value of protecting the elders and the children — particularly those who through no fault of their own are left to walk all night.

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APPENDIX A

I. CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION QUESTIONS

A. Generic information questions: Agency.

1. Number of street youth in city?
2. Percentage of First Nations' street youth.?
3. Number of workers in agency. (Percentage of First Nations workers in agency)?
4. What are your funding sources?
5. Who decides policy?
6. What organizations are represented on your board of directors?
7. Are there First Nations people on your board of directors?
8. What age group do you work with?

B. Non-generic information questions: Agency.

1. Do First Nations street youth readily access your services? Do they under utilize? (Research alludes to First Nations over representation in street youth — if they are not using agency services, also at the highest percentage. Why not?)
2. Do you provide culturally specific services (re. identity, cultural ceremonies, therapeutic methods) or do you refer youth to specific places? If agency is First Nations: what kind of culturally appropriate services?
3. Have your workers (agency) had racism awareness training, workshops, speakers, etc? What do you do if a person tells you about a racist assault? Do you work with self esteem and identity?
4. Why do you think there are so many street youth? Why do you think there are so many First Nations street youth?
5. Do you have any recommendations (ideas) about how to keep these youth off the street or to get them back home?

C. Questions, Open Ended Interview (Parent & Advocacy Person Front Line).

Parent:

1. How old was your child when they got into street life?
2. How did the problems start (between home and youth)?
3. How did you cope?
4. Did you use social agencies to help you (youth and self)? Which ones? How many? Did they help?
5. Why do you think your child went to the street?
6. How did this situation affect your family? Your health? Your work?
7. Can you identify outside sources of problems for your child? (i.e. school, police, peers). Do you think these had to do with racism, self-esteem or cultural identity?
8. Is there anything you would recommend to help these street youth stay off the street or to get back home?

Agency Person:

1. Why do you think aboriginal youth end up on the street?
2. Do you think there are differences between mainstream street youth and those who are First Nations? What kind of differences (if any)?
3. Do you know about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada?
4. Do you observe that the street youth have identify problems?
5. Is racism a factor? How?
6. Are there appropriate culturally specific agencies and services for you to refer these street youth to? (i.e. extended family counselling).
7. Is there anything you would recommend for policy regarding service delivery, prevention and repatriation?
8. Do you have anything else to add?

APPENDIX B

I. THE CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

A. The street youth: open ended questions.

1. Define "street" situation with the participant.
2. How long have you been on the street?
3. What are you running from?
4. How did you get here?
5. Why did you get here?
6. Who are the significant people in your life (your extended family) on the street?
7. Do you use the street services in your area? if no why not? Do you get welfare services? educational services? employment services? aids prevention? birth control? drug and alcohol counselling?
8. What kind of things happen to you that you think don't happen to other street youth?
9. Do street services workers treat you the same as everyone else? Do you feel comfortable using their services? if not why not? Do you know any Aboriginal street workers? How does it feel to talk to them?
10. Do store keepers and ordinary pedestrians treat you the same as everyone else on the street? better? worse? if worse why do you think they do this?
11. What happened back home (whatever that means)? Why did you leave home? Would you go back? Under what kind of conditions would you go back home? Do you have contact with your family? extended family? home reserve? home community?
12. Do you experience a lot of racism on the street? Tell me about some examples? From other street people? From people in general? How does this make you feel? Does this include violence? How do you cope?
13. Let's talk about grief. Are there things that you are very sad about? For example; separation, suicide, death of someone, loss, loneliness, wanting to go home.
14. Let's talk about shame. Are there things that you feel are very shameful for you to talk about? Have you talked to a counsellor, elder, your parent, police, teacher, social worker or anyone else about this? if not why not? Would you like to? Do you know where to go?
15. Let's talk about fear. What kind of things do you fear on the street? What kind of exploitation happens (if any) to you on the street? Does anyone try to take advantage of you on the street? What about drugs? What about alcohol? What about sniffing? What about prostitution? How do you survive? How do others survive?

16. How do you feel about being an Aboriginal person? Do you know much about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada? Do you practice any Aboriginal culture? Did you when you were home? Would you practice if any kind of ceremonies or services were available? What would you advise a government policy person to do about this subject?
17. What would make your life easier than it is today? What kind of services do you think Aboriginal street youth need? How can we put them into operation? What kind of things need to happen at the family, community, city level for prevention of more street youth. What about education at the street level — what kinds of things need to be known by the youth? How would we set them up? How would we operate them? What would you say to a government person about this subject?
18. Would you go home if you could? Would you go to school if you could? What stops you right now?
19. Who are your role models right now? Who do you admire most? Why?
19. What would be the best possible future for you?
20. Is there anything we left out? Do you want to add anything?

B. The former street youth

1. Define "street" situation with the participant.
2. How long ago were you on the street? How long did you stay there? How did you get off the street? What has happened to you since you got off the streets?
3. How did you get there?
4. Why did you get there?
5. What were you running from?
6. Who were the significant people in your life (your extended family) on the street?
7. Did you use street services in the city? if no why not? Do you get welfare services? educational services? employment services? aids prevention? birth control?
8. What kind of things happened to you that you think don't happen to other street youth at the time?
9. Were there street services workers for you to go to? Do you feel comfortable using the services? if not why not? Did you know any Aboriginal street workers? How did it feel to talk to them?
10. Did store keepers and ordinary pedestrians treat you the same as everyone else on the street? better? worse? if worse why do you think they do this?

