Resilience

Resilience is the strength of spirit to recover from adversity. When we experience disappointment, loss, or tragedy, we find the hope and courage to carry on. Humour lightens the load when it seems too heavy. We overcome obstacles by tapping into a deep well of faith and endurance. At times of loss, we come together for comfort. We grieve and then move on. We create new memories. We discern the learning that can come from hardship. We don't cower in the face of challenge. We engage fully in the dance of life.

-Virtues Reflection Cards, The Virtues Project™

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

EAST COMING WEST:

STORIES OF IMPLEMENTING *YES! FOR SCHOOLS* IN A CREE COMMUNITY

BY

MEREDITH KATHRYN ARIANWEN SHAW

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Approval of Thesis

The undersigned certify that they have read the thesis entitled

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Submitted by

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Dedication

To Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, in gratitude and humble devotion

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Abstract

The *YES!* (Youth Empowerment Seminar) for Schools program, taught by the International Association for Human Values (IAHV) is a six-week, school-based biopsycho-social intervention with a strong emphasis on yogic breathing practise. From late February to April 2014, the program was taught to students and staff at a school on a Cree reserve in Canada. This narrative inquiry explored the question: *What do the stories of participants reveal about how this program fits within the particular cultural and socio-economic situation of this First Nations reserve community?* This thesis shares the stories of four research participants as they described their experience of the YES! program to the researcher: a student, the school counsellor, an Elder and addictions counsellor at the school, and the mother of one of the students. Nine threads that run throughout the stories are identified: spirituality, youth, school, breathing, helping, resilience, non-interference, stones, and moving forward.

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Chapter One: Problem Statement

Welcome to the Rez

It's a normal workday morning. I pull up in my SUV. "Rez roads" killed the suspension on my little Toyota Echo, so now I'm an SUV driver. The sky is grey. Sometimes it seems the sky is always grey here. Is it possible that there is a grey cloud that hangs over this reserve? Just this reserve? A cloud of trauma? Bad Karma? Bad Medicine, the locals might say.

I hear, as I do many mornings, traditional Cree music coming from the townsite, someone playing the local radio station. The strong, confident drumbeats prevail, emanating from the too-small and too-close run-down houses. The cracked windows, missing garage doors, bedsheets for curtains, and exteriors wanting for paint give term broken home new meaning. This townsite is locally referred to as "the ghetto". I head to my workplace, the local counselling office, a re-purposed trailer with a leaky roof.

I'm proud to work here. I'll admit, in part my pride comes from the fact that I recognize that not everyone can do it. The poverty, addictions, trauma, and general ill health do get to people. Many who come to work here from the outside leave after a short stint, preferring better paying and less challenging jobs elsewhere.

I'm also proud to work here because of the resilience I've had the great pleasure to witness. As a counsellor here, I've seen resilience at its best. In my former career, as a high school teacher, I was often left to wonder what became of the "less successful" students. The ones who were always in the principal's office, the ones who left school early, the ones who swore at me and made my life difficult. After they left school, I wondered about them and often imagined the worst. Here, as a counsellor, I get to see success. A few examples come to mind: a colleague from another agency who was once involved in a gang, who's had a few near-death experiences, who's a recovering alcoholic and who now works as a suicide prevention worker sharing his life story and encouraging youth to avoid the suffering he faced; a teenage client who was raised by a father addicted to prescription medication, who faced incredible abuse and who, despite significant emotional distress and trauma, is working very hard to finish high school and to be a good person; a client who, after serving his time in prison, was released healthier and happier and eager to be a good father to his young son; a number of Elders who are humbly and dedicatedly working to revive cultural and spiritual traditions once outlawed by the Canadian government…

Still, not every story is so rosy. A young man who was in my social skills group at a local school comes to mind. Recently, during a walk through the ghetto on my lunch hour, I saw him sporting gang

> *colours and doing a "bro-shake" (gang handshake) with a few of his "buddies". He saw me walking past and turned his head so I couldn't see his face, perhaps ashamed to have me see him in his new circumstance. While some youth from the reserve do finish high school, get jobs, have happy relationships, become caring parents, and generally succeed in life, they are the exception rather than the norm. Many, like my young friend from the social skills group, face more negative outcomes: alcohol and drug abuse, leaving high school, early pregnancy, criminal activity, or gang life, to name a few. As a former teacher and a counsellor, I find myself wondering, "What can schools do to increase the chances of young people becoming healthy, resilient, successful adults?"*

The community where this study took place is a Cree reserve in western Canada.

Youth at Risk

Some, perhaps all, of the youth in this community, are "at risk." "At risk" is a term used by many professionals: teachers, social workers, mental health workers, police officers, counsellors. Quite often the term is spoken casually, implicitly understood without much thought. The term begs the question: "At risk" for what? Some authors (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Garmezy, 1993; Ungar, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001) might suggest it refers to being at risk for drug and alcohol (ab)use, early sexual activity, unemployment, homelessness, mental illness, criminal activity, high school incompletion, and self-destruction. However, this view of risk presumes that high school completion, employment, later sexual involvement, and so on would universally be considered positive and desirable conditions. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, such clear delineations between risk and resilience are not easily made (Ungar, 2004). Indeed, I have encountered a client who was proud to be homeless, parents and grandparents who were delighted to learn that their sixteen-year old was expecting, mothers who preferred social assistance to employment,

and many clients who did not see the value in completing high school. Given the value-laden and culturally-biased nature of the concept "at risk", this paper offers an alternate definition: "Facing great adversity, potentially impeding one's ability to achieve physical, social, emotional, and mental health and well-being." This definition incorporates two aspects. First, as Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) noted, most definitions of resilience incorporate both the element of adversity and the element of positive adaption. "Risk," then, is synonymous with "adversity", the first aspect of developing resilience. The second aspect to the definition of "at risk" used here refers to wholistic well-being: physical, social, emotional, and spiritual. As will be described in greater detail later, this view of well-being is in keeping with the four-bodied person (Medicine Wheel) view of health taught in Cree tradition. Using this definition, the answer to the question "At risk for what?" is answered, "… for losing one's overall well-being." This definition assumes that most people want to be well, an assumption I am comfortable making and, I believe, an assumption that fits within the Cree culture of the community within which I work.

Several authors (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Fergusson, Horwod, & Lynskey, 1992; Green, Zebrak, Fothergill, Robertson, & Ensminger, 2012; Werner & Smith, 2001) have identified these risk factors: dependency on welfare, low socio-economic status, unskilled occupational status of the head of the household, and minimal maternal education; overcrowded housing and large family size; paternal criminality; stressful life events, foster home placement of the children in the family; parental illness (including mental illness); parental substance abuse/dependence.; poor parenting, family discord, and reduced family support; and disadvantaged

minority status. First Nations Canadians, in particular First Nations Canadians living on reserve, are faced with many of these risk factors. A brief statistical overview of the many discrepancies between living conditions and life experiences of First Nations and non-First Nations people in Canada will illustrate the degree to which First Nations youth living in reserves are disproportionately exposed to risk[1].

Education and Employment

As stated above, dependency on welfare, low socio-economic status, unskilled occupational status of the head of the household, and minimal maternal education are risk factors for youth. High school completion rates for Aboriginal students are low. In 2006, 33% of Aboriginal adults aged 25-54 had not completed high school, in contrast to 13% of non-Aboriginal Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2010b). Low levels of education are related to unemployment. The employment rate for First Nations Canadians living on reserve was 51.8%, a stark contrast from the 81.6% employment rate among non-Aboriginal Canadians. As a result, the on-reserve rates of social assistance (welfare) dependency are much higher than the national rate. In 2005-2006, the on-reserve dependency rate was 36%, compared with 5.5% nationally (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2007). Clearly, First Nations youth more often grow up with parents who depend on social assistance for income to meet basic needs. Similarly, there was an $11,000 gap between the median income for Aboriginal Canadians ($22,000) and non-Aboriginal

[1] Wherever possible the statistics used represent the statistics from First Nations people living on reserve. When these numbers were unavailable, statistics for First Nations people (on and off reserve) are included. At times, the information available concerned Aboriginal people, which in Canada refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

Canadians ($33,000) in 2005. On-reserve, this gap was even more striking. The median income for persons living on-reserve was just over $14,000 (Statistics Canada, 2010b), below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) for a three person family living in a rural area for that year (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Housing Conditions

Overcrowding and large family size have been found to be correlated with negative outcomes. Nearly half (45%) of First Nations Canadians living on reserve in 2006 reported living in homes in need of major repairs, in comparison to 7% of non-First Nations Canadians. Furthermore, those homes are frequently crowded. In 2006, 11% of Aboriginal Canadians lived in crowded homes (defined as more than one person per room), contrasted with 3% of non-Aboriginal Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2010b).

Criminal Activity

Paternal criminality and stressful life events are both risk factors for youth. Overall, rates of crime are much higher on-reserve than in the rest of Canada—overall crime rate is three times higher, assault rate eight times higher, sexual assault seven times higher, and homicide rates six times higher (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts, & Johnson, 2006). Aboriginal Canadians are three times more likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal Canadians. In 2004, there were 319 violent incidents per 1000 Aboriginal people, compared with 101 violent incidents per 1000 non-Aboriginal Canadians. About half of the incidents (56%) committed against Aboriginal people were perpetrated by someone the victim knew (Statistics Canada, 2010b). These statistics indicate that youth growing up on reserve are

much more likely to have a parent involved in crime and to experience a stressful life event such as being victimized or losing a family member to crime than the general population of Canadian youth, both risk factors for future negative outcomes.

Foster Care Placement

Foster care placement of children in the family is another factor correlated with negative outcomes. Nearly 4% of Aboriginal children are in foster care, compared with 0.3% of non-Aboriginal children (Statistics Canada, 2013), meaning that Aboriginal youth are 13 times as likely to face the risk of being in care or having a sibling in care than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Health and Illness

Another risk factor identified is parental illness. The Healthy Utility Index (HUI), developed by researchers at McMaster University, generates a composite measure including self-report scores regarding vision, hearing, speech, cognition, mobility, dexterity, cognition, and pain (Horsman, 2006). A HUI score of 0.80 or higher indicates "good to full functional health". While 81.6% of the general Canadian population had an HUI score of 0.80 or more, only 63% of First Nations adults did (First Nations Information Governance Centre [FNIGC], 2012), indicating that First Nations youth are more likely to be exposed to the risk factor of parental illness.

Substance Abuse

Parental substance abuse or dependence is also correlated with negative outcomes. While First Nations Canadians are more likely to be abstinent from

alcohol than non-First Nations Canadians (35.3% vs. 23.0%), First Nations Canadians are more likely to binge drink (defined as five or more drinks at one time). Rates of binge drinking, while similar to those in the general population among youth, continue to remain high into the 30s and 40s, unlike the overall Canadian population (FNIGC, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2010c).

Familial Risk Factors

While family-based risk factors such as "poor parenting", "family discord", and "reduced family support" are hard to measure, and difficult to contrast with non-First Nations populations, there is evidence to suggest that these risk factors are also more prevalent for First Nations people. The regional health survey, a First Nations controlled survey of health, wellness, and health determinants, reported that 43% of First Nations adults living on reserve felt that their parents' attendance at a residential school had negatively impacted the parenting that they themselves received (FNIGC, 2005). These authors also indicated that poverty is associated with poor parenting and lack of social support. Similarly, Campbell's (2010) study of Manitoba First Nations girls living on reserve found that 23% of her research participants reported living with "family discord".

Minority Status

Finally, disadvantaged minority status has been identified as a risk factor. As 38% of First Nations adults living on reserve reported having experienced an incidence of racism in the 2002-03 year (FNIGC, 2005), it is clear that First Nations people are exposed to the disadvantaged minority status risk factor as well.

Outcomes

What might be the outcome of growing up in such an environment? While it is important not to draw causal links between the various risk factors listed above and any particular outcomes, it is reasonable to imagine that the health (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual) and well-being of youth are negatively impacted. Indeed, the statistics seem to bear this out. First Nations youth have higher rates of teen pregnancy, criminal activity, gang involvement, and suicide than non-First Nations.

One third of all First Nations adults living on reserve or in Northern communities reported having their first child before the age of 18. In addition, the number of teen pregnancies appears to be increasing, as 39.4% of First Nations adults under 30 reported having had their first child before the age of 19, while only 16.6% of First Nations adults 60 or over had their first child as a teen (FNIGC, 2012).

The rate of youth being charged with a criminal offence on a reserve in Canada in 2004 was over three times as high (24 391 per 100 000 vs. 7023 per 100 000) than the rest of Canada. Youth living on reserve were 11 times more likely to be accused of homicide and 7 times more likely to be accused of breaking-and-entering than youth in the rest of Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2012). While Aboriginal youth made up only 6% of the general population in 2006, in 2008-2009, they represented 36% of youth in custody (Calverly, Cotter, & Halla, 2010). About 80% of those youth had gang involvement (Nafekh, 2002).

The most recent data on youth suicide rates, states the suicide rate among First Nations males (15-24 years) was 126/100,000, five times the national rate for

males of the same age, 24/100,000. First Nations females (15-24 years) also died from suicide at a higher rate than females of the same age in the national population, 35/100,000 compared with 5/100,000 (Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2000). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the suicide rates among First Nations people in Canada are still higher than the general population, thirteen years later.

Towards Healthier Outcomes

In the face of the disheartening reality of life for First Nations people living on reserve, it would be easy to become problem-focused or to believe there is little hope for improvement. However, the literature (Benard, 2004; Chan et al., 2004; Garmezy, 1993; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1999; Rutter et al., 1979) and my experience suggest that resilient, healthy outcomes are possible, and that resiliency can be supported, developed, and enhanced. As such, there are opportunities to improve the outcomes for First Nations youth living on-reserve, including those in the community where I work. School has the potential to play an instrumental role in fostering resiliency in young people, as many authors have noted (Brookover et al. 1988; Garmezy, 1993; Masten & Powell, 2003; Neisser, 1986; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979; Wilson, 2012). As the title of Rutter et al.'s book *Fifteen Thousand Hours* suggests, students spend a good deal of their young lives at school, and therefore school is well-suited to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for students.

Much research (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, n.d.; Chan et al., 2004; Hahn, Crosby, Moscicki, Stone, & Dahlberg, 2007; McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasino, Goelitz, & Mayrovitz, 1999; Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003) has been

dedicated to evaluating school-based prevention programs to determine their effectiveness. Some of these studies showed significant differences in effectiveness among programs, with certain programs being deemed "model" or "promising" programs, and others being described as "well-intentioned" but ineffective and potentially harmful (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, n.d.). Meanwhile, other research indicated that it is not the program itself that makes the most impact, but rather the approach to implementation, with whole-school approaches making the most impact (Greenberg et al., 2003; Nation et al., 2003; Patton et al., 2000). At the same time, very little research has been conducted regarding which programs or interventions are effective with youth in First Nations communities. While it is understood that interventions with First Nations youth must be culturally appropriate (Alberta Education, 2005; Arthur & Collins, 2010; Gone, 2009; Yellow Horse & Brave Heart, 2004), there is little data about what is effective From this research gap arises the impetus for this study. There is clearly a need for culturally-appropriate school-based interventions for First Nations communities, and my experience suggests that the Youth Empowerment Seminar (*YES!*) program, especially when implemented using a whole-school approach, may address this need.

Why the *YES!* Course?

Seven years ago, I walked into my first Art of Living[2] Basic Course. Drawn in by a beautifully-worded poster, I came with the hope

[2] This thesis refers to two non-profit organizations, the Art of Living Foundation, founded in 1982 and the International Association for Human Values (IAHV), founded in 1997. These two organizations are partner organizations, both founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. At the present time, the *YES!* for Schools program is taught

that the course, as its name suggested, might help me turn my healthy, but somewhat lacklustre life into an art.

Explaining the Art of Living Course is difficult. Some experiences are more felt than anything else. It's full of many good stories, fun games, valuable life-lessons, and heart-felt laughter. I was taught by a gifted teacher. His demeanour was peaceful, his face enthusiastic, his energy centred. As the six days of the course unfolded, I felt that my world began to fill with wonder. I found joy in the smallest things, felt love for all people and all life, and enjoyed every minute of whatever I was doing, even filing at work. I had no idea why the course made me so happy—I was just happy.

On the second and third days of the course we learned a simple rhythmic breathing process called SKY (Sudarshan Kriya Yoga). These words in Sanskrit mean a purifying act that gives you a greater vision of yourself. I remember vividly that after I finished my first Kriya "present". It seemed I understood living in the present moment on an almost cellular level.

On the last day of the course, we were shown a video about the big picture of the Art of Living Foundation's work. "Love Moves the World" it was called. I saw in the video how SKY, that I had just experienced, was changing people. Now, as a graduate student, I can tell you a lot about the impact that breathing has on the body, on the cells, on the brain and why and how SKY might have such a huge impact on people's lives. In the video, I discovered that Art of Living is in more than 150 countries, that SKY has been taught to people from all walks of life and that it's making a difference. I saw former terrorists, former addicts, and current and former prisoners talk about SKY changing their lives. I began to get a sense that the breathing process that made me feel "present" might be helping people in some pretty big ways.

At this point in my life, I was just about to begin my teaching career. I had completed my student teaching and spent two years volunteering in inner-city schools. I had been drawn to teaching originally by a desire to be of service to others. Yet, my experiences in schools had introduced me to many angry and unhappy youth who I often felt ill-equipped to help. Watching the Art of Living video a way to help others came into focus.

My hand shot up. "How do we get this into the schools?" I asked the teacher.

My teacher smiled and suggested that maybe it was up to me to be the change that I wanted to see in the world.

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under the auspices of IAHV. Throughout the paper, the non-profit organization mentioned refers to the organization responsible for the particular program or services under discussion.

> *Thus the impetus for this project. Inspired by my intensely positive experience on my first course in July 2006 I went on to volunteer for the Art of Living Foundation and became an Art of Living teacher in January 2010. The youth version of the Art of Living Course is called the Youth Empowerment Seminar (YES!), the subject of this current study.*
>
> *During my nine-year involvement with Art of Living I've been privileged to watch many people gain improved health and well-being from Art of Living. Now, working in a community fraught with many problems, I wonder what role Art of Living might play in reducing some of the stress, violence, and trauma there. Knowing that Art of Living programs have been taught all over the world to people of many cultures, religions, and languages gives me hope that Art of Living might make a significant positive impact here.*

This study aims to gain an understanding of participants' experiences of the Youth Empowerment Seminar (*YES!*), a school-based resilience-building workshop, as it is offered on a Cree reserve. Narrative inquiry, a culturally-respectful research method, will be used to appreciate the perspectives of a student, a faculty member, an Elder, and a parent.

This study explores the question: *What do the stories of participants reveal about how this program fits within the particular cultural and socio-economic situation of this particular community?*

The next chapter will provide the conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Relevant Literature

In this chapter, I will provide the conceptual framework for this study. First, I examine First Nations mental wellness and un-wellness, outlining an indigenous outlook on mental well-being, as well as a historic overview of the traumatic events impacting the research community, and the outcome of these events. This section concludes by distilling important components of a successful prevention initiative for Cree youth. Next, I review the current literature on resilience and how it may be fostered or enhanced, particularly in the school system. Finally, I describe the history and theoretical underpinnings of the *YES!* program, as well as a detailed course description is provided, illustrating how the *YES!* program may be in line with the literature regarding what has the potential to build resilience among youth on the reserve.

First Nations Mental Wellness and Un-Wellness

Traditional Knowledge

Traditionally, native cultures and European cultures have very different worldviews. This difference was eloquently illustrated by King (2003), as he compared the Turtle Island creation story to the biblical creation story. He pointed out that "creation stories… help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist" (p. 10). While the Turtle Island story illustrated the importance of balance, harmony, sharing, and cooperation, the biblical story emphasized individual accomplishment and competition. The following is a brief overview of some of the aspects of a traditional Cree worldview that contribute to a Cree concept of mental wellness.

"We had a way of being—it was focused on values" (F. Whitstone, personal communication, August 16, 2013). Heavy Runner and Morris (1997) indicated that while it is difficult to summarize fundamental "Indian" values, given the 554 recognized tribes in the United States and a similar number in Canada, there are ten they choose to highlight, those being spirituality, child-rearing/extended family, veneration of age/wisdom/tradition, respect for nature, generosity and sharing, cooperation/group harmony, autonomy/respect for others, composure/patience, relativity of time, and non-verbal communication. There is a Cree teaching about values, that each of the poles of a tipi represents an important value, and that certain values are important to develop throughout different phases of the life span. Tipis are constructed with twelve poles. The first three represent the values to be developed in childhood: obedience, respect, and humility. The values to be developed in adolescence are happiness, love, and faith. In adulthood, the values of concern are kinship, cleanliness, and thankfulness. Elders' values are sharing, strength, and good child rearing. The two poles holding the control flaps represent hope and ultimate protection—the flaps themselves represent balance and harmony with nature. Finally, the rope that ties all the poles together represents strength (Wanuskewin, Heritage Park, n.d.). One way of viewing mental wellness in Cree terms would be mastery of these values.

F. Whitstone (personal communication, November 29, 2012) explained the teaching of the four-bodied person, or the cycle of life (sometimes referred to as the Medicine Wheel in other Aboriginal cultures). A whole, healthy person, according to this teaching, would be one who was fully developed in physical, social, emotional,

and mental aspects. As HeavyRunner and Morris (1997) stated, "All four dimensions must be kept in balance" (p.3). Traditionally, each of these aspects would be the focused on at a different age, or stage of life. The physical aspect would be developed from birth to age seven, the social aspect from age seven to fourteen, the emotional aspect from age 14 to 21, and the mental aspect in adulthood. In this way, "mental wellness" is a Western concept, as the health of an individual is wholistic, involving balance of all four bodies.

"Because we are a spiritual people, we seek spiritual solutions to our problems" (P Lalonde, personal communication, May 5, 2013). Spirituality for First Nations people refers to the interconnectedness of everything and the spiritual nature of all living things (HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997). HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) further explained, "Spirituality includes our interconnectedness with each other (relationships), the sacredness of our inner spirit, our efforts to nurture and renew ourselves daily (prayer), balance and harmony (awareness), and our responsibility to be lifelong learners (growth)" (p. 15). First Nations spiritual practises include prayer, smudging and numerous ceremonies like sweats, feasts, sundances, round dances, coming-of-age ceremonies. Sungmanitu Hanska (Long Coyote) described spirituality this way " I have a seed inside that needs to be nourished before it will grow. When it gets a little nourishment, or an invitation for myself to nourish it, it begins to grow. I am beginning to understand that the seed is my Spirit" (Arbogast, 1995, p. 84). Lalonde's emphasis on the role of spirituality in Cree communities is echoed by Whitstone who explained that, while some people describe the Medicine Wheel as having a spiritual quadrant, instead of a social one,

he was taught that spirituality is present in everything at all times. As such, spirituality does not have its own quadrant in the cycle of life, as spirituality is implied in each of the four quadrants, or stages.

In Cree the word *wahkohtowin* refers to the idea that everything is related. Humans are related to every other living thing. As Campiou put it, "Everything we talk about is about family. If you just, in simple terms, it's about family because everything in nature is family" (Benson & Laboucane-Benson, 2009, 19:36). As everything is related, Cree people strive to achieve *wetaskiwin*, which describes a situation where people come to live together in peace and harmony, with mutual respect, obligation, and responsibility to maintain healthy relations. In order achieve these harmonious relations, *wahkohtowin* dictates rules of how to respect one another and other living things. This gave rise to customary law and natural law. Customary law taught that in all interactions, people should aspire to live by four values: perseverance, commitment, tolerance, and willpower. These laws were intended to decrease greed and promote balanced, harmonious relations in communities (S. Skakum, personal communication, May 16, 2013). Next, natural law is an integral teaching in Cree culture. Natural law presumes that humans are subservient to nature, rather than the Western view which often operates the other way around. In natural law, "… human beings are of the natural world and are related to the animals, plants, and all of creation. It is a Cree belief that by observing the habits and characteristics of the animals, lessons are learned" (Makokis, 2001, pp. 87-88). For example, Black Elk (Brown, 1988) described what can be learned from watching nature:

> You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living centre of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west have rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind have strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves (p. 35).

Elders in Makokis' grounded theory study reported that when one observes nature, four important lessons are learned: love, honesty, sharing, and strength.

Intergenerational Trauma

One of the key concerns in the literature on First Nations mental un-wellness is the issue of intergenerational trauma (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Fast & Collin; Vézina, 2010). Known by many names (intergenerational trauma,

historical trauma, and trans-generational transmission of trauma) the essential understanding of this term is that Canadian and American government policies aimed at assimilating First Nations people (i.e., encouraging the slaughter of the buffalo by sports hunters in order to conquer the Plains Cree, outlawing the practise of traditional ceremonies, and forced attendance at residential schools) inflicted trauma on generations of First Nations Canadians. This trauma, and a vulnerability for re-traumatisation, has been passed down, in a variety of ways, to younger generations. As a result, some First Nations youth, who may not have directly experienced the traumatic events, still demonstrate trauma symptoms.

A brief history. This Plains Cree community is subject to Treaty Six. While Treaty Six was concluded in 1876, the Plains Cree did not sign it, as it did not give them political autonomy and did not fully recognize their sovereignty over the land. It was only in 1882, after a famine resulting from the disappearance of the buffalo, brought on in part by American government policies aimed at exterminating the traditional food, clothing, and shelter source of the Plains Cree, that the Plains Cree agreed to the treaty (Cardin & Couture, 2000; CBC, 2001). Thus began a history of government laws and policies in the favour of the government and to the detriment of the Plains Cree people.

Also in 1876, the federal Indian Act was enacted. It defined who was a "status" Indian and who was not. At the time, it was assumed that the concept of "status Indian" would be a transition phase and that, once all Indians were living on reserves and engaged in agricultural activities, they would voluntarily choose to assimilate into the European lifestyle (Cardin & Couture, 2000). As such, the Indian

Act outlined a number of ways for Indians to lose their status. From 1881 to 1951, a number of amendments to the Indian Act continued to remove or significantly restrict the rights of status Indians, including the institution of "Indian Agents" who had control over many aspects of life, the prohibition of traditional ceremonies, the requirement for official permission to wear traditional regalia, and the ability of reserve lands, previously granted through the treaties, to be leased or sold by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

In 1920 came what has arguably been the most detrimental of all the Indian Act amendments—the mandatory requirement for all school-aged Indians to attend day, industrial, or residential schools. The explicit purpose of these schools, run cooperatively by the Canadian government and Christian churches, was to assimilate Indians. The schools were often overcrowded, underfunded, under- (or inappropriately) staffed, unsafe, and unhealthy. Students suffered malnutrition, contagious illness, and sometimes death. Speaking Aboriginal languages was outlawed at these schools, as was practising traditional cultural or spiritual practises. Many students suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of staff and other students.

The "sixties scoop"refers to a period (1960s to 1990s) when large numbers of Aboriginal children were removed from their families and placed in non-Aborginal homes, often far from their home communities. There were multiple reasons for the removal of these children. In part, cultural misunderstandings between western social workers and First Nations people led social workers to misinterpret certain traditional Cree parenting practises as abuse. Additionally,

government underfunding of on-reserve housing and services led to unhealthy conditions for children. Furthermore, after attendance in residential schools, many parents were unskilled and unprepared for parenting. Being "scooped", for many First Nations Canadians led to internalized racism and loss of language and culture (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996).

Much of the community's history is similar to that of other Canadian First Nations reserves. However, one key event in the 1950s, the discovery of oil on the reserve, compounded the trauma already experienced . Foureyes (2005) described this quick influx of large sums of money into the community as "an ironic tragedy" (p. 15). Whereas the money had the potential to improve the quality of life and overall mental health of band members, the outcome was quite different.

As York (1989) described, "In the history of Canada, very few communities have been transformed from poverty to wealth so suddenly. As the oil money poured in…the social upheaval was traumatic. Alcoholism increased, cocaine arrived on the four reserves, families broke apart, and the suicides mounted steadily" (p. 89). York cited Émile Durkheim's (2002) research on suicide that demonstrated that any social upheaval, whether positive or negative, leads to a rise in suicide rates. He also described that, unlike the provincial government, which also profited from the oil royalties, the band had no financial experts to suggest longer-term investments. Ultimately, the oil money dried up in the 1990s, leaving behind a community of people who had developed addictions and had become

accustomed to receiving a healthy monthly income for which they did not have to work.

Traumatic responses to historical events and ongoing trauma. Many of the events described in the community's history could be described as traumatic stressors, that is, "… direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate" (American Psychiatric Association (APA), DSM-IV-TR , 2000, p. 463). Bombay et al. (2009) concluded that, "The cumulative impact of this history is the demonstrated and consistent health and socioeconomic disparities that exist between First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples in North America" (p. 14). As such, compared to non-First Nations Canadians, community members suffer from higher rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse, all of which is passed from one generation to the next through a variety of bio-psychosocial factors including genetics, prenatal environment characterized by stress-hormones, poor parenting, and lack of coping skills (Bombay et al., 2009).

Not only are the children of those initially traumatized more likely to experience adverse childhood experiences, but they are more likely to directly experience trauma themselves, an experience termed *stress proliferation* (Bombay et al., 2009). Adverse conditions, depression, and/or negative cognitive styles may all be results of adverse childhood experiences and may contribute to stress proliferation (Bombay et al., 2009).

The end result then, of the initial trauma on future generations is increased likelihood both of adverse childhood experiences and of subsequent trauma.

Implications of a traumatic history. Pavlov's (1927) experiments in classical conditioning have shown that a conditioned stimulus may provoke a physical, previously-unconditioned response. Indeed, conditioning helps animals survive and reproduce—by responding to cues that help it to gain food, locate mates, and produce offspring (Hollis, 1997). One way to understand trauma is to view it as an example of classical conditioning, where the physical fight or flight response is a conditioned response to having been exposed to the threat of death or serious harm. Sights, sounds, smells, and other stimulus present during the initial traumatic incident may invoke the physical fight-or-flight response even when serious threats are not present.

The fight-or-flight response has its roots in two key areas of the brain: the brainstem and the limbic system. The limbic system, containing the hypothalamus, the main hormone regulator of the body, impacts the release of epinephrine, an important instigator of fight-or-flight. Meanwhile, one of the functions of the middle areas of the prefrontal cortex is fear modulation, releasing an inhibitory neurotransmitter onto the limbic areas. Therefore, as Siegel (2007) explained, "Fear may be learned limbically, but its 'unlearning' may be carried out via growth of these middle prefrontal fibres…" (p. 43).

Given the contribution of historical trauma plays to the many social problem on the four reserves, effective prevention interventions would ideally address the roots of trauma that underlie the negative outcomes in the community.

Understanding the biology and neurology of trauma suggests that effective interventions for trauma would improve the ability of the prefrontal cortex to modulate fear. As will be shown later, one of the ways to do this is through mindfulness, as is taught in the *YES!* program.

Best Practises for First Nations Youth

Several sources (Alberta Education, 2005; Arthur & Collins, 2010; Gone, 2009; Yellow Horse & Brave Heart, 2004) have stressed the importance finding culturally-relevant interventions, in particular when working with First Nations populations. However, much of the literature about preventative programs in First Nations communities is problem-focused, emphasizing the scope of violence, underage pregnancy, substance-abuse, crime, and poverty, with few solutions proposed (Anderson et al., 2006; Eickelcamp, 2010; Fuery, Smith, Rae, Burgess, & Fuery, 2009; Pavkov, Travis, Fox, King, & Cross, 2010; Senior & Chenhall, 2007). Yellow Horse and Brave Heart (2004) and Gone and Alcantra (2007) noted that current practises for working with American Indian youth typically come in two forms: first, those interventions that have empirical support within the general population, and can be or have been adapted to the context of First Nations youth; and second, programs developed within First Nations contexts that report anecdotal effectiveness, and still await empirical support. In their 2007 review of mental health interventions for indigenous Americans, Gone and Alcantra identified only two interventions which would be described as "evidence-based" (one of which, the Zuni Life Skills Development Curriculum, will be addressed later in this review) and numerous interventions claiming anecdotal, but not empirical support. As Moran

(1999) put it, "scores of programs have been implemented, but few have been systematically evaluated" (p. 53).

HeavyRunner and Morris (1997) offered examples of the types of locally-developed, anecdotally-supported interventions. They suggested that traditional languages, ceremonies, dances, blood/clan systems, music/arts, medicine, foods, clothing, and storytelling are ways of teaching First Nations children a positive worldview, or a good way of life. They suggested that cultural practises unlock human potential, allowing natural resilience of children to be realized. Similarly, when Carpenter, Rothney, Mousseau, Halas, and Forsyth (2008), implemented a lunch-hour mentorship group with Aboriginal youth, they used Aboriginal education practices such as sharing circles, traditional Aboriginal games and activities, and balancing physical, social, emotional, and mental activities.

The *YES!* program may be an example of a program that could be adapted to a First Nations context. There is substantial anecdotal evidence suggesting that the *YES!* program, and other similar programs offered by the Art of Living Foundation (AOLF) have been beneficial in Canadian First Nations' communities. Programs have been offered in or for community members of Gitanyow, BC; St Theresa's Point, MB; Rousseau River, MB; Paugingassi, MB; Six Nations, ON; Wemotaci, QC; Pangnirtung, NU, and Iqualuit, NU, with course participants and community members reporting positive experiences and important reductions in risk-behaviour (Art of Living Foundation, 2007).

Brokenleg (2012) described that an effective resilience-building intervention for indigenous youth would address the roots of trauma in their history, would be

spiritual (in the sense that it helps to develop the young person's spirit), and nurtured values such as belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Others, (Preston, Carr-Stewart, & Northwest, 2009) described a number of programs and strategies with the potential to reduce youth gang involvement. They emphasized the importance of strengthening youth self-concept and cultural identity, improving relationships between families and schools, and increasing youths' connections to Elders and cultural practises. Brertton suggested that effective programs for Cree youth would need to "give them back responsibility" (Benson & Laboucane-Benson, 2009, 18:03). He further elaborated on the importance of building youth's internal resilience, "…they treat symptoms. Nobody treats the inside and that's where the healing's supposed to happen" (Benson & Laboucane-Benson, 2009, 18:07_. As will be shown later, the *YES!* program includes most, if not all, of these elements.

