Indigenous Employment Engagement in Niagara:
Social Knowing, discrimination, and the importance of Indigenous resources

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INTRODUCTION:

This project arose from an expressed need and desire to learn more about the employment/unemployment engagement experiences of Indigenous people living in the Fort Erie/Niagara region as well as the wider socio-economic, cultural and historical contexts of those experiences. In early 2017, the Fort Erie Native Friendship Center (FENFC) approached Brock University to discuss research possibilities, leading to a collegial research relationship between the FENFC, Brock's Social Justice Research Institute (SJRI), and Brock's Tecumseh Centre for Aboriginal Research and Education. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Brock University and the FENFC to cement their cooperative partnership in the initiative that produced this report. In this exploratory, inquiry-based project, funded by the Ontario Human Capital Research and Innovation Fund (OHCRIF), four focus groups/sharing circles were conducted with 21 under/unemployed Indigenous residents and representatives from two local employers (one public and one private) in the Fort Erie in the Niagara region.

Our research sought to understand the following questions:

(1) What barriers to employment engagement are faced by the unemployed Indigenous residents of Fort Erie (e.g., skills mismatch, intergenerational trauma, mental health issues, lack of culturally appropriate services, colonial conceptions of work, incidents of racism in employment and service environments, etc.)?
(2) What strategies (both successful and unsuccessful) have been used by the largest employers in Fort Erie to attract and retain Indigenous employees?
(3) What programs, supports, or resources would assist Indigenous individuals to apply for, obtain, and remain in employment? How do these vary across age, gender, education level, and type of work obtained (i.e., part-time, full time, with or without benefits?).

Our research is framed by the larger Canadian context in which differences exist in education and employment levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Education levels remain relatively low for Indigenous Canadians compared to the wider Canadian population. According to the 2011 Canadian census, 29.1% of people who identified as Aboriginal (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) did not have a high school diploma or certificate (whereas for all other Canadian citizens, this figure was 12.1%). Among First Nations people, 33% did not have a certificate, diploma, or degree; this number was elevated to 47.2% for First Nations people living on reserves (25.6% off-reserve) (Statistics Canada, 2011). Since 2011, the numbers have remained largely unchanged. Data from the 2016 census shows that 92% of non-Indigenous Canadians have at least a high school certificate, but that far fewer Indigenous peoples in Canada do. It states: "Among Métis, 84% have completed high school. Among First Nations young adults living off reserve, 75%. But among those living on reserve, only 48% have done so – less than half" (Richards, 2017; see also Statistics Canada, 2017). Taking a closer look at younger Canadians, 20.1% of Indigenous men and women between the ages of 25 and 34 have not completed high school, whereas this is true of only 8.5% of their Canadian counterparts.

There is strong evidence that without a high school diploma, individuals are likely to experience high rates of unemployment and poverty (Calver, 2015) and "young adults with lower levels of education are more likely not to be in the labour force" (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to a study by Statistics Canada conducted by Moyser:

> In general, Aboriginal people in Canada have lower participation and employment rates, and a higher unemployment rate, than non-Aboriginal people. The labour market integration of Aboriginal people living off-reserve was affected more severely, and for a longer duration, by the 2008/2009 economic downturn than was that of non-Aboriginal people […] The period of 2014 to 2015 saw some deterioration in employment, unemployment, and participation rates for the Aboriginal population—both in absolute and relative terms. This deterioration was concentrated among Aboriginal women and First Nations people. (Moyser, 2017, p. 3)

As we detail in this report, education is partly to blame for higher levels of unemployment among Indigenous peoples. Yet, drawing on insights from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a growing body of scholarship on the enduring impacts of colonization, residential schools, the "Sixties Scoop," and intergenerational trauma, there is a need to widen our understandings of the multiple intersecting factors that lead to lower educational attainment, lower levels of high school completion, and higher levels of unemployment among Indigenous people. Although our focus in this study and Report is on Fort Erie in the Niagara region of Ontario, we believe that our findings and analysis have implications beyond this region.

1. METHODOLOGY

Our research was guided by a methodological process that combined the team's experience with Indigenous methodologies/epistemologies/ontologies, community-based research, and ecological approaches to knowledge making and narrative analysis (Doucet, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Jewell, 2018). The research process began in the spring of 2017, before funding was obtained, when we met with Elders at the FENFC to discuss ideas for a project on Indigenous unemployment; their concerns fed into our project planning process. Once funding was obtained from OHCRIF, we underwent two levels of ethics review: one conducted by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (with input from the Aboriginal Research Advisory Circle [ARAC] and the other by the Ontario Federation of Friendship Centers (OFIFC). The research team included three members from Brock University (the Principle Investigator [PI], an Indigenous Postdoctoral fellow, and a Brock University undergraduate Research Fellow), and two peer researchers from FENFC, including their Wellness Coordinator, who is a co-author on this Report.

Our research process was highly collaborative. We worked with an understanding of "data as relationship" (Kovach, 2009), meaning that at each stage of the process, we were aware of how we were facilitating particular stories, then analyzing and making sense of those stories, and