11. What happened back home (whatever that means) to make you leave and go to the street? Why did you leave home? Did you go back? What made you go back home? Did you have contact with your family? extended family? home reserve? home community?
12. Did you experience a lot of racism on the street? Tell me about some examples? From other street people? From people in general? How did this make you feel? Did this include violence? How did you cope?
13. Let's talk about grief. Were there things that you were very sad about? For example; separation, suicide, death of someone, loss, loneliness, wanting to go home.
14. Let's talk about shame. Were there things that you feel are very shameful for you to talk about? Did you talk to a counsellor, elder, your parent, police, teacher, social worker or anyone else about this? if not why not? Would you have liked to? Did you know where to go?
15. Let's talk about fear. What kind of things did you fear on the street? What kind of exploitation happened to you on the street? Did anyone try to take advantage of you on the street? How did you survive? How did others survive?
16. How did you feel about being an Aboriginal person then? How do you feel about being an Aboriginal person now? Did you know much about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada? What about now? Did you practice any Aboriginal culture? What about now? Did you when you were home? Were there any kind of cultural ceremonies or services available to you in the city then? What would you advise a government policy person to do about providing appropriate cultural services to Aboriginal street youth?
17. What kind of services do you think Aboriginal street youth need to help them get off the street? What kind of services do you think Aboriginal street youth need to prevent them from going to the street? How can we put them into operation? What kind of things need to happen at the family, community, city level for prevention of more street youth. What about education at the street level — what kinds of things need to be known by the youth? How would we set them up? How would we operate them? What would you say to a government person about this subject?

APPENDIX C**Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples****Urban Perspectives: Street Youth Project****Consent Form**

I, _____, agree to participate in the Street Youth Case Study Research Project investigating the life circumstances and environment of street youth. I fully understand all of the interview sessions, of the case studies and the interviews with parents and advocates in the contextual information gathering, will be audio taped and used solely for the Street Youth Project of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). By signing this form, I agree to participate in the Street Youth Project and to be audio taped. I have been assured by RCAP that my participation is completely voluntary and confidential and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence. I understand that the material discussed in the interviews will not be made public in any form in which I can be personally identified.

I understand that this research project is being carried out by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Urban Perspectives, Research Co-ordinators Rosalee Tyzia and Donovan Young; the Project Co-ordinator, Lauri Gilchrist; and Research Assistants: Marie Baker, Bev Dagg Lopez, and Alysa Praamsma. Questions regarding this research project can be directed to Rosalee Tizya or Donovan Young at 1-800-363-8235. In the event of any complaints about the procedures used in this project, I am aware that I may contact David Hawkes (613-934-8529) or Marlene Castellano (613-943-2050), Co-directors of the Research Department at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Signature _____

Date _____

Witness _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D

Face sheet

- Code name:_____ Code number for files:_____
1. Gender: male____ female____
 2. Age: 12-15____ 16-18____
 3. Education: (number of years).
 Primary____ Secondary____ High School____
 K-8 8 & 9 10-12
 4. Schooling: (any combination).
 On reserve____ Off reserve____ Urban____
 Residential school____ Rural____
 5. Regional information: Home identification
 Rural____ Town____ Urban-(100,000 and up)____
 Province____ Reserve (state)____
- Notes: _____
-
- In the case of foster care, adoption or institutional care, please make notes and remember to discuss in the dialogue.
6. Indian ethnic affiliation: (ie Cree, Metis, Inuit)
 Cultural identity____
 Status____ Non-status____ C-31____
 7. Languages spoken:
 Indian language (state)____ English____ French____
 9. Family constellation:
 Single parent: Mom____ Dad____ Brothers____ Sisters____
 Two parent (state type of family):
 Brothers____ Sisters____
 Extended family primary care:
 Grandparent(s)____ Aunts or uncles____ Cousins____
 Friends____ Others____

Foster family____ Foster family brothers____ Sisters____
 Other Aboriginal youth in home: Brothers____Sisters____

Adoptive family____ Adoptive family brothers____ Sisters____
 Other Aboriginal youth in home: Brothers____ Sisters____

10. Social service institutional care: any occurrence in last year.

Social worker____Detention centre____Group home____
 Special school____

Notes: _____

11. Current shelter/living arrangements:

Streets____ Hostel____ Emergency unit____ Other____
 Friends (adult) ____ Friends (peers) ____

Notes: _____

Notes:

12. Current nutrition/food arrangements:

Streets____ Hostel____ Soup Kitchen____ Other____
 Food bank____ Friends (adult) ____ Friends (peers) ____

APPENDIX E

Face sheet — Former street youth

Code name: _____ Code number for files:_____

1. Gender: male_____ female_____
2. Age: 18-20_____ 21-30_____ 30-40_____

3. Education: (number of years).

Primary_____ Secondary_____ High School_____

K-8 8 & 9 10-12

Life skills_____ College_____ University_____

Notes: _____

4. Schooling: (any combination).

On reserve_____ Off reserve_____ Urban_____

Residential school_____ Rural_____

5. Regional information: Home identification

Rural_____ Town_____ Urban-(100,000 and up)_____ Province_____

Reserve (state)_____

Notes: _____

In the case of foster care, adoption or institutional care, please make notes and remember to discuss in the dialogue.