Resilience

Numerous definitions of resilience have been offered. As Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) pointed out, most definitions are based around two key concepts: adversity and positive adaptation. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) proposed the following definition, "The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaption despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (p. 426). This definition is useful for two reasons. First, its description of adversity as set of "challenging or threatening circumstances" fits with the reality of the youth from this reserve, who are not generally faced with a single adverse event from which to adapt, but rather a set of challenging circumstances that form their daily reality. The other aspect of Masten, Best, and Garmezy's definition that is appropriate for this research is the

multifaceted nature of resilience—they describe it as a process, a capacity, and an outcome.

In considering the idea of resilience as a "capacity for positive adaptation", I am drawn to the work of indigenous authors HeavyRunner and Morris (1997) who stated that "resilience is our innate capacity for well-being" (p. 3). Similarly, this idea of innate resilience is echoed by Richardson (2002) who described resilience as a "motivational force within everyone that drives them to pursue wisdom, self-actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength" (p. 309).

The idea that resilience is innate is further developed by Mills and Shuford (2003) in their Health Realization Model, in which they claimed that, "everyone, no matter how alienated or emotionally disturbed had access, at times, to a healthy perspective. This healthy perspective includes a more long term, mature outlook, good problem solving skills and the ability to maintain healthy relationships. We also discovered that this healthy, resilient outlook is innate, it is hard-wired into us as human beings from birth just as the ability to breath(sic) or digest food or have our heart beat to pump blood all are innate, hard-wired functions" (p. 6,7).

At the same time, it is worth noting that resilience is a social construct that can be individually understood and lived. Ungar (2004) noted that many of the youth in his research described activities, typically understood as high-risk, as resilience-enhancing or healthy. Unger questioned what Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) describe as "successful adaptation", proposing that youth generally make the best of their circumstances, and that successful adaptation may not always involve

behaviours considered healthy and prosocial by society at large. Unger challenges readers to understand a complex variety of resilient outcomes, and to listen carefully to what the youth say about their experiences.

How Resilience Develops

Rutter (2012) suggested that exposure to a stressor may result in a sensitizing or a steeling effect. That is, an individual may become more sensitive to stress in the future or may become more resilient and more able to handle stress in the future. Richardson (2002) elaborated four different outcomes for individuals facing disruptions in their lives: resilient reintegration (experiencing some growth through disruption), reintegration back to homeostasis (just "getting past" a disruption), reintegration with loss (loss of motivation, hope or drive), and dysfunctional reintegration (resorting to substances or dysfunctional behavior). How then, do we understand the process by which one may be sensitized to stress or may become stronger?

Risk and protective factors. At its simplest form, this sensitizing or steeling process involves the interaction of risk factors and protective factors. Factors that are correlated with negative outcomes such as alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, criminal activity, gang involvement, dropping out of school, and suicide include marital instability, low SES, overcrowded housing, large family size, paternal criminality, foster home placement of the children in the family, parental illness (including mental illness), poor parenting, dependency on welfare, unskilled occupational status of the head of the household, minimal maternal education, disadvantaged minority status/perceived discrimination (Laframboise, 2006),

reduced family support, stressful life events (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007).

On the other hand, there are many protective factors correlated with better outcomes despite adversity, that is to say those which appear to contribute to the steeling effect described by Rutter (2012). Benard (2004) provided a helpful framework for categorizing the many factors which seem to have an influence on building resilience (see Figure 1).

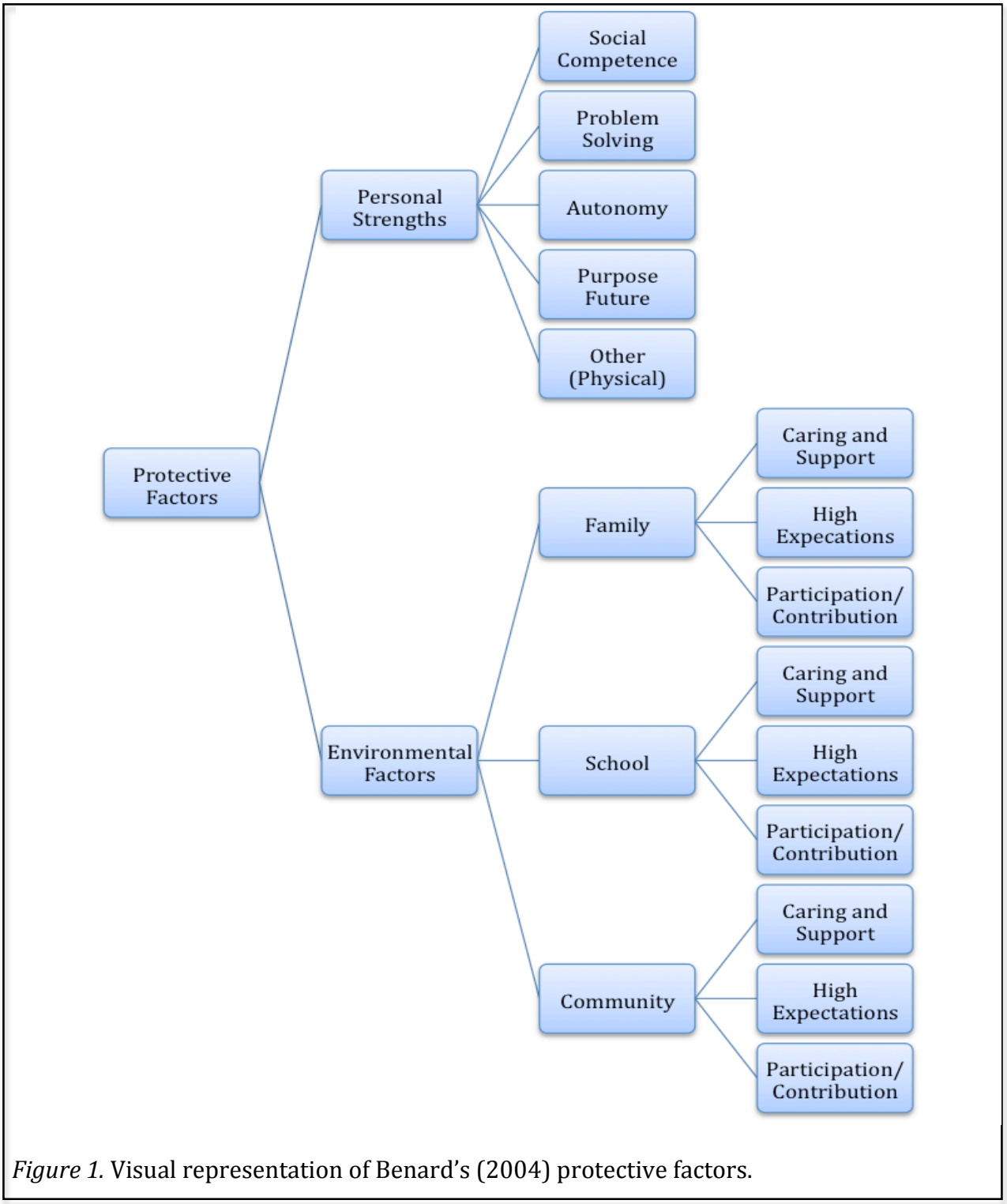

Figure 1. Visual representation of Benard's (2004) protective factors.

First, Benard (2004) divides these factors into "personal strengths" and "environmental factors". Personal strengths are simplified into five categories: social competence, problem solving, autonomy, purpose/future, and other.

Environmental factors are divided into family, school, and community environments, emphasizing the importance of caring and support, high expectations, and participation/contribution in each environment. Benard went on to provide a "Matrix of Personal Strengths" where she integrated the work of several authors into her framework, showing that the many personal strengths related to resilience can be categorized in her five categories of social competence, problem solving, autonomy, purpose/future, and other. Social competence, for example, includes cultural connection (Brokenleg, 2012; Enriquez, Kelly, Cheng, Hunter, & Mendez, 2012; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Preston et al., 2009), commitment to relationships (Hauser, Allen, & Golden, 2006), emotional resources, empathy, and volunteerism (Zautra, Hall, & Murraya, 2008). Problem solving includes cognitive functioning (Masten & Powell, 2003; Zautra et al, 2008), self-reflection (Hauser et al, 2006), planning (Quinton & Rutter, 1988), learning/memory, and executive function (Zautra et al, 2008). Autonomy (Benard, 2004) included a sense of personal agency (Hauser et al., 2006; Zautra et al, 2008) laughter (Zautra et al., 2008), and temperament (Masten & Powell, 2003). Purpose/Future (Benard, 2004) includes hope, optimism, spirituality (Zautra et al., 2008). Finally, the fifth category dubbed "other" by Benard most often referred to physical health and includes physical exercise, heart rate variability, immune system response, and genetic factors of stress management (Zautra et al., 2008). Benard's categorization of personal strengths is a helpful one.

At the same time, taking a closer look at her categories, in light of the wholistic approach to well-being upheld in many First Nations contexts, I propose

another, more culturally-fitting categorization of the personal strengths related to resilience: the four-bodied person. As mentioned above Benard's "other" category most often described physical health, that is, the physical quadrant in the cycle of life. The social competence category evidently refers to the social quadrant. What Benard calls "autonomy" would refer to the emotional quadrant, and "problem solving" would refer to the mental quadrant. Finally, Whitstone (personal communication, November 29, 2012) commented that, while some teach that there is a "spiritual" quadrant, he proposed that spirituality is always present, in everything and therefore not a separate quadrant on the wheel, but an integral part of each one. Taken this way, Benard's "purpose/future" category in a Cree perspective might refer to the importance of spirituality, present at all times (see Figure 2).

Like personal strengths, Benard's environmental resilience-enhancing factors are in line with the work of many other authors. She divided environmental factors into family (also mentioned by Masten & Powell, 2003; Zautra et al., 2008), school (Masten & Powell, 2003), and community factors (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Zautra et al, 2008). In each environment, she emphasized the importance of offering young people caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities for participation or contribution. This understanding of the role of environmental factors in promoting resilience is reflected in indigenous teachings as well. HeavyRunner and Morris (1997) highlight that the tradition of storytelling as one way that young people were offered culturally-specific high expectations, caring and

support, and opportunities for participation. These authors also underscore the idea that "resilience" is very relevant in indigenous cultures:

> The elders teach us that our children are gifts from the Creator and it is the family, community, school, and tribe's responsibility to nurture, protect, and guide them. We have long recognized how important it is for children to have people in their lives who nurture their spirit, stand by them, encourage and support them. This traditional process is what contemporary researchers, educators, and social service providers are now calling fostering resilience. Thus, resilience is not new to our people; it is a concept that has been taught for centuries. The word is new; the meaning is old. (p. 2)

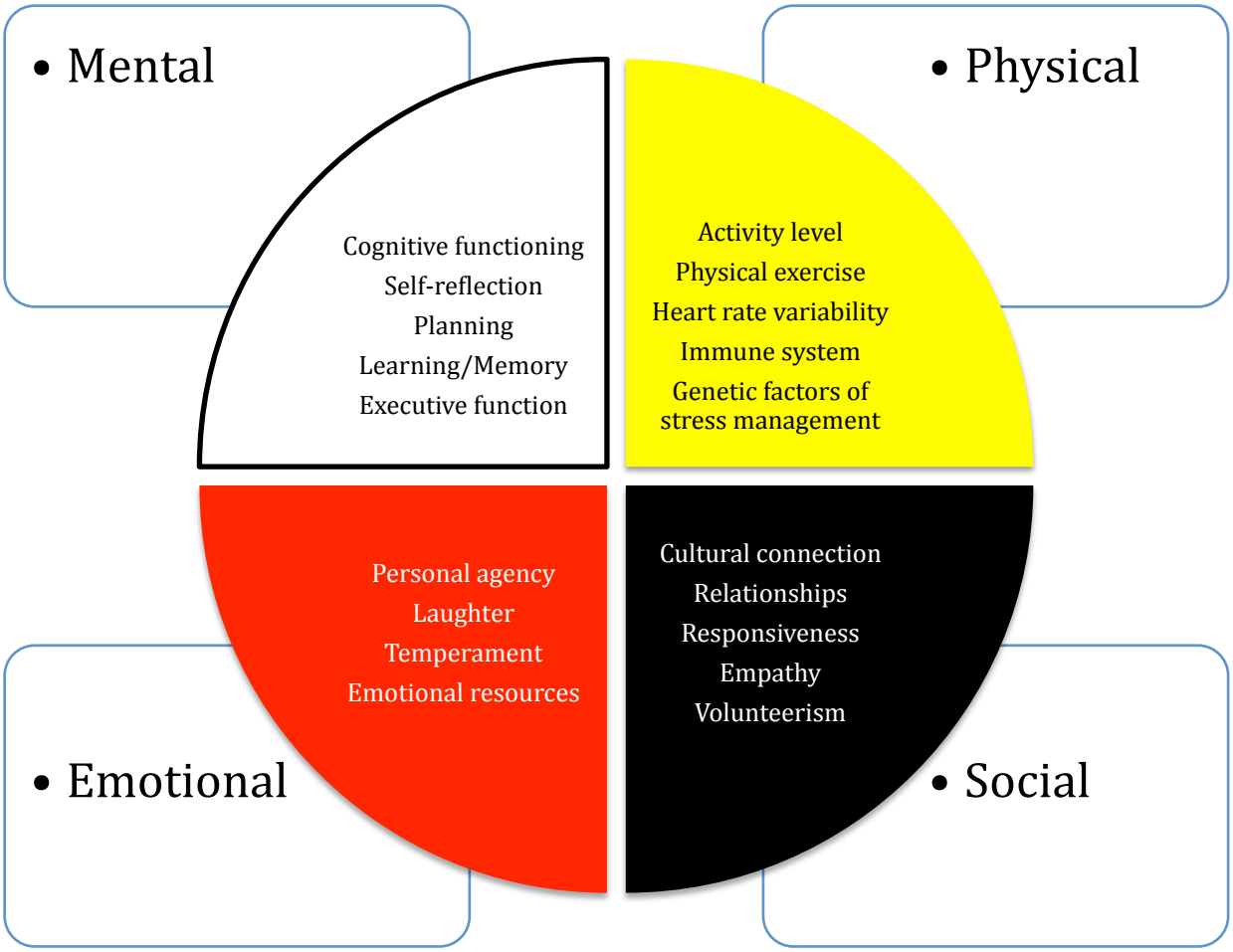

Figure 2. A First Nations perspective on resilience. Using the categories of personal strengths proposed by Benard (2004), I reframe them in terms of the four-bodied person or the cycle of life (Whitstone). In this model, the spiritual category (called "Purpose/Future" by Benard) is not its own quadrant as spirituality is seen as present in all four quadrants.

Clearly, many authors have outlined the types of risks which may disadvantage young people as well as the many protective factors which may contribute to the "steeling" process and build an individual's resilience in the face of

adversity. At the same time, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) stated, "We still have little understanding of the process by which change and protection occur" (p. 215). Indeed, knowing the factors that are correlated with risk and the factors which are correlated resilience with tells little about *how* resilience develops.

Richardson (2002) described "resilience theory", one understanding of how resilience develops. In his theory, "there is a force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength" (p. 313). He went on to describe that resilient reintegration requires energy. Essentially, as one's energy is increased, one's innate resilience can more easily be expressed. Using examples from physics, Eastern medicine, transpersonal psychology, and psychoneuroimmunology, he described that the source of energy that drives a person towards self-actualization may be variously described as quanta, chi, spirit, God, or resilience. He suggests that skills such as meditation, Tai Chi, prayer, yoga, Aikido and other alternative therapies may be used to access a client's resilience. Resilience, as Richardon described it, is expressed as one's child-like nature in which one is self-nurturing, moral, intuitive, and noble. This theory ties in well to the theory behind the *YES!* course, in which Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) is used to boost students' prana (the Sanskrit word for subtle life-force energy, known in Chinese as chi), allowing their positive qualities (human values) to be expressed.

The next section describes how the process of resilience-building is connected to biological processes.

Biology and resilience. Rutter (2012) pointed out that it is becoming increasingly evident that resilience-building is a biological process. The first way that biology is implicated is through gene-environment interactions (GxE). Studies (Caspi et al., 2003; Hariri & Holmes, 2006; Karg, Burmeister, Shedden, & Sen, 2011; McGuffin & Uher, 2008; Uher et al., 2011; Uher & McGuffin, 2010) have shown that serious environmental risks, like maltreatment (rather than short-term life events) are associated with different genetic expression, in particular of the serotonin transporter gene which may make an individual more susceptible to psychopathology, especially depression, later in life. Thus, the gene expression brought on by maltreatment does not trigger any particular mental disorder, but makes the person more vulnerable to other stressors later in life. At the same time, Sharma et al.'s (2008) study on SKY indicated that those who practise SKY daily exhibited better stress regulation and immune system responses than non-practitioners due to the expression of "prosurvival" genes.

Next, Cicchetti (2010) indicated that resilience is accompanied by hormonal and neural changes. For example, children who demonstrated resilient behaviour in negative situations had increased left hemisphere brain activity. The left hemisphere is associated with positive emotion and emotional regulation. Additionally, Cicchetti found differences in the levels of cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), the two main stress-response hormones in children demonstrating resilient adaptation. Interestingly, the results diverge, dependent on the situation of the children. Non-maltreated children who were demonstrating resilient adaptation had lower levels of cortisol and DHEA than non-

maltreated children who did not demonstrate resilience. In contrast, maltreated children who demonstrated resilient adaptation had higher levels cortisol and DHEA than maltreated children who did not demonstrate resilience. Finally, Cicchetti proposed that adversity may damage parts of the brain and neural plasticity may enhance resilience. He promoted further research be done in this area.

School-Based Resilience-Building

School has consistently been identified by numerous authors as important in nurturing resilience in young people (Brookover et al. 1978; Garmezy, 1993; Masten and Powell, 2003; Neisser, 1986; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979; Wilson, 2012). Schools assist the development of resilience in young people by offering specific programs aimed at resilience-building. To this end, Garmezy (1993) encouraged research aimed at gleaning a strong understanding of the mechanisms and processes at play in the development of resilience with an eye to creating "scientifically sturdy programs of intervention" (p. 133). Indeed some researchers (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, n.d.; Chan et al., 2004; Hahn, Crosby, Moscicki, Stone, & Dahlberg, 2007; McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasino, Goelitz, & Mayrovitz, 1999; Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003) have focused on locating "scientifically sturdy" school-based prevention programs. Some of programs were deemed "model" or "promising" programs, while others were described as "well-intentioned" but ineffective and potentially harmful (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, n.d.). At the same time, the current trend in school-based prevention and mental health promotion is away from the focus on

specific programs, and toward approaches that address the needs of the entire school, which will be addressed later.

School Transformation from the Inside-Out

A contrasting, but complementary view of school-based mental health promotion, is that proposed by Marshall (2005), who stated that school transformation may in fact be an "inside-out" process. Transforming the school from the inside-out means that the adults in the school system who interact with youth on a daily basis become increasingly aware of their own health and resilience and therefore are living examples and role models. Combining Marshall's (2004) and Palmer's (1998) perspectives, I suggest that as caregivers better understand their own inner lives, they then become more able to "…mentally and spiritually dance with their students" (Marshall, p. 130).

An inside-out example. One approach to school-based resilience-building is described by Miller and Shuford (2003). Their approach is based on the Health Realization Model, described in the section on resilience. In this approach, three main aspects were included: 1) teaching young people to understand the dynamics behind how perceptions are formed, including and understanding of thought, consciousness, and mind, 2)helping youth see their own inborn capacity for common-sense, good judgment, learning and insight, and 3) encouraging students to recognize how their conditioned thinking affects their perceptions in contrast to the insights and feelings they experience when in healthier states of mind.

With regards to the first point, the Health Realization curriculum teaches students that Mind is, "the force or power source behind all our psychological

functioning, including our ability to think and be conscious" (p. 12), that thoughts become blended with Consciousness to form our individual perception of reality. Thought, as these authors describe it, is the "capacity to create images, to create perception" (p. 12). Finally, Consciousness is awareness and the construction of that awareness is based on how we use Thought. The Mind, Miller and Shuford (2003) explained, is capable of two different kids of thought. One is based on memory, and the other functions out of "a deeper wisdom provided via our inborn state of mental health and mental clarity" (p. 13).

Teaching these simple principles to parents, teachers and students, practitioners have reported excellent results:

- Parent involvement improved by 500%
- 87% of parents reported that their children were more cooperative
- Attendance improved and school truancy dropped by 80%
- School discipline referrals decreased by 75%

Whole School Mental Health Promotion

The whole school approach to mental health promotion is rooted in the World Health Organization's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), which emphasized teaching health knowledge and skills in the classroom, changing the physical and social environment of the school, and creating relationships between the school and the community as a three-prong approach to improving students health in all areas, including mental health. This multi-faceted approach is sometimes referred to variously as the health-promoting schools approach, comprehensive school health, or coordinated school health.

A synthesis of research on the health promoting schools approach conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2006) found that the most effective programming was that which promoted mental health, healthy eating, and physical activity. As such it is worth noting that the *YES!* program encompasses all three of these areas of health promotion. That same synthesis identified that the most effective school-based health programming was sustained over a long term and involved the whole school.

Similarly, Nation et al. (2003) identified six key characteristics of effective prevention programming:

1. Uses a research-based risk and protective factor framework that involves families, peers, schools, and communities as partners to target multiple outcomes.
2. Is long term, age specific, and culturally appropriate.
3. Fosters development of individuals who are healthy and fully engaged through teaching them to apply social-emotional skills and ethical values in daily life.
4. Aims to establish policies, institutional practices, and environmental supports that nurture optimal development.
5. Selects, trains, and supports interpersonally skilled staff to implement programming effectively.
6. Incorporates and adapts evidence-based programming to meet local community needs through strategic planning, ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.

A number of the points listed above go beyond the content of the program to consider the context in which such programming is delivered. Indeed the focus is on improving the overall school environment, transforming schools into what Cefai (2007) calls "…caring, inclusive… learning and pro-social centred communities" (p. 119). Piette and Rasmussen (1995) identified that transforming school climate into the positive communities Cefai described involves addressing the hidden curriculum in the school's discipline code, the standards of behaviour, staff attitudes toward students, the implicit values in the school's operation, and the overall atmosphere or climate of the school. Greenberg et al. (2003) pointed out that short-term prevention programming generally produces short-term results and that multi-year, multi-component programs that take whole school approaches and included improvements to school-home-community relationships are most likely to foster benefits.

Similarly, Wells, Barlow, and Stewart-Brown (2003) completed a systematic review of universal school-based mental health promotion initiatives. Their research found that long-term interventions aimed at promoting mental health (as opposed to preventing mental illness) for all students and changing overall school climate were more likely to be effective than brief class-based interventions. They identified that the most effective programs (programs with the largest effective sizes and/or positive outcomes on the greatest number of measures) were ones which implemented a whole school approach, involving students, staff, families, and the community.

Parsons, Stears, and Thomas (1996) emphasized four areas in developing a health-promoting school: building good relationships within the school, promoting staff health and well-being, promotions of students self-esteem, and using staff as good examples of healthy behaviour. As *YES!* offers programming directed at staff as well-as students, it is an approach that is in line with Parsons, Stears, and Thomas' suggestions of promoting staff health and well-being as well as offering students healthy exemplars in the staff role models.

The literature is clear that the most effective approach to fostering mental health in students is through long-term, whole school approaches, that involved the wider community, and address the atmosphere of the school. The next sections will look at some of the ways that the whole-school approach is being implemented.

Response to intervention. Response to intervention (RTI) is a three-level model of intervention aimed at maximizing student achievement and reducing behaviour problems. RTI addresses the mental health needs of the whole school while also attending to the higher needs of specific students. Sullivan and Long (2010) found that nearly half of an American sample of school-based practitioners were working in settings using an RTI model, indicating the prevalence of this approach. In the first level, universal prevention programming is directed to all students and all students are screened to determine which students may be most at risk of learning or behaviour problems, such as learning disabilities or behaviour disorders. In the second level, interventions are offered for students at risk. Secondary interventions are small-group interventions for students who need additional academic or behavioural support but may not qualify for special

education. Examples might include social skills instruction, check and connect programs, or daily behaviour report cards (Yong & Cheney, 2013). Tertiary intervention is for students who do not make marked progress with secondary intervention. For these students, individualized intervention is provided (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). The RTI literature emphasized that interventions on all three levels need to be evidence-based and culturally responsive.

MindMatters. MindMatters is a mental health promotion framework adopted on the national level in Australia. It is based on the World Health Organization's four-level, whole school approach to school change, in which change begins at the level of school climate, on the second level education about mental health is offered as part of the curriculum, on the third level interventions are offered for students needing additional help (about 20-30% of students), and on the fourth level professional treatment is offered to the 3-12% of students who require it. The MindMatters program consists of a professional development program and course materials for school use. The professional development programming is oriented towards teaching staff how to use a whole school approach to mental health, as well as offering a structured mapping process that allows school staff to make choices about how to use available resources. The curriculum materials for classroom use cover four areas: enhancing resilience, dealing with bullying, grief and loss, and understanding mental illness. (Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling, & Carson, 2010) Rabaa (2010), a social worker in an Aboriginal community in northern Queensland, shared her experience of the implementation of MindMatters

in her school. She reported that, in her view, it was a positive experience, in particular because of the building of sustainable partnerships with the community. These partnerships allowed the services provided to be "locally responsive, contextually sensitive, and culturally oriented" (Santhanam et al., 2009, p.11).

Gatehouse. Another whole-school approach widely used in Australia is the Gatehouse project. Gatehouse, also rooted in the WHO health promoting schools framework, sought to teach students skills to improve their own mental heath, while at the same time building a positive social and educational school environment. The curriculum component, based on CBT, taught that thinking influences feeling, so one can always think differently about the ups and downs in life. Gatehouse, based on attachment theory, emphasized building a sense of positive connection with teachers and peers. The goals of the projects were to 1) introduce skills via the curriculum, 2) improve the schools social and learning environments, and 3)strengthen the links between school and community. The Gatehouse Project followed a five-step process: creating an Adolescent Health Team; reviewing current practise to identify priorities for change while including the perspectives of the student population, planning strategies to address the areas identified in review, offering professional development to train staff to implement the chosen strategies, and evaluation of the project strategies. A randomized control trial of the Gatehouse Project identified that students in the target schools had reduced rates of substance use and heath-risk behaviour, but reported no change in depressive symptoms, nor in school connectedness (Bond & Butler, 2009).

School-Based Resiliency-Building with Indigenous Youth

In an effort to see what other school-based programming has already been implemented for indigenous youth, I conducted a search of the PsychARTICLES database using the search terms "Aboriginal" and "school-based". I also searched the University of Saskatchewan's iPortal, their online indigenous studies research tool, using the individual search terms "school-based", "resilience", and "youth". The following are the results of those searches. I included only those programs which focused, in one manner or other, on developing resilience (as opposed to treating mental health problems or addictions), those programs offered in North America, and programs which reported some degree of success or positive change in its participants.

Zuni Life Skills Development

In 1987, the Zuni pueblo, a reservation in New Mexico was concerned about rising suicide rates. In response, the community developed and delivered the Zuni Life Skills Development program in their local high school. Sixty-nine students received the curriculum, which was delivered by two non-Zuni language arts teachers in cooperation with two Zuni cultural resource people. The program was taught three times per week over the course of 30 weeks during regular language arts class time. Curriculum covered seven topics: 1) self-esteem building, 2) identifying emotions and stress, 3) communication and problem solving, 4) eliminating self-destructive behaviour, 5) general suicide information, 6)suicide interventions training, 7) community and personal goal setting. A quasi-experimental study on the program showed that students who received the

intervention were less at risk for suicide, more hopeful, and more capable at problem-solving and suicide intervention (Lafrombroise & Howard-Pitney, 1995).

Aboriginal Shield Program

The Aboriginal Shield Program is a Canadian curriculum offered to grades 5/6 students and grades 7/8 students in Aboriginal communities. It is offered as a part of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) Drugs and Organized Crime Awareness Service (DOCAS), a facet of the Prevention Action Strategy. Piloted in 2010, the program focuses on substance abuse prevention and healthy lifestyle coaching. The program consists of twelve lessons, ideally taught by Aboriginal community members, who are trained to used the standardized Aboriginal Shield manuals. ASP was evaluated as part of the National Anti-Drug Strategy by the RCMP's evaluation division. A pre- and post-test evaluation of ASP showed that participants had an 39% increase in their knowledge of the subjects covered, including alcohol, drug, and tobacco abuse. In addition, there was a statistically significant decrease in both cannabis and cocaine among young Canadians between the years of 2004 and 2010, which the authors attribute to the Prevention Action Strategy. How much of this decrease occurred among Aboriginal people and to what extent the Aboriginal Shield Program played a role in this decrease was not reported. (Justice Canada, 2012; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2011).

Life Skills Training (LST)

University of Alberta researchers (Baydala et al, 2014), in cooperation with Alexis Nakota Sioux community members worked on a project aimed at reducing the root cause of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, substance abuse. After a

thorough literature review, it was decided that the Botvin Life Skills Training (National Health Promotion Associates, 2015) program would lend itself well to cultural adaptation. With the help of Elders from the Alexis community, the program was adapted to include cultural activity, ceremony, and prayer. The Elders also made adaptations to include Isga language and Sioux spiritual teachings. The program consists of an elementary and a junior-high curriculum, each with programming for three grade levels. At each grade level, LST includes eight to 14 one-hour modules teaching cognitive-behavioural skills for building self-esteem, resisting advertising pressure, managing anxiety, communicating effectively, developing personal relationships, and asserting one's rights. The culturally adapted program was delivered in the Alexis community from September 2008 to June 2011, followed by both qualitative and quantitative evaluations by University of Alberta researchers. At the junior high level, there were statistically significant differences between the intervention groups and comparison groups, including increased knowledge of the negative effects of alcohol and decreased drug use. No statistically significant effect was found at the elementary level. Qualitative results suggested student participants demonstrated increased cultural pride and increased self-esteem, while also highlighting the need for an accompanying LST parent program.

Dǫ Edàezhe

In 2009, Yellowknife Catholic Schools received a grant to develop a crime prevention curriculum project. Dǫ Edàezhe is a three-tiered program offering services to the Dene students in Yellowknife Catholic Schools. The first tier offers

community liaison support (CLS) to students with poor attendance. In CLS, school staff work with students, teachers and parents to determine barriers to school participation and offer supports such as food and transportation to increase student attendance. The second tier of Dǫ Edàezhe involves mentorship, with at-risk students being partnered with mentors for a minimum of 40 minutes per week. The third and most intensive level of Dǫ Edàezhe is the Leadership and Resiliency Program, which includes three components: 1) alternative activities, such as cultural and/or outdoor activities, 2) service learning, and 3)resiliency groups, which were established as a locally developed high school credit course. The resiliency groups followed an informal framework, allowing the students to "be" the curriculum, covered topics such as goal-setting; healthy relationships; coping strategies; leadership development; and use and attitudes about alcohol, drugs, crime, and violence. Evaluation conducted by the school board on the Dǫ Edàezhe program found that it contributed to improved attendance, decreased office referrals, and improved academic performance (Lafferty, 2012).

Uniting Our Nations

A multidisciplinary team of researchers, educators, program developers, and community leaders working for the Thames Valley District School Board in London, Ontario developed a series of strengths-based initiatives for the Aboriginal students attending their secondary schools. These initiatives aimed to increase youth engagement in school. The first of these initiatives was a peer mentoring program, where younger students were paired with mentors from the higher grades. Each pair met on a weekly basis during lunch time. In addition, an adult First Nation

mentor visited the school several times per year to run teaching circles and offer support to the student mentors. The mentorship program demonstrated high levels of student retention. The second initiative was a credit-course called the First Nations Cultural Leadership Course. The course essentially allowed the youth mentors and mentees to earn credits for their mentorship time, while also allowing them to participate in cultural activities and assume volunteer roles. Students participating in the course had higher academic performance and lower absenteeism in the Cultural Leadership Course than in their other courses and senior students in the course articulated a strong desire to be role models for younger students. The third initiative was Aboriginal Grade 8 transition conferences, two-day events aimed at preparing Aboriginal youth from the elementary feeder schools with some preparation for entering high school. Elementary students attending these conferences reported more confidence and optimism and reduced anxiety about entering high school (Crooks, C.V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D., & Hughes, R. (2009).

Seeds of Encouragement

A team of researchers from the University of Manitoba sought to explore the question *how can we support and empower children and youth who are often pushed out of schooling institutions to recognize the leadership qualities that they each carry?* This research project spurred a mentorship program in a multicultural suburban community with 10 to 12 Aboriginal high school students leading an after-school program for up to 25 students from a nearby elementary school. The program consisted of gym games and healthy snacks. Researchers, who used qualitative

methods, reported that the program developed belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity, in keeping with the indigenous Circle of Courage model (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Brockern, 2002), in both the elementary and high school students.

Summary

School-based resilience-building programming for First Nations youth has been implemented with some success in various parts of North America. At the same time, there is space for more research and improved implementation of such programs. Much of the programming that has been offered to date are short-term, classroom-based interventions offered to small numbers of students at a time (Zuni Life Skills, Aboriginal Shield, Alexis Life Skills, Seeds of Encouragement). These programs may offer valuable programming for young people and could be improved by implementing them within a whole school model. In addition, these programs do not include the wholistic approach to health that *YES!* offers. The Life Skills programs and Aboriginal Shield offer the types of lessons includes in the healthy lifestyle module of *YES!* and Seeds of Encouragement offers physical exercise and healthy eating, like that included in *YES!*'s healthy body module, but each program, on its own, does not take a wholistic approach to health. Out of the programming reviewed above, Dǫ Edàezhe was the program most in line with the literature in that it worked to improve relationships between families and schools and followed a three-tiered approach. The authors noted some challenges in choosing and implementing curriculum for their resiliency groups. Might implementing a curriculum like *YES!* add something valuable to the successes already seen with the Dǫ Edàezhe program?

The next section describes the *YES!* program with the goal of explaining why the *YES!* program may be a good fit within a First Nations context.

The *YES!* Program

Ghahremani et al. (2013) described the *YES!* Program as "…a biopsychosocial workshop for adolescents that teaches skills of stress management, emotion-regulation, conflict-resolution, and attentional focus" (p. 2), and "aims to promote emotional and physical well-being via psychosocial education combined with yoga and meditation" (p. 3). These descriptions are accurate. At the same time, the *YES!* program differs from other school-based prevention programs in that it was created and first taught by an international humanitarian and spiritual leader. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is known world-wide as an ambassador for peace. In 1982, following a ten-day silence, Shankar developed Sudarshan Kriya Yoga(SKY) (Art of Living Foundation) a yogic breathing technique, and the Art of Living Course, a six-day program for adults that incorporated SKY with "knowledge points," aimed at helping people lead violence-free, stress-free lives. Years later, in the 1990s, Shankar adapted the Art of Living Course to meet the needs of young people, creating ART Excel (All 'Round Training in Excellence) for ages 8 to 12 and *YES!* (Youth Empowerment Seminar) for ages 13 to 17.

Curriculum

The *YES!* program covers three different modules: healthy body, healthy mind, and healthy lifestyle. The healthy body modules includes physical fitness and nutrition. Physical fitness is taught through active games and yoga, in particular Sun Salutations and Kapal Bhathi. Sun Salutations teach balance, flexibility, abdominal

strength, and cardiovascular fitness. Khapal Bhathi improves digestion, strengthens the abdomen and assists in losing weight. Healthy eating is promoted by guest speakers, video clips, and sharing healthy snacks. The Healthy Mind module includes breathing techniques and lessons about the tendencies of the human mind. The module begins with a lesson about the importance of awareness in daily life and the recognition that having more energy means having more awareness. Different sources of energy are discussed, including breath, which leads into the teaching of the various breathing techniques. Seven different breathing techniques are taught, each with a different purpose. The victory breath improves sleep, and assists students in overcoming fear, and anger. The expansion breath improves lung capacity, immunity and calms the mind. The power breath increases energy. Alternate nostril breath balances both hemispheres of the brain and improves mental focus. Focus technique increases concentration and memory retention. Hoom breath helps overcome fears of public speaking and improves self confidence. Finally, SKY is the rhythmic breathing technique developed by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Prior research has shown multiple physical and mental health benefits associated with SKY and its associated pranayams (breathing practises), asanas (yoga postures). It has been shown to improve cardiac function (Jyotsna et al., 2012), lower Diastolic blood pressure and waist-hip ratio in hypertensive patients (Swapna, Haripriya, Tamilselvi, & Hemamalini, 2012), lower “bad” cholesterol and increase “good” cholesterol (Sayyed et al., 2010) improve slow wave sleep in middle-aged individuals (Sulekha, Thennarasu, K. Vedamurthachar, Raju, & Kutty, 2006), improve immune function (Sharma et al., 2008), increase antioxidant

enzymes and decrease blood lactate levels (Sharma et al., 2003), and have positive benefits for cancer patients (ie. increased Natural Killer cells) (Kochupillai et al., 2005). It has also been shown to be effective in treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005a, b; Descilo et al., 2010), depression (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005a, b; Janakiramaiah et al., 2000; Naga Venkatesha Murthy, Janakiramaiah, Gangadhar, & Subbakrishna,1998; Vedamurthachar et al., 2006), anxiety (Agte & Chiplonkar, 2008; Brown et al., 2012; Brown & Gerbarg, 2005a, b; Sharma et al., 2003), to reduce exam stress (Subramanian, Elango, Malligarjunan, Kochupillai, & Dayalan, 2012), to lower Cortisol (one of the stress hormones) (Vedamurthachar et al., 2006), to reduce craving for cigarettes (Kochupillai et al., 2005; Rawat, Rawat, & Rawat, 2011) and to increase Global Assesment of Functioning (GAF) and well-being in adult male prisoners (Sureka et al., 2014). See Zope and Zope (2013) for a review of the available literature on SKY. The healthy mind module also covers the value of focusing on the present moment and utility of focusing on increasing strengths versus removing weaknesses.

The third module, healthy lifestyle, promotes healthy intra- and interpersonal relationships as well as introduces the idea of being of service to others. Students learn about self-respect, being natural, and being "button proof". They discuss relationships with parents and peers and embracing diversity and cultures. And they are invited to stretch their personal comfort zones to take responsibility for the greater good (International Association for Human Values, 2011).

The *YES!* program is also accompanied by a program for school-staff and for parents called SMART (Stress Management and Resilience Training). The SMART program introduces adults to the *YES!* curriculum, including some of the same breathing techniques, while aiming to created a team of healthy, committed, individuals who are dedicated to taking responsibility for the greater good.

Presentation Style

Marshall (2005) and Walsh (2000) indicated that improvement in young people's mental health is often not about a program itself, but rather who delivers it and the way it is delivered. In this way, the "inner health" (Marshall, p. 130) of those teaching youth programs is very important. It can be argued that *YES!* teachers meet the challenge of being strong helpers to youth. Becoming a *YES!* teacher is a challenging pursuit. The training consists of at least three weeks of intensive 12-hour days. In addition, to qualify for training, teachers must meet numerous pre-requisites: some curricular, such as attendance of at least five entry-level Art of Living Foundation courses; some lifestyle, such as abstaining from drugs, alcohol, and smoking; and practicing the Sudarshan Kriya daily. The result of this challenging route to becoming a *YES!* teacher is that teachers are energetic, dynamic, and enthusiastic individuals who "walk the talk" of what they teach to young people. They not only teach the values and practises—they live them.

In addition, teachers are trained to "facilitate", not to "teach". As such, the program is taught through games, activities, and stories intended to get students thinking and uncover the course values and lessons themselves. The course is

structured, from seating arrangements, to group and paired discussion in a way which promotes sharing and relationship-building among students.

Theoretical Threads of *YES!*

Spirituality. Like any prevention program, *YES!* program is rooted in some key assumptions about humanity and the nature of well-being. In discussing other prevention programs, I might refer to these key assumptions as the "theoretical foundation" of the program. Here, they will be referred to as the spiritual foundation. At the centre of the *YES!* program is Shankar's teaching that there are seven layers of existence: body, breath, mind, intellect, memory, ego, and Self. At the centre, the Self is "…the subtlest, unchanging aspect of our existence" (Shankar, 2011, "Knowing About Your 'Self'", para. 1). Shankar teaches that the Self, at the core of our existence, is pure. We are pure, peace, joy, and love at the core of our beings. Using the metaphor of an electron, he likens the nucleus at the centre to the Self, explaining that mental health concerns such as violence, stress, anxiety, and depression are merely disturbances at the periphery.

The crux of the spiritual foundations of the *YES!* course is the importance of the breath. The breath, teaches Shankar, is the link between the body and mind. He pointed out that various patterns of breath correspond to different emotions and by consciously changing breath patterns, we may, in turn, change our emotional state. Essentially, breathing is a way to reconnect to the Self, where we are healthiest and happiest.

Mindfulness and the brain. Mindfulness has been variously defined as, "… a form of attentional skill that focuses one's mind on the present," and, "… a form of

healthy relationship with one's self" (Siegel, 2007, p. xiii). Viewed in this way, the breathing techniques taught in the *YES!* course, along with their spiritual underpinnings can be viewed as a type of mindfulness. Five factors form the framework of mindfulness: 1) observing emotions without reacting to them; 2) observing sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; 3) acting with awareness (non-distraction); 4) describing/labelling with words; and 5) non-judgement of experience (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Tony, 2006). Indeed, the first three and the fifth of the aforementioned processes are present in the *YES!* course. A number of studies have revealed correlations between changes in the brain and the various practises of mindfulness. Davidson et al. (2003) noted a shift in brain function to left frontal dominance. As may be recalled from the literature on resilience, young people exhibiting resilience in negative circumstances also exhibited left frontal brain dominance. In addition, a number of researchers (Cahn & Polich, 2004; Lazar et al., 2005; & Lutz, Greishcar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004), have shown increased thickness and improved functioning in the prefrontal areas on both sides of the brain. Considering that the prefrontal areas are associated with balancing emotions, empathy to others, modulating fear, and responding to situations with flexibility; mindful practice offers a number of important benefits. Siegel proposed that neural integration, the coordination of different parts of the brain to work together effectively, may be an important factor in self-regulation. He pointed out that as the middle prefrontal regions link the limbic, cortical, and social processes of the brain, improved functioning in those areas, brought on by mindfulness practise, may also bring about improved neural

integration.

Research on *YES!*

To date, there has been only one published study on the *YES!* program (Ghahremani et al., 2013). The study used 788 students (524 *YES!*, 264 controls) from Los Angeles area high schools. Using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, students' levels of impulsiveness were measured before and after the *YES!* program. Students in the *YES!* groups showed a significant ($P<0.03$) reduction in impulsiveness, while the control groups showed no change. The authors proposed that since impulsivity is linked with risky behaviours, the *YES!* program may serve to prevent behaviours such as substance abuse.

This initial study indicated that the *YES!* program shows promise as a helpful school-based prevention program, but more study is needed to confirm its effectiveness. In addition, the context of inner-city Los Angeles schools is different from that of a Canadian First Nations reserve, which is why investigating the fit of the *YES!* program within the community is important.

Why *YES!*?

This literature review has summarized salient aspects of First Nations mental wellness, resilience, and school-based mental health promotion with the aim of addressing the question, what would an effective school-based resilience-building program for First Nations youth look like? The literature points to a number of factors, many of which are present in the *YES!* program, making it a worthwhile program for further study in the context of a First Nations reserve.

What would be taught?

WHO (2006) noted that the most successful school-based interventions were those which focused on mental health, healthy eating, and physical activity. Parsons, Stears, and Thomas (1996) mention the importance of developing self-esteem, while Nation et al. (2003) add that a successful program teaches social-emotional skills. When considering which factors would be included in a school-based program specifically for First Nations youth, the literature suggests a program would address trauma (Yellow-Horse & Brave Heart, 2004), teach values (Brokenleg, 2012), nurture a young person's spirit (Lalonde, 2013; Brokenleg 2012), take a wholistic approach to health (Whitstone, 2013), and be infused with cultural content (Gone, 2009; Yellow Horse & Brave Heart, 2004; Heavy Runner & Morris(1997). The *YES!* program is in line with this aforementioned literature. *YES!* is a program promoting wholistic wellness through its healthy body, healthy mind, and healthy lifestyle modules. By teaching students and adults social-emotional skills, *YES!* may serve to increase student self-esteem by showing them that they have the tools to make healthy lifestyle choices and they have many inherent positive qualities which becomes more easily expressed when their stress is reduced and their energy is increased through practising the breathing techniques taught in the program. Furthermore, breathing practises are tools which can be used to address trauma, the program deals with the expression of human values, and nurtures course participants' spirits. The missing element of the *YES!* program is cultural content specific to a Cree community. One of the curiosities at the heart of this research is

whether the *YES!* program may fit within the Cree cultural context and/or be adapted to fit.

How would it be taught?

Marshall (2005) proposed that a successful school-based resilience building intervention would be one that takes an inside-out approach, this is that adults in the school system learn to realize their own heath and resilience, thereby becoming effective role models for students. Miller and Shuford (2003) and Richardson (2002) described resilience as an inherent quality that students and caregivers may discover within themselves. Richardson further described that resilience increases as one's subtle life force energy increases. And several authors have noted that resilience is associated with physiological processes: gene expression, hormonal differences, and brain function. Taken together, this literature suggests that a successful school-based resilience-building intervention would be one that takes a physiological approach to resilience-building, allowing the intrinsic resilience of each student, parent, and school-staff member to be expressed. The *YES!* program fits this description as the research on SKY and other mindful practises indicates that they is associated with the same hormonal, neurological, and genetic differences that promote resilience.

Program Context

The literature suggests that the context in which programs are delivered has an important impact on their success. First, Nation et al. (2000), Cefai (2007), Piette and Rasmussen (1995) and Benard (2004) mentioned the importance of building resilience within a positive school climate, where staff members have good

relationships amongst themselves and where mental health programming is delivered using a whole school model, similar to the three-tiered interventions offered within a Response to Intervention approach. Benard (2004) also emphasized the importance of maximizing protective factors, by creating school, home, and community environments characterized by high expectations, caring and support, and opportunities for contribution and participation. The development of these environments would be assisted by implementing The World Heath Organization (1986) and Preston, Carr-Stewart, and Northwest (2009)'s suggestion of building good relationships between families, schools, and communities. Also, WHO (2006) and Greenberg et al. (2003) added that multi-year programs would have the greatest impact. Furthermore, Yellow Horse and Brave Heart (2004), HeavyRunner and Morris (1997), and Makokis (2001) recognized the importance of school communities including Elders as mentors for young indigenous youth. These authors indicate that in order to maximize the *YES!* program's effectiveness, it needs to be delivered in the right context. Offering *YES!* to staff and parents as well as students, and offering *YES!* as a first-tier intervention in the context of a larger, and long term whole school mental wellness program would create best conditions for the greatest program impact.

Conclusion

The literature suggests that, implemented under the right conditions, the *YES!* program has many of the ingredients for a successful school-based resilience building program on a First Nations reserve. This project endeavours to hear the stories of program participants as the *YES!* program is implemented in this context.

I will use narrative inquiry, a culturally-respectful research method, to allow community members to tell their own stories of their experiences with the *YES!* program. The next chapter will describe the narrative inquiry research method as it pertains to this study.

Chapter Three: Research Method

Goals of the Study

Previous quantitative research (Ghahremani et al., 2013) has shown that the *YES!* program is effective at reducing impulsiveness. However, this prior research leaves an incomplete picture of the *YES!* program and the way it is experienced and understood by the youth and adults who participate in it. As White and Epston (1990) would phrase it, Ghahremani's study provides only a "thin" description of the *YES!* program. This study aims to provide a more detailed picture of the *YES!* program as it is experienced by participants (one student and one faculty member) and close observers (one Elder and one parent). Ghahremani's research leaves many unanswered questions: do participants like the program, does it matter to them, do their parents notice anything different about them as they go about the program, is it better or worse than other programs the students have experienced, does it influence more aspects of their lives than impulsivity, is it more meaningful to some than to others? and so on…. The use of story allows me to begin to answer some of these questions (and quite likely other questions raised by the research participants themselves), and to give a voice to those most closely impacted by the program. As such, this study aimed to "flesh out" the story of the *YES!* program, what White and Epston (1990) referred to as creating a "thick" description of the program.

The *YES!* program was offered in this community at the Complementary School, a small school of 50 students. The school offers programming for those who don't fit within mainstream schooling, for a variety of reasons including disabilities,

parenting, work schedules and so on. The program was offered over six weeks in March and April of 2014. Initially, the school staff were offered a two-day, twelve-hour professional development session. Many, but not all, of the school staff participated as other professional development sessions were offered concurrently. Following the staff sessions, the students received the program, taught by two volunteers, one male and one female, from the International Association for Human Values. The program was offered to all students for one hour per day for six weeks.

With the aims of giving voice to participants and creating a thick program description, I wonder: *What do the stories of participants reveal about how this program fits within the particular cultural and socio-economic situation of this First Nations reserve community?*

What is Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story. It is both a way of understanding experience, as well as a research method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry takes the stance that human lives are complex and multi-layered. Therefore, to research human experiences, to understand the complexities of human experience, necessitates a research method that is open to ambiguity and complexity—a method which can capture the multi-layered, contextually-based, intricate realities of life.

In understanding narrative inquiry, a few important features are important to highlight; Relationship, negotiation, context, the three dimensional inquiry space, and the incompleteness of the final product are a few of the important touchstones of narrative inquiry which will be described here. Relationship refers to the sense

that the research participants plays an essential role in the telling of their own stories, that the research is completed with collaboration in mind, that researcher and participant share mutual wants from the research (Kushner, 2000). Related to relationship is the negotiation involved in narrative inquiry. Researchers and research participants negotiate the meanings and interpretations of the stories told and co-construct the final narratives to be published. Narrative inquiry is attentive to the larger contextual picture within which research participants' stories are told, recognizing that participant stories occur in the midst of other narratives: past, present, and unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives (as an example, see Clandinin et al., 2006). In the same way, researchers are in the midst of their own lives, their own stories and their own life contexts as they approach their research. One way of including context in the research is to be attentive to the "three dimensional inquiry space". Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described how narrative inquirers use terms that point them "backward and forward, inward and outward, and locate them in place" (p. 54). The three dimensions then, are temporality, personal and social, and place. Finally, research texts are not viewed as the "final story". Because human lives are evolving and complex, because researchers encounter participants in the midst, there is recognition that the research text is a stopping point "for now", but it is not viewed as the complete answer to a research question or as the only story about the research puzzle.

Why Narrative Inquiry/Narrative Inquiry and First Nations People

This study is intended to be a complement to the previous quantitative

research about the *YES!* program. Ghahremani et al.'s (2013) prior research provides some generalizable results about the effectiveness of the *YES!* program. At the same time, Rutter (2012) highlighted the importance of qualitative research in the field of resilience to identify the *meaning* of experiences. Adding a qualitative study to the body of knowledge about the program will allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the experiences of each participant. Just as Masten and Coatsworth (1998) indicated that little is known about the *process* by which resilience develops, little is known about the process of the *YES!* program as experienced by the participants. In addition, no previous research has investigated the use of the *YES!* program within a First Nations community. This study aims to uncover "the stories behind the stats" of the *YES!* program, with particular attention to how the program may or may not fit, culturally, socially, economically or otherwise into the dynamics of the this reserve. As Webster and Mertova (2007) indicated, reflection is a key element in storytelling of human experience. Narrative inquiry is a research process that is well-suited to enriching our understanding of the *YES!* program, in particular the way it is experienced on an Alberta First Nations reserve.

Narrative inquiry is a particularly appropriate method for this study for its culturally respectful and culturally relevant nature. By culturally respectful, I refer to the fact that it respects the community, the research participants, and is relational and collaborative in nature—important aspects of conducting research in a First Nations community. Caine (2013) referred to her research participants as her co-researchers, a representation of the fact that research participants are active

participants in the telling of their own stories in narrative inquiry. Not only do they tell their own stories, but they participate in the construction of the research texts, by offering their own input and feedback on the narrative to be published.

Another way that narrative inquiry allows for cultural respect is by my presence within the research. Narrative inquiry asks the researcher to begin with an autobiographical inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Similarly, certain authors (Mertens, 1998; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2008) emphasized the importance of cross-cultural researchers starting their research with increasing their self-awareness of their own cultural influences. Similarly, narrative inquiry asks researchers to declare their own biases and recognize the role they play in shaping the narratives composed. This is in keeping with Richards (2005) suggestion that researchers conducting cross-cultural research should make their own subjectivity explicit.

Narrative inquiry is a culturally-relevant research method as it fits well within the cultural values and practises of many indigenous cultures. As stated in chapter two, First Nations people take a wholisitic view of health—physical, social, emotional, and mental aspects are intertwined. Mohatt and Thomas (2006) recommend that researchers allow opportunities to explore all four of these aspects in their research projects. Narrative inquiry, with its open interviews, and its respect for the research participant as the expert on his/her own life, allows for participants to share information about all four aspects in their narratives.

Additionally, storytelling is vitally important in most indigenous cultures (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). Stories are used to teach cultural values, traditions, and history. Furthermore, First Nations stories are often multilayered, full of

metaphor and hidden interpretation (Lightning, 1992). Narrative inquiry invites the sharing of stories, welcomes the use of metaphor, and allows the participant to share what fits the time and place.

Narrative Inquiry Process

In the Field: Beginning in the Midst[3]

In narrative inquiry, the "relational space", the negotiated relationship between researcher and participant, is "field". Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explained that there are two starting points for narrative inquiry: listening to participants tell their stories and living alongside participants as they live and tell their stories. In a manner of speaking, this research involves both. I have been working in the community for two years. My time as a counsellor in the community has been as much about learning to be a competent counsellor as it has been about learning to be a respectful visitor on the reserve. I quickly learned that while my office is only a fifteen-minute drive from my home, that I "world-travel" (Lugones, 1987) every time I go to work. The nature of my work has afforded me the opportunity to get to know the larger picture of the community. I have spent much time outside of the office in many different community spaces: client's homes, the women's shelter, several schools, the child welfare agency, community centres, friendship centres, the RCMP detachment, and the community college. In addition to visiting different spaces, I've been privileged to visit different cultural events: a feast, a sweat, a sundance. I've had a number of very helpful guides in my world

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[3] All the titles of subheadings in this narrative inquiry process section have been taken from Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) work on the step of the narrative process.

traveling, mostly coworkers who've been willing to take time to answer my naïve questions, or who've invited me to "go for a drive" or "go meet some people" and offered suggestions of good books to read, places to visit, or people to talk to.

In preparing for this research, I approached the superintendent of the local educational authority, a local man whose family has been influential in creating educational opportunities for Cree students for some time. He suggested I speak to the principal of the Complementary School about this project. The principal, a Caucasian woman with many years experience working in the community, felt the *YES!* program would be a great complement to the character education initiatives already present within the school . She was eager to introduce the program within her school and to play a role in this research. I then met with the school board, comprised of local community members, including one band councillor, and presented information about the *YES!* program and about my research plans. The school board granted me their permission to conduct the research, while expressing their worry that as soon as my research was done I would leave the community and the *YES!* program would be neglected and forgotten. I reassured them that this was not my intention.

Once I gained approval from the school board, the principal secured funding to run the program from an Enbridge School Plus grant. I visited the school a number of times prior to the start of the *YES!* program, was introduced to staff and students at a morning meeting, and was given the opportunity to observe lessons and the general functioning of the school. Over time, I have become a familiar face within the school, always welcomed at the door by staff and students.

From Field to Field Text

From spending time in the relational spaces of the field, the *YES!* classroom and the interview spaces with each of my participants, I began to create field texts. In narrative inquiry the term "field text" refers to the data of the narrative inquirer. Field texts are created at the intermediate stage of the research—tentative beginnings at making sense of the phenomenon under study. For this study, my field texts consisted of field notes that I created when I visited the *YES!* classroom and observed the program unfold, journal entries based on my own personal experiences when speaking to the *YES!* teachers or interviewing my participants, and the transcripts of research interviews I conducted with my four research participants.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, "When narrative inquirers are in the field, they are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else's experience. They too are having an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to explore" (p. 81). In recognizing that I myself, as researcher, was part of the field in which I conducted research, I recorded my inner and outer experiences of the *YES!* program and of the research process in my field notes and journal entries. Pieces of my journal entries sometimes found their way into the narratives I co-constructed with my research participants, sometimes not. All shaped my understanding of my research process, the community, and the *YES!* program in this context.

Composing Field Texts

Four research participants were part of this study. I introduce them here.

Rock Child. Rock Child is the school counsellor at the Complementary School. I invited Rock Child to join the study based upon the school principal's suggestion. He participated in both the *YES!* Staff Program, called Stress Management and Resilience Training (SMART) and visited the *YES!* classroom on an ongoing basis. I interviewed him three times. Once just before the *YES!* program began, once towards the end of the program, and once six weeks following the program. I also met with him after composing his narrative to show him what I had written and to ask for his feedback and input.

April. April was, at the time of the study, a student at the Complementary School. I invited her to join the study after she was suggested as someone who might be interested by the school principal. She participated in the *YES!* program. I interviewed her three times (at the same points of time as Rock Child) and met with her after I had composed the narrative to ask for her input and feedback.

Asiniy Awasis. Asisniy Awasis is an addictions counsellor and cultural advisor who works at the Complementary School. He visited the *YES!* classroom and participated in the program about half of the time. I invited him to join the study after a casual conversation between he, the *YES!* teachers and myself after one of the *YES!* classes. I presented him with protocol (offering tobacco to an Elder is a Cree custom when making a request to learn from an Elder) explaining the intent of my research and why I felt it wasàs important to have an Elder's perspective on the program. Asiniy Awasis joined the study late, after another research participant left the study due to time constraints. I interviewed him twice, once during the program

and once about six weeks after the program ended. I also met with him after I had composed his narrative to invite his feedback and input on the final narrative.

Lynda. Lynda is the mother of Onîkânew, one of the students at the Complementary School She participated in neither the *YES!* SMART program, nor the six-week student program. Her only relationship to the *YES!* program was through her son's experiences as a participant. I invited her to be part of the study, based on the school principal's suggestion. I interviewed her three times and met with her after writing her narrative to invite her feedback and input.

All of my research participants were offered opportunity to give their informed consent to participate in the study. Each was given a form (see Appendix) explaining the intent of research, the expectations on the research participant, and the freedom to drop out at any time. April was 19 years old at the time of the study, and, as such, did not require parental consent to participate.

Research interviews, as described by Kvale (1996), are "neither as anonymous and neutral as when a subject responds to a survey questionnaire, nor as personal and emotional as a therapeutic interview" (p. 125). This project used a semi-structured interview approach. As such, specific topics or areas of inquiry were delineated, but the interview allowed for participants to offer other relevant information not specifically queried. Kvale (1996) described that interviews may differ in the openness of purpose and their emphasis on exploration vs. hypothesis testing. Narrative inquiry uses an open, exploratory approach. As such, a semi-structured interview allows for both structure and flexibility. The interview guide, as suggested by Kvale (1996) contains interview questions directly related to each

research question. In addition, I listened for what Kvale termed "red lights" (133), that is unusual terms, strong intonations etc. that signaled a topic that was especially important to my research participants and paused to explore such items further.

Interviews were recorded using my iPhone or my computer and transcribed by me. The study consisted of conversations ranging from 1.5 to 2 hours in length. Audio files and electronic transcripts are stored on a password-protected removable hard drive, to which myself and my supervisor, Jeff Chang will have access. Any hard copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to personally identifiable information.

From Field Text to Research Text

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed that, unlike other researchers, narrative inquirers do not begin their analysis from the point of view of theory, but rather from the explorations of experience. The task of narrative analysis is one of constructing meaning from field text. A narrative inquirer looks for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 132) in conducting analysis. After the first phase of interviews, I transcribed the recordings. Later on, I hired transcriptionists and then read through the transcripts while listening to the recordings to make small edits and to check for the veracity of the transcripts. As I re-read and re-listened to our conversations, certain threads or themes began to emerge. I noticed certain ideas being mentioned more than once by different participants, or certain ideas earning great emphasis in our conversations. I kept a running document of "threads I was noticing" where I noted

these important threads to follow up on later. Before each new interview, I re-read the transcript of the most recent interview I had had with that participant and noted "tensions" that had come up in the last interview, in order to explore them further in the next interview.

When all the interviews were complete, I used a meaning condensation approach to work with the interview transcripts, as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). First, I read through the transcript of each interview to get a sense of the whole. Next, I broke each transcript into natural "meaning units" (section of text that express a complete thought). Then I restated the theme of each meaning unit in a short phrase. With those meaning units delineated, I began to organize the multiple transcripts from each participant into narratives, organized by the "meaning units" I had created. Each narrative then, was written by bringing together all the participants' comments on each of the particular themes or threads discussed. As I completed this process, I again noted threads and themes that ran across the narrative accounts, from one participant to another and made note of them in my "threads I'm noticing" document.

I began to notice that the narratives I was writing included a lot of personal information about my participants, in most cases at least half of the narrative told their life stories, not specifically related to the *YES!* program. I wondered whether to keep these pieces of the narratives or not. I found myself wondering , "Am I telling stories of the YES! program or stories of these participants' lives?" As I pondered this, I came to realize that these contextual aspects of the narratives formed important elements of my participants' stories. Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) instructed narrative researchers to consider texts in terms of the three-dimensional inquiry space: temporality, personal-social dimensions, and place. Including the aspects of the life histories that my participants shared with me, I have allowed the reader (and myself as researcher) to understand more aspects of the three-dimensional inquiry space for each participants, allowing readers to understand how these stories of the *YES!* program are both personal and social narratives, told in a particular place at a particular time, impacted by the events in each participants' past, present and foreseen future.

Having completed interim narrative accounts, I then met with each research participant for further negotiation. Each research participant had the opportunity to read my "rough draft" of the narrative and together we discussed whether they were comfortable with the interpretations I had made, whether there was anything to be added, removed, or changed.

I then composed the final chapter of my thesis, looking to delineate the common threads of my participants' stories, sliding towards the social side of the personal-social dimension, wondering what collective stories my participants might be telling. I returned to the "threads I'm noticing" document and chose to write about the threads that were mentioned by at least three of my four research participants.

Trustworthiness

In an effort to produce a trustworthy qualitative research product, this research was conducted with Guba and Lincoln's (1986) criteria for quality: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity.

Credibility refers to the idea that research results should be believable from the perspective of the research participants. By sharing my interim narratives with my research participants and inviting their feedback and making requested changes, I aimed to create a narrative that was an accurate representation of the stories each research participant wanted to tell.

Transferability refers to the extent to which research results may be applicable in other settings. By asking interview questions about the context of the reserve community, allowing my research participants to describe the particular characteristics of the context in which this study takes place, I aimed to include and describe the aspects of the three-dimensional inquiry space that shaped the stories told herein. I included contextual factors in my final narratives, allowing readers to understand the factors which may or may not be present in other communities that may lead to these research results being transferable.

Dependability refers to following a systematic process. I aimed for dependability by steering away from leading questions in the interview process, by asking clarifying questions while interviewing my participants, and by following a meaning condensation approach to analysis.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which other researchers would find the same interpretations from reading the same data. To increase the confirmability of my research, I weighed multiple interpretations of the data against the evidence from each transcript and reported the interpretation with the "best fit". I incorporated feedback from my supervisorial committee members, who offered alternative interpretations based on their views of the transcript data. I aimed to be

my own devil's advocate, weighing both the pros and cons of the program in my analysis and reporting both sides as appropriate.

Finally, authenticity refers to the researcher being conscious of one's own perspective. This type of authenticity is very important in narrative research. Narrative asks researchers to situate themselves with the research and to openly share their biases and opinions for readers and research participants to understand. In my narratives, I have often reported my own opinions and experiences as they pertained to the participant stories and to the research process.

Chapter Four : From Rock to Butterfly: Rock Child's Story

"I'm always the white guy trying to do the cultural thing."

When the principal first suggested Rock Child to me as a research participant, I hesitated. The 42-year-old, blond-haired, blue-eyed school counsellor didn't seem like my idea of someone who could tell me about how the *YES!* program fits into this Cree community. I thought I needed to find someone more cultural, more local, more Cree. But the principal insisted he'd be a good choice since he'd been working in the community for many years, had lived in the community at one point, and was married to a local. She convinced me.

So as we sat down for our first interview in a coffee shop near the reserve, I had invited my research participants to bring with them something that they felt symbolized spirituality. Rock Child brought me a few rocks from his collection, explaining that he had always been a "rock hound", looking around for and collecting rocks. In describing his geodes he said, "ugly on the outside, but you never know what's on the inside" (Interview One). For me this description came to represent the potential within each one of us to be something beautiful. It seemed a fitting way to begin a series of interviews about a program intended to foster the innate resilience in its participants.

Relationship to the Local Cree Community

Since I knew little about Rock Child's relationship with the local Cree community apart from what the principal had mentioned, I began by asking Rock Child to tell me about his history with the people on the reserve. Rock Child moved to a community a short drive from the reserve at age six and, from a very young age,

was raised to view Cree people as special. "I was raised in the Mormon Church…I was raised to believe special things about native people. They were a "covenant" people, like a chosen people, in our religion" (Interview One).

As a six year old, new in the community and inspired by his Mormon upbringing, Rock Child decided to start befriending the Cree children who went to his school. "I started to get harassed by the other white kids for trying to play with the Indian kids. The Indian kids didn't know what to make of me, they weren't used to a white kid trying to befriend them, so I was getting bullied a bit by both…" (Interview One). Those early friendships led to other friendships with children, and then teens, from the nearby reserve. At eighteen, Rock Child began coming to the reserve frequently to visit friends and attend other events. "…it was just a fit for me. I've been more readily accepted being a crazy little white guy that gets along with native people than I have by (people in town)…" (Interview One)

As a young adult, Rock Child worked at a number of bars and restaurants in town, where he "started to kinda meet lots of different generations…" (Interview One). Bartending and serving led to new relationships. "I ended up getting invited to different parties to bartend. Pretty soon I had friends (all over the reserve). I was building relationships. They weren't the healthiest relationships all the time." He told me about how experimenting with drugs gradually turned into dealing:

> I knew quite a few people here, growin' up in town here, I know some of the guys that sold it, and then some of the guys who sold it, they ended up growing and, as they got older, moved on to different parts of that industry…My friends were paying outrageous prices, and I was like, well geez

> I can get it cheaper for ya. You know, thinkin' I was being a good friend. You know, when suddenly you're scoring for eighteen different friends, you're kind of dealing. So, not proud of that part of my life, but it is, you know, that's another way that I've built a lot of relationships and met a lot of people in the community. (Interview One)

Now, married to a woman from the reserve and a father to four Cree boys, Rock Child feels even more at home within the reserve community and strongly drawn to learning about and understanding Cree culture:

> I've been adopted. I have other parents. Like, I have a mom and dad and nobody will ever take them away or replace them, but it's cool to have other people call me son, you know. Henderson[4], my adoptive dad, he was there to run the sweat today, you know, and having him acknowledge me as son, very humbling, you know it's very accepting. (Interview One)

> It's weird because I'm a white guy, but I'm always asking the cultural question. Am I sensitive about the culture? Ninety percent of my life is out here [on the reserve]. Ninety percent of my family is Cree (my own little nuclear family). (Interview Two)

> My kids are [Cree], my kids are from [the reserve], I wanted to make sure that if my kids chose to go the cultural route, that I was learning with them. I didn't want to be an outsider watching them grow away from me, I wanted to

[4] All names have been changed to pseudonyms.