6. Indian ethnic affiliation: (ie Cree, Metis, Innu)

Cultural identity_____

Status_____ Non-status_____ C-31_____

7. Languages spoken:

Indian language (state)_____ English_____ French_____

9. Family constellation:

Your own family:

Partner_____ Sons_____ Daughters_____

Your childhood family:

Single parent: Mom___Dad___Brothers___Sisters___

Two parent (state type of family):_____Brothers___ Sisters___

Extended family primary care:

Grandparent(s) ___ Aunts or uncles___ Cousins___

Friends___ Others___

Foster family___ Foster family brothers___ Sisters___

Other Aboriginal youth in home: Brothers___Sisters___

Adoptive family___ Adoptive family brothers___ Sisters___

Other Aboriginal youth in home: Brothers___ Sisters___

10. Social service institutional care: any occurrence in childhood.

Social worker

Detention centre

Group home___

Special school

Notes: _____

11. Current living arrangements:

Notes: _____

12. Agencies or persons who helped you get off the streets:

Parents

Extended family

Agency person

Social worker

Police

Teacher

Notes: _____

APPENDIX F**Documentation sheet**

To be used immediately after each dialogue with participant. This is where you will describe where you are meeting with the participant, what is significant about their appearance, date time and any other description of the person or the surroundings that will fill in the detail of the interview with the participant as well as your personal thoughts about the events.

Reflection	Description

APPENDIX C

Vancouver: Services directly mentioned by participants in the study

In this section we elaborate on some street services which participants have directly mentioned whether or not they use the service. These also represent some of the agencies which we visited. There were services which were visited but mentioned elsewhere in the study because there were just too many.

Every person in the Vancouver group mentioned the **Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (D.E.Y.A.S.)**. The society was established in 1979 by John Turvey who is still the Executive Director. Eighty to ninety percent of its funding comes from the Ministry of Social Services with the balance coming from the Vancouver Social Planning Council. In 1992 the budget was \$550,000. DEYAS employs 21 workers, 8 are Aboriginal (2 reconnect workers, 2 counsellors, 3 needle exchange, 1 AIDS worker). Policy is decided by a multi-cultural board made up of 30-40% Aboriginal people.

The organization works with an open age group policy (0-84), however, 70-80% are youth. They work with 50-75% Aboriginal youth, (13 years ago 50% were Aboriginal). They estimate 25-100 entrenched street youth (very few middle class) on the street on any given night who are involved in quasi criminal activities, drug dealing and prostitution. Street workers state that there has been an increase of 50-90% street children in the last 5 years, many of whom are from reserves and small communities. Some of them are third and fourth generation families living in the city. Many Aboriginal street youth have had relatives die violent deaths in the eastend of Vancouver, many grew up in care.

Services provided by the program include: education, counselling, assessments and referral. The Reconnect Program is available 24 hours a day for street youth under 19 which assists to reconnect youth with families and community, to identify who is new on the street, and to refer youth to appropriate agencies such as detox, housing, health services, and outreach services. After interviewing five workers from DEYAS the research assistant wrote in her journal, "After five formal interviews I am feeling overwhelmed by the plight of our Aboriginal street children."

The **Needle Exchange Program** is a part of the DEYAS organization. It consists of three vans in which 5-8 staff members (ex-street people) travel the streets of Vancouver. Aboriginal staff averages from 1-4 people at anytime. The services they provide are: AIDS prevention and education. They exchange needles, provide condoms and bad date sheets, and they refer to other street services. Six nights a week until 2:00 a.m. the program deals mostly with cocaine and heroin users (talwin and ritalin secondary) and prostitutes. According to personnel 35-40% of the frequent users of the service are Aboriginal people, 9% of the total population are teenagers, approximately 40% of which are Aboriginal youth, and Aboriginal teens are 60% more likely to be users compared to total youth population. The April 1993 statistics show that there were 10,945 visits, 29.3% of which were Aboriginal people.

A street worker stated that estimates of Aboriginal street youth population are hard to pinpoint because some are underground, they are very transient and resistant to social services, and they are very often on the run. A recent most troublesome underground trend with urban Aboriginal youth is the involvement with Asian youth gangs and /or with exploitative older (25-40 age group) Asian men. Another underground portion of street youth population, less often but equally destructive, are involved with child exploitation industries.

The **Adolescent Street Unit (ASU)** is a non-Aboriginal organization which is situated on Drake Street. ASU is funded by province of British Columbia. Their policy is decided at the Deputy Minister level ("who often don't know what's happening at the grassroots level"). ASU has 24 workers with only one Aboriginal worker in the alcohol and drug area. Youth age 12-19 year old can access help which offers all kinds of services as diverse as possible.

ASU workers estimate 400-500 street youth on the street, 55-60% of them Aboriginal youth, that use their service as frequently as other youth. They do not provide any Aboriginal specific services although workers have had at least two days of cross cultural training from United Native Nations and they refer to Aboriginal services such as court workers and the Indian Centre. ASU recognizes that there is a need greater efforts for outreach to Aboriginal youth.

Street Youth Services (SYS) is located at 1237 Richards Street, it was instituted in 1987 funded by the Ministry of Social Services, with a small amount coming from the city and other donations. SYS is an outreach program that identifies youth at risk and connects them with appropriate services. They provide youth with someone to talk with, referral and advocacy. They share office space with the STD clinic, AIDS counsellors, prenatal counsellors — 5 days per week with 2 nights late coverage. The staff consists of 2 1/2 positions with 1/2 designated as an Aboriginal position. Three hundred street youth under the age of 19 use their service in a month, 30 of which are Aboriginal youth, however, they state that 70% of males prostitutes in "Boystown" are Aboriginal. SYS has been adopted by the Aboriginal males that frequent Boystown. The workers spend more time with their Aboriginal users because there are no other services for them. However, they do not provide any Aboriginal specific services. SYS workers say that many of the Aboriginal youth do not like going to the DEYAS, particularly the gay males who are subject to homophobic discrimination from Aboriginal people and racism from the White people. A lot of their Aboriginal clients come from adoption breakdown in White homes (interviews).

NEXUS a Substance Abuse Outreach Services program located at 575 Drake Street is a confidential alcohol and drug information and counselling service for street youth. They assist youth to connect with detox, treatment, support groups, counselling and other alcohol and drug services. It appears, from participant responses on alcohol and drug abuse, that youth get or have access to information and the help they need to get off of drugs when they are ready. Most of the youth we spoke with had alcohol and drug counsellors and they were reasonably responsible with addiction issues in their lives.

The medical clinics in the inner core of Vancouver: the **Drake Street Clinic** at 575 Drake Street; the **Richards Street Clinic** at 1237 Richards Street; the **Main Street Clinic** at 219 Main Street; and the **Health Clinic** at 414 E. Cordova Street, provide confidential and free pregnancy, STD and AIDS testing, treatment, advocacy and referral to street affiliated youth and adults. The youth in this study spoke freely about using clinics and they were fully informed of the dangers of contracting AIDS through sex and needles. The health education on the street is reinforced by consistent networking of street workers, the needle van and the clinics. This is a very positive development in street culture. Street youth are probably more informed than the average middle class teen anywhere in Canada.

Employment oriented services are on the rise in Vancouver. **Creative Opportunities For Kids** is one of them. It was founded in 1985 by Vancouver street workers, sponsored by the Seva Service Society. Now it is also supported by Family Services of Greater Vancouver and government funding. The program is a grassroots initiative that helps street workers make contact and provide street youth

with part-time employment. The youth can gain employment experience and skills. In other words — a place to start. Three full time employment and skills counsellors work at the street level.

The organization has placed over 400 in more than 75 placements in places such as restaurants, day-cares, and private businesses since its inception. Joanne was one of their clients. She said that she experienced sexism after being placed in a work placement where she was a carpenter's helper. The employer quickly lost interest in the youth after the program part was completed. Joanne stated that she did not get any long term benefits and the employer frustrated them by promising work which did not materialize.

Other programs like **Life Choices for Youth Society** (auto service training) and the **Picasso Cafe** (training for the food service industry) also help to train youth before they go out on their own (White, 1992).

Stable housing is an issue because youth need an address and telephone number in order to be eligible for welfare or to go for job interviews. They need a place to eat, sleep and to have a shower. Youth on their own experience systematic discrimination in housing simply because of their age. Stereotypes of street youth behaviour and Aboriginal people are also barriers. Stable affordable housing is key to enhancing the life chances of Aboriginal youth in the city. Vancouver has low rental housing for Aboriginal people in the city that would be ideal for youth on their own.

The one Aboriginal program, **Aries Project/Urban Native Youth Association** situated at #1-1607 East Hastings Street in Vancouver, is a day and evening program for street involved Aboriginal male youth. Aries Project provides meals, life skills, recreational, cultural and social programs and academic upgrading. The program is useful for youth who have made some effort of transcending the street and who have a place to stay. None of the youth mentioned using this service. The participants in Vancouver do not qualify by virtue of their gender.

The male street population is more visible in addiction and criminal justice statistics, therefore Aboriginal specific programming that are also gender specific tend to address their needs first. Although **Urban Images for Indian Women**, run under the auspices of the British Columbia Professional Indian Women's Association is a life skills and job readiness program, it deals with women survivors of abuse in the family and addiction. This program is suitable for older women (re)entering the labour market and Aboriginal female street youth would not qualify. In any case the waiting list is too long. Female Aboriginal street youth are marginalized in Aboriginal programming even though the Winnipeg Social Planning Council Research Report (1990) shows that young females run more often and for longer periods of time (see Winnipeg background information — chapter four).

SKID (Street Kids in Distress) is worth mentioning because of its recent closure. In December of 1992 the store front operation opened on the corner of Pacific Boulevard and Richards Street. It opened after a track record of one year of providing food, clothing and education to many youth with no where else to go. The organization was closed in January 1993 for allowing 13-15 year olds to sleep on the premises (Truscott, 1993). Where do the 10-16 year olds go who are running from care givers? This type of enforced homelessness makes youth more vulnerable to pimps and gang abductions. It is also interesting that the organization now plans to open a short term housing (six bed) unit to youth 16-18. This is a small concession in a city where over 400 street youth roam the streets and still leaves the younger range to the mercy of a predatory void in the system.