> grow with them, so for me I had that extra investment with my kids being Cree to take an interest in the culture. My wife's family is very cultural. (Interview One)

I am struck by Rock Child's biculturalism, that is, his ability to integrate cultural practices from both his American Mormon, Western Caucasian upbringing and Cree culture while maintaining a strong sense of his own personal identity (Sattler, 2008). Throughout our interviews he alternated between calling the reserve "out here" and "out there", as if town and the reserve both felt like home. While it seems that Rock Child has certainly embraced life in the Cree community, he has not let go of his Mormon upbringing or his strong connection to his family of origin. This became clear in his descriptions of his belief system:

> I would say that I'm spiritual, not religious. Religion, people can fight over religion. Religion has to do with I'm right and you're wrong. Spirituality, we all have spirits. Spirituality is all encompassing, it's what we have in common. It's about celebrating the good things we have in common, not fighting over the little differences…
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> …moving away from religion and toward spirituality so I can, I can go comfortably, and I can go to a sweat on this Sunday and next Sunday I'm just as comfortable to sit beside my mom and dad in church, you know. (Interview One)

Rock Child's openness towards the similarities between belief systems, which he referred to as parallels, was in part inspired by the Virtues Program, a

wellness program integrated into the school. Rock Child described the background of the Virtues Program, explaining that the creators of the program went through the various scared texts (Bible, Koran, Bhagavad Gita, etc.) and uncovered a long list of virtues that all these faith traditions had in common:

> We all want our kids, doesn't matter if you're Buddhist, or Muslim, or Mormon, or Christian, whatever, we all want our kids to be loving. We all want them to be accepting and caring, you know, tactful, whatever, right? (Interview One)

Listening to Rock Child describe the similarities in faith traditions and his openness to viewing spiritual parallels, I feel that this is something that he and I share. I have often found many similarities between my Catholic religion and my spiritual foundation in the vedic traditions. In fact, I feel it was this same ability to see spiritual parallels between faiths than inspired me to introduce the *YES!* program into a Cree community.

Rock Child told me, "I'm proud to be white. I'm super proud. I'm proud that I was raised to good loving people who taught me to embrace my brothers and sisters regardless of colour" (Interview One).

Family of Origin

As Rock Child spoke about his young life, his connection to his family was obvious. He told me, "Family for me, like, family is forever. Family is a big thing to me. I was raised that family—nothing comes before family" (Interview One). The strong loyalty amongst himself and his siblings came across when he told me about his brother, "He was my protector. He could beat me up and nobody else could. If

any body messed with me, he had my back, my sisters" (Interview Three). Perhaps Rock Child's strongest family connection was, and is, to his mom. He described that "Mom was awesome," (Interview Two) "my mom never gave up on me," (Interview Three) and "my mom…she's my everything" (Interview Two). Rock Child felt it was extremely important to make his mom proud and described how proud he felt when he could tell his mom that he had quit dealing drugs and had an "honest" job and how much he'd like to quit smoking to make his mom proud.

At the same time, while Rock Child's love and connection to his family is obvious, not everything he shares with me about his childhood is so rosy. One of the themes throughout our interviews, in many of the topics we discussed was his struggles with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). As he told me about his childhood, he began to mention how it affected his childhood, "I was kind of a troubled kid with lots of energy, ADHD…" (Interview Two). He told me about how his mother perceived him as a young child, "You were a full-time, 365, 24 hours a day, couldn't take my eyes off you," (Interview Three) and offered an example of the type of trouble he could get into:

> I mean when we lived in Fox River[5] when I was four years old, I had seen the hitchhikers on the highway as a four-year-old and my mom, we lived on an acreage outside Fox River. My mom had gone into the village whatever to do the laundry. I got away from the babysitter and I figured I was going to find my mom. So I was hitchhiking on the four lane at four years old. Right, and the police had picked me up and, of course, they took me back to my house.

[5] Place name is a pseudonym.

The babysitter was like losing her mind. And I did it more than once." (Interview Three)

Getting into trouble as result of having lots of energy and ADHD was not the only challenge Rock Child faced growing up:

> Dad was awesome, but he had a drinking problem. So sometimes, Dad wasn't awesome and I had a lot of anger because there was a little bit of violence sometimes, a lot of verbal abuse, whatever. I internalized a lot of things and I'd act out in school. I didn't talk to a whole bunch of people because I didn't want to be taken away from the home. (Interview Two)

What stood out for me as I listened to Rock Child describe the alcoholism, abuse, and violence of his childhood, is his ability to turn a negative into a positive. He told me:

> I didn't drink. My dad was an alcoholic and I never wanted to follow in those footsteps 'cause I remember I, I've always held on to what it felt like as a kid, you know, waiting for him to come back and tell me that he loved me after he raged for no reason, you know. And that, you know, that didn't happen. But I learned a lot of good things from it, from his mistakes. The first one was just not to drink… (Interview One)

Resilience

As I think of Rock Child choosing to learn from his father's mistakes, I start to think of him as an example of the resilience the *YES!* program encourages and nurtures. Without invitation, Rock Child spoke to me about resilience and how he sees it as a crucial characteristic in First Nations people:

> I'll have a deck of virtues cards… And just the virtue of resiliency… makes me think of First Nations people. It is the one virtue that for me stands out, in the deck of 100 cards. But speaks highly of First Nations people. (Interview One)

While Rock Child associates resilience with First Nations people, I see him too as an example of resilience in action. He told me about how he decided to quit dealing drugs:

> I was 26 years old and I got out of it. My wife was pregnant, I knew I was going to be a father and I could not see myself going to jail and I wasn't cut out to be a drug dealer…it wasn't who I was supposed to be, you know. And I, it wasn't who I was raised to be…I couldn't imagine missin' out on a day of my son's life, you know. From the first moment I held him, I knew I was never gonna sell drugs again. (Interview One)

As I'm researching the *YES!* program, a resilience building program for youth at risk, I am attracted to Rock Child's own story of a "resilience-building" experience that impacted him as a youth, at a time when he was internalizing the abuse he experienced at home:

> When I got into martial arts, and my sensei really concentrated on the breathing aspects of it, just being able to focus, clear my mind kind of thing...so as a kid it helped. It helped me be able to de-stress. Whether I was—I couldn't really do it at school, but after school or whenever I can sit down and I can just breathe for five to ten minutes, kind of clear my mind so I wouldn't go rage or go punch a hole in a wall or go steal—the different ways

> that I would act out. All those impulsive things that I used to do started to come under control as a kid. So yeah, there was a reduce in money missing from mom's purse, I wasn't getting in as many fights in school, my marks started to go up, things like that. (Interview Two)

Counselling

> I remember very much and I can feel some of the hurts that I have been through as a kid and I see those in my students and I try to put myself, like, what was it that I wanted back then? I wanted somebody to put their arm around me and tell me that things are going to be okay. That's it not the end of the world, that they believed in me, that I am not a piece of shit. (Interview Three)

> I'm open with my faults and my mistakes and such. It's helped me build relationships with my students and especially a lot my students, some of my students, are children of the people I used to smoke with or the people I used to buy for before. And I can't lie about who I am, what I've done in [the community]. I'm a white anomaly, I stand out, you know…so I can't hide, you know, so I just embrace it… (Interview One)

At the same time that Rock Child is open with his mistakes, he also strives to be a good role model for his students, "You got to do it. You can't just tell them one thing and do another. You have to model it" (Interview 2).

As I think about Rock Child wanting to model positive behaviour for his students, it occurred to me that for Rock Child, counselling is more than just a job. It

seemed to me that he takes his role as caregiver in the community very seriously and that his desire to help is motivated by genuine care and concern for all the youth in his community. He told me, "I don't care if I get credit. I'm not about credit, I'm about the message, the kids in our community. That's our natural resource" (Interview One). He told me how he will sometimes go to other schools and other parts of the reserve to talk to a kid he knows on a personal level, even though it wouldn't be considered part of his job description. He shared with me how his care for his students carries over into his home life:

> I'm always giving my phone number out. You know, ticks the wife off because I'll get four o'clock in the morning phone calls, but it'll, it's fine because I love helping people, hopefully, you know, I don't know if it's some kind of addiction for me, like if I get some kind of rush out of it, I do like the feeling of helping somebody. Help them make their life better, you know. (Interview One)

As Rock Child's last comment demonstrates, the youth are not the only ones who benefit from Rock Child's work. He further explained, "The students are the ones that have always validated me. The kids that I work with make me feel kind of heroic at times" (Interview One).

He described his career as a calling, saying that his "career ended up finding [him]" (Interview One). While Rock Child never planned to be a counsellor, he found a job working as an intake worker at a receiving home on the reserve. "The teenagers kinda flocked to me, so they sent me for some training working with 'high risk' kids" (Interview One).

Eventually, Rock Child's work at the receiving home led to a job at a crisis centre, which led to work as a support worker at a youth centre. Over time, Rock Child's job at the youth centre led him to his position as a high school counsellor:

> When the high school used to have problems with kids ideating suicide or whatever because of the relationship that I had with them at the youth centre, I had gained the trust of a lot of the kids in the townsite and just word was, if you had a problem, you could talk to Rock Child, he's cool, he won't tell anybody. So the school would phone me and I would go over to the school and I would assist their counsellors with different things. Just either initiating conversations with the counsellor about suicide, you know.
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> I've always, because I don't have, you know, my formal education—I've got hundreds of certificates for different workshops and things, but not having that degree or that diploma, I always really minimized what I brought to the table. But trust is something that I underestimated because it was trust and the relationships I built with the kids. They ended up giving me the job [as school counsellor] when the counsellor had gotten sick…I was like, well, I don't have my education and they said, 'We can teach you. You can learn all that stuff. We can't teach trust. The kids trust you, you'd be a good fit. (Interview One)

Youth

Thinking about Rock Child's long history working with youth in the community, I asked him what he thinks kids on the reserve need. He tells me:

> A lot of our students, even the parents mean very well and stuff, but there is just so much shame, so many putdowns, so much damage to their self-esteem and they don't sift through the garbage to see, "It's a stupid thing you did. You worried me and I love you." They don't hear that. They don't hear the message behind all the crap. So for me, as a caregiver in the community, I try to help them understand that if a parent's getting mad it's because they love you, try and make them connect to the positive. Because the parents, they just don't communicate the right way…
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> So what do the kids in [the community] need? They need more positive reinforcement; to be acknowledged for the good things they bring to the world. Eventually those other things we want from them, I think they are there. Give them time to grow. But for a lot of them, the present moment stuff, like forget the stuff that happened I the past 'cause even the present moment stuff, trying to help them come to terms with just some of the day-to day issues that they face: hunger, sleep…
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> I think our students and our kids and all our people in [this community] need to be reminded about forgiveness and that it's possible. Because it's not about the other person, it's about you and how empowering that is. Forgiveness, trust are two big virtues in our community…that are not practised very well… (Interview Three)

One of the statements Rock Child made about youth surprised and stuck with me. He told me, "They're all high risk kids, even the ones that aren't in trouble. That's the way I look at it" (Interview One). I asked if he meant kids from the reserve or

kids in general. "All kids," (Interview One). This comment put in perspective what he told me about the needs of youth in the community. My research question focuses on the particular fit of the *YES!* program within this particular on- reserve environment, but perhaps there isn't so much difference between kids on and off reserve after all? Perhaps their needs are more similar than different? Certainly some of the things Rock Child listed as needs of youth in the community could apply kids anywhere: love, acceptance, understanding, hope, faith, direction, guidance, "to be heard, to, like, have somebody not tell them how to feel, but just to be able to tell them how you feel without any fear of judgement, without any fear of punishment or shame" (Interview One). As we shifted from discussing Rock Child's life, history, and the context he brings to experiencing the *YES!* program, I asked him how much the *YES!* program meets those needs of students:

> Virtues are all gifts. They're already inside you. They're intrinsic. Depending on the circumstances of your life, you have to pull them out and grow different ones. So I think that the *YES!* program just clears your mind a little bit and lets you access some of those things or look at yourself in a different way or a different light. (Interview Two)

Listening to this, reminded me of a comment Rock Child had made in our first interview. He told me about a metaphor used in the Virtues Program, the metaphor of the acorn seed:

> This seed is just like us, you know. It has everything he needs to grow up to be that big mighty oak tree. All it needs is a little sunshine and water along

> the way, where they compare that to guidance from your schoolteachers, parents, or whatever. (Interview One)

Rock Child's description of how the *YES!* program helps students to have better access to their intrinsic virtues along his reference to the acorn seed, put me in mind of Richardson's (2002) theory of innate resilience. Richardson's theory is that as one's energy increases, one's innate resilience is more likely to be expressed. As Rock Child mentioned that "awesome feeling" after finishing the breathing and made a connection to virtues, I found myself thinking that perhaps Rock Child was describing the experience of reconnecting with one's inner resilience. Perhaps, for Rock Child and for his students, the experience of doing the advanced breathing (Sudarshan Kriya Yoga) increased their energy and brought about a reconnection with their own innate resilience and its associated virtues. Maybe SKY can be likened to the "sunshine and water" of the acorn metaphor—breathing is, after all, as fundamental to human life as is sunshine to the process of photosynthesis. When Rock Child and I met to look over his interim narrative, he confirmed that he felt that the *YES!* program "indirectly" teaches young people virtues—that it enlivens the virtues, or as the *YES!* program would call them, the Human Values, already present within them.

As we began to discuss the *YES!* program, we started by exploring Rock Child's personal experience of the program and its benefits.

Personal Benefits

With Rock Child, our conversations about the *YES!* program focused almost exclusively on the breathing processes. While the SMART program (the professional

development program for school staff) is a 12-hour program covering a variety of topics, including Human values; being "button proof"; the connection between awareness, energy and breathing; naturalness (being yourself); being 100%; complaining vs. gratitude or taking responsibility; creativity; commitment; teamwork; the value of a strengths-based approach; and moving outside of one's comfort zone, what stood out most strongly for Rock Child, to the exclusion of all else, were the breathing processes. "…we started to do some of the breathing exercises, I was a big fan of it right off the bat" (Interview Two). He explained that the breathing exercises reminded him of some of the self-control exercises he used to do with his sensei as a teenager, "…it brought me back to that as a kid. I know that. I made a connection there, so I was just, you know, open up my heart and open up my mind" (Interview Two). Underscoring the value or breathing for himself, Rock Child noted:

> Again, having the breathing when I was like 16 to probably till I was out of high school were some tough years from my teachers, and my parents probably, and just being able to have that sensei to help me in those moments. So it helped me succeed when I was younger. And I lost it and in a way, I kind of lost my way, lost my spirit. I stopped doing the breathing and I started working in the bar industry and just everything became chaotic. The breathing kind of helps filter out chaos I guess. (Interview Three)

Rock Child's connection between stopping breathing and losing his spirit and losing his way in life stood out for me. He told me that for him, he viewed the advanced breathing sessions as a form of prayer, "It's a chance for me to get in touch

with something bigger than myself" (Interview Two). I wasn't sure what to make of his comment. Certainly for me, with my eight years of experience within the Art of Living Foundation and my decision to become an Art of Living teacher, I have always viewed the advanced breathing (Sudarshan Kriya Yoga) as a sacred process, but I was very surprised to hear Rock Child, having only experienced SKY a few times and having been exposed to the *YES!* course for just over a month at the point when we had this conversation, telling me that he too viewed SKY as prayerful. Again, I found myself thinking about Richardon's (2002) theory of resilience. For Richardson, resilience, quanta, chi, spirit, and God are synonyms. While many readers, myself included, may have trouble equating God and resilience, perhaps, as Rock Child described his reverence towards SKY, he had recognized, on a subconscious level, the connection between spirit (or spirituality) and resilience. Perhaps, as his energy (or prana, or chi) increased when he practised SKY, and his innate resilience began to be expressed, he intrinsically recognized this as a prayerful or meditative process?

In speaking about the benefits he had experienced, half way through the *YES!* program, Rock Child began by crediting the breathing with helping him to cut back on his smoking, "I'm smoking less cigarettes because of the breathing. Half of the time when I wanted, it's, I'll breathe for five minutes instead of going outside having a cigarette" (Interview Two). About a month after the *YES!* program was finished he reported that he was continuing to cut back on smoking:

> For me to be down to two in a day is awesome. My first cigarette I am delaying for as long as I can. Usually on my way to work and I'm trying to

> wait until the end of the workday. Once I get home, I get busy, supper, kids need to go to sports whatever, so that even gets prolonged a little longer. And so I made it two days where I had one cigarette with my wife. I just had the one cigarette… (Interview Three)

Rock Child experienced many other benefits from using the breathing. In describing his own experience of personal benefits, Rock Child introduced the cultural framework of the four-bodied person. He told me:

> The breathing itself is one thing, but also how it just affects your spirit and your mind at the same time—that's just from my experience. It just brings everything in tune, you know?
>
> You talk about like the whole wholistic part of a human being, especially here in the Cree community—your mind, your body, your spirit, your emotions. After doing the breathing for a half an hour or whatever, everything is just running properly. You're just on an even keel with all four parts of who you are as a human being. (Interview Two)

As he spoke about all four parts of himself being "in tune", he brought his hands together to show that those parts were coming together in unison. Immediately, I was put in mind of the word yoga. The original Sanskrit definition of the word yoga is "union", expressing the idea that yoga brings together body, mind, and spirit. I shared that with him and he was surprised and thought it was "very neat". Likewise, I was surprised that Rock Child's experience of the advanced breathing was the embodiment of the word yoga. And that while yoga comes from an ancient Eastern tradition, that Rock Child was describing his experience of yoga

in Cree terms. The parallel between the wholistic approach of yoga and the wholistic view of the four-bodied person was one I had previously identified, but Rock Child brought this up without my invitation. I was once again reminded of the affinity that I feel between he and I in our ability and willingness to focus on the similarities between faiths traditions more than the differences.

As he continued to share the personal benefits he had experienced from the *YES!* program, he often spoke in terms of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits he experienced.

One of the main physical benefits that Rock Child experienced from the advanced breathing was having more energy. "Physically, I feel like I could run a marathon. I'm a lot more relaxed. I have a lot more energy" (Interview Two). He added:

> More energy, you know? Just more energy at the end of the day. On a day that I haven't done my breathing, I want to go home and have a nap. On a day that I've done my breathing, I go home and I want to take the dog for a walk. I've noticed that. (Interview Two)

Mentally, Rock Child expressed, "my mind is clear" (Interview Two). In particular, he found the breathing improving his ADHD symptoms. He told me:

> I've been a little more focused with my students. It's reminded me just like how to be in the moment, especially after like on a day—and I notice on a day when I've done my breathing, I'm a lot more— I'm less distracted, especially I have to struggle with ADD since I was a kid kind of thing. I've noticed on the days that I do my breathing, there's a little more, not even a little more,

> there's a lot more focus. I'm not as easily distracted with— the little shiny things are farther away. I don't notice them as much, which allows me to be in the present moment with my students or my own kids or my spouse. (Interview Two)

He went on to describe his improved concentration. "The channels aren't being changed as fast right now" (Interview Two). He was so convinced of the benefits of SKY for his ADHD, that he even declared, "Forget pharmaceuticals, yoga is the cure for attention-deficit" (Interview Two). Given the literature, I have no trouble believing that this may be the case. While none of the research about Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) completed to date specifically addresses attention deficit concerns, the fact that researchers (Cahn & Polich, 2004; Lazar et al., 2005; & Lutz, Greishcar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004) have revealed a link between mindfulness practises and prefrontal cortex function, it is quite reasonable that SKY would have a positive impact on ADHD symptoms.

Emotionally, Rock Child noticed that he was experiencing, "less anxiety, less worry for me as a counsellor about my students. I can leave work at work. I can go home and enjoy my own kids and stuff easier" (Interview Two). He also found himself less angry:

> I'm not speaking from a place of anger right now. It's weird…I would never think that I'm an angry person, but growing up with my dad being very angry and when I do finally lose my—I lose it. It's rage. It hasn't been there for a while. I'm calmer. I'm a peaceful warrior right now. (Interview Two)

"My heart is not so heavy," he told me and shared a personal story of how the breathing had helped him handle the grief he felt after his wife's recent miscarriage. "I find myself just more at peace. Even with the loss, like with [my wife] and I losing the baby, I grieved. I'm still sad, but I'm not distraught. I can manage my emotions easier" (Interview Two).

Spiritually, "I am more connected to my spirit…it's kind of reunited me." He elaborated:

> For me it's like, during the day my spirit is out doing whatever and if I actually take the time to do the breathing in the day, it's like, okay, my spirit comes back and it just gets comfortable and I feel more whole when I've done the breathing. (Interview Three)

As we discussed the multiple benefits that Rock Child experienced from doing the breathing exercises from the *YES!* program, Rock Child commented, "it's reminded me of the importance of taking time, even if it's 10 minutes" (Interview Two).

School Experiences

Beyond his and his family's benefits from the *YES!* program, Rock Child shared his perspective of how the *YES!* program impacted the school. He shared an example of another staff member who really embraced the *YES!* program:

> Well Annette will not miss [*YES!* sessions]. [She] has to be in the room. She ditched her PLC (Professional Learning Community), right? And that's, like, "I don't need the job. I need the breathing." I laughed. I thought it was so awesome. Like, at the end of the day. I mean, she's an Elder in our

> community, lived here, the stress, all the different whatever, to see her and just the level of joy on the days when she gets to do the breathing. I think it's made a big impact for her. I think she does it outside of class. She's probably looking into taking yoga. (Interview Two)

As a side note, the aforementioned staff member did take a yoga and mediation course offered by the Art of Living foundation in the nearby major city about a month after this conversation with Rock Child. She also attended every follow-up breathing session at the school until the end of the school year.

Beyond individual experiences, Rock Child went on to describe a positive impact on the school community as a whole:

> I don't know how to explain this. Sometimes I can literally feel energy. I don't know like somebody is really heavy and sad or whatever, like, the energy in our school is more positive since the *YES!* program. We have had less infighting in our school, it's been—our elders feel received, there has been more reverence when they are smudging in the morning for the ceremonies, even. Like there has been a gradual, continual change in the energy of our students, it's more positive…it's been beneficial to out school without a doubt. Without a doubt, staff—I have had more mediations with staff this year than I have students, that dropped off. (Interview Three)

As Rock Child described the energy in the school shifting, it made me think of the research literature that points out that the most effective school-based resilience-building interventions are those that focus on changing school culture. Rock Child offered a few comments suggesting that the *YES!* program and its

associated breathing practises had worked their way into the daily culture of the school, "It would be like, "Oh, you're having a bad day? Let's go do ten deep breaths." Again, they hear it from the staff too, so of course it's kind of like ammo" (Interview Three).

> The more we use some of the breathing techniques with our students, whether it's just to self-soothe for a couple minutes or if they were in a crisis situation and they come to school worked up, whatever situations, we're finding ways to kind of—I guess just to give them opportunities to—if you don't use it, you lose it. Some of the teens might be tired of breathing now because it's like, "Go for a walk, take some deep breaths, come to my office, sit down. You know what? Let's do some power breaths." They'll probably get it, because it's not just from me, Rachel's using it, other people at school are using it, so you definitely had a buy-in at the school… (Interview Three)

Rock Child began to speak about the experiences he observed in his students, offering his perspective as the school counsellor, "I'm not much in the room with the instruction and their schoolwork. But when it comes to the wellness, when it comes to them opening their mind, taking in any new information or challenging themselves…" (Interview Two). Rock Child observed many positives in his students, stating, "I think it teaches them to love themselves," (Interview Three). Some of the positive changes he observed in students were, "less behaviours, more focus, more work getting done," (Interview Two). Specifically, he noted:

> They're de-escalating themselves. A couple of them, even in crisis situations when the whole fight-or-flight kicks in, on the days when they've done their

> breathing, there's not so much drama. It's more of a relaxed, "Hey, you know what? I think I might have some problems going on," compared to a day when they didn't do the breathing and it's like "The world is ending!" (Interview Two)

Rock Child shared what his students told him about their experience of the program. One student told him, "…the breathing makes it easier to push the hurt away" (Interview Two). Meanwhile, other students had trouble expressing the experience. Rock Child explained, "…just the ones that can put it into words. There are some that just don't have the words. The only words they can say is, 'I feel good'" (Interview Two).

Rock Child shared one particular positive student experience that stood out for him. He shared that this student had been very "high needs with regards to counselling." For her, however, YES! had had a very strong positive impact:

> Since the YES! program started, [she] has not self harmed….and she will de-escalate herself just by taking 30 minutes to breathe and then she doesn't yell at Kokum…and because she had restraint, she did not say those mean terrible things, even if she felt like it, she's so proud of herself….
>
> She was in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend who really did not look or see her worth as a person…and since the *YES!* program, she's not with the boyfriend. That relationship is over and she is more positive, goal oriented, she's going to graduate from our program, from our school and if he ever wants to get off his ass and become something of himself, fine. But he is not going to hold me back anymore and he is never going to treat me that

> way. Nobody is ever going to treat me that way again. So there has been a change in her self-esteem, and her self-worth and is it specifically because of the *YES!* program? I don't know, but I know that the change started to happen after the *YES!* program… (Interview Three)

At the same time, Rock Child shared that not all student experiences were as positive as those shared above. In fact, Rock Child raised one of the most interesting points of my research, a subject that stayed with me as I worked through my research, "[The weekly advanced breathing sessions had] kind of, I won't say it's splintered—what's a good way—or fractured our little student group" (Interview Two). Rock Child elaborated that the fracture was between the students who bought in to the *YES!* program and found benefit from the breathing practises versus the students who did not as readily accept the practises. "And they were getting pissed off at each other because they weren't being quiet and they weren't being respectful. 'You're wrecking my relaxation' kind of thing" (Interview Two). He elaborated:

> There's been more discussion amongst the students just about, "if you'd actually shut up and listen and do the breathing, you'll know why we feel the way we feel" kind of thing. And the other ones are like, "You guys are so cheesy…" "Well, it's because you're too busy pissing around to get the benefit. We're getting the benefit and it's making us feel better. And then you see us feel better and you're pissed off with us because we feel better. It's because you're not trying." The ones that are actually taking it and immersing themselves in it and doing the breathing exercises, they're

> benefitting from it. And then the other ones are like—I don't know if you want to say envious and jealous. So it's weird. (Interview Two)

> The one's that were reluctant, I think they're a bit jealous that the other ones were getting benefit from it, either because of their attention span or whatever that they weren't. So I think there was a little bit of envy, "Why is this working for you and it did not work for me? Like that's BS or you're just pretending kind of thing. (Interview Three)

Given that the small community of students at the school are a tightly-knit group, I was concerned that the introduction of the *YES!* program might have had a damaging impact on the sense of belonging or community that students experienced at the school. At our last interview, a month after the program was over, I asked Rock Child about the fracture he had mentioned half way through he program:

> They're so in the moment kind of thing, so that the *YES!* program is over, they are over that kind of thing so we are back to…I don't know if you could say normal, but they don't pick at each other for that anymore kind of thing. And they have some flexibility—the ones who want to come breathe [during the weekly follow-up sessions], the ones who want to breathe come on their own and the ones that don't, they go to the other room. (Interview Three)

As Rock Child began to speak about the experiences of students who did not "buy in" to the *YES!* program, I saw an echo between the tensions experienced within the student body and the individual tensions of specific students:

> I think there's been a reaction to real relaxation, intrinsic. Against that extrinsic, smoking a joint to relax. I think it's been a clash. There's been an internal struggle going on with some of our students because here we are, we're trying to teach them this new healthy tool they can use. This is a tool. It's something you have with you forever so you can calm down and relax and just center yourself. (Interview Two)

Rock Child went on to describe one specific example of a student who experienced this "clash":

> She started doing the breathing. I don't know if she's just scared of being healthy. I'll be honest. There's like this fear like, "Oh my God! I can deal with stuff myself. I don't need the pills and I don't need this"…This one girl who has some poly-drug addiction use kind of thing, she was really confused. She was like, "I'm still using the drugs, but I don't feel I need it. It's more of a want now." It was really confusing for her kind of thing. It's like, you're screwing me up!… [This student] is like, "You're wrecking it for me. You're wrecking the drugs for me." I just laughed and I was like, "What do you want?"

Another student had a similar experience:

> The one kid was like, "What are you doing to me? You know, I don't need the drugs. That's all I ever had. What are you doing to me?" kind of thing. It was scaring the heck out of him. It's like, "I think I only smoked two joints this weekend. Usually I'd smoke 20. What's going on?" kind of thing and I'm like, "You're getting better." (Interview Two)

Rock Child also suggested that some of the students who claimed no benefit from the program might, in fact be denying the program's benefits:

> Students shut down, they realize that, " I feel really good and it's tool that I can use, " and they are self-aware in that moment… And then they make the decision to say, "Oh no, this is not working for me, " when I know it was. Because I saw a change in your energy. I saw two days later some of your behaviours were different and I saw a positive change and when we go talk about it…they're like, "No, nothing different about me!" (Interview Three)

As Rock Child and I spoke about the students who didn't embrace the *YES!* program, I realized that Rock Child never criticized or questioned the *YES!* program itself. In fact he encouraged students who reported no benefit from the program to keep trying:

> If it doesn't work for you now maybe later on in your life when the time is right it will work for you and you just don't quit trying. So be willing to try new things, take a healthy risk. (Interview Three)

He also suggested that the students who resisted the program's benefits were "getting better", but just not ready to embrace those benefits. As we spoke about these students we spoke a great deal about change and some of the barriers students might face to healthy change. First, Rock Child highlighted a tension between wanting positive change, but not wanting to become separate from one's social group or family paired with the social group or family group not wanting a member of the group to change:

> Change is scary for people. So when you give somebody a healthy tool and it works for them and they find themselves getting better, it's also very lonely because everybody, their social group, the other people around them that aren't moving ahead like them, that aren't—they're still back there. It's like, two steps forward, I feel better, and this works for me, but oh my God! Everybody else is still back there… (Interview Two)

> Well, it's scary because everybody else around you stays the same. If they don't see anything wrong with them and they see you making a change, "What the hell are you doing? Why are you leaving us? Come back here." So you get all these people trying to hold you back or hold you down because they don't want to come along and be part of the change. It's both for the people that are changing and the ones around them, scary for all of them. (Interview Two)

Second, Rock Child noted a tension between what described as intrinsic versus extrinsic change. Discovering that they had their own inner tools to manage stress could mean having to take personal responsibility for wellness. Rock Child suggested this was a choice these students were just not ready to make.

> I think for some of them, I think some of them that it did work for became scared that it was working and suddenly, "Oh my God! I can change!" Or, "If I use this then it means I have, I can get through my cravings, I don't need a cigarette. I don't need to smoke dope because I can do the breathing and that will help me"…So I think the few that it worked for were kind of like, "Oh my

> God, if I do this now it means I don't have any cop outs. I don't have any reasons, no excuses to drink or do drugs. So I think that there was for some of them, I honestly believe that it was, "not yet." (Interview Three)
>
> Overall, Rock Child noted that while some students might not be ready for change, the program offered great benefits to those who were ready:
>
> I do know that the whole subject of change, the *YES!* program offers you a chance to change some of the things, a positive change, lasting change, if you buy in, if you participate completely. I think it's a powerful tool. It's just having that buy in.

As I thought about Rock Child's observations about the students who weren't ready to change, I found myself thinking about Prochaska and Norcross's (2007) transtheoretical model, in particular their work on the various stages of change. These authors describe five stages of change: precontemplation (unaware or underaware that there is a problem, not considering changing), contemplation (aware that there is a problem, but not yet ready to change), preparation (intention to take action and a few small changes in behaviour), action (successful a changing their behaviour), and maintenance (engage in healthy or problem-free behaviours for six months or more). Prochaska and Norcross went on to describe that therapy is most successful when the change process selected is well-matched to the client's stage of change. As such, processes like motivational interviewing, consciousness-raising, and dramatic relief might be best suited to pre-contemplators and contemplators, whereas experiential therapies would be a better fit for clients ready for action.

In thinking about how the transtheoretical model applies to the *YES!* program, I wonder if, for some students, the program offered "too much too soon". Were the students who found the program "scary" in the precontemplation stage and being offered a program best suited to those in the action stage? How could the awareness of the various stages of change impact the way the program is offered?

As our conversations drew to a close, we began to talk about the potential for *YES!* within the community moving forward, taking a look at how the *YES!* program might fit or not fit within the cultural, social, economic context of the community:

First, we began talking about how the program fit with traditional Cree teachings. "I think that (without using too many words) it completely complements"(Interview Two). He added:

> There is a reverence in the *YES!* program. It's almost ceremonial. And I think that makes a connection because when you're in a sweat, the reverence, the silence, so you can make a connection there. But ceremony is important in the Cree culture, so it is sort of a ceremony in itself. It's got a certain way that it needs it be done, somebody leading the process, so maybe a ceremonial connection.
>
> How is it different? I don't know if I know enough about the culture because I don't know if there is like some kind of breathing exercises within the Cree culture. (Interview Three)

"To me, as a crazy white kid who's still learning about the culture, I see a huge fit" (Interview Two). He went on to suggest bringing the four-bodied person to mind for the students after completing the breathing, asking them about how

they think and feel and if they've experienced improvement in each of the four quadrants. "You ask them those questions after they've done the breathing and you have buy-in right now of anybody that practises the culture" (Interview Two).

I asked if there was anything that did not fit:

> You know, just because of the fact—they're like between residential school and churches and things like that, there's been a negative impact on First Nations communities because of European, right? It bugs me—you know, western thinking and western the way language is, anything that's not Cree… it's considered westernized thinking or "it's not our way."
>
> We're just trying to help make connections that yeah, it's always been your way. We have an English word for something that you've been doing for years. You guys had been going on Vision Quests, that's an ultimate form of mediation when you guys go into—when they do their Sundance and some of the ceremonies that they do, meditation… If you look deep enough, it's always been there, but we just have different words for it…That's what I mean. The parallels are there.

From this comment, I gathered that Rock Child's willingness to see the spiritual parallels between his Mormon upbringing and Cree teachings transferred to his understanding of the *YES!* program. Again, for him, he was willing and able to see the connections between Cree teachings and the lessons of the *YES!* program and the impact of the breathing on one's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual life.

Given Rock Child's willingness to see these inter-cultural connections, and taking into account his recognition of the fact that some people in the community would reject the program because of it being from the outside, I was curious how Rock Child would respond to those who initially rejected the *YES!* program:

As far as like any adversities, you just get people to experience it. (Interview Three)

> I would say, " Keep an open mind." I am a *Mooniaw* and I came, I am an outsider to your community, I kept an open mind and I came in here and I found beauty and I found strength and I found all kinds of wonderful ceremonies and things that benefit me within your culture. But keep your mind open and your heart open because you might be able to find something that works for you from this other culture, from this other experience. So I kind of put it back on them to be able to take the experience. (Interview Three)

As we spoke about the possibilities of implementing *YES!* in the greater community and how it might be received, again the topic turned to a readiness for change:

> I think it will be challenging. I think it's a great fit for the community, it's just going to have challenges along the way because we are—there's such a percentage that is unhealthy. It's going to work for some people and that's going to scare them and they're going to probably run the opposite way. Some are going to run to the light, some of them are going to run away from it. I guess it's depending.