Recent proposals for the use of an old hotel on Hastings Street for a housing unit for street youth met with loud protests. It is ironic that the idea that street youth housing could be in close proximity to the adult street population was not acceptable to city council.

Brenda Carr's Art Studio was the service consistently mentioned with great respect and admiration. Situated in downtown Vancouver the art studio is a place where street youth can go for a cup of coffee, a safe place to hang out during the day without strings attached. It is a place where youth can express themselves artistically and somewhere from which they can call home every so often. Older people, particularly police and social workers, are discouraged from going to the safe haven. This aspect is much appreciated by the youth. Brenda Carr is someone to be trusted with stories from the street, with the burdens of the day, and with hopes for the future.

Vancouver and Montreal each had a particular person that attracted youth to street services and inspired trust and affection from the most alienated and distrustful youth. Etah from Vancouver said that it was the personal qualities of the person that characterized the patron saints of the street and not the type of service. The people in question showed unconditional service, advocacy and affection. They were flexible and were not above bending the rules just a little in order to alleviate pain and suffering. They were perceived by the youth to be on their side. In other words, as much as possible, they did not collaborate with the police or social workers against the youth. In Montreal that person was Pop's originator of Dans la Rue. In Vancouver Brenda Carr fit the bill. In Winnipeg, SKY, an agency came closest to the characteristics that inspired trust in the youth interviewed. Although workers were mentioned by name it seemed that the atmosphere at the agency was the drawing point in that particular case.

APPENDIX H

Winnipeg: Services directly mentioned by participants in the study

The agency where we met with the participants for this study was **Street Kids and Youth (SKY)** situated at 415 Graham Street. This centre was comfortable for the participants. It was to be closed one month after we were there. Ironically on June 1, 1993, a day set aside to commemorate International Children's Day, also marked the day when SKY closed its door to street youth. The program's funding had been terminated.

None the less, it is important to identify the services that are/were frequented by those we interviewed. SKY came into operation in September 1991, funded by the former Winnipeg Core Area Initiative, the Winnipeg Foundation and the Downtown Improvement Zone. Board members from Mamawi, the Boys and Girls Club, the City Police Department, Children's Home and Child and Family Services decided policy. SKY had served 13,000 youth ages 7-25 up until the time we were there. They provided food, clothing, counselling, bus tickets, and a safe place to be off the street for a brief period of time.

The director spoke of the image of Aboriginal people that youth have to come to terms with in Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg, the young are impressed with the stereotype of the drunk on Main Street. Some kids are told they act Indian like their father or are a whore because of their mother. Constant exposure to racism makes it hard to have a positive identity ... Schools such as Children of the Earth have helped tremendously. The Native youth have been strongly influenced positively in their identities. But they need to learn to celebrate all cultures as well (interview).

To provide better services, she went on, "warehousing" has to be avoided. Lumping of services or clients in one location doesn't always make it easier. Separating Aboriginal youth from others makes it less likely they will learn to interact comfortably with their own age group. They need in-between areas to choose — where an agency doesn't regiment their associations. By the time some are 13 years old they have been in 24 placements, and by 15 some are on their own. They need a place that gives them time to think and is not so crisis-oriented.

Beat the Street, created by Tracy LeQuere in May 1985 out of Toronto's Frontier College opened a resource centre in Winnipeg in September of 1990. The literacy resource centre, located on Sutherland Avenue is open to youth 16 and over. The organization produces a space where street youth tutor street youth. The literacy program consists of individualized learning programs. Native clients form about 70% of the total client population. The agency mandate is directed to street youth in providing literacy or basic skills. There's no entry level when it comes to grade levels. Once clients complete this program, they go to the employment readiness programs.

R. B. Russell does provide counselling and job strategies using "the school approach" especially for their Grade 12 students. Although, some institutions like the universities stipulate that "mature" students may enter, there are some restrictions that relate to particular high school course level work.

There is an over-representation of Aboriginal youth on the street, stated Beat the Street personnel, with an estimated 74-89% population in correctional institutions (1990 figures). When

Native youth are undercounted by the system, it might be an effect of bias where there is a refusal to take into account any type of racial, ethnic or cultural difference.

Cultural appropriate services are delivered by contracting with "Flying on Your Own" instructors. Students are taught the Medicine Wheel and how to talk in a circle as was done at Alkali Lake.

Why we see more street youth may be because there are more single parents or dysfunctional families than before. The media as well as Much Music have been influential on street youth about a certain kind of lifestyle. Some youth find another family on the street or gang to belong to. About 21 gangs exist in the city of Winnipeg although this is an unofficial estimate, even the police now seem to notice the increase of gang activity. Even the Police Chief has attributed the cause as increased poverty. Maybe even more apathy exists among youth especially when youth defy authority figures. The Young Offender Act has been itself responsible for condoning violence in the treatment toward crimes against property such as stealing cars or break and enters. Housing costs are barely met by welfare cheques. Raising children on welfare for a single parent is still too lean an existence. Changes that would be beneficial might be changing the Young Offender's Act especially with the increase of car thefts. Street youth need more recreation facilities and more arts or craft training opportunities. Here, the Native Arts Foundation in Toronto was recommended as a possible funder for some gifted youth. Seems to be not enough counselling for youth especially to allow some to know more about their basic rights. So many are abused in their families. More walk-in counselling sessions to deal with sexual abuse would be a high need. Youth need to re-establish their education and have to gain the skills to help them "fit in" to the educational system which has some inflexibility to respond to adult learners. Some youth seen at Beat the Street are "brain damaged" and present behaviour problems for instructors. Others have complained of "signing documents" which may have meant more jail time for them. Other staff talked about the services of providing language instruction to Cree and Saulteaux clientele. Presently, an evening program provides Cree lessons. An instructor in Saulteaux is needed (interview).

Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights (P.O.W.E.R.), is a Drop-in Resource Centre for prostitutes situated at 50 Argyle Street. POWER is a drop-in centre for women, kids and trannies involved in prostitution. The program began in 1985, closed, then reopened in 1992. POWER is funded through the Provincial Health Services Development Fund, as a demonstration project through the Core Area Initiative and Manitoba Community Services. Policy is decided by an advisory board. One Aboriginal person sits on the board. Some of their 40 volunteers are Aboriginal people but as yet they employ no Aboriginal staff (out of five staff).

We encourage our clients to get involved in public presentations on Aboriginal culture ... We are arranging for a contract position to have a First Nations person on site ... We are organizing a sweatlodge. We are trying to get people who have left the reserve to reconnect with their culture. This will be a paid position.

The organization provides a safe place off the street with facilities for laundry, bathing and cooking; street outreach service — condoms, bad date sheets and health information on sexually transmitted disease; counselling; health program with full time nurse on staff; referral services; and

public education. "We help them through crisis intervention, or problems with the justice system, refer them to Legal Aid, and Child and Family Services."

The number of contacts is 7,000 with 40-45% Aboriginal clients between the ages of 18 and 22. 21% of clients are under 18. Some are around 10 to 12 years old. They keep files on clients who consent. "We have 100 files on different individuals. We could have three times that amount."

The employee that we interviewed stated that he did not think there was racism on the street or in their service delivery, however, he noticed racism in the justice system. The organization has not provided anti racism training to their workers.

We don't see racism on the street, don't see clients calling each other names. There are women who sound racist about other people's pimps. But there's no racism amongst the women in here ... The racism I have seen is discrimination or racism with prostitutes trying to access services. When a woman is beaten or raped is taken to the emergency ward, if the hospital gets wind she's a prostitute, they discriminate in the way they talk to her. There's racism throughout the justice system (interview).

Why are there so many Aboriginal street youth in Winnipeg? The worker offered an opinion.

Poverty — part of it is people coming from reserves. Kids coming from small towns, getting swept away. They're taken away from the reserve, stuck in a group home. They run with other girls who have been on the street. You can lose your sense of identity. They're usually running away from something, if their home wasn't good. It's poverty and economics. They run away also within the city. The ones who are working Sutherland or Jarvis, the majority are Aboriginal kids hanging out together. Racism is still there in society. A lot of Aboriginal family situations are bad, but it doesn't mean that is the only reason, it's always a mixture. When they're on the run, they shack up at different people's houses, or stay in a hotel room, or sleep outside. They can run from their own home, or from a locked setting, or treatment centres, or big institutions. They're not happy in foster homes. They get into legal trouble, they're scooped again, put back into group homes. On the run, they live off their friends, or steal or prostitute themselves. Some kids get confused, kids who have been in foster homes (interview).

The **Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Youth Centre** situated on 2nd floor, 531 Notre Dame Avenue, gets funding from the provincial government, federal government as well as municipal sources. The Board of Directors runs the Centre through a Work Relations Committee. They have 65 employees who are almost all Aboriginal people. They use a status blind approach to service delivery. A non-designation of status makes it possible to serve all First Nations or Aboriginal youth. "Street youth readily access our services because of a youth outreach effort and also because of the Bear Clan patrol. The youth program has a drum group and offers other culturally related activities."

The administrator we interviewed said that 50% of the overall Aboriginal population is under 15. This is the reason there is a high number of Aboriginal street youth.

A high rate of school drop outs contributes. Hard core street youth are homeless or live with friends. Some youth who hit the street come to the city for the summer from the reserves. Of the sniffers, a quick head count shows more are Aboriginal although non-Aboriginals are also involved in solvent abuse (interview).

The topic changes to problems with street youth services in the city and what he believes is needed with regard to working with Aboriginal street youth.

Problems faced by street youth are not always addressed by agencies or professionals because of a mainstream criteria for service delivery. Shelters may focus on women and usually for a particular emergency or crisis situation. Child and Family Services Act restricts some family work by the need to report "at risk" children or in need of "protection". Some abuse may be hidden or disclosure withheld. Mainstream services don't work out well because of the stress on the individual. When street youth are not accessing an agency, not enough outreach has been done ... Racism awareness training does not deal with colonialism or with self-esteem and identity. Native people have mixed values and some experience a cultural confusion. Instead of racism training, "social reconstruction" would reconstruct social identity and give a history of Indian people and the colonization process. Even Native social workers trained toward a BSW need to be retrained or need to refocus their skills. They do not receive enough content in their academic preparation to help them work with communities and families. Not enough [practicum] placement of students has been with Native agencies.