> But the one's that do embrace it, the ones that do open their heart and open their mind just a little bit are going to have some immediate benefit. I guess when that happens, we'll see what happens when it happens. They're either going to run towards it (you, know, this good thing) or they are going to run away from it so they can be enabled to be dysfunctional and unhealthy. (Interview Two)

Nonetheless, despite his recognition of the fact that some people in the community might not be ready for change, he was confident that the *YES!* program and its related SMART program for adults had a place within the community:

> And with the whole residential school and people, the whole community has PTSD and all that kind of stuff. I think that, I'm excited like you said you're doing it for adults in the community…I think if we can fix the adults, we can fix our kids at the same time because they are the ones that are modeling for the children—monkey see, monkey do. (Interview Three)
>
> There is a lot of unresolved issues that people in our community carry around with them, a lot of stress, a lot of negativity, historical or just daily stuff maybe you've read in the paper, whatever. In summer time, I am involved in the wellness programs. I do a lot of work, grief recovery, self esteem programs. And I think there is a huge tie-in there…
>
> So if I was going to do grief recovery, I could use the *YES!* program to start the program off because it centers you, it grounds you. It gets you kind of back into the present moment, no more preoccupations. And I think that it can be a chance to look deeper inside themselves. Anger management, let's

> teach you a tool that will help you detach so you don't get managed by your emotions, you mange your emotions. So I think there is a connection to anger management…
>
> So I see a fit both in anger management. I've seen it for grief recovery, for self-esteem, like for any of the program they run, there would be like a tie-in. So yeah, I see it fitting well in the community.
>
> I think the *YES!* program will complement a lot of different programs in the field of wellness, whether it's anger management or—what else is there? Stress reduction, grief recovery, you name it. (Interview Two)

I asked Rock Child to offer suggestions on how to better incorporate Cree culture into the program. He suggested starting off each session by smudging with an elder:

> It's like, "Hey you're smudging!" Let's go get some of that good smoke on us and then suddenly, well I just smudged and I'm in the room and then there's an Elder speaking and all, she's explaining it to me in my own language, cool. And other than that, I wouldn't mess with the program too much. I think it works pretty well the way it is set up.

Concluding Words

I asked all my participants to offer an idea of a symbol that represents the *YES!* program. Rock Child suggested a butterfly, "because it is, there is a change. There is some kind of metamorphosis that happens" (Interview Three).

As it was, our interviews began with the symbol of the geode, ugly on the outside, with so much potential within, and concluded with the symbol of the

butterfly, which suggested to me potential realized. For Rock Child, and others who participated in the *YES!* program in the winter of 2014, there was a transformation, revealing their innate resilience. From hidden gems to radiant butterfly wings.

Chapter Five: At the Crossroads of the Traditional and the Modern: April's Story

"I'm like an anomaly here"

April, at age nineteen, is one of the oldest students at the school. It's first thing in the morning at the school as she and I meet for our first interview in one of the empty classrooms. While many of the other students have not yet gotten out of bed and made it to school, April has already started her schoolwork. The principal tells me she is one of the most regular attenders at the school. Within our first few exchanges of conversation, she strikes me a friendly, vivacious, funny, and open. I get the sense I'm going to enjoy following her journey through the *YES!* program.

Family

April's story begins, as it does for many Cree people, with the generations who came before. Her family comes from a reserve in central Saskatchewan and she considers both herself and her daughter to be from there, although they have never lived there. Most of her grandparents still live in Saskatchewan, with one mosom (grandfather) living in northeastern Alberta near the Saskatchewan border. How did her family come to live here, I wondered. Her dad wanted to leave Saskatchewan, she explained, and came to the area to live with relatives, "I can't remember how the story went, but he came here, couple years went by and then he met my mom. And then, they fell madly in love. And then here we are" (Interview One), she laughs.

At the present time, she and her one-year old daughter live in the town near the reserve with both her parents. She speaks highly of her parents and the upbringing they gave her:

> I'm not saying that I'm better than anyone and I'm not saying that I just—that I'm like being cocky about it, but I've had both my parents all my life. Both my parents aren't drug addicts. They aren't alcoholics. They both have jobs. They both—we've always had food in our fridge. We've always had a roof over our heads. I've always had clothes on my back. I've always gone to school. They've always supported me in everything I did and my dad and my mom always taught me that I could do whatever I wanted as long as I worked hard enough for it. So my confidence, that's pretty big. (Interview Two)

She went on to describe the positive qualities she sees in both of her parents, noting her father is "a dominant figure, father figure" and, "I got my open-mindedness from my mom" (Interview Three). She felt such a strong bond to her father that she credits her father's presence in the delivery room for making her labour with her daughter easier. "To me it was a piece of cake. I think it was mostly because my dad was there" (Interview One).

Like many Cree people, April's definition of family is broader than biological ties. She tells me that she had a lot of friends that she has "culturally adopted" as siblings:

> I have two cultural brothers and I have four, no, I have five cultural sisters, that I adopted. That I considered. And they're open to call my mom and my dad "Mom" and "Dad" and they've known, they know that I culturally adopt

them. And that they're allowed to come over whenever they want. Like, I've had a lot of 'em, a lot of my brothers and sisters move in with me because I wanted them there. They're annoying, but I wanted them there. I love them. (Interview One)

She explained to me that part of her motivation in adopting these friends as siblings is wanting to share her family with those who don't have a healthy family like she does:

I have two brothers that don't have parents. Well, they do kind of. One of my, my younger brother, he has, he lost his mom and dad when he was younger and, uh, he lives with his kokum, and I have one older brother who lost his mom and dad too, but he got adopted by another mom and dad, and then all my sisters have parents, but they're, to me they're deadbeats. They're somebody, there's people that you don't, you wouldn't see yourself being friends with, I guess. It's just that you wouldn't want to talk to them. Like they either got abused or things like that. So I took 'em in. Sometimes I feed them, sometimes I clothe them, I buy them things, I take them places, and by me, I mean my dad…

You'd get your dad to do it.

Right. I'd pay, he'd drive…to me, I think I've helped them. (Interview One)

Culture and Spirituality

Along with a healthy, supportive, upbringing, April's family also passed on cultural teachings. "I consider my culture very interesting", she told me and explained that she has learned the cultural ways of doing things from the women in her family—her mom, her sister, her aunts, her "kokum, well like my half-kokum, er, my kokum once removed. Well, she takes me as her grandchild, (Interview One)" once again making reference to the common practise of cultural adoption. "The women teach you" (Interview One).

Throughout our conversations, April made many frequent references to the contrast between the modern or "Westernized" way of doing things and the traditional ways, at times recognizing the value of tradition and at times welcoming the modern. One of the areas of tradition that April showed the most pride in was the traditional role of women in Cree culture. "It wasn't very Westernized, where the man did this and this and this. No" (Interview One):

> The women in my culture did everything. They told the men when to hunt, they told men when to have wars, they told the men to do everything. And the women, did you know that the women decided… if the man should take another wife for the household. If she needed help, he'd get a second, he'd have to wife another woman, 'cause she said so…And even is some other cult-, uh, some other First Nations cultures, the women went hunting and the men stayed back or they went with them.
>
> So, uh, during the treaties, they uh, they say that women didn't have a say in it, but the chiefs consulted women during that time. So, I thought that

> was pretty cool. It makes you feel, when you think of that, like, that women have a lot of choice, well, in my culture, that you feel like proud, you feel good about it, that it's like yeah, I can tell people what to say. [laughs] (Interview One)

In talking about the cultural ceremonies such as feasts, wakes, and funerals, April described that some of the differences between men's and women's roles have been maintained:

> 'Cause the women cook everything, the set everything up, the men pray…there's a lot of things that stayed the same like women cook and got everything ready for the feasts and everything and the giveaway and the men would keep the fire, like those are the things that stay the same… (Interview One)

April described to me in detail her coming of age ceremony, a ceremony practised when a young woman has her first "moon time", telling me that:

> It was said in our cultural times that when a young girl turned into a young woman and anytime after that, anytime she had her moon time, is that she, that's when she's the most powerfulest. You could heal people, you can stop things, you can pray and God would, the Creator would help you and things like that. (Interview One)

The picture April paints of the Cree woman, traditional and modern, is one of strength. The Cree woman she describes is capable, hard-working, decisive, commanding, and powerful. A woman with choices. I see April as personifying many of these qualities she admires. It stands out for me that she describes this

strong Cree woman in contrast to a Westernized view of women. I wonder how she would describe Western women? In what ways does she see Cree women as different?

Again, April found it important to contrast more traditional ways of doing things with modern practises, pointing out the value in the more traditional way:

> There's little things in between that may have changed, like people put them on, they don't put them on the ground, they keep them up high, but in our culture we're supposed to put them on the ground because they're levelled with the earth and that's what they're transitioning back into, the earth, so we're giving them back to Mother Earth. That's why they're supposed to be on the ground. (Interview One)

While April valued traditional teachings, she also commented, "there's a lot of things in our culture that's been modernized" (Interview One) and recognized the value in modernizing, noting for example that while traditionally women sat on the ground for ceremonies, "we can't all sit on the ground, our knees are weak, we hurt, and so we have to sit on chairs" (Interview One). She also noted that some of the elements of the women's rite of passage ceremony have changed as a result of it taking place indoors instead of in tipis.

In speaking about death and loss, April shared some of the elements of her spiritual beliefs. She tells me, "I dunno, I have a weird belief system. I believe in a Creator, I believe in my culture, but just the way I look at things is more in a logical state of mind" (Interview One). To me this comment suggests that April shows a willingness to craft her own belief system, which is perhaps a blending of the

traditional and the modern. Mainly her description of her beliefs centred on describing her thoughts, feelings, and experiences about those who had passed on:

> I guess I do, in some way do believe in it, in the Creator and the things that we do because, like, why would you see anomalies and ghosts and things like that? And why would you feel the, like the people that are close to you pass away, why would you feel them beside you? Why would they, why would you feel them around when they're already gone? Things like that. (Interview One)

She tells me that, at various times in her life, she has felt the presence of those who have passed on, like an uncle who she was very close to and a nephew who passed away as a baby. She told me that she feels their presence most often when she is "confused and I can't think straight" (Interview One). At the same time, she doesn't feel the presence of all of those who are "already gone". I ask April why some spirits stay and some move on. She tell me that she thinks it's unfinished business or unfulfilled promises to those still living, "because they promised within themselves that they'd always look over somebody, so they'd stick around longer, 'till they feel like that's fulfilled." "When they know for a fact they're strong enough and they fulfilled, they've fulfilled their promise to you, then they leave" (Interview One).

Beyond the presence of those that April lost that she knew personally, she also had many ghost stories to tell, explaining:

> I'm a strong believer in ghosts and things like that, so. And if you're not and you came here and you walked around at night, yeah, you'd believe in it too, 'cause a lot of crazy things go on. (Interview One)

I have heard many similar ghost stories from locals of all ages. While the belief is ghosts is often met with scepticism in mainstream society, in this reserve community, belief in ghosts is the norm.

Resilience

Many things about April suggested resilience to me, including her tendency to be at school early, ready to work. In this community, where many students drop out around grade ten, this dedication to school stands out. In addition, knowing that April has a young daughter, I admire her commitment to finishing school even more. She confirmed that going to school while raising her daughter was a struggle, especially financially. She told me she had to pay for, "rent, groceries, pampers, daycare" (Interview One), which uses up the entirety of the $400 a month she gets from government benefits. As she doesn't work while she's going to school that small amount of money is her total income. "I have to stretch a five dollar bill…I haven't bought myself something in almost a year now" (Interview One). She told me that she'll have a difficult summer because she'll miss out on travelling around to powwows with her family as she usually does in the summer. Instead she plans to work. "I don't like that…but now that I have a daughter, I have no choice 'cause I need money" (Interview One).

April agreed with my view of her as resilient:

> I think I'm very resilient. I'm able to bounce back—well, we all have our moments. Like, you can't be resilient all the time. So I think I'm in like that, well, average place where I can bounce back from whatever situation that causes me to fall down. But I'm also human. So I'm going to fall down and not be able to bounce back as fast as I'm able to on other days. So I think I'm pretty good with that. (Interview Three)

In thinking about her resilience, April saw herself as an "anomaly" (Interview One). She tells me:

> I want people around me that are like me, that like to go to school, want to get things done, don't want to go party everyday. I don't drink anymore. I quit drinking. So, it's like, why do I want those people around me? It's like, oh, come to school with me. Let's go to school every day. Let's have frickin', let's go out to the movies, let's drink pop, let's watch Netflix at home, let's do our homework together, things like that, like I'd rather do that. (Interview One)

In describing herself in this way, she affirmed that, while she would like to surround herself with like-minded people, she is "kinda the only one" (Interview One) of her peers that lives her life this way.

Despite these financial struggles, April told me that she planned to graduate at the end of the school year. A glance at the local newspaper in the fall confirms that she did, in fact, graduate as planned. At the time of writing, April was doing some upgrading at a local community college, with plans to attend university at a campus about 30 minutes from home in the winter. She intends to study psychology

and become a counsellor. “And then I’m gonna come back to the reserve and work in the school system” (Interview One).

When I invited April to think of times in her life when she had demonstrated resilience, which I described as the ability to “bounce back when something bad happens to you”, she thought about recovering from grief when loved ones have passed away:

> It’s stressful and it hurts a lot, but I have a good enough relationship with all of them that I know they wouldn’t want me like this. They don’t want to see me sad. They’ve never wanted to see me sad. So, I usually just bounce back from that. I always miss them, but you do what you gotta do I guess. (Interview One)

She also told me about her “real hard frickin’ pregnancy, it was horrible” (Interview One). She had a condition called pregnancy cholestasis, a liver condition which made her exceptionally itchy:

> It was like a mosquito bite that would never go away. The bottom of my feet and my hands and my arms. Like right here. I would have red rashes, my hands would be like, they’d look like they’d almost bleed from how hard I was scratching, and my feet actually did bleed ‘cause of how hard I scratched. I lived in the basement and I would scratch my feet on the cement wall and that’s the only thing that helped. (Interview One).
>
> She explained that the itchiness would keep her up at night because it was worse at night:

> So I'd stay up all night, come to school and then by that time I'd like probably be almost 24 hours that I was sleeping, so I'd be able to sleep for approximately two hours, here.
>
> At school.
>
> Yeah.
>
> Where did you sleep at school?
>
> I used to sleep in the staff room.

To me, April's determination to keep coming to school despite extreme physical discomfort and sleep deprivation shows her remarkable commitment to school. The school's willingness to provide a space for her to sleep, to me, speaks to the type of school climate in place. It seemed to me that the school also recognized the efforts that April was making to continue her studies despite significant obstacles and created an opportunity for her to have one of her needs met at school. It occurred to me that a lot of young people, perhaps even most young people, would give up on school in the face of the kinds of obstacles April faced during pregnancy, so I asked her what kept her going:

> It was because I didn't want her future to be. I didn't want to still be going to school…I want her to know. I want her to know my stories. My daughter, I

> want her to know my stories. That I had a horrible pregnancy and I still went to school and I had to get myself up from the bed and that I just pushed myself as hard as I could sometimes. (Interview One)

To me, April demonstrates what my late mother used to call "bloody mindedness", a kind of stubborn determination or drive that persists despite obstacles. I wonder where April's drive to "push herself as hard as she could" comes from? Why would April be so committed to bettering herself for the sake of her daughter when so many others aren't? Many young girls in this community become pregnant, and few finish school. Even fewer show that strong desire to make their lives into a story that they are proud to tell the next generation. I greatly admire April's bloody mindedness, and I wonder how that kind of inner drive could be developed. In many ways, it is this question of how to foster resilience/inner drive/bloody mindedness that is at the heart of this research.

Benard's (2004) model of protective factors may provide some clues. Benard described resilience as being fostered through environmental factors and personal strengths. Environmental factors include positive family, school, and community environments. In each case, Benard described a positive environment as being one which provided caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities for participation and contribution. For April, I suspect that her family environment is one that has helped to foster her resilience. In thinking about her previous description of her parents, "They've always supported me in everything I did and my dad and my mom always taught me that I could do whatever I wanted as long as I worked hard enough for it" (Interview One), it certainly sounds like her home

environment is one with lots of care and support. At the same time, it stands out for me that, while April lives at home, she is still expected to pay rent to her parents. Given that both of April's parents work for the school board, I doubt that this expectation comes out of financial necessity, but rather out of a desire to provide April with what Benard termed "high expectations".

At the same time, while April's home environment undoubtedly helped for foster her resilience, April's drive to finish school seems to me to be more intrinsic than extrinsic. Benard described social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose or future as personal strengths that all worked in favour of resilience. Certainly, April's story demonstrates many of these qualities in her. But I wonder, what exactly is the relationship between these personal strengths and resilience? Does the presence of these qualities in someone's personality lead to resilience? Or are these qualities a result of one's inner resilience? Mills and Shuford (2003) would perhaps argue for the latter. They described a healthy, resilient, outlook as being "hard-wired" (p. 67) into each person. For these authors, that resilient outlook includes "…long term, mature outlook, good problem solving skills and the ability to maintain healthy relationships" (p. 67), some of the same "personal strengths" that Benard described.

Perhaps April's resilience is, as Mills and Shuford (2003) suggested, the result of her own hard-wired resilient outlook. Maybe the caring and support and high expectations April received from her parents served to foster and grow the resilience already present within her. What might this mean for the other students at April's school? If their resilience is also hard-wired, then perhaps they only need

a positive environment to help bring those personal strengths out. I find myself thinking about the metaphor for resilience that Rock Child offered in his narrative: the acorn seed. If all students are like acorn seeds, and already have everything within them to grow into mighty oaks, then perhaps what sets April most apart from her peers is not that she possesses so many personal strengths, but rather than she was raised in an environment where those personal strengths were allowed to flourish.

The Local Community

As April was the very first participant that I interviewed, she was the first to surprise me when talking about the local reserve community. When I asked her what made the community unique, her first response was, "the strength of people here" (Interview One). As it turned out, all of my participants began their answer the same way, highlighting the strengths of the community. I was very surprised. As an outsider, especially one who works in the counselling field, I hear stories of grief, sadness, addiction, abuse, and trauma everyday. I was expecting my participants to bring up the many challenges the community faced. Ultimately, each participant did describe the community's problems, but every single one started first by underscoring the community's strengths.

> For April, she experienced the community's strength in times of loss:
>
> When someone passes away, the community comes together. And you can feel that support, you can feel that strength of everyone holding that one or that whole family up. Their friends, their family, you can feel that…when my late nephew passed away, I um, these are people I had never seen before in

> my life that lived on the reserve and we weren't even related to me or my sisters were, they came out and they shook our hands, they gave us hugs, they held us and they kept us strong just by the way, just by being there…Like, I was really hurt during that time and just by random strangers' hugs, that's what made me feel better. That's what helped me get through that tough time. It was just seeing people there supporting us, giving us their strength to keep going. (Interview One)

While the conversation did start with strength, it quickly came around to the many challenges present in the community: trauma, suicide, grief, gangs, alcohol…

In talking about the needs of the community, she began by explaining:

> Everyone needs counselling here. And it's not because they're crazy, it because they need help on the inside. They might be emotio- they might be strong on the outside, but everyone has a breaking point. I think everyone needs counselling, it's either due to residential school or it's mom and dad, it's alcohol abuse, it's self-harming, it's the death of a loved one, it's death of a friend, it's everything and people don't, not a lot of people know how to handle that… (Interview One)

April went on to describe times when one suicide follows another:

> I remember there was this one time…someone passed away, she ended up hanging herself in the basement and then every month after than someone passed away, like literally every month. And there was this one month where every week someone passed away. And it was, it was really hard on the

> community. When you drove through here, you could feel it. Like all the questions, you could feel that, feel the heaviness of it… (Interview One)

As I write this, April's comments strike a chord with me after two suicides in the community this past weekend. Those suicides brought on more concerns of suicide risk as friends of those who recently passed began ideating suicide as well and my colleagues and I were called out to respond to a number of high risk individuals. I have seen months like those April described with "a suicide every week". In fact, within the first two weeks of the *YES!* program beginning in the community last spring, there were two suicides and a murder. To me, the harsh reality of the prevalence of these types of losses makes the need for programs like *YES!* and all other efforts to improve the overall mental health of the community members, that much more important.

April offered her perspective on gangs, "they're not a problem, I'd say they're a nuisance" (Interview One). In thinking about a recent gang-related murder in the community, and the two clients I am currently seeing who are grieving the victim's loss, I have trouble sharing April's perspective that gangs are merely a "nuisance", but I listen to what she has to say:

> It's like, there's only ever been three main gangs [here], and that's basically all family. Three different families. And all the other ones are just little wannabe, like little kids being dumb…like, my perception of gangs are weird.

Mmm? How so?

> Because I know a lot of them. And they're great people. Just a lot of great people doing messed up things. (Interview One)
>
> Moving on from gangs, April tells me:
>
> Alcohol's a factor here. It's a major factor actually. It, that's probably the reason why most of these people pass away here, because of alcohol, either alcohol poisoning, liver damage, um, drinking and driving, drinking suicide… (Interview One)
>
> A lot of domestic violence that happens on the reserve is because alcohol is involved. AND a lot of child abuse AND a lot of, what would you call it? I dunno probably, I'm guessing, sexual abuse too. Everything bad you could think of was because of the bottle, was because of the alcohol. (Interview One)

I ask April for her perspective on how to begin bringing about positive change in the community and putting an end to some of the personal and social problems she has mentioned, "It's gonna take time to change that. And you gotta start somewhere" (Interview One). April offered a couple interesting insights into the source of these social problems, which may offer a clue as to where to start. First she told me, "people have nothing other to do, so they look out, they look for things to fill that void and it ends up being negative" (Interview One). She also suggested:

> The only way a gang's gonna disappear is if people know how to communicate right. And the only way it'll probably totally diminish is if people know how to handle a heartbreak or in a new form, rather than turning to drugs"

(Interview One). Thinking about how people, on and off reserve, often turn to unhealthy coping strategies to "fill a void" or "handle a heartbreak", I once again see the importance of the *YES!* program. The way Bill Herman (2014) described it "when we ask teenagers, 'how do most adults deal with stress?' they tell us 'drinking, drugs, yelling, violence, smoking' and so on. What *YES!* does is teach young people and their teachers to manage stress in healthy ways. It gives us the opportunity to change the patterns in society by teaching healthy alternatives for managing stress". Personally, I can see *YES!* as teaching course participants exactly what April suggests—how to handle heartbreak in a healthy way.

YES! Program

April started by summarizing her feelings about the *YES!* program this way, "I'm like right in between to where I didn't like it and to where I liked it" (Interview Two). She reported that what stood out of her the most from the program, was "the positivity that comes from it. That's what stays with me the most is that the energy that comes from it" (Interview Three). For her own personal experience, she most enjoyed the daily yoga (the healthy body module), "Physically, it helped. A lot of healthy— through all the yoga activities, sun salutations, everything like that, and doing it daily, would help a lot" (Interview Three). However, near the end of the program she injured her back was unable to continue with the yoga.

She also appreciated the life lessons discussed in the healthy lifestyle module, although she felt they were mostly things she had heard before:

> I actually knew a lot of those things that they were talking about…Actually, I've been to seminars where they talked about it and motivational speakers

> talked about it. So I already knew that. I still participated, but it was a good reminder though. (Interview Two)

She commented that part of the reason that the healthy lifestyle curriculum was not new to her was because of the positive, supportive upbringing she received from her parents. Referring to a process in the course about expanding one's comfort zone, April commented, "I've never had a small— what we did in the *YES!* program, I never had a small comfort zone. I can do whatever I wanted. I've had that support, that back-up and everything" (Interview Two). She added, "It feels like a lot of the things my mom and my dad taught me tied into the *YES!* program" (Interview Two).

One lesson that April took away from the *YES!* program was about the possibility of "erasing boundaries." "A lot of…boundary lines that you created for yourself or society created for you, it's like those can be gone…" She used the examples of realizing that she could have friends of all ages or that women need not be limited by the restrictions society places upon them as cases of boundaries she had erased in her own life.

While April liked the yoga and could relate to the lessons in the healthy lifestyle module, her feelings about the breathing aspects of the program were more mixed. The *YES!* program contains six different breathing techniques (Bee Breath, Power Breath, Focus Breath, Expansion Breath, Victory Breath, Belly Breath) in addition to the advanced breathing (Sudarhan Kriya Yoga).

> If it wasn't for *YES!* I wouldn't know how to like do certain techniques to wake me up or to make me think better or just to make me feel better,

> because the only breathing I knew is doing ten breaths for when I have my anxiety attacks. That was the only one I knew. But knowing there are other breathing techniques to relax and everything, then I could use them in other—in, like, day-to-day activities. (Interview Three)

She added:

> I get really, really stressed easily and during those times where we did the breathing and we've relaxed and everything, I wasn't that stressed out, I guess, during those times. (Interview Two)

Although April had some positive things to say about the basic breathing techniques, she "didn't prefer" to do the advanced breathing. "Every time I did, I was tired and I didn't even like it and I didn't even feel refreshed after. It felt like I was overtired all the time." She added, "I didn't like the way it made me feel. It made me feel like—I kept having weird dreams. I didn't like the weird dreams" (Interview Two). I asked her to tell me more about the weird dreams. She described them as "lucid dreams", which sometimes occurred the night after she had done the advanced breathing in class, sometimes, while the breathing process was going on. In these dreams, she felt as though she were floating above herself watching herself sleep. What seemed to bother April the most about these dreams was the awareness that she was sleeping and dreaming while she was sleeping, "you're not supposed to know when you're sleeping, when you're dreaming." She added, "Dreams are like places where you're supposed to get away subconsciously. You're supposed to get away. That's not what happened" (Interview Two).

After a few of these lucid dreams, April decided to stop doing the advanced breathing:

> I just didn't want to do it anymore. It freaks me out. Like, I was scared to do it again because I don't like those dreams because your mind can like run wild and what if it shows me something really scary one of these times. Oh, it freaks me out. (Interview Two)

After that, April would sit in the classroom while the breathing sessions were going on, but would just breathe normally instead of breathing in the cyclical patterns of the advanced breathing process.

While April had some positive experiences of the *YES!* program, she didn't see it fitting into her life at the present time:

> Like, I don't have time. Like, if it only take like, what? Ten minutes to do the breathing, yeah. But even then with a daughter at the age of 19, then we—that has her own set schedule. Also homework and on top of that, all these other things. I don't have time for it. So that's why it doesn't help me right now. (Interview Two)

At the same time, she commented that she might have more use for what she learned in *YES!* in the future, "I don't need it now, but I might need it in the future or I might show my daughter in the future" (Interview Two). She elaborated:

> Right now, I don't have a use for *YES!* I don't see a use for *YES!* But I'm not saying that I'm not, that I won't see it in like three years from now, five years from now.

> There might be a moment in my life where I'm like, hey I learned this when I was younger (Interview Two).

School and Community

Moving beyond herself, April spoke very positively about the program's potential to help others, within her school, within her community, and beyond. Speaking of her fellow students, she noted, "…that the students got to learn that. Because I learned that by my parents, but some of these students don't have that opportunity. So I thought that was pretty good" (Interview Two). She observed the *YES!* program as having a positive impact on other students, "They participated. That's how I know it was helping them. Because they were participating" (Interview Two). She went on to explain that full participation was more the exception than the norm at her school. About a month after the program had ended, April commented on the environment of the school post-*YES*! saying, "I think it's a lot more happy…it feels content. It feels very calm, more calm than it did during the winter while they were here. What they did was helpful" (Interview Three). She went on to explain:

> I see it actually that people are more out of their comfort zones. One of the lessons that we did was getting out of your comfort zone and I see a lot of that, more than I did before. I don't know if it's because kids are more comfortable with the people they are around, but during that time when we were having *YES!* they weren't and it helped them get out of it and now there are people who wouldn't normally talk to people are talking to them now.

> Everyone hangs out with everyone. It doesn't seem like—it seems like it's good. It's a wonderful atmosphere… (Interview Three)

While April described the program as having a very positive impact on the school environment, she had some complaints about how the program was implemented in the school, specifically feeling like that staff were "forcing" the program too much. For herself, she commented that because of her being the oldest at the school and being "a good kid", that "people have a lot of high expectations on me" (Interview Two). In part because of her role as "good kid", she experienced the staff as forcing her to participate to be a role model for others, "It just all felt forced to me. Like in my own point of view, it was forced on me. I had to be there. If I wasn't there, then some of the students wouldn't be there" (Interview Two).

April's feeling of coercion extended to how she viewed the way the staff encouraged participation on the part of other students as well. I had heard that the school had organized a project for students who didn't want to participate in *YES!* and I asked her about that:

> The staff didn't want them to do it [the project]. They wanted them to be in *YES!* because it was more simpler. Yeah, we were all forced to be there…If you're not, you're going to do a project. That was their threat, that you're going to do a project for it instead of *YES!*, having all this fun apparently and everything. There was no project. I've never seen any of the students do a project. (Interview Two)

Outside of the school, she thought the program could be helpful for her daughter's dad. "He's troubled I guess. I just think maybe it would help him" (Interview Two).

Within the community, April thought there was definitely a place for *YES!*. "I think it would be good for this community. Now that I think of it, it probably would be—you would feel a better atmosphere here" (Interview Three).

> I think it would help a lot of people on this reserve. But it's like a bigger picture than that. They need more help. But this could be a good start if it just came out this way. It could be a good start to where it will help them control— because there are a lot of people here that have like anger issues and other things that make them who they are. So, being able to control that, to control, to make sure that their buttons don't get pressed. They can learn that and yeah, I think it would be a good thing to do basically. (Interview Two)

I noticed that in her description, she used the vocabulary from the course, as a lesson about being "Button Proof" is one of the first topics from the *YES!* program. In addition to thinking that the *YES!* program would be beneficial to the community, April also thought that it offered something not currently present in the community:

> I think it offers something different. Like there are activities you can go to. I don't think there are yoga classes. I don't know actually…But anyways, it [the *YES!* program] has a variation of things. You learn to use your mind better. You know how to use your body better. It's just—it's where it blends body, mind, and spirit. (Interview Three)

While April thought that the *YES!* program had some benefits to offer the community, she thought it might be slow to catch on and require support from specific people:

> If they were to set one up that had it for like a whole year, we wouldn't have that good of a turnout until at least the year was up because anything new that people don't understand, they won't—you would have to get like—you would have to get people that are also role models within the community.
>
> If you were to get my sister to go out, let's say you had it at the [Recreation Centre] and you were to get my sister to go out. Then all my sisters would go with her. If my sisters went, then everyone in the…ghetto…would be there. Then it builds up like that. You got to get certain people to go first before other people followed. (Interview Two)

Beyond her home reserve, April saw *YES!* as a program with a lot to offer any reserve community, explaining that one of the reasons that *YES!* might be especially helpful to reserve communities is healing some of the trauma caused by residential schools. She saw the *YES!* program as one way to "relieve that kind of distress" (Interview Three). She also thought it would be helpful for "every minority culture", offering "how you can deal with things to fix that" (Interview Three). This observation of April's stands our for me because, in many places in the United States, *YES!* is offered in inner city environments with at risk students of Hispanic and African American descent.

She specifically mentioned the reserve where her daughter's father lives, pointing out that there's been a lot of recent deaths there and there's "grief hanging

over it and then just the positivity of the *YES!* program I think would be really helpful for the reserve over there" (Interview Three). She added:

> But a program like that [*YES!*] to help them, like the program on—like button pushing and being open-minded about things and being able to take that big step forward in certain situations, things like that. I think the reserve would really benefit from it a lot. (Interview Three)

Interestingly, she commented that the reserves near Alberta's big cities might be a good next step, mentioning Tsuu T'ina, Siksika, Brocket, Enoch, Paul Band, and Alexis, commenting that those reserves might often be overlooked because of their proximity to major cities, "Oh, they live by the city. What kind of problems could they have?" (Interview Three).

Cree Culture

One of the aspects of this project that I have been most curious about has been the fit of the *YES!* program within Cree culture. April told me that she felt the *YES!* program "ties into Cree culture pretty well" (Interview Two), specifically citing the "math of the mind" (a lesson about how the human mind is more prone to "adding" positive qualities than to "subtracting" negative ones) and "comfort zone" lessons as being lessons that fit with cultural teachings:

> It connects in quite a few ways to a lot of the teachings…The mind is powerful. It's good to have a spiritual connection because there's a spiritual connection in what the YES! program does and then it combines—like when you have that cultural mindset, you can see in certain areas of *YES!*, it connects to it perfectly. (Interview Three)

For herself, she found the *YES!* program allowed her to have "a more open mind" towards her culture:

> I feel my family members are cultural and that—well, quite a few. But I'm more in that generation where technology came about. I had a computer when I was six. That's when they first like decided to hand them out to everyone. Then internet all of a sudden came about, we ended up havin' internet, and we had—basically every first technology, big brand technology came out. I was so used to it and such.
>
> I kind of avoided the cultural thing because it didn't interest me and now I feel more open-minded to it because just the way *YES!* taught me how to be more open-minded about things. Get out of what you consider your comfort zone and erase those boundaries because in reality there is no boundary. You can do whatever you want. That's what *YES!* taught me was that you can do whatever you want if you just put your mind to it. (Interview Three)

April rated the current cultural fit as an eight out of ten, adding, "But you can like blend it to where it is culturally relative (sic) and also its own thing" (Interview Three). I ask for her suggestions of how to do this:

> Smudge and prayer, just because it connects culturally and it—and to a lot of people, smudge brings back good memories… To me, smudging feels good. You feel safe afterwards. We do it in the mornings some days and at night we do it. Just the smell of it brings—it feels like it brings safety. It makes you

> feel content and like calm. So I think it would be a good idea. (Interview Three)

April also commented that the blending of culture with the *YES!* program need not be done quickly, nor even be restricted to only Cree culture:

> Yeah to slowly start bringing in elements of our culture, or even other cultures, and blend it and let it mesh nicely I think it, actually within, I'm thinking like a ten-year… I think it would be awesome if it was a ten-year plan. It would be good. (Interview Three)

We joked that we'll meet again in 2024 to talk more about *YES!* and then April reminded me that the cultural exchange involved in bringing *YES!* to the community is not a one-way relationship, "if they [the *YES!* instructors!] were to ask an elder a question like that, to help them like tie things in like that, it would give them a lot of insight into Cree culture" (Interview Two). She also mentioned how much she valued Mark, one of the *YES!* teachers, listening to the class and the teachers at the school, "because we were giving him some cultural insight for the Cree culture" (Interview Three). I appreciate the reminder that the *YES!* teachers who come to the community need to ready to listen as much as talk and to be open to hearing about the community and culture within which they will be teaching. I am reminded of my first year in the community, where I focused on simply listening and observing and learning as much about the local ways of being as I could. It was only after that first year that I began to introduce the idea of the *YES!* program in the community.