Ni Tin Away Ma Gun Antat (My Relations House), a safe house for Aboriginal street youth, opened in July 1993. Their funding comes from Child and Family Services who have a "hands off" or supportive approach to the Aboriginal Board of Directors of the safe home. The facility is for Aboriginal youth age 18 years and under with a capacity of 16. The services fall under protection, prevention, and advocacy, in basic needs, counselling, crisis line, independent living support, and education. They foster participation of elders, volunteers and the urban Aboriginal community.

Na Tin Away wants to develop a more cultural appropriate model than the medical oriented or behaviour modification perspectives. The staff provide services that are more sensitive to peer-support with an emphasis on the need for adult service providers to be both supportive and yet authentic in their approach to youth work. The home provides a safe environment so that some children may be reunited with their parents or family members. An advisory committee is made up of some parents so that parental involvement in the management of the safe home is insured.

Some sniffers will be admitted but the safe home will not be a treatment centre. Basic needs for food and shelter will be met. Some opportunity to up self-esteem by participating in support groups will be encouraged. Several elders will visit the safe home to counsel the residents. Treatment referrals for sniffers might be Fort Alexander and also the program, Breath of Life in Kenora, Ontario. If child abuse or sexual abuse is a problem, then the safe home will attempt to provide a safe placement for the kid in either a foster home or group home, one that takes into account working with street kids within a neighbourhood that has community development or betterment programs also operating (interview took place before the safe house opened).

The **Bear Clan Patrol** came into existence in 1992 at the initiative of Brian McLeod and Ernest Daniels as a result of concern with prostitution in the northend of Winnipeg and its impact on the community. It works with the co-operation of the Winnipeg police with anywhere from 38 to 70 volunteers. The Bear Clan patrols the inner city northend to prevent violence against Aboriginal people (particularly the prostitutes in the area), take drunks and children home, and try to get prostitutes and pimps to take their business somewhere else (Demas, 1993).

Child and family services

We interviewed an Aboriginal worker who has had experience in Aboriginal child and family service agencies, with the provincial social services system, and who has had experience with street youth on her caseload. Her insights on Aboriginal street youth and services for families in crisis are presented in block form as the standard questions did not apply in this instance.

The present trend toward privatization makes it more difficult for families to receive support services. Staff time has been cut back and there are more gaps in services ... With the increased privatization, more options for young clients are needed. The only option now is to stay with family or to go to the street. Maybe some should be encouraged to live on their own. Youth may administer their own hotels and cafes. There's not much dignity for those utilizing soup kitchens. I try not to utilize group homes but instead prefer to place kids with extended family or at a foster home. Kids who go to group homes are left unsupervised. They hang around in malls. They are too young (age 13-14) and are easily influenced by the peer group within the group home and the street ... We provide no cultural specific services except perhaps referral to residential treatment at the Native Alcoholism Centre, and no anti-racism training ... The problem of street kids has become more severe because of increased poverty, lack of specific services for them, schools are not meeting their needs, lack of recreational programs or funding for sports/arts participation, parents are not represented on school boards which lack community involvement, parents and kids are separated or don't know each other or they don't communicate ... Repatriation needs a more comprehensive approach and should be handled by more than a single agency. This is a specialized service and should address the stigma families experience of having lost their kids. The abuse attributed to Chiefs and Native Child welfare agencies results from the "dumping of problem clients" and the inadequate resources. Child welfare should still address the needs for more support services for families. Families need more than just counselling or intervention. Some families are not ready to function without extended help from agencies. Some mainstream agencies tend to work with women and not with children. Stigma is attached to hookers as single parents. Workers must look at the welfare of the children and not cast judgment on the lifestyle of the parent. If children are not at risk, workers should not simply condemn a mother for her lifestyle or economic behaviour ... More Aboriginal workers are needed in the mainstream child and family services field. Because of the high numbers of Native people, institutions and agencies need to reflect the population base better. Some schools need more visible Native staff such as teachers or administrators. The move toward separate schools or services does not always fit the client group because Native families do have more diversity than is generally assumed. They are more than statistics or victims.

APPENDIX I

Montreal: Services directly mentioned by participants in the study

Le Bon Dieu Dans la Rue (The Good God in the Street), (Dans la Rue for short) founded by Father Emmet Johns, a 63 year old Catholic priest known to all as Pops, in December 1988, was the best known emergency service for street youth in Montreal. As stated before, Pops' method of delivery and unconditional regard for the street youth, particularly the younger ones like Natasha, endeared him to alienated youth. In the field work process it became quite clear that Pops was very personally involved in watching out for Natasha on the street. She, in turn, spoke affectionately of his help.

Dans la Rue is a non-denominational group (four full time staff and volunteers who work in teams of six per shift, 45 volunteer teens in all) aimed at helping Montreal street youth. It is predominantly designed to help minors although no one is turned away. They have had contact with over 30,000 people from 10 to 35 years of age since its opening (Lalonde, 1993). They work from a 31 foot GM mobile home, everyone calls "the van," handing out everything from food to blankets, condoms to second hand clothes, They also provide counselling, referrals, advocacy with the court system and generally being a friend. The van was donated by the Rotary Club of Montreal.