Concluding Words

I see April at the crossroads of the traditional and the modern. In some ways, she sees herself as a modern woman, taking full advantage of technology and ready to tackle society's restrictions placed on women. In other ways, April is a more traditional Cree woman, valuing traditional teachings about ceremonies about death, rites of passage, and women's power. At her young age, April has begun to negotiate a place for her culture and her own individual identity, a negotiation that I suspect will continue as she sorts her way through her "weird belief system" and aims to strike a balance between the "cultural" and the "logical". Perhaps this negotiation between the traditional and the modern is a journey undertaken by many Aboriginal youth, perhaps youth in general. I find myself wondering if the *YES!* program fits into this niche, at the crossroads of the traditional and the modern. It too, is informed my ancient wisdom in the form of Vedic teachings, while being taught in a way that is fun, engaging, and relevant in 2014.

At the end of our interviews, I asked April to suggest a symbol that represented her experience of the *YES!* program. She offered:

> I would say the open, the top half of a globe. You know how you can open a globe? I want to say it's the top half because on the top half you go Europe and a little bit of Asia and everything in there. And the reason why I said the globe is because *YES!*, it's basically all over and it originated from India, like the Asian area, and it's only the top half because it's able, I'm able to get more things and put it in, be open about it. Open-minded about it.

Chapter Six: Bridging the Generational Gap: Asiniy Awasis' Story

"You have a special job and your job is to be the speaker for the people."

As Asiniy Awasis and I sat down for our first interview, I began setting up my papers and recording equipment on the table in the staff breakroom, as I had done for an interview with April before, when I realized that Asiniy Awasis was sitting on the floor. I sheepishly collected my items and began setting up on the floor to sit across from him. He had spread out a cloth on the floor, lit some smudge, the wind blowing in the window blew the smoke around us both, spreading the now-familiar-to-me scent of sweetgrass. After he smudged himself (wafting the sweetgrass smoke over his body, starting from head to toe), he clutched a number of sacred objects to his heart and was quiet for a time. He explained to me that he was holding an eagle feather, his pipe, his sundance whistle and a braid of sweetgrass, "So I'm just mentally preparing myself; asking the grandfathers to be present to give me the wisdom of what they want to share, not from me" (Interview One). From this first encounter, it was clear to me that our exchanges were more than "research interviews", but rather sacred conversations. I proceeded humbly and tentatively, with much reverence for this man in moccasins.

Finding and Following the Sweetgrass Road

Asiniy Awasis is somewhat young to be an Elder. In his thirties, he is not the grey-haired, wrinkled Elder I might have originally pictured speaking to when I thought of this project. I had heard from other school staff, however, that he carried a pipe. While my knowledge of the pipe is limited, I knew that carrying the pipe

denotes an individual as leading a certain lifestyle, one that meets certain cultural, spiritual, and moral standards. One typically must earn the pipe. Speaking with Asiniy Awasis, I was reminded of a comment that my boss once made in a staff meeting, "Not all our old people are Elders, and not all our Elders are old" (G. Lightning, personal communication, May 2013). Within the school, Asiniy Awasis serves as educational assistant, cultural advisor, and addictions educator for the students. Asiniy Awasis is trained as a certified addictions counsellor and had previously worked in addictions treatment settings.

"The way I was taught, when the Creator made me at the top of the circle of life, he has already set your path out of what you're supposed to do" (Interview One). While raised very traditionally, it took him some time to truly embrace his identity as a Cree man and to follow what he calls "the sweetgrass road" (Interview Two).

Asiniy Awasis was raised in Alberta, by his mother and his grandparents, among others:

> When you look at the Cree philosophy that it takes a community to raise a child, I am a living breathing example. I did not have a father. I had male role models through the Catholic Church that guided me. I had male role models through the ceremonies that have guided me. (Interview One)
>
> When I was a kid…first thing in the morning…my grandmother would wake me up in the morning before the sun was up. She would come into the basement, *"Waniska",* time to get up.

> In the morning, you are supposed to meet the Creator at the same time and you light that smudge and you ask for blessings for that day. But you still have to follow a sense of meditation. Yes, you can move around, but you have to move around quietly; you are not allowed to make noise. And that's to pay respect to the spirit, see? Again, you pay respect to the spirit. It's not till midmorning that you really start getting full force active into your workday. (Interview One)

Asiniy Awasis' upbringing was steeped in cultural teaching and he was encouraged from a young age to embrace his Cree identity.

> I was raised very traditional by my grandparents and also through the Roman Catholic Church. And I was always told as a young boy, I always hear this all the time from my grandmother like I always say, *"awîna kiya?*" Who are you? She always reminds me that, "Who were you born first?" And it plays into a life story of telling me, how she wants to go when she passes. And growing up, I kind of always thought, when she goes on, incorporate both: traditional teachings and Catholic burial.
>
> She said, "Till the day you can answer that question, I will tell you how I want to go." And for a long time it bothered me because I didn't understand what she meant and then again she asked that, "Who are you born first?" And I kind of thought of that, "Well, who am I?" And then she said, *"Kiyano, napwew nêhiyaw*," Cree man. "*Nista mina, nêhiyaw-iskwêw*", Cree woman. And then it sunk in. In that teaching, you were born to be who you are for a

> reason. You are given the teachings and way of life for a reason. (Interview One)
>
> You are always taught that—respect who you are. It's a gift to be given who you are. You could be chosen to be white, black, red, yellow for a reason and that's to respect the way the Creator made you. And I always say, no matter who we are within the circle of life, we are all related. We all pray to the same God, he just has different names. Everybody sees Him a different way. (Interview One)

Listening to Asiniy Awasis, I was struck by his strong identification with his Cree identity, as nurtured by his grandmother, juxtaposed with his acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all cultures and similarities among all people. To me, this is the essence of the teachings in the *YES!* course about human values. As Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (2011) put it:

> Every child should know a little about all cultures and religions in the world. They will start feeling a connection with all the cultures. Every child should know a little bit about all religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism. They will grow up with a broad mindset… we are connected...It's good to have identity, but we have to grow beyond that. (p. 137/138)

Rather than erasing differences, the idea of human values is about acknowledging our differences, while connecting with others through our similarities.

> That's how I was raised to understand who I am first. And through the years I was brought up by one of my grandfathers… He raised me through the

sweat lodge learning how to prepare sweat lodge and all the roles being an *oskâpêwis,* an Elder's helper.

But he passed away into my early teen years…And how I came to earn my pipe, because this is his pipe. He had left this pipe at our home, at the sweat lodge and he said, "Every time you have a sweat, this is the pipe you use as a family." And it just happened to be that when we had very tragic deaths of four individuals in our community, I was at the funeral trying to help all the other men sing….It was starting to be too overwhelming for me, so I decided to leave.

And I get a text message from one of my good friends, my adopted mom actually, … And she was saying that, "Your grandfather is a very respected man and he has come to see me from the other side…He is telling me to sweep your way. Sweep that path clear for you."

And I was being told in ceremony growing up numerous times to choose which way of life to go; either go your Christian way and lose the gifts you are going to be given or you go your cultural way and you receive the gifts as a Cree man. And so I had to make that choice and I am being told, "This is what you're supposed to be doing." And that's with a pipe… eventually using them because there are certain protocols that you have to follow before you can even smoke your very first pipe. And that's what I'm doing now in life, is following those protocols. And it does, it comes with a strict life, but I guess I was modeled into it…

> Well, through my dreams actually, it showed me where to go to find one of his pipes, that's how powerful the Cree way of life is. Is you get told through dreams what to do, you see things coming and that's how I was told it's time for you to follow that road now. And I did the protocols. I went to my grandfather because this [the pipe] was his and I told him what I was told through my adopted mom and was told it's time to hand it down now. These are passed down generationally through the males. (Interview One)

Now, having fully stepped into his identity as a traditional Cree man, Asiniy Awasis works to pass these gifts on to the students that he works with. "I do my addictions training with the students culturally, and I also incorporate Western theory. But my sole fixation is on the culture, the identity, how does it relate to our community, our homes?" (Interview One)

> I want to go forward in life and that's protecting our Cree way of life, protecting our ceremonies, protecting the language, making sure our young people are healthy and following their Cree way of life, passing it down from generation to generation so that the history continues to go on like how it was done years ago. (Interview One)

Youth

As Asiniy Awasis has committed to passing on the Cree way of life to the generations who follow him, I am interested to hear what he has to say about the needs of youth:

> Best way I can describe it is, when you are born as an infant, you are right there with the Creator, you are an innocent child. You go into your

> adolescent years, your childhood years. You go into your teenage years in the south and then you move on to your west side, you are an adult, and then you journey into your eldership years. (Interview One)

As he spoke, he drew a circle with his finger, showing a circle that begins and ends at the north. I recognize that he is describing the cycle of life, four-bodied person, or Medicine Wheel as described by Whitstone (Chapter 1). He continued:

> So when you look at the lines of the Medicine Wheel, the North and South, you have your Elders at the North, you have your teenagers in the South. So to find the spiritual connection to get to a youth, you get to your Elders. Your Elders are supposed to be the ones who look after our youth…
>
> Right now these kids are supposed to be in tune to hear the stories of the Elders, how it was with the struggles in their day, because when you look at how the tone of an Elder, when an Elder speaks, you have that genuine soft tone that shares love, *sâkihitowin.* They feel that and that's what they are urging. They want that sense of love and that they are being paid attention to. So for me they should be able to be searching out their Elders, hearing those stories of the past and where they need to go for the future. (Interview One)

Emphasizing the importance of Elders, Asiniy Awasis described a teaching his grandmother had given him:

> When an Elder lights a pipe, you are connected spiritually with the Creator. Like in Cree you say *eksânowak,* old man, but to pay real respect to an Elder when that pipe is brought out, you say *kisenohwak*. 'Cause you say that

> because you are introducing *Kisemanito,* which is the Creator. You have the Elder and the Creator at the same level, ***kise****nohwak,* ***Kise****manito*, they are the same, they are present. …because he is representing our people with the Creator. (Interview One)

At the same time, while Asiniy Awasis highlighted the importance of the connection between youth and elders, he also acknowledged that in many cases, this traditional connection has been broken down. Contrasting the current situation of youth with his own upbringing, Asiniy Awasis related:

> And then you look at today's day and age of youth. They have cell phones, electronics, satellite, TV, you name it. That's all they're glued to! You look at the development of a child, our children are not allowed to be children because of modern-day influences. They are already taught to be grown-up before they even are able to learn how to play. So they never got a chance to feel and express all those feelings and emotions it is to be a child because they are already advancing into adult years early. (Interview One)

YES! **Program**

One of the first impressions that Asiniy Awasis shared with me about the *YES!* Program was how important a role it could play in the local community. As someone who works with the best interests of youth at heart, Asiniy Awasis was glad that *YES!* was a program specifically geared toward youth. Given the modern reality for youth, Asiniy Awasis described above, he felt that *YES!* had something important to offer young people:

> Like I said before, the fast pace of society, they're so used to that high realm of intense energy. They don't get that opportunity to sit there for five minutes and just enjoy peace. Everyone comes from a different background, whether it's a high-paced work society right down to the alcoholic home, right down to that negative energy, so just to have that in such a young life to show them that pure, natural energy. (Interview Two)

In addition to allowing youth to enjoy peace in the face of a more fast-paced, modern society, Asiniy Awasis thought at *YES!,* because of its focus on youth, offered something not currently present in the community, especially given the reserve's demographic make-up:

> I think because this program is geared toward the youth. When we look at our community-based level programming, they say our youth are our future. When it comes to campaigning time for leadership positions within [this community], they target our youth, giving them false hope, saying "I promise you this. I promise you that."
>
> When I look at seeing the *YES!* program being implemented here at the…school, it showed that the leadership within our school has the focus of our youth and seeing it in our community, I just see it flourishing from here because it's a different program where, even though some of it is kind of the same to me in some of the trainings I've taken, but it really is very energetic, youth formatted. So that it's not just the same old repetition over and over again. It's kind of very open and it gives a lot of leeway to understanding our youth…It is unique because our youth are left out. It's like we have 75

> percent population in the [community] that are youth. So we look at statistics-wise. All the programming and money is geared towards adults and then we look at the high population of youth. What money is allocated to them, it's sporadic. (Interview Two)

Asiniy Awasis went on to underscore the value of a youth program in the community not only because of the high percentage of youth in the community, but also because youth will grow up to be the community leaders of the future. "They're basically the front line workers for the future. They're going to be the ones that say, 'You know what? I took this when I was younger. This still needs to continue within our community'" (Interview Two).

Asiniy Awasis was in the classroom for about half of the program, sometimes needing to offer alternative programming for students who came to school under the influence of marijuana or take care of other work responsibilities. He did not attend the professional development training that Rock Child attended, opting for an alternate workshop offered at the same time. As for his own personal experience of *YES!*, Asiniy Awasis reported that the program served to reconnect him to his already strong commitment to leading a cultural life:

> I guess for me, I guess it's just a continuation. Like you said, it's a reminder. Where is my focus going? Because I remind myself daily. What's the plan the Creator gave you on this earth? Are you living it? What tools do you need to use to get by for just a day? So that's how I look at it. *YES!* was just another—get back on that sweet grass road. (Interview Two)

Overall, Asiniy Awasis described the *YES!* program as very positive for himself personally, as well as for the school staff:

> For me it was a very enjoying experience because of the high energy, fun atmosphere that I got to see within, not only the students but the staff. And to me that was a big bonus because a lot of the times it's just peer to peer, youth to youth involvement. Where, it was a team effort here at the school where we like to be involved with the students to grow with them in the *YES!* program. (Interview Two)

In particular, the process that stood out most for Asiniy Awasis was a process called "sculpture", where a group of four or five individuals create a sculpture together in silence, one person striking a pose, the next person adding on to the sculpture, then another person and so on. The group continues to rotate through various postures, without talking, to a background of reflective music for at least 20 minutes. For Asiniy Awasis, "it stimulated a chain reaction to creating positive-ness. If one person can do it, than I can do it…It creates that empowerment within our youth" (Interview Two).

Cultural Connections

Unsurprisingly, Asiniy Awasis and I spend most of our time in discussing the *YES!* program discussing its fit with traditional Cree culture. Overall, Asiniy Awasis described the *YES!* program as "simplifying" or "summing up" Cree culture:

> There are so many different areas within the culture that utilize as Cree people, as First Nations people in general. The reason why I say "simplify" is because it sums it all up into one body with just simple little breathing

exercises and movements. Because you could say—you can use any other word to sum it up. But for me, I use "simplify". It's because it creates harmony, that unique wholistic balance of *YES!* into the cultural component…

When you look at YES! program, just simple breathing techniques which are repetition everyday, right? When you look at Cree culture with breathing, there's different ceremonies that use the same technique but follow different guidelines, different principles and different rules and traditions. So that's saying *YES!* program simplifies it very easily so that it's not this, this, this. It's just this. Then you can refresh and look back and say," Yeah, we do this in this ceremony. We go back." So it's like back and forth…

It's a simple reminder. It's very basic. It's to the point. It creates that routine within an individual to where one day you started taking that life journey if they choose to go whatever road in life, but hopefully they choose to know who they are as a Cree person. You know, they will start to understand, "Hey, I did this before. I did this in the *YES!* program. Now I understand what they meant." (Interview Two)

In describing more directly the relationship between aspects of the *YES!* program and cultural practices, Asiniy Awasis added:

When you look at the *YES!* program and the philosophy of the breathing, the meditation, the grounding exercises. When you look at *nêhiyaw* way of life, the Cree way of life, it's in there. It is all in there, it plays a wholistic balance…

Because when you look at a wholistic balance in Cree, *Nêhiyaw*, it stems from the Cree word, *nêwo*, four, known as the four components of the

> medicine wheel that you look at that makes up a human being… I look at that in the *YES!* program which is simple techniques of grounding yourself…or the breathing techniques.
>
> And I thought about that, the breathing techniques. I thought about the Sundance. When you are a dancer, and I'm going to talk as a personal experience—I am on my last year to finish my cycle of four. And when you are blowing that whistle, you have to have a certain way to blow it. You have to follow the beat of the drum. You just can't blow it whenever you want to blow it. You have to follow that beat of the drum and then you correlate it with your breathing. And it really make me think of how I felt in the Sundance because, yeah, you are fasting, so no food, no water, but at the same time how do you get through it? It is based by prayer, by meditation, based by breathing.
>
> It's those breathings by blowing a whistle. Because I was thinking about that, when we do the breathing exercise, the different speeds, you get that in the Sundance. There is certain singers, certain songs that will have a slow beat. They will have a medium beat and you have kind of some that are a faster beat. So you have those different levels of breathing within the ceremony itself. (Interview One)

Asiniy Awasis' observation about the strong parallels between the Sundance and Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) astounded me. Having observed a Sundance the summer previously, I had observed it as the healthiest, most beautiful ceremony I had witnessed in the community to date. To have SKY compared to a Sundance is

high praise. Furthermore, I noted that Asiniy Awasis welcomed the connection between the meditation and breathing in the *YES!* program, rather than taking the stance of "we already have this in our cultural ceremony, so why add something new?" I also noted that he, like Rock Child, found a link between the Medicine Wheel, or Four-Bodied Person, and the wholisitic approach of the *YES!* program.

As we continued to talk about the connections between *YES!* and Cree culture, I asked Asiniy Awasis how to continue to integrate culture and the *YES!* program. He offered:

> With today's generation, I would leave it as it is. But you can incorporate like how it related to First Nations content like getting those stories of how it does tie to the culture. Because I know this generation is kind of really not so fixated on learning who they are and it's tough as it is to get them to try something new.
>
> But I do think that evolving it to a point where it's right in there and just taking baby steps with it and then to a really hard-core point where at the end of the program, you are basing it and immersing it with the Cree teachings… (Interview One)

Like Rock Child and April, Asiniy Awasis emphasized the value of smudging with the students and suggested doing it at the start of the *YES!* session every day, bringing in "somebody that can explain the importance of why smudging is important" (Interview Two):

> When you smudge, there is a difference. When you look at human-to-human contact, that's just vice versa. When you have human-to-human contact with

> smudge, you are connecting the spirit, you are asking your spirit to be involved. So you have that general respect, because now the Creator is present and that's a lot of the Cree teachings is, when you smudge, it's not only you there. You are asking the Creator to be present, you are asking your ancestors to be present and the ones that have passed on, from current to way back.
>
> And the kids, you'll get that general response right away because it is automatically, it's genetic. When you head into a ceremony, they are automatically going to start— Depending on what ceremony it is, you will have that reverence, where they are going to respect it right away. They will know when to pay attention and anything I do, I always incorporate smudging right away because it connects with the spirit, not the body…so you are getting that spirit attack, right? You are trying to clean out that spirit. When you clean out the spirit, you can work on the body easier, instead of the other way around, working on the body and then working on the spirit because when—in the end, it's our bodies that die, not the spirit. The spirit always lives on. (Interview One).

In talking about cleaning out the spirit, Asiniy Awasis touched on what he saw as a strong similarity between the *YES!* program and his use of Cree philosophy with youth: the idea that both have the same objective—to heal or clean out the spirit, allowing young people to be "grounded and that's being wholistically balanced" (Interview Two). He observed that meditation and breathing were the approaches of the *YES!* program to allow them to "enjoy peace" and "pure natural

energy" (Interview Two). At the same time, the Cree approach to being grounded, as described by Asiniy Awasis, was about connecting with nature:

> Go outside with no socks on. Go walk on the grass. Feel the medicine that comes from Mother Earth and that's what we always say. Reconnect to yourself, ground yourself, because when you ground yourself, you let go of all that energy, that negative energy that's within your body. (Interview Two)

While Asinisy Awasis described the traditional Cree way of grounding as being different from the means used in the *YES!* program, he never described them as being in conflict with each other. It seemed to me he described *YES!* and traditional Cree culture as having a harmonious relationship, complementing each other, and working together towards the same goals—the health and well-being of young people.

As we began to discuss possible future directions for the *YES!* program within the community, Asiniy Awasis, like the others I interviewed, foresaw some resistance to the program within the community, while also believing it worthwhile to expand the program:

> For me, I'm very open to it. But then we have some hardcore traditionalists within our community that are very…rigid to where their way or the highway. If it's not based by Cree culture, the language, the songs, they're not going to look at it.
>
> Then we also have some other people within our community that are hardcore Christians, right? That are not very open to—if it's not based by the Bible, they're not going to look at it. Right? So, we do have a variety of

> people within our community, but it's to bridge that gap, right? So we have been doing that for years between non-Native, First Nations people. Catholic, Pentecostal, full Gospel, cultural people and it's the same thing with this, right?
>
> It's something new to the community and it's going to be new to the people and that's the first reaction you're going to get is fright or flight. If it doesn't fit them, they're so used to that routine.
>
> But I think by captivating the youth population, they're going to be able to take that home and say, "You know what? This is a program all our people need. Then this is why," because if you captivate the youth population with *YES!* that's a higher population that's receiving it, compared to an adult population that's more minimal. (Interview Two)

In describing the diversity of belief systems in the community, Asiniy Awasis reminded me of an important reality that I had forgotten when I started this research project. In my work in the community, I have encountered people of many different faiths: Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic, etc. In thinking about Asiniy Awasis' observation that people in the community need to be able to "bridge the gap" between each other, I wonder if the *YES!* program might be a tool for building bridges. Reflecting on Rock Child's observation that spirituality is broader than religion, "Spirituality, we all have spirits. Spirituality is all encompassing, it's what we have in common. It's about celebrating the good things we have in common, not fighting over the little differences" (See Chapter Four), I can see how *YES!*, a program more spiritual than religious, might play a role in bringing diverse

people in the community together. At the same time, Asiniy Awasis' recognition that very traditional people of any faith will be prone to reject *YES!* is worth noting also.

In thinking about where the YES! program might go next, Asiniy Awasis offered two ideas. First, he suggested that he'd "like to see *YES!* program implemented in treatment centres. Because we look at the battle of addictions to regroup yourself and you're going through that process of finding yourself within treatment. *YES!* program suits that category so very much" (Interview Two). He also suggested YES! be "utilized at a higher capacity with joint venture with different programs" (Interview Two).

Concluding Thoughts

At the end of our first interview, Asiniy Awasis held up one more sacred item to show me that I hadn't noticed at the start:

> I am holding a rock and you can see it looks like a foot. In Cree, when something is related to you, it's your *kwemâ*. Because my Cree name is Asiniy Awasis, Stone Child this is my *kwemâ*. And this stone goes, the name, goes right back to the evolution of the world, when the world was created, before man walked this earth. When the Creator have all the roles and responsibilities to the animals on the earth, that's how old that name is…
>
> When you're given your Cree name, it comes with a story and also it comes with a song. So I found out my story…When the Creator gave all the duties to the animals and the beings, when *Wesakechak* was roaming the earth, just like an earthquake arose, Asiniy came up, *Mamotawimow,* "Great Spirit, you never gave me a role, what is my responsibility?" And he said,

> "*Kiyano Asiniy*," he said, "You are very, very special." He goes, " There is going to come a time, that there's going to be a different life that's going to walk this earth, that's going to need all of your help on this earth to live life. You have a special job and your job is to be the speaker for the people."
>
> So when you look at stone, where do you know that they speak on behalf of our people? You have a pipe. You have your sweat lodge. You are back in your mother's womb. You are incorporating the womb and then the speaker of all your prayers goes to the Creator. (Interview One)

I think of Asiniy Awasis as embodying the role of "speaker for the people" in many ways. First, as my research participant, he is speaking to me on behalf of his people, sharing cultural teachings and traditions so that I can learn and understand. At the same time, I think of him as a speaker who helps to "bridge the gap" between diverse groups. Asiniy Awasis spoke of the importance of bridging the gap between non-native people and Cree people, as well as between people of many different faiths within the community. While Asiniy Awasis has chosen to be firmly grounded in the cultural teachings of his ancestors, he maintains an attitude of acceptance and understanding to others as well. In addition, I see Asiniy Awasis, bridging another gap as well. As a "young Elder", Asiniy Awasis is someone whose life is entrenched in the ceremonies, stories, songs, and teachings of his forefathers. At the same time, he has chosen a career working with youth and holds a vision of passing on his cultural knowledge to the next generation. I wonder if Asiniy Awasis' openness towards the *YES!* program is informed by his desire to bridge the generational gap within his community. Asiniy Awasis exhibited both a desire to share cultural

teachings with young people, while at the same time recognizing that modern-day youth are more glued to technology and less open to listening to the stories and teachings of Elders than Asiniy Awasis was at that same age. The "energetic, youth-formatted" *YES!* program may, in fact, serve as a tool to reconnect young people to cultural teachings. As April experienced, the *YES!* program encouraged her to have a more open-mind about a variety of things, including culture. Rock Child found that the program encouraged him to be "more connected to his spirit". Asiniy Awasis himself found that the program reminded him to "get back on that sweet grass road". While the *YES!* program, with its roots in India, may at first appear to be culturally inappropriate for a Cree community, it may in practise encourage people to deepen their connection to their own belief system, whatever that may be.

Chapter Seven: A Mother's Perspective: Lynda's Story

When Lynda tells me she'd like to do our first interview at her aunt's home, I feel a little uncomfortable. Her home is located in the old ghetto. Driving there, I realize I've never been to this part of the reserve at night. Here, I had been feeling quite proud of myself that I come here and work in this environment, day in and day out. Now, I realise that living here is a totally different experience. As I drive around, looking for her house, observing the dogs wandering the streets, the people having a smoke or a joint on their front steps, the neighbours shouting to each other out of windows, people bundled up walking from place to place, I realise that I have never seen the reality of this community. To work here and to live here are two very different things. This place at once buzzes with life, with closeness, with belonging, and smacks of danger, of trauma, and of struggle. A strange contrast. I am humbled.

Reflecting on my interviews with Lynda, I think of two things. First, how much she represents motherhood to me. Lynda is the mom of four boys, ranging in age from 11 to 17. I recall that each one of our interviews took place with children around. During the first, one of her sons sat at the table with us, moaning and complaining of a toothache. During the next interview, Lynda was looking after a two-year old, her nephew I think, who brought me his shoes and tried to coax me to let him go play outside. In our last interview, I walked into a living room full of sleeping bags as her home had played host to her eldest son's sleepover the night before. To me, it seems Lynda's life is full of children and childrearing. I think about my own son, four years old at the time of writing, a curious, smart, enthusiastic,

exhausting little boy with a huge appetite for life, and my tendency to keep my "work life" and my "mommy life" separate. It wouldn't occur to me to have him around during a research interview, but here the presence of children seems completely natural.

I also think about the distance and awkwardness in our relationship. Out of all my research participants, Lynda was the one I knew least well prior to meeting together. Rock Child and Asiniy Awasis were colleagues of mine in some ways, as we had coordinated services and attended professional development together a few times. I had encountered April at the school a few times prior to this research project, so she was a familiar face. But I met Lynda for the first time at our first interview. The school principal had connected us and all I knew about her was that she was the mom of a student at the school and all she knew about me was that I was a white woman doing a research project. This distance became apparent throughout our first interview in the awkward silences between us, her confusion at some of my questions, and, in one case, her subtle but clear avoidance of one of my topics of conversation. As our interviews progressed, from February to June, however, the distance became smaller, I was able to build up some rapport, and Lynda became more forthcoming. Lynda taught me a lot about how to be a better narrative researcher.

Life History

Lynda stands apart from my other research participants in one aspect. Whereas my other research participants are originally from somewhere else, Lynda has lived her whole life in the community. Lynda has lived on-reserve her whole

life. For the most part, she went to school on-reserve as well, but spent some time attending school off-reserve in her teen years. She didn't finish high school as a teenager, but went back to school four years ago, completing high school and is now one year away from completing a Bachelor's Degree in psychology. When I asked what had motivated her to study psychology, she expressed a strong desire to help people, relating that one of her aunts, an addictions counsellor, was an inspiration for her, "I've seen her heal a lot of people through her words. That inspired me that I wanted to do the same" (Interview Three).

Lynda's life is full of examples of resilience. When I think about Lynda's life, I am struck by the number of times that major life events have been the inspiration for her to live a healthier life. She tells me that getting pregnant with her oldest son was her reason for quitting drinking and she never went back to it after he was born. After losing her mother and her sister to diabetes, she quit smoking marijuana. She couldn't say exactly what it was that made her quit:

> I don't know. Maybe I just grew up, saw the light. I don't know. It wasn't getting me anywhere but it would get me in trouble with the law and I just thought that's not the way I want to live. (Interview Two)

She described her late husband as a good provider who took good care of herself and her children. But, "when he got into a motor vehicle accident which left him paralyzed…I had to, that was a major obstacle I had to go through loops just to pass courses, training, everything, just to take care of him" (Interview One). Later on, when he passed away, Lynda found herself having to learn how to be "into the

society, because I'd never been into the society for years and years. Because I was more of a like a stay-at-home mom and like an aide, more or less…" (Interview One):

> It was when my husband passed away…because he was—he provided for us. He took care of the financials and the kids and everything. When he passed away, it was like a life shock. Okay, what are we going to do? We've never ever went into [town| and got anything. We never asked for anything because it was always here when their dad was alive.
>
> Then when he died, we struggled for like two years to get our lives back together. Then I thought, okay, this is—I've had it. I can't keep hiding under this big rock. I got to do something. We're starting to need things, the necessities. We need it for the kids and for myself. So I thought, "That's it." I went out the door, went to [town], went back to school. That's where my life started. (Interview Three)

She described going back to school as an intensely positive experience, "I was just so pumped to go to school everyday" (Interview Three):

> [School] has motivated me. It gave me something to live for. It was like it gave me energy. It gave me life. It gave me hope and I don't know. It made me see things, to see values that I lost out on. (Interview Three)
>
> That's how I got my life back was I went back to school. I'm still doing good. (Interview Three)

Throughout our interviews, I asked Lynda several times what she thought was at the source of her own resilience. She was never quite sure, but suggested, "strength, courage, a lot of prayers…" (Interview One).

Onîkânew

Onîkânew is Lynda's oldest son. He attends the school and participated in the *YES!* program in the spring. About Onîkânew, Lynda told me, "He's my friendly giant" (Interview Two). Indeed, he stands a stocky six feet tall. While his appearance might be intimidating to some, during my visits to the school to observe the *YES!* program unfold, Onîkânew appeared quiet and shy, often sitting on the sidelines of activity. Lynda's description of her son fits very well with my observation, "He's a quiet kid, yeah. He won't speak unless you speak to him. He doesn't like to be—he puts that gap in the circle. He's always been like that. He's like—I don't know. Like shy, likes to keep to himself" (Interview Three).

Onîkanew was sent to the complementary school because he'd been skipping a lot of school. At the time, Lynda also worried about his friends because they would, "like be in a gang" (Interview One):

> He'd hang with them and then they'd go to his cousin's and they were in a group, so they thought, oh, this kid's a jumper, which he wasn't because Onîkânew's not a fighter. (Interview One)

While Lynda worried about the Onîkânew's friends, "we couldn't do nothing because all his friends are his relations…he would be related to this group and he would be related to the other group" (Interview One).

Lynda initially worried about him attending the complementary school because, "that's where all the troubled bad kids were being sent" (Interview Two):

> But now that he's older, within the past, I would say year and a half, coming on two years now, he knows better. Like, I used to worry a lot about him, but

> now he's at that stage where he knows to listen to his instincts, like his gut feeling. He knows right from wrong. (Interview Two)

Lynda tells me that, despite his shy demeanour, if he finds something that interests him, Onîkânew is "right in there" (Interview Three). In addition to a strong interest in mechanics, sports, and outdoor activities like camping, Onîkânew shows a connection to his culture:

> If it's cultural, he will participate. Yeah, because he does a lot of volunteer stuff with his school, like with sweats and lodges and stuff. He helps the elders a lot. He doesn't have to be asked. He just knows what to do. (Interview Three)
>
> People would—in the community would look up to him and say like, "Okay, this kid knows the protocol and everything and you don't have to ask him to do it and he knows." Which I'm proud of him for that. (Interview Two)

Parenting

In describing Onîkânew's relationship to culture, Lynda told me, "I just raised him that way" (Interview Three) and told me that all of her children are the same. "What I was taught, I showed my children" (Interview Three). I was curious what else Lynda would have to say about parenting, starting with what it's like to be a mom in this community:

> It is scary. When your kids get up in the morning to go to school, that's where you start to worry. Like really worry and stress yourself. It's like are they going to be okay? Is anything going to happen? Are they going to make it home on the bus? Stuff like that. You're constantly thinking. That's what I

do anyway, because there's a lot of, uh, gang members who go to all the school around here. Sure, they have securities, and they have staff patrolling, but they can't be everywhere. (Interview One)

Given her concerns about the dangers of sending her sons out into this community, I wondered how Lynda parents:

I talk to my kids a lot. We sit and talk about obstacles, things out there, what to expect, what to avoid, what not to come into contact with. And just pray. Pray for them to have a good, safe day. And they do. (Interview One)

We will talk. We will play and we will laugh. I still play with my kids even though they're old. I will wrestle with them. We just eat normal food. Like, we're not on any special diets, nothing. We do a lot of prayers and whatever with the sage and stuff. That's all I do. I just pray every day for strength and courage, keep us going day by day. (Interview Three)

With my kids, I always tell them, "Okay, when you're with your friends, your friends are going to do a lot of crazy stuff, a lot of things that kids that age shouldn't be doing, by getting into violence, getting into gangs and whatever they do." I always tell my kids, "Okay, you got to know what's right from wrong, because when you know your friends are doing something wrong, you're going to hear this little voice, your inner child, tell you, "No, don't do it. Don't do it because your mom told you like it's going to be bad.

…it's like they know the burdens and the—like the emotional tricksters like. They do get encouraged by friends. "Okay, we will do this and no one is going to catch us or we're not going to get caught." They do get

> away with it, but in the long run, people do eventually know who they are. With my kids, I trust them because I know they know the values. They know that we have this bond, our strength. It's like we can connect, all five ways, because there are five of us." (Interview Three)

Lynda reinforced that idea that, in her view, the process of building resilience in young people begins at home, "It has to start from the parents, the family. Like you have to—they have to learn to talk to their kids, make them understand and show them the—what's out there, what to expect, what not to expect, the hidden burdens out there." (Interview Three). "There are obstacles that they will meet, a lot of challenges, and I guess it would be up to the parent to talk to the child about what to expect" (Interview Three). She thought " the boundaries, the strengths, and the commitment they have at home" (Interview Three) were important sources of resilience for young people.

For Lynda, building resilience in her own children means, in large part, sharing cultural practises. For her own part, she learned cultural teachings from her grandparents and she felt that, "the storytelling's they used to tell us when we were kids" (Interview One) were a great way of teaching resilience. The symbol she chose to represent her own relationship to culture was a stone, or a rock:

> They're strong, bold. They're secure. They're attached. And it can be used as a tool. Like for balance, encouragement, serenity wisdom, a lot of things. Rocks are strong. It holds pieces in life together (Interview One).

She has made sure to share her connection to culture with her children. "Well, what I do with my kids everyday is, spiritually, is…the smudge, morning and evening" (Interview One). In raising her four boys:

> They have to know the man role. Because there's a women role and a man role. So with the man's role…the spiritual part, the cultural part and stuff like that and it would be just like—how can I explain it? Like a provider. Yeah. (Interview Two)

She also shared that she felt like passing culture on to her children might mean planting seeds for their future:

> Once you're taught as a child the teachings and the values, the beliefs of the native way, like you never lose it. It's always with you. But as you grow old and get sidetracked into other situations and stuff like that, like they forget about it. They put it in the back of their head. But as they get older, like, "Okay, I remember this." It slowly comes back. (Interview Three)

Thinking about her willingness to talk openly to her kids about obstacles and emotional tricksters, and her calm confidence as she tells me about her parenting, I have little doubt that Lynda and her children do have strong bonds. Lynda strikes me as a caring mother with the best interests of her children in mind. While she makes an effort to be healthy for her children, and works hard to raise them in a safe, caring, a spiritually-grounded home, she recognizes that not all children in the community are so lucky, "There are a lot of kids out there that don't even eat or have clothing, a lot" (Interview Three).

She elaborated:

> A lotta kids on the reserve are lost, they don't know how to associate like, uh, interact with one another. They need healings, they're in the spirituality. And plus there's a lot of them that grieve and, you know, they don't know how to deal with it…" (Interview One)
>
> And a lot of these gang members are just lost kids that were put aside. They can still be taught, they just gotta—for someone out there to get a hold of their attention, so they can be taught, but around here no one tries. (Interview One)

She also was concerned for the many children who aren't growing up with the Cree cultural teachings:

> There are lots. The parents don't make efforts because probably the parents aren't doing it also. There's a lot in this community that don't do it. Those are the kids that—to me I find them lost and alone. The don't have no one to look up to, no one to comfort them, to talk to. Those are the ones I feel sorry for. But all you can do is just pray for them to get better and heal themselves as they grow. That's why the kids are the way they are today in this reserve.

At the same time, Lynda didn't blame the parents for not passing on teachings:

> Because maybe the parent of that child wasn't taught in the first place? Like it wasn't handed down or shown any kind of a, a cultural pattern. So maybe the parent didn't even know what it was too.

Community

In describing her concerns for the "lost" young people, Lynda related that, while many parents were not able to pass on healthy teachings, the community was also neglecting its responsibility towards its young people:

> [The community does] have facilities and resources, but the only thing that I don't see them working or trying to make an effort on, is like, youth centres. They don't have none of that for them, they're always talking and using the logo, "The children are our future." Like what is it for the future for these kids when they, they don't have nothing to offer them?

In addition to a lack of resources of youth, Lynda mentioned a number of other community concerns: gangs, addictions, suicide, poverty… We began exploring why some of these problems persist in the community. "Funding is the main thing. I always hear a lot of people saying that maybe reserves are—get less funding than any other—anywhere in Canada…Like with education, they get short-changed" (Interview Three). Lynda suggested a few other reasons. For example, Lynda observed that there's:

> …not enough people trained on the reserve to help people that need it…they need more certified workers—ones to know how to control, reach out to individuals, the kids. That's why there's a lot of suicides, they think no one's out there, they're left alone. They feel like they're abandoned, like, they're alone. No family, nothing. (Interview One)

Lynda also observed that there is a class structure and concerns with nepotism in the community that make it hard for some to get ahead:

> There's the high, middle, and low class. The high class ones are the ones that receive everything. The middle class is, you get acknowledged like maybe once in a while. The low class, they don't receive nothing. The don't receive benefits, housing, whatever for their families. Like if you were to see—a low class person trying to get help at the band office. You will not receive nothing. You got to be either in the two higher stages to get what you want around here. Also they only help family members. The don't help any other people in the community. It's crazy the way it's run. (Interview Three)
>
> You can't even get a job anywhere [on the reserve]. No way. When you put in applications everywhere, you will not get it.. They give it to a family member. (Interview Three)

Lynda also commented that, while some community resources are missing, some programs do not have properly trained staff, and class structure and nepotism prevent some people from accessing services, that some of responsibility for improving their lives lies within the individuals themselves:

> I'd say it's they've had help before—it's just the community needs to do their part. They got to get out there and help one another. They got to start realizing like, "Hey, there's help out there, we just got to take that first step, cross that line and ask for it," …The only time they attend is when they're court ordered. Other than that, they won't even try. (Interview One)
>
> Maybe it's because they're just lazy. (Interview Three)

YES! **Program**

Out of all my research participants, Lynda and her son Onîkânew were the two who had the least involvement in the *YES!* program. While Lynda expressed an interest in attending the *YES!* SMART program that was offered for adults, one of her sons had a toothache that necessitated her taking him to the dentist instead.

Onîkânew, as mentioned above, often sat off to the sidelines of activity when he did participate in the program, and I often noticed him skipping sessions. On one occasion, I teased him about him missing sessions and he told me he was tired. Onîkânew told his mom little about his experience with the program, apart from the fact that he complained about the yoga making him sore and that he had missed a few sessions. Lynda commented that she saw no change in him over the course of the program. "He's still the same, quiet" (Interview Two).

Lynda told me that she and her boys were getting their lives back into balance and into their normal routine after a very challenging few months. She was reluctant to tell me more, saying, "a lot of white people don't understand the native culture, the way it works. It has a lot to do with that" (Interview Two). She became more forthcoming when I asked if it was related to bad medicine, explaining that her husband's children from a previous marriage were trying to scare the family out of the house, by sending a "bad, evil spirit" to haunt their home:

> At first we didn't notice it right away. We thought, "Okay, they're just nightmares". And they start getting more and more. Then to the point where it would make contact with my kids and sometimes at night my second youngest son would be sleeping and something would just lift his legs. I

> thought, "Okay, that's not right. Something is wrong there. That's where I noticed it. (Interview Two)
>
> Lynda described the extent to which the bad spirit created disturbance in their lives:
>
> So it, more or less it threw off their sleeping patterns, their, everything. It affected my boys a lot, really a lot. That put a lot of stress on me and I was like, had no mobility, no strength, no life in my body left to try and fight and deal with this thing. (Interview Two)
>
> [The boys] would stay up all night and as soon as the sun would come out, they would be—I would have to stay up with them to make sure they were okay, like nothing was bothering them. Yeah. It was scary… Before I was like—I couldn't even do nothing, I couldn't even think. (Interview Two)

Ultimately, Lynda's nephew, a medicine man, came into their home to do a sweat in the basement, which sent the spirit away. I commented that I had heard many stories of bad spirits and ghosts in my times on the reserve. Lynda explained that, "it's the evil in [this reserve]" (Interview Two) that brings negative spirits to the community. "It's the things people do, the way they live, the things they bring in to the reserve" (Interview Two), a common belief I have heard among many locals—that the unhealthy lifestyles of many community members, drinking, drugs, suicides all contribute to the prevalence of bad spirits. I asked Lynda how to combat that type of evil. She suggested that the best way is to be "strong-minded" (Interview Two). Is strong-minded another word for resilience, I wonder?

In considering what Lynda shared with me about her family's struggle with the bad spirit, I wonder to what extent that would have affected Onîkânew's participation in the *YES!* program, or in school in general. Certainly, staying up all night would explain why he was tired when I teased him about not participating. In thinking about the bad spirit at Lynda's home and about her son's toothache, I began to realize that an individual's non-participation, in *YES!* or any other such program, may not be so much a comment on the program itself, or the individual's perspective on the program, so much as a reflection on the other things going on in one's life at the time. Of course, if an individual decides not to participate in a program, it shows some degree of lack of interest in the program. At the same time, Lynda's sharing with me what her family had been going through for the past six to seven months helped me to realize that non-participation may be related to other factors in the greater context of one's life.

Given how much Lynda had shared with me about the importance of traditional Cree culture in her own and her family's life, I asked Lynda's opinion on the relevance of offering a yoga program in a Cree community, specifically whether there would be any conflict with Cree teachings. "I don't see no conflict" (Interview Two). She also saw commonalities among various belief systems, "In the native way, we pray to the same God as any other person does…when [my kids| do their prayers with the smudge, they know they're praying to the same one everybody else does. Like, it's no difference" (Interview Two).

I shared with her that the word yoga means "union" of body, mind, and soul. She quickly connected that concept to Cree culture:

> Body, mind, and soul would be in prayers, like when you're doing your—the smudging—you would sit or kneel over while you're doing this and you have to have a clear mind and you got to use your body, your mind, and your soul to make your prayers stronger…Because a lot of native culture, it has to do with body, mind, and spirit. (Interview Two)

Given their minimal participation and experience of the program, Lynda and I spoke about three main themes: the importance of building resilience at school, how to encourage participation from reluctant participants, and the importance of non-interference in First Nations cultures.

Resilience-Building at School

While Lynda emphasized the important role of resilience-building at home, she also realized that some young people in her community are growing up in families who don't have the resources, internal or external, to nurture resilience in their children. Lynda recognized therefore the importance of resilience-building at school:

> I think that would have to start from school…because if the parents can't do it, the school has to start somewhere… See, because the teachers are with them everyday. They should know the signs and like the—how the kids are behaving and how they adjust with others or in a group. They should be able to see it because they see those kids everyday…I think they need to start a program like that in schools on the reserve. (Interview Three)

I suggested to her that the *YES!* program might be such a program and provide helpful tools to young people from all sorts of households. Lynda agreed

that it's not only the kids from challenging home situations who need a program like *YES!*:

> There's always a gap in every family. A stable family even has gaps. Parents have gaps. Like no one out there is perfect. Every family has their own situations, things to deal with. (Interview Three)

In recognizing the role that schools play in building resilience in young people, Lynda acknowledged the positive environment at the school Onîkânew attended and the efforts the school staff make to encourage resilience in their students:

> They talk with the students. Like they do sweat lodges with them and everything. They have elders there constant. Yeah. One of the staff members there really helps him a lot and he talks to them. (Interview Two)

I asked who that staff member was and was not surprised to learn that it was Rock Child.

Non-Interference

One theme that Lynda mentioned often, both in reference to herself and her son and to people in general was the idea of non-interference or not forcing anything on people, a common in First Nations cultures (Brant, 1990).

"How can you change a person that doesn't want to be changed?" (Interview Two) Lynda observed, " I don't think you can change a person. If a person wants to change, they have to do it themselves" (Interview Two).

> You can offer things to others, but it's up to the individual to want to accept it, to take the first step in life, to accept the help they need. Like you can't just

> throw it at them and say, "Okay, here, do this." That ball or whatever if just going to sit at their doorstep. The will just kick it aside. They've got to help themselves first. (Interview Three)

Lynda related this to her own experience attending a rehabilitation centre for drinking, "When you force a person to go into rehab it won't work. They have to do it on their own. I got forced into one. It didn't help me…" (Interview Two).

This same perspective applied to the way she approached her son's participation in the *YES!* program, "I really don't like to force them into things. I want them to do it own their own, like willingly" (Interview Two).

Lynda explained that her desire to have her children take to things, "on their own" applied to cultural practises as well:

> I think with that, it would be natural, because I don't know. I kind of explained it. It's like they were born around it. They were raised around it. Like, they know it's part of their culture, their religion. But then like with the native way, like you don't force your child… (Interview Three)

At school, the cultural teachings are offered in much the same way:

> It's open to the students, but they have to do it willingly. Like, you can't force a person into the culture. They got to choose it and want to do it. But Onîkânew does participate and he helps the elders set it up. (Interview Two)

I noticed this contrast between Onîkânew's lack of participation in the *YES!* program and his engaged participation in the cultural practises offered by the school.

For Lynda, this non-interventionist approach applied not only to her own children, but to people in general, even when some people reject cultural teachings for a time or go through a crisis of faith:

> You don't push them or force them to continue practising it. You just let them go at it. Okay, they're just going through a phase. Something is going on in their life. Maybe they're under stress, depression, family issues or stuff like that. But I would just let them be and let them learn it on their own because either way, they will go back to it. They eventually do. (Interview Three)

Encouraging Participation

Given her strong belief in non-interference, I wasn't surprised to hear that Lynda wouldn't want to force youth to participate in *YES!* "You can't just do that because they're just going to slowly push back" (Interview Three). I wondered if Lynda would have any tips on how to encourage her son or other students like him, to participate in *YES!* without forcing.:

> You'd have to have something in the inner circle to attract that kid to want to participate. Like an activity or—I don't know, some kind of recreational thing, because there are a lot of kids on the reserve that are like that… There would have to have something that catches his eye or makes his ear like, oh hey, that sounds good. (Interview Three)

For Onîkânew, the things that might attract his eye or ear, Lynda suggested, would be recreational or cultural activities.

Concluding Thoughts

After our second interview, when it was clear that neither Lynda nor Onîkânew had much to share about their experience of the *YES!* program, I wondered if I would have anything to learn from our conversations. In the end, I learned a lot from her. The biggest lessons I gleaned from our conversations were about connection. From our rocky beginning to a much more open and relaxed final interview, Lynda made me recollect a quotation that one of the teachers who participated in the *YES!* Educators course shared with us, "People don't care what you know, until they know that you care." I wonder if Onîkânew's lack of participation in *YES!* was largely due to feeling disconnected—from the curriculum or from the instructors? In that way, perhaps his experience paralleled my experience with Lynda, who shared little about herself and her experience in our first encounters until we built more of a rapport. It occurs to me that Lynda and Onîkânew have taught me the importance of coming alongside others (course participants, clients, research participants) and working with them wherever they're at. In my interviews with Lynda, I had to drop my agenda, my interview guide, and explore subjects that were more relavant to her. Perhaps the same is necessary sometimes for *YES!* participants? Taking the time to just get to know them, as people, and build a relationship before worrying about delivering "a curriculum".

Chapter Eight: Revealing Common Threads

This research was inspired by a hope and a wonder. Inspired by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's vision of a violence-free, stress-free society, it was my hope that the *YES!* program and it's accompanying programs for adults might provide a path towards healthier living—violence-free, stress-free living in the reserve community where I work and, ideally, in other First Nations communities as well. My wonder was whether this hope had the potential to be realized.

In exploring this wonder and this hope, this study endeavoured to gain a thick description of the *YES!* program, as experienced by its participants. This exploration was guided by the question: *What do the stories of participants reveal about how this program fits within the particular cultural and socio-economic situation of this First Nations reserve community?*

What can be gained from a narrative inquiry into participants' experiences of the *YES!* program? Macadams (2009) suggested that there are two ways of doing things in research. One way, the context of justification, concerns itself with proving or disproving hypotheses. The other way, the context of discovery, is about deriving new ideas, building theories, and creating new hypotheses. Macadams asserted that narrative research, and other research methods which focus on gaining a deep understanding of individual cases, is best suited to the context of discovery. With that in mind, what new ideas or hypotheses can I generate after listening to, and crafting narratives with, my four research participants?

In exploring what new ideas this study might generate, I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach of looking for "threads" that run through my

participants' stories. Indeed many threads, or themes, boldly repeated themselves from one participant to the next. I have chosen to share the narrative threads which were mentioned by at least three of my four participants.

Stories of Spirituality

All four participants shared stories of their spiritual beliefs, often making connections to the spiritual orientation of the *YES!* program. Each of the four participants demonstrated a sort of spiritual open-mindedness. Whether it was April's acknowledgement that she believed in the Creator, but also preferred to see things from a logical state of mind, Asiniy Awasis' and Lynda's recognition that we all pray to the same God, or Rock Child's preference for moving away from religion and towards spirituality because, in his view, spirituality is a celebration of human similarities, each participant showed a willingness to step outside the lines of traditional dogmatic thinking to describe their own beliefs. On the flip side, each participant also agreed that there would be people in the community, who Asiniy Awasis referred to as "hardcore traditionalists", who would have trouble accepting the program.

I suspect that these participants' open-minded spiritual perspectives is part of what allowed them to accept the *YES!* program, with its spiritual roots on the other side of the planet, into their community. Similarly, each participant mentioned what Asiniy Awasis referred to as "wholistic balance", making the link between the wholistic perspective offered in the *YES!* program and the four-bodied person, or Medicine Wheel in Cree spirituality. April suggested that the *YES!* program offered something not currently present in the community because it

blended body, mind, and spirit. Lynda commented that the idea of yoga, or union, was closely related to native culture, which also had to do with body, mind, and spirit. Asiniy Awasis, commented that the breathing techniques taught in *YES!* had the effect of grounding a person in all four components of the Medicine Wheel. And Rock Child described in detail how he felt that doing the advanced breathing had improved his life in each of the four areas.

Related to spirituality, April, Asiniy Awasis, and Rock Child, all attributed a deepening of their spiritual connections to their participation in the *YES!* program. For April, she felt that since the program had encouraged her to step out of her comfort zone to learn more about her culture. Whereas she originally saw herself as part of a generation that valued new, modern technologies more than traditional teachings, she found that the *YES!* program encouraged her to "erase boundaries" and to be more open-minded about many things, including her culture. Asiniy Awasis described the *YES!* program as a reminder that allowed him to reaffirm his commitment to a cultural life. He described the program as encouraging him to "get back on the sweet grass road". And for Rock Child, his involvement in the *YES!* program inspired him to make a commitment to his spiritual life, whether to attend a church service or to attend a sweat once a week. What I found interesting about these stories was that the *YES!* program served to reconnect these participants to spiritual life, in whatever way was meaningful to them. While April and Asiniy Awasis found the *YES!* program connected them to cultural teachings, Rock Child committed to attending church more regularly, as well as following Cree cultural traditions. It seems the *YES!* program does not serve to connect participants to one

particular belief system, but rather to connect them to spiritual belief and practise in general.

Taking Macadams suggestion of using narrative research as a means of generating new ideas or hypotheses, what new ideas might we consider from these stories of spirituality? What theories might future researchers test using other research methods?

One hypothesis that might be generated from these stories of spirituality is that *YES!* is most readily accepted by those who are willing to honour all belief systems, and unlikely to be accepted by those who take a more traditional approach to religion or spirituality. Another might be that the *YES!* program serves to reconnect participants to their own belief systems, whatever those might be. What about the wholistic connection between Cree culture and yoga? Perhaps this is a connection that makes the most sense in this context. What different connections might be made in different contexts, like multi-cultural urban centres, or Muslim communities, or corporate boardrooms? These stories of spirituality offer many interesting questions for future researchers to explore.

Stories of Youth

Asiniy Awasis, Lynda, and Rock Child all emphasized the value of the *YES!* program in targeting youth.

These three research participants all mentioned the idea that young people in the community will grow up to be the leaders and decision-makers of the future. Lynda and Asiniy Awasis both commented that the idea that youth are the future is used by community leaders as political rhetoric, but it seemed to be all talk and no

action. By contrast, each of these adults held the interests of young people as extremely important. Rock Child's comment that, "The kids in our community. That's our natural resource" (Chapter Four) was echoed by the other two adult participants. All three demonstrated a commitment to nurturing resilience in young people, through parenting and counselling roles, through sharing cultural teachings and the wisdom of life experience. Asiniy Awasis was hopeful that the young people who participated in *YES!* today, would, as adults, choose to continue the program for years to come.

The three adult participants all noted a lack of community resources for young people in the community. Lynda pointed out that, while the community does have many facilities and resources, youth-specific resources were missing. Asiniy Awasis commented that all programming and money in the community is geared toward adults. Rock Child, as one who had spent his career working with youth in the community, lamented the closure of the youth development centre where he used to work. In our follow-up conversation, he even boldly stated, "We had a youth centre. They shut it down. Kids started to die" (Rock Child, personal communication, December 2014), referring to an increase in suicide and gang participation after the loss of the youth centre. Clearly, the importance of offering resources, facilities, and programming for youth is something that these participants all took seriously. This idea was underscored by Asiniy Awasis who pointed out that the reserve community has a very young population, and therefore programming for youth is essential. While his estimate that 75% of the community's population are youth is surely an overstatement, the demographic reality in this community,

and in Canada in general, is that the Aboriginal population is very young. The 2011 National Household survey showed that 46% of the Canada's total Aboriginal population were under the age of 24 (Statistics Canada, 2013). Given that nearly half of the Aboriginal population are so young, it makes sense to offer programming such as *YES!*, which specifically target youth.

Another idea, brought up by April, Lynda, and Rock Child, was that many youth in the community are not living in healthy, supportive homes. April spoke about her friends who she adopted as brothers and sisters because their parents were deceased or were "deadbeats" (Chapter Five). Lynda spoke about many youth in the community being "lost", growing up in some cases without basic needs like food and clothing, and very often growing up without adult guidance or role models. Rock Child mentioned that a lot of parents don't communicate "the right way" (Chapter Four), criticizing more often than offering positive reinforcement. Lynda suggested that while, ideally, resilience is best fostered by parents at home, that schools are well-situated to build up young people's resources. Mentioning that teachers are with students for several hours a day and have the opportunity to get to know students well, she felt that school had the potential to be a supportive environment for all young people, pointing out that "every family has gaps" (Chapter Seven).

Thinking of Benard's (2004) model of protective factors that help to nurture resilience, she divides environmental factors into three categories: family, school, and community. These research participants pointed out that the community lacks resources for young people and that many young people are not growing up in

healthy homes. Given that community and family resources are missing for many young people on this reserve, Benard's model might suggests the importance of offering school-based programming like *YES!* in this community, an idea that is reinforced by Lynda.

School Stories

Each of my participants spoke very positively about the school where *YES!* took place. Rock Child described that school culture as, "a tight school family" (Interview Two), a sentiment that seemed to be echoed by Lynda, who valued Rock Child's willingness to talk to her son and get to know him personally, as well as the infusion of cultural practises and cultural knowledge into school life. Asiniy Awasis felt that the school leadership really had the best interests of youth at heart, as demonstrated by their choice to implement the *YES!* program. April, from the student perspective, spoke about how she liked that the school focused on life skills she knew she could really use, like writing resumes, learning how to drive, or completing applications for post-secondary studies. April also spoke about the school staff allowing her sleep in the staff room when she was pregnant, which I thought suggested a supportive environment focused on more than academics.

These participants' comments matched my own observations about the school. What I was first struck by as I visited the school before the introduction of the *YES!* program is that, at first glace, it appeared to be a school that might not need the *YES!* program at all. Staff are friendly but firm. There are clear rules and everyone understands them. Posters on the wall promote virtues and there are various "bucket filler" posted on the wall of the staff room showing where staff have

written compliments to each other, based on the book *How Full is your Bucket?* (Rath & Clifton, 2004). The atmosphere of the school certainly seems to match with Benard's (2004) writing about the importance of school environments being caring and supportive for resilience-building. Perhaps, I thought to myself, this school has no need for the *YES!* program. It seemed like this school was already well on its way to being the sort of school that promotes resilience.

At the same time, Rock Child, April, and Asiniy Awasis all spoke about the program's benefits for the school staff, students, and the climate of the school in general. April pointed out that she saw her classmates getting out of their comfort zones more. She credited the *YES!* program with building a "wonderful atmosphere" in the school and a community where "everyone hangs out with everyone" (Chapter Five). For Rock Child, he described that the "energy" in the school had improved and become more positive for staff and for students, noting in particular improved staff relations. Asiniy Awasis described the *YES!* program as creating a "high energy, fun atmosphere" in the school and a "team effort" (Chapter Six), in particular appreciating that *YES!* was something that both staff and students could participate in. Listening to these participants speak about the benefits of the *YES!* program for the school climate, it seemed to me that, even though the school already appeared to be a positive, resilience-building environment prior to offering the *YES!* program, that the program enhanced the positive school climate already in place.

What new ideas might be generated by these school stories? Perhaps their stories suggest something about the type of school, or school administrator who chooses to implement the *YES!* program. Are schools that are characterized by

Benard's (2004) resilience-building qualities of caring and support; high expectations; and participation the types of schools to show an interest in implementing *YES!*? How might these stories be different if *YES!* was implemented in a school with an environment that staff, students and parents described as negative and frustrating? Would those schools report more or less improvement in school climate after the implementation of *YES!*? These school stories suggest some ideas about the schools in which *YES!* is implemented and bring up new questions to explore.

Breathing Stories

Rock Child, April, and Asiniy Awasis all spoke in some detail about the significance of the breathing processes taught in the *YES!* course, even though none of my interview guide questions specifically asked about breathing.

April reported that she liked the basic breathing techniques and appreciated learning that different techniques could be used for different life situations. At the same time, she disliked advanced breathing (Sudarshan Kriya Yoga or SKY), in particular because she found it gave her lucid dreams. She preferred to "get away" in her dreams instead of being aware that she was sleeping or dreaming. Ultimately, she decided to stop doing the advanced breathing, but was open to the idea that she might use it at some point in the future.

Asiniy Awasis found a parallel between breathing along to the varying drum beat during a Sundance and the different breathing rhythms during SKY. He talked about prayer, meditation, and breathing as being the tools that support a sundancer to get through the challenging four-day of fasting and dancing.

Rock Child spoke extensively about the breathing. First, he made a connection between breathing he had learned in martial arts as a youth and SKY. In both situations, he spoke about breathing as a spiritual process. He commented that when, as a young man, he stopped practising the breathing that he learned in martial arts, he "lost his spirit" (Chapter Four). As a school counsellor, Rock Child encouraged students to treat SKY with reverence, like they would a sweat lodge ceremony. He described SKY as bringing the various parts of his being (physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional) "in tune", while also reporting that SKY provided him with personal benefits on each of those levels.

As for Lynda, who never experienced the *YES!* program personally, when I explained to her that a key element of the program was breathing exercises, she commented that it made her think of prenatal classes, where breathing is taught as a technique to manage labour.

What do these stories about participants' experiences of breathing suggest? I see a couple possible ideas about the significance of breathing for these participants. One way to view these breathing stories is to consider the idea of breathing as a tool or a technique to help get through challenging situations. April spoke about the many different types of breathing that she learned in *YES!* and how each one had a different application in her life. Lynda spoke about breathing as a tool to get through labour. And Rock Child described breathing as something that helped him to handle his challenging upbringing. Asiniy Awasis described breathing as one of the means to cope with the fasting and all-day dancing during a Sundance.

But these participants' stories also suggest may have a deeper impact on a person than simply being a technique or tool. April, Asiniy Awasis, and Rock Child all described SKY as a powerful, spiritual experience. For Asiniy Awasis and Rock Child this spiritual experience was a positive one, with both of them linking their experience of SKY to something they had experienced before, either a Sundance or martial arts training. Both of them made connections to other spiritual experiences, linking SKY with meditation and prayer. For both of these participants, their experience of SKY was one that brought about a healthy, positive outlook. Asiniy Awasis described SKY as a "grounding" technique that allowed himself and young people to "enjoy peace" and "pure natural energy". Rock Child spoke about SKY bringing all the parts of himself in tune and reported positive impacts to his physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Meanwhile, for April, she too reported that SKY was a powerful, spiritual experience, but did not describe it as pleasant. SKY increased her awareness to the point that she knew she was dreaming or sleeping, and, at times felt that she was floating above herself watching herself. She disliked both of these experiences and ultimately chose to stop practising SKY. In each case, SKY was described as a powerful, spiritual process, which may be experienced as pleasant or unpleasant.

Helping Stories/Redemptive Narratives

All four research participants are working as counsellors or studying to be counsellors. This was in no way by intentional selection on my part, merely a coincidence; in fact I didn't even realize this similarity among them until I was writing up Lynda's narrative. Recognizing this commonality among them, a

commonality I share with them, I began thinking about Macadams (2006) description of the redemptive self. According to Macadams, "the most caring and productive midlife adults in American society tend to construe their lives as stories of personal redemption" (p. 3). A redemptive narrative begins with the protagonist viewing him or herself as gifted or advantaged in some way, but recognizing that not everyone is so fortunate. As a young person, the protagonist demonstrates a sensitivity to the suffering of others and develops a belief system that guides their life choices and promotes pro-social action. As the life story progresses, the protagonist faces several obstacles, but overcomes them to become stronger and closer to the realization of an "inner destiny" (p. 13). The story ends with the protagonist viewing his or her life as a work in progress in which he or she aims to leave a positive legacy for future generations.

When I first read about the redemptive self, I recognized that my own life story, in particular my life story as it pertains to *YES!*, follows the redemptive sequence very closely. As a young child, I grew up in a healthy, middle class home with a lot of love and support. It was also a home which I was encouraged to explore my own spiritual path, which I did with great sincerity and wonder. I remember visiting the inner city with my mom for various appointments and feeling compassion and concern for the homeless. I remember learning about war-torn and impoverished countries around the globe and feeling a sense of responsibility that I wanted to do something with my life to ease others' suffering. I attended Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific, an international high school focused on promoting tolerance and understanding among young people from around the

world, with the intention of finding a way to use the privileges that I had grown up with to be of service to others. I left discouraged and lost, with more questions than answers. A few years later, after completing my Bachelor of Education degree, I discovered the Art of Living Foundation. For me, taking my first Art of Living course was the unearthing of two things I had spent my life up to that point seeking: a way to be of service to others and a spiritual foundation on which to build my life. On the last day of the course, I felt a conviction to see Art of Living programs be delivered in schools, as my previous experience volunteering in the inner city had sensitized me to the acute need for effective resilience-building curriculum for youth. From that day in July 2006 until now, my conviction to see *YES!* for schools implemented has grown stronger. I see myself continuing the work I have started on *YES!* for Schools and constantly finding ways to live out Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's vision of a violence-free, stress-free society.

In considering the narratives that April, Rock Child, Asiniy Awasis, and Lynda shared about their own lives, redemptive sequences are also present. April described her parents and her upbringing very positively and sought to share her parents and their healthy guidance with her friends. Recognizing that many young people in her community are not growing up with the same supports, April plans to finish a degree in psychology and work as a counsellor in the school system.

Rock Child described counselling as the life he was meant to lead, suggesting a sense of "inner destiny" (p. 13) as described by Macadams. Despite the many challenges he faced as a young man, he described his childhood in positive terms, highlighting that he was raised to honour First Nations people and that was deeply

loved and has a great deal of respect for both his parents. Describing the young people of the community as a "natural resource", he spoke passionately about how much it means to him to help others help themselves.

Asiniy Awasis spoke fondly about being raised by a "village" of caring adults, including family and church leaders and deeply valued the cultural teachings passed on to him by his grandparents. Now, as an addictions counsellor, Asiniy Awasis works with the vision of passing on the Cree way of life to young people and strongly believes in the importance of supporting young people to be healthy leaders for the future.

Lynda talked about having to overcome the challenge of losing her husband and having to learn to take care of her family and children on her own. She also spoke about being inspired to heal others by her aunt, an addictions counsellor. Now, having overcome a number of obstacles herself, she is studying psychology with the goal of becoming a counsellor.

In different ways, my research participants and I all tell our life stories as redemptive narratives, where we feel a strong conviction to be of service to others. For me, the *YES! for Schools* program is my way of living out my "inner destiny" of serving others. Each research participant described the *YES!* program in largely positive terms. Might it be that *YES! for Schools* appeals mostly to those who see their own lives in redemptive terms? What will be the relationship between *YES! for Schools* and these participants in the future? Rock Child has expressed an interest in becoming a *YES! for Schools* teacher. Asiniy Awasis has in interest in seeing it implemented in addictions treatment settings. April would like to see *YES!* offered

on other reserves as well. Will these participants become champions of *YES!* in part because it plays in to the redemptive narratives they are already living? Or will they choose to continue to live out their redemptive narratives in their own ways, with their *YES!* experience playing a small role in the larger narratives of their own lives? How would the stories of participants who don't see their lives in redemptive terms be different? Would they be more similar to Onîkânew's experience?

Resilience

One of the key pieces of a redemptive narrative the overcoming of adversity to become stronger and more able to achieve one's "inner destiny". April, Rock Child, and Lynda all described obstacles that they had faced and overcome, to ultimately become stronger and healthier, each demonstrating resilience in their own way.

Each participant also viewed the *YES!* program as something promoting resilience in youth, each offering different ideas about which aspects of the program were most memorable or effective. April suggested that young people resort to drug use, drug dealing, or gang membership as a way to fill a void in their lives and that people need to learn to communicate better and to handle a heartbreak in a healthy way. These comments suggest that the healthy mind module of the *YES!* program, in which students learn a variety of breathing techniques to handle stress and negative emotions might be important resilience-promoting elements. What stood out for April from the program was the positivity and increased energy that same from participating in *YES!*. She most appreciated the daily yoga and the process

about getting out of one's comfort zone, which encouraged her to erase some her perceived boundaries.

Asiniy Awasis spoke about the value of the *YES!* program allowing young people to experience "pure natural energy" (Chapter Six). He described the program as creating a "high energy, fun atmosphere" in the school and appreciated that the program allowed the staff to grow along with the students. He mentioned the utility of breathing and meditation as being a tool to ground students. His most prominent memory of the program was the sculpture process, which he perceived as creating a chain reaction of positivity.

Rock Child strongly connected to the breathing processes on the course. He talked about how the *YES!* program "indirectly" teaches young people to express their intrinsic virtues, emphasizing the idea that young people already have everything they need inside them to grow into healthy adults and that those qualities only need to be nurtured.