The organization is funded mostly by private donations (the city donated \$20,000 in 1992). It represents a place to get reprieve from the cold, hunger and a slim chance to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, and even a couple of free cigarettes, with no questions asked and best of all "you don't have to beg." It is also a place where unconditional love is liberally dished out (Abley, 1993).

Pop's makes stops at Atwater Avenue and Ste. Catherine Street, Peel and Ste. Catherine Street, Parc Lafontaine (a well known male prostitution district), Amherst and Ontario Street (a favourite spot for transvestites), Clark street and Ste. Catherine's, St. Denis and Rene Levesque Boulevard. And has contact with 125 people a night, as high as 175 on an extra cold night.

A new initiative that is currently underway is a short term, 20 capacity, rooming house for homeless youth ages 12-17. A \$30,400 contribution from the city of Montreal will assist in the operation of the house in a location near the downtown bus terminal. Youth Protection Services will be advised within 72 hours of a minor being housed in the unit. The goal of the house is to provide stability while permanent planning for the youth is underway. An advisory committee of former street youth, volunteers and three full time employees will help run the house (Lalonde, 1993).

Cactus (Centre d'action communautaire aupres des toxicomanes / utilisateurs de seringues) which has a fixed cite at 1209 Saint-Dominique Street in downtown Montreal, was founded in July 1989. It is funded by provincial and federal governments. The organization also provides services at several other locations. The prison locations are at the provincial medium security prisons La Maison Tanquay (150 women, 2000 women per year), and Le Centre de Detention de Montreal (850 capacity, 12,000 per year) with sentences of less than two years. Cactus also operates a drop in clinic situated within the St-Luc Hospital, and is an integrated part of the detox unit in downtown Montreal (Hawkins et al. 1993).

The drop-in site operates seven days a week, 9 p.m. - 4 a.m., with four nursing staff (Redpath, 1990). They serve 150-175 clients per night. The services they provide are education on AIDS, HIV prevention, needle exchange and condom supply, counselling and medical referral. About one out of ten prostitutes are likely to be HIV infected according to Cactus statistics (Cactus Evaluation Report, Jan. 1993).

Natasha mentioned, in her interview that she spends time at the Cactus drop in centre in Montreal. Her only complaint was that after a short period of time they call the provincial child care

system when a minor uses their services. Since Natasha is always on the run from authorities this is not a drawing feature for her.

Heads and Hands, situated at 2304 Old Orchard Avenue, is a Community health and social service centre for youth and young adults in the west end of Montreal. Services consist of referral, counselling, legal help, Monday to Friday 10 a.m. - 10 p.m. (Friday until 5 p.m. only). Personnel are also available to schools, the community and church groups for education on addictions, sexually transmitted disease, nutrition and dental care (Brochure).

Sawbridge: Youth Centres, 3065, boul. Labelle, Prevost, where we found Natasha and Charnelle, is a detention centre that serves youth 12-18 years old that have been "processed" through youth protection or the young offenders systems. They are funded through the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services. Out of 369 staff members one is Aboriginal and no Aboriginal organization representatives or private citizens sit on their board of directors. We were directed to the Law 120 section of Quebec's new law on health and social services, which laid out strict guidelines for representation on the board of directors. Aboriginal people are not likely to be elected or appointed in any of the categories.

In the seven districts in Quebec, 31 Aboriginal youth age 12-21 were admitted to Shawbridge in 1992-93, Montreal alone had 10 Aboriginal youth in detention. So far in 1993-94, 6 Aboriginal youth have entered their care. Natasha and Charnelle were two of them. The organization staff recognize that Aboriginal identity is a particular problem "especially for Native youth who were adopted into White families and the adoption is breaking down." However, they say that they do minimal culturally specific work with Aboriginal youth but will refer to Aboriginal agencies when appropriate.

Passages is a program for juvenile prostitutes and runaways (14-18) who come from all over Canada, from many ethnic backgrounds, and from all socioeconomic classes. It is an 18 unit centre with an average stay of six months (City helps, 1988). A package, that Passages uses for educational purposes states, that the johns are mainly men 35-50 years of age, from all socioeconomic backgrounds and all professions. Youth in the sex industry need services designed specifically for them. Robertson (1984) stated that youth requested counselling services, legal aid, medical referrals and information, lifeskills training, some structure and discipline and protection from their pimps. All of our participants had either tried prostitution or had been approached by would be pimps.

The Native Friendship Centre of Montreal created in January 1974, is situated at 3730 Cote-des Neiges. They provide services, information, referral and counselling, to Aboriginal people (usually over 30 years of age), cultural community-recreational activities, food depot and daily meals, and addictions outreach. Except for incidental accompaniment of parents to cultural activities, the participants did not mention the Friendship Centre as a resource they felt they had access to. The research assistant also observed that most of the clientele were older Aboriginal people. They had no programs for Aboriginal youth.

APPENDIX J**Consent and release form**

I _____ hereby give permission to Lauri Gilchrist to use the interviews which I conducted as part of the Aboriginal Street Youth Study sponsored by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1993. The interviews were conducted in May and June of 1993. I understand that the material will be used in a dissertation as partial requirements for a Ph.D. in the Social and Educational Studies Department, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Further I understand that I will have the opportunity to see the final document to insure that the context of the interviews reflects the reality of the persons interviewed.

Name: _____

Date: _____