Lynda spoke as a parent about how she nurtured resilience in her own children. She talked about how she keeps a close connection with her children, by talking to them, playing with them, eating with them, and laughing with them. She also emphasized the value of prayer in her home, encouraged her children to listen to their "inner child" when faced with the temptation to do something wrong and talked about sharing traditional values with them. She also spoke about warning her children about the obstacles and challenges they might face in life and how to deal with them.

What do these stories suggest about how the *YES!* program's relationship to resilience? First, Rock Child, April, and Asiniy Awasis all spoke about breathing. The breathing techniques would seem to be essential resilience-building tools from the program. Next, Rock Child and Lynda suggest the idea that resilience is intrinsic. Rock Child, using the metaphor of the acorn seed, talked about how each person already has everything within them to grow into a mighty oak. Lynda encouraged her children to listen to their inner voices when faced with challenges, suggesting that she had faith in their intuition to make healthy choices. If resilience is intrinsic, perhaps the *YES!* program does not teach resilience, so much as allow one's natural resilience, and one's human values, to be expressed. April, Rock Child, and Asiniy Awasis all used the word "energy" to describe the program's impact on themselves and others in the school. April and Asiniy Awasis also described the "fun" and "positive" environment the program created within the school, suggesting that program's strengths-based approach is key. Finally, each participant seemed to esteem different aspects of the "healthy lifestyle" module. Whether it was comfort zone, sculpture, or teaching one's children how to get past obstacles, each participant thought it was important for young people to gain insight into how to move beyond the limitations in their lives.

Non-interference

Brant (1990) pointed out that non-interference, or the discouragement of coercion of any type, is a common rule of behaviour to many First Nations cultures. This idea was reflected in the stories of Lynda, April, and Rock Child, with regards to the *YES!* program and regarding change in general.

April spoke about how she disliked the feeling of being forced to participate in *YES!* and that she felt that the staff at her school had coerced student participation. She was frustrated at having to be a role model for others and the high expectations placed on her because of her being seen as a "good kid".

Rock Child, meanwhile, noticed the reactions of students who were perhaps not ready for the tools taught on the *YES!* course. He commented that some students were scared by positive change, scared to be alienated from the families and peer groups, and just not quite ready for change.

Lynda spoke about how forcing people to change could cause them to move in the other direction. She talked about how she liked her own children to take to things on their own and how Cree culture is something that cannot be imposed on anyone.

With regards to the *YES!* program, these stories suggest to me the importance of allowing students and staff the choice to participate or not. As a professional with the best intentions at heart, I would be tempted to impose the *YES!* curriculum on everyone, but these participant stories suggest that those efforts would backfire. Participants who are forced or given too much too soon may resent what they are being taught or simply resist the positive lessons they are receiving. Norcross and Prochaska's work on the stages of change may provide some clues as to how to organize the program. Might some program elements fit best with pre-contemplators? How might the program be organized to suit the needs of students in different stages of change?

Stone Stories

One of the more surprising threads from this research, for me, was the unexpected, unsolicited, and repeated references to rocks or stones. Lynda, Asiniy Awasis, and Rock Child all made reference to a strong spiritual connection to rocks in our conversations. Each research participant was invited to choose his or her own pseudonym and two participants, in effect, chose the same name for themselves: Asiniy Awasis translates as Rock Child in English.

Lynda spoke about rocks being strong, bold, secure, attached and promoting balance, encouragement, serenity, and wisdom. "It holds pieces in life together" (Chapter Seven) she told me. Rock Child, meanwhile, described a lifetime relationship with rocks as a rock collector and shared that rocks, "kinda keep me grounded" (Interview One). He brought me a worry rock, a rock to keep in your pocket and rub when you feel stressed out, and a geode to show me, sharing that he loves the way that geodes are ugly on the outside and pretty on the inside. Asiniy Awasis told the story of his own name, sharing that the Great Spirit had given Rock the job of being the speaker for the people, referencing the role that the pipe (made of stone) plays in linking the unseen spiritual world to the concrete world of humans and objects.

Clearly, stones are an important symbol for these research participants, symbolizing strength, connection, groundedness, and spiritual connection. As I pondered what possible connection this symbol might have to the *YES!* program, I recalled a quotation from Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, "Breath is the link between the inner world of silence and the outer world of activity"

(https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/five-ways-slip-meditation-sri-sri-ravi-shankar "Using the Breath"). In many ways, it seems that the breath, as used in the *YES!* program, and stones fulfill the same roles: relieving stress, grounding, providing a source of strength, revealing hidden resilience and connecting the seen and unseen. Perhaps stones are a concrete representation of the intangible effects of breathing?

Moving Forward

Offering the *YES!* program in the winter of 2014 served as the genesis of a larger project, with the idea that *YES!* might expand to other schools and settings in the community and over time adapt more to the cultural and social norms of the community. Each of my participants had suggestions on how to move the program forward and to begin to make adaptations to the program to improve the program's fit within the community.

Smudging

All of my participants spoke positively about smudging, the wafting of sweetgrass or sage smoke over one's body, and suggested that it be used to start each *YES!* session. For April smudging was something that made her feel safe, content, and calm and brought back positive memories. Lynda reported that she smudged with her sons twice a day everyday. Rock Child suggested that smudging might increase the students' "buy-in" to the program, as they would want to get some "good smoke" on them. Asiny Awasis explained the value of smudging in greater detail, explaining that smudging is an invitation to one's spirit, to the Creator, and to one's ancestors to be present. He explained that smudging is about cleaning out one's spirit and that young people have been raised to have respect and

reverence when smudging is taking place, so it would be a way to introduce an attitude of greater respect among *YES!* program participants.

Men and Women

April and Rock Child both suggested that there should be two separate classes of *YES!*, one for boys and one for girls. This seemed to be motivated by two different reasons: student comfort level and cultural tradition. Both felt that course participants would be less self-conscious if males and females were separated. Rock Child reported, "I know like any kind of group work that we do in our school, the level of trust drops when it's coed. Guys don't want to make themselves vulnerable in front of the girls and talk about the hurtful stuff" (Rock Child, Interview Three). April, meanwhile, felt that girls didn't generally feel comfortable doing yoga in front of guys and vice versa.

At the same time, Lynda, Asiniy Awasis, and April all spoke about the traditional cultural separation between men's and women's roles. Lynda spoke about how she wanted her sons to learn the traditional men's role of provider and how her male relatives played an important role in teaching her sons about the Cree culture. Asiniy Awasis, likewise, spoke about learning cultural teachings and inheriting his pipe from his grandfathers. April spoke with pride about women's power and roles and emphasized that she had learned the most about culture from her aunts and other women in her family.

Moving forward, separating male and female students into different classes for *YES!* seems like a good idea. Perhaps over time, cultural knowledge pertaining specifically to each gender can be worked into the *YES!* curriculum as well.

The Wisdom of Elders

All participants spoke about the importance of Elders and their teachings. Lynda spoke about how pleased she was that Onîkânew's school had Elders constantly present to guide the students and how proud she is that he son is one who helps the Elders with setting up sweats and other cultural ceremonies. Asiniy Awasis shared that youth and Elders are spiritually linked on the Medicine Wheel and that, in ceremony, Elders are on the same level as the Creator. Elders can convey love and wisdom to the young people.

With regards to the *YES!* program, April thought it would be a good idea for the *YES!* instructors to meet with Elders and learn from them about the cultural ties between the *YES!* curriculum and Cree teachings. Similarly, Asiniy Awasis thought it would be good to "get the stories" of how *YES!* relates to Cree culture. Rock Child thought that Elder involvement would increase student interest and respect for the program, especially if it included teachings in the Cree language.

Significance

This study asked the question: *What do the stories of participants reveal about how this program fits within the particular cultural and socio-economic situation of this First Nations reserve community?* The stories shared by my research participants suggest that *YES!* can have a place within the community, offering much-needed programming for youth. Their stories suggest that the program's wholistic approach is a fit within the wholistic approach to health within Cree culture and that the program may be further adapted to fit even better. This section

will discuss the significance of this research finding, it's limitations, and suggestions for future directions for research.

In suggesting that the *YES!* program may be a program that fits within First Nations communities, this study provides a useful addition to the extant literature. As mentioned in the literature review, examples of best mental health practises for First Nations youth are limited. Yellow Horse and Brave Heart (2004) and Gone and Alcantra (2007) noted that some of these practises are those which have been adapted from mainstream contexts to fit within indigenous contexts. This study offers another program with the potential to be culturally appropriate for First Nations youth. The thick descriptions of my research participants also suggest why the YES! program might be a fit within Cree culture, suggesting that, as a wholisitic program that invites young people to reconnect with their spirits, it carries some parallels to traditional Cree teachings. Certainly more research is required to determine the *YES!* program's effectiveness, but the stories told in this study suggest that the possibility of the *YES!* program being an effective resilience-building program for First Nations youth is a hypothesis worth testing.

This study also contributes to work on school-based resiliency building, offering in-depth descriptions of how this particular school-based program was experienced by individuals, and valuable insight into how participants' readiness may impact their receptiveness to such programs. These participant stories suggest some ideas about how such personal factors such as an interest in helping professions and open-minded perspectives on spirituality may impact a

participant's interest in the *YES!* program in particular and perhaps other school-based programs as well.

Arguably the greatest contribution of this research is to the *YES!* for Schools team around the world, offering ideas for improved implementation, as well as further research and evaluation ideas. At the time of writing, *YES!* is being offered in four different schools in the community. The facilitators have taken my participants' suggestions of separating boys and girls, and smudging every day with positive results. The students are more comfortable and more engaged in the course processes and the teachers report that the classes are "easier" to teach with fewer behavioural concerns. Integrating elders and cultural teachings into the program remains an important goal for teaching *YES!* in this community.

In addition, this study may serve as a model for other teachers in other communities for how to learn more about program adaptation in differing cultural contexts. In the past three years, *YES!* has expanded from a few key centres in the United States and Canada, to Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Africa. In each community, the cultural norms and protocols will be different. Narrative inquiry conducted in this manner served as a culturally sensitive tool for learning about the fit of the *YES!* program in this community. Other *YES!* instructors may be able to use similar research approaches to integrate the *YES!* program into other schools in other cultures and communities.

This study, taken in context with the literature reviewed in the second chapter, provides ideas for how to move forward with the *YES!* program to increase its positive impact. In particular, the literature on whole school approaches and on

tiered intervention may offer important implementation suggestions for the future. At the time of this study, the *YES!* program was being offered, there were, in fact, two programs being offered in two different schools. Only one of them was the subject of this study. The school in this study offered the program to all students and all staff and noticed an impact on the school climate as a whole. In the other school, the program was only offered in one classroom. The impact was noticeably smaller. This drove home, for myself and the facilitators, the value of using the whole school model. At the present time, we are considering differing ideas of how to most effectively implement the *YES!* program using a tiered model. This may mean delivering the *YES!* program to all students, and then offering small group or one-on-one interventions to students who aren't improving using the class-wide approach. Or, this may mean, inspired my Rock Child's comments on readiness, questioning the students about their readiness for change, and offering only as much of the *YES!* program to each group of students as will be useful to them.

Limitations

There are important limitations to consider when reviewing the results highlighted in this research. Most importantly, the four participants whose stories are told herein are not representative of the entire community. I have made an effort, in the narratives themselves, as well as in the section of common threads to include the personal factors of each participant that may have contributed to them sharing the stories they did. For example, each participants' interest in counselling and helping professions undoubtedly impacted their interest in this, a helping program. Also, each participant took an open-minded, non-dogmatic approach to

spirituality, which certainly increased their ability to accept the *YES!* program with its roots in India. What might the "hardcore traditionalists" mentioned by Asiniy Awasis have to say about the program? It is also worth noting that three of my four participants are not "locals" in the sense that they did not grow up in the community, but moved there later in life. Perhaps their stories and experiences are shaped by having lived in other places. Generalizing the results of this research to others must be done with great caution, while carefully considering the contextual factors that impacted these participant stories. Quantitative research would be required to determine the extent to which these stories represent the views of the community at large.

It is important to remember that narrative research is not intended to draw conclusions, nor to prove or disprove ideas, but rather to generate new ideas and open up the possibilities for new avenues of research. To this end, each of the nine threads highlighted above, opens up new directions for research and creates new hypotheses for testing. The thick descriptions offered by my research participants serve to deepen our understanding of the *YES!* program, of resilience-building, of First Nations mental health, and of school-based programming in general, while inspiring our curiosity for more research.

Future Research

Research on the *YES!* program is in its infancy. So many questions remain. A next logical step would be to conducting effectiveness studies, in communities of all kinds, perhaps comparing and contrasting program effectiveness in different contexts. This research suggests factors to consider when evaluating effectiveness.

Would the program be more effective with participants who were "ready" for change using Norcross and Prochaska's transtheoretical model, for example? This study also offers suggestions on which changes in participants might be worth measuring. My participants mentioned changes in smoking habits, anger, physical energy levels, and cultural and spiritual connection. Large-scale clinical trials and multi-year studies, could explore the possibility of *YES!* being an evidence-based practise for certain mental health concerns.

Further research may also assist in finding the most effective implementation methods for the program. Offering the program within the context of a tiered intervention approach, for example, may be studied. Similarly, exploring the impact of having parents participate in the *YES!* SMART program or experimenting with tools to determine which students in a school may glean the most benefit from the program are avenues of research which may improve the implementation of the program.

Finally, continued study of the *YES!* program within First Nations contexts can provide a valuable contribution to the study of First Nations mental health. As I continue to work in the community, I hope to continue to work with Elders to marry the *YES!* curriculum with Cree teachings more strongly. Further research on this process may offer ideas to others looking to adapt mainstream mental health programming for specific cultural contexts. Similarly, exploring the *YES!* program within other First Nations communities with an eye to discovering the extent to which *YES!* may provide benefit to young indigenous people around the world is a worthwhile area of study.

Long-Term Commitment

Somewhere in the process of this research project, I realized that perhaps I was asking the wrong research question. My wonder about the cultural fit of the *YES!* program within the community, it turned out, was not the primary concern of the local people. In fact, the only people who have ever asked me about the cultural appropriateness of bringing the *YES!* program to the community have not been Cree.

Similarly, questions of socio-economic concerns rarely came up in our interviews. I had anticipated some discussion around the program's cost and whether that cost would be reasonable in this community, but that question did not seem to be of concern to my participants. Perhaps this was due in part to my not asking such questions directly, but rather asking participants more generally about their community's character, resources and so on. Financial wealth or poverty was seldom mentioned in our interviews, rather participants seemed to focus on emotional or familial resources instead. When financial resources were discussed, it was frequently along the lines that resources were available in the community, but could be allocated differently to more adequately address the needs of youth.

When I met with the local school board to request their permission to conduct this research project, their main concern was my staying power. They asked me, "If you run this program, and we like it, are you going to stick around to keep offering it?" Time and again, the theme of my conversations with locals has been around the idea that lots of good projects come and go and they want a good program to stay, grow and become sustainable. As one of my coworkers put it, "It's

not the sprint, but the endurance race that makes a difference" (S. Skakum, personal conversation, March 2014).

April, Rock Child, and Asiniy Awasis all mentioned that they would like to see the program continue for years to come. Rock Child mentioned how excited he was to hear that we planned to offer programming for parents, feeling that helping parents change would bring about a positive impact for the youth as well. Asiniy Awasis spoke about "evolving" the program to a point where it was immersed in Cree teaching and that he thought the youth today would be the ones promoting and continuing the program in the future. And April suggested working on a ten-year plan for how to move forward.

While April and I joked about meeting up again in 2024 to check in on how the program was going, perhaps that was not so much of a joke after all. At the time of writing, I just finished co-teaching the *YES!* for Schools Educators course to 45 school staff from five different schools in the community. The principal of the hosting school has a plan to secure funding for programming for parents. A local school superintendent plans to run the *YES!* for Schools Educators course in the fall for all of his school staff, about 150-200 people. And we have secured $45 000 in funding for the *YES!* for Schools program to run in three different schools in the 2015-2016 school year, reaching about 180 students. Clearly, *YES!* for Schools is starting to gain momentum. I plan to organize a *YES!* for Schools facilitator training in the summer of 2016 so local community members can start teaching the program. So far, I have kept up my commitment to stay in the community and continue to use *YES!* for Schools as a tool to work towards a violence-free, stress-free reserve and I

have no plans of stopping. When April and I do meet again in 2024, what might *YES!* for Schools look like? What might the community look like? How much closer might we be to achieving the vision of a violence-free, stress-free community?

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Appendix A: Athabasca University Research Ethics Approval

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 21, 2014

TO: Meredith Shaw

COPY: Dr. Chang (Research Supervisor)

Alice Tieulié, Acting Secretary, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Dr. Vive Kumar, Chair, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

FROM: Dr. Paul Jerry, Chair, GCAP Research Ethics Review Committee

SUBJECT: **Ethics Proposal #GCAP 14-01**

YES! for Schools: Resilience Building in a Cree Community A Narrative Inquiry

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The Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology (GCAP) Research Ethics Review Committee, acting under authority of the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board to provide an expedited process of review for minimal risk student researcher projects, has reviewed the above-noted proposal and supporting documentation.

*I am pleased to advise that this project has been awarded **FULL APPROVAL** on ethical grounds.*

The following collegial comments are offered and are not conditions on the approval:

Application Form:

B1-5: Narrative inquiry often situates the researcher in the context of the research. Describing how this researcher fits into this community may help clarify her interests.

B2-1: Are the interviews done individually or as a group?

If you have any questions, please contact the Committee Chair (as above), or the AU Research Ethics Secretary at rebsec@athabascau.ca

Appendix B: Research Instrument

Interview Guide

This project will use an Interview Guide approach. As such, specific topics or areas of inquiry will be delineated, but the interview will allow for participants to offer other relevant information not specifically queried. As each individual's experience is unique, but relevant to the research question, the open interview guide approach allows for both structure and flexibility.

First Interview (Before the start of the Program)

- What are the needs of the youth of the this community? To what extent are these needs being met?
- What specific things might you like to see changed/improved in your community, if anything?
- What might "helping" look like in your community?
- (Adult Question) This program aims, among other things, to help young people become more resilient. What does that idea of resilience mean to you?
- (Student question) This program aims, among other things, to help young people become more resilient. Have you heard that word before? (If no, provide the definition that resilience is about being able to "bounce back" or recover after something bad happens to you) Can you think of examples you have seen (in your life or someone else's) of resilience/bouncing back?
- What do you feel are the strengths of this community? What resources does the community have that it can build on to make the community healthier?
- How much benefit might there be (or not be) in bringing in outside helpers or expertise in tackling some community issues?
- What other "helping" courses or training programs have you experienced in the past? What made those programs helpful or unhelpful for you?
- How connected would you say you are to traditional Cree teachings?
- What particular Cree teachings are most important to you?/inform the way you live your life on a daily basis…
- What, in your opinion, makes this community different than, say, neighbouring communities
- Do you have a belief system? How would you describe your spiritual beliefs to an outsider?
- Interviewee invited to bring an object (memory box item) that represents his/her relationship to culture

Second Interview (half-way through the program) and Third Interview (at the end of the program)

- Was this program helpful/beneficial for you personally? In what ways?
- Can you think of any other people in your life who might benefit from this program? Who might you recommend it to ?
- What stands out for you from the YES! program so far?
- Any particular lessons or exercises from the program you especially liked or disliked?

- Have you found yourself thinking about or using anything you learned about in YES! in your life outside the program?
- How does this program compare to any other training you have taken?
- What, if anything, have others noticed about you since participating in the program?

- So far, how do the activities in the program fit with traditional Cree teachings?
- So far, how does the program fit within the specific realities of the community? (Mention certain details about the community brought up in the first interview)
- Does the program go against any of the cultural teachings you received growing up?

Fourth Interview (Four to Six Weeks Following the YES! program)

- In your opinion, how helpful would this program be for other schools in the community?
- How does this program relate to or differ from the existing resources already in the community?
- Has your view of resilience (bouncing back) changed at all since the first interview?
- Review needs of youth mentioned in first interview. How might this program meet those needs?
- Review topics of conversation from first interview.
- What did your participation in the YES! program mean to you?
- Now that the program is over, how much of the course lessons do you find yourself using in your daily life? What about your fellow students/staff/others in the program?
- What do you see as the strengths of the program?
- Which parts of the program stand out for you?
- Start/Stop/Continue (one of the processes in the course)…what have you changed or continued in your life?
- Memory box item that symbolizes his/her experience on the YES! program
- How connected would you say you are to traditional Cree teachings now? Has there been any change since the start of the program?
- Keeping in mind some of the characteristics of your community that were mentioned in the first interview, how does this program fit with those?
- Do you have a belief system? Has this program influenced your spiritual understandings in any way?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Documents

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SEMINAR

(YES!) Student Registration & Permission Form

Student's Name: _____

Parent or Guardian's name: _____

Home Street Address :

_____

City: _____ Province & Postal Code: _____

Email:_____

Phone : Day: _____ Eve._____ Cell: _____ Age:____ Gender: M F

School:_____ Previous YES! Courses taken: YES ____ NO ___

Date Location Teacher Date Location Teacher

_____

Please list any Health / Psychological Conditions or Concerns:

_____

Please list any medications your child is taking: (prescription or non-prescription)

_____

_____

_____

Please list any allergies your child has, the reaction & what to do:

_____

_____

PERMISSIONS:

1. By signing below, I give my son/daughter permission to participate in the Youth Empowerment Seminar (YES!) conducted by trained instructors of the International Association for Human Values Youth Programs.
2. I understand that my son/daughter needs to attend all sessions and fully participate to maximize his/her benefits.
3. I understand that I can withdraw my consent for my son/daughter's participation at any time.

PARENT'S SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____

STUDENT'S SIGNATURE:

Please check (either yes or no):

☐ YES, I am willing to participate and be interviewed by an Athabasca University researcher about my experiences. (Please see next page for research project description.)

☐ NO, I am not willlling to participate and be interviewed by an Athabasca University researcher about my experiences. (Please see next page for research project description.)

STUDENT SIGNATURE: _____ **PARENT INITIALS:** _____

DATE: _____ **DATE:** _____

PARENT'S SIGNATURE:

Please check (either yes or no):

☐ YES, I am willing to be interviewed by an Athabasca University researcher about my son/daughter's experiences. (Please see next page for research project description.)

☐ NO, I am not willing to be interviewed by an Athabasca University researcher about my son/daughter's experiences. (Please see next page for research project description.)

PARENT'S SIGNATURE: _____

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 780-675-6710 or by email to rebsec@athabasca.ca.au.

Student Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Student,

I am writing to request your consideration to participate in a study on the YES! for Schools program, which will be offered at the Ehpewapahk Alternate School in the 2013-2014 school year.

My name is Meredith Shaw, and I am a graduate student at Athabasca Unviversity, under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Chang, Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology (jeffc@athabascau.ca; (866) 901-7647). We are engaged in a study entitled ***The YES! for Schools Program: Resilience Building in a Cree community***. We are looking for participants willing to participate in the YES! for Schools program to share their experiences of the program.

Prior research on the YES! program has shown that it is an effective tool in reducing impulsiveness in young people. My research will focus on the "stories behind the statistics", allowing YES! program participants to share their experiences of the program, any changes they may make in their lives as a result of the program, what the program means to them, and how the program fits with their spiritual and cultural beliefs. I am especially interested in learning the extent to which this program fits within the culture and day-to-day reality of community members.

There will be a total of four (4) audio-recorded conversations with each participant.

- The first conversation, prior to the start of the YES! program, will focus on getting to know you, your cultural and spiritual beliefs, your opinions of the strengths and challenges in the community, and your past experiences of "helping" programs.

- The second (half-way through the program) and third (immediately following the program) interviews will cover the same topics: what you like or dislike from the YES!, and how the program fits with your cultural and spiritual beliefs.

- The fourth interview, four to six weeks following the program, will cover the ways the program has influenced your daily life, and how this program might or might not benefit others in the community.

After the conversations I will draft a narrative account from the interview data. Then we will meet for a final conversation where you will have an opportunity to read the narrative I have composed, respond, and makes changes. The expectation of you would be to talk with me for four individual 1.5- to 2-hour conversations and then read and respond to the narrative account.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and, even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. Your anonymity as well as the anonymity other participants will be protected. Your name will never be used and no identifying marks will linger. All information collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

The information gained from this research may appear in scholarly publications and/or conference proceedings. As a study participant, you may request copies of these publications, by contacting me via telephone at: (780) 352-6645 or via email at meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca.

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 780-675-6710 or by email to rebsec@athabasca.ca.au.

To request additional information and/or to arrange to participate in the research, please contact me by telephone at (780) 352-6645 or email: meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca

Your time and interest in this study are much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Meredith Shaw

Parent Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Parent,

I am writing to request your consideration to participate in a study on the YES! for Schools program, which will be offered at the Ehpewapahk Alternate School in the 2013-2014 school year.

My name is Meredith Shaw, and I am a graduate student at Athabasca Unviversity, under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Chang, Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology (jeffc@athabascau.ca; (866) 901-7647). We are engaged in a study entitled ***The YES! for Schools Program: Resilience Building in a Cree community***. We are looking for participants willing to participate in the YES! for Schools program to share their experiences of the program.

Prior research on the YES! program has shown that it is an effective tool in reducing impulsiveness in young people. My research will focus on the "stories behind the statistics", allowing YES! program participants and their parents to share their experiences of the program. I am interested in hearing about any changes you may observe in your child during the program, what the program means to them, and how the program fits with your spiritual and cultural beliefs. I am especially interested in learning the extent to which this program fits within the culture and day-to-day reality of community members.

There will be a total of four (4) audio-recorded conversations with each participant.

- The first conversation, prior to the start of the YES! program, will focus on getting to know you, your cultural and spiritual beliefs, your opinions of the strengths and challenges in the community, and your past experiences of "helping" programs.

- The second (half-way through the program) and third (immediately following the program) interviews will cover the same topics: what you like or dislike from the YES!, and how the program fits with your cultural and spiritual beliefs.

- The fourth interview, four to six weeks following the program, will cover the ways the program has influenced your daily life, and how this program might or might not benefit others in the community.

After the conversations I will draft a narrative account from the interview data. Then we will meet for a final conversation where you will have an opportunity to read the narrative I have composed, respond, and makes changes. The expectation of you would be to talk with me for four individual 1.5- to 2-hour conversations and then read and respond to the narrative account.

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To request additional information and/or to arrange to participate in the research, please contact me by telephone at (780) 352-6645 or email: meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca

Your time and interest in this study are much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Meredith Shaw

Staff Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Staff Member,

I am writing to request your consideration to participate in a study on the YES! for Schools program, which will be offered at the Ehpewapahk Alternate School in the 2013-2014 school year.

My name is Meredith Shaw, and I am a graduate student at Athabasca Unviversity, under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Chang, Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology (jeffc@athabascau.ca; (866) 901-7647). We are engaged in a study entitled ***The YES! for Schools Program: Resilience Building in a Cree community***. We are looking for participants willing to participate in the YES! for Schools program to share their experiences of the program.

Prior research on the YES! program has shown that it is an effective tool in reducing impulsiveness in young people. My research will focus on the "stories behind the statistics", allowing YES! program participants and their parents to share their experiences of the program. I am interested in hearing about any changes you may observe in your child during the program, what the program means to them, and how the program fits with your spiritual and cultural beliefs. I am especially interested in learning the extent to which this program fits within the culture and day-to-day reality of community members.

There will be a total of four (4) audio-recorded conversations with each participant.

- The first conversation, prior to the start of the YES! program, will focus on getting to know you, your cultural and spiritual beliefs, your opinions of the strengths and challenges in the community, and your past experiences of "helping" programs.

- The second (half-way through the program) and third (immediately following the program) interviews will cover the same topics: what you like or dislike from the YES!, and how the program fits with your cultural and spiritual beliefs.

- The fourth interview, four to six weeks following the program, will cover the ways the program has influenced your daily life, and how this program might or might not benefit others in the community.

After the conversations I will draft a narrative account from the interview data. Then we will meet for a final conversation where you will have an opportunity to read the narrative I have composed, respond, and makes changes. The expectation of you would be to talk with me for four individual 1.5- to 2-hour conversations and then read and respond to the narrative account.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and, even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. Your anonymity as well as the anonymity other participants will be protected. Your name will never be used and no identifying marks will linger. All information collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

The information gained from this research may appear in scholarly publications and/or conference proceedings. As a study participant, you may request copies of these publications, by contacting me via telephone at: (780) 352-6645 or via email at meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca.

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To request additional information and/or to arrange to participate in the research, please contact me by telephone at (780) 352-6645 or email: meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca

Your time and interest in this study are much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Meredith Shaw

Elder Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Elder,

I am writing to request your consideration to participate in a study on the YES! for Schools program, which will be offered at the Ehpewapahk Alternate School in the 2013-2014 school year.

My name is Meredith Shaw, and I am a graduate student at Athabasca Unviversity, under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Chang, Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology (jeffc@athabascau.ca; (866) 901-7647). We are engaged in a study entitled ***The YES! for Schools Program: Resilience Building in a Cree community***. We are looking for participants willing to participate in the YES! for Schools program to share their experiences of the program.

Prior research on the YES! program has shown that it is an effective tool in reducing impulsiveness in young people. My research will focus on the "stories behind the statistics", allowing YES! program participants and their parents to share their experiences of the program. I am interested in hearing about any changes you may observe in your child during the program, what the program means to them, and how the program fits with your spiritual and cultural beliefs. I am especially interested in learning the extent to which this program fits within the culture and day-to-day reality of community members.

There will be a total of four (4) audio-recorded conversations with each participant.

- The first conversation, prior to the start of the YES! program, will focus on getting to know you, your cultural and spiritual beliefs, your opinions of the strengths and challenges in the community, and your past experiences of "helping" programs.

- The second (half-way through the program) and third (immediately following the program) interviews will cover the same topics: what you like or dislike from the YES!, and how the program fits with your cultural and spiritual beliefs.

- The fourth interview, four to six weeks following the program, will cover the ways the program has influenced your daily life, and how this program might or might not benefit others in the community.

After the conversations I will draft a narrative account from the interview data. Then we will meet for a final conversation where you will have an opportunity to read the narrative I have composed, respond, and makes changes. The expectation of you would be to talk with me for four individual 1.5- to 2-hour conversations and then read and respond to the narrative account.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and, even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. Your anonymity as well as the anonymity other participants will be protected. Your name will never be used and no identifying marks will linger. All information collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

The information gained from this research may appear in scholarly publications and/or conference proceedings. As a study participant, you may request copies of these publications, by contacting me via telephone at: (780) 352-6645 or via email at meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca.

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To request additional information and/or to arrange to participate in the research, please contact me by telephone at (780) 352-6645 or email: meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca

Your time and interest in this study are much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Meredith Shaw

Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how YES! program participants and observers understand and integrate their experiences as they progress through the program.

The main research question is: To what extent is the YES! program an effective resilience-building tool for the community? I am interested in any changes program participants may make in their lives as a result of the program, what the program means to them, and how the program fits with their spiritual and cultural beliefs.

What Will Participants be Required to Do?

I will conduct four interviews with you, each one taking approximately one and a half to two hours. After these interviews, I will write a narrative based on these interviews and we will meet for one final conversation, where you will have the opportunity to respond to the narrative account I have written and propose any changes you'd like made. Each conversation will be recorded and I will also take notes. Recordings will be transcribed after each interview, and you will be allowed the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. Recordings, notes, and transcripts will be handles confidentially.

Participants who indicate that they would like to receive a summary of the research will be sent a summary upon completion of the study's completion. The summary will be approximately 10 pages and will only be sent if requested. You can check the box below on this consent form to request the summary document.

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in the study altogether, or you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your anonymity as well as the anonymity other participants is protected. Your real name will never be used and you will be given the opportunity to review your narrative to ensure that all personally identifiable information has been removed. All information collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

What Type of Personal Information will be Collected?

Should you consent to participate, you will be asked to provide you name, age, gender, and relevant health information that may impact your participation in the program.

What are the Risks of Participating?

In being interviewed about your life experiences related to the YES! program, you may talk about specific life events, transitions or painful experiences. As a result, you may feel some emotional distress. It is very unlikely that your emotional distress would be long-lasting. If you do wish to seek counselling to feel better about anything discussed in the research inteviews, free counselling is available from your school counsellor or you may visit:

XXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

What are the Benefits of Participating?

Past participants of the YES! program have reported a greater sense of emotional well-being; healthier eating and sleeping habits, and better relationships with family and peers. Being interviewed about your experiences may serve to increase these benefits, as you have the opportunity to reflect on what's working and what lessons or practices are most helpful for you.

What happens to the information you provide?

Throughout the course of this study, all data will be stored under pseudonyms, chosen by the participants themselves, chosen by the participant rather than under the participant's name. Electronic copies of transcripts will be stored in a computer to which only the researcher will have the password.

I choose the pseudonym _____ to refer to myself.

In publications based on research (my Master's thesis and possible scholarly publications), you will be referred to by the pseudonym you have chosen.

Participation is voluntary and confidential. You are free to withdraw from participating at any time, without penalties. Withdrawing from the research project will have no impact on your participation in the YES! program. Only the principal researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear the interview recordings or know the names of the research participants.

Interviews will be recorded electronically and stored on a password protected electronic storage device. Transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the principal researcher. The anonymous data will be archived for five years, after which time notes and transcripts will be shredded and electronic documents and recordings will be deleted. Should you withdraw from the study, all data provided by you will be immediately destroyed.

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Meredith Shaw

Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology

Athabasca University
or

Phone: (780) 352-6645

Email: meredith.shaw@artofliving.ca

Dr. Jeff Chang

Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology

Athabasca University

Phone: (866) 901-7647

Email: jeffc@athabascau.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 780-675-6710 or by email to rebsec@athabasca.ca.au.

Consent Form

Consent To Participate:

Your signature on this form indicates that you:

1) Understand the information provided to you about your participation in this project

2) Agree to participate in this study.

This does not waive your legal rights, nor does it release the principal researcher or Athabasca University from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. Feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

I choose the pseudonym _____ to refer to me

Participant's Parent's Name (if participant is a minor): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

- I would like a copy of the research summary: ☐ YES ☐ NO

Researcher's Name: Meredith Shaw

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

- A copy of this form has been given to you for your records and reference.
- The researcher has also kept a copy of this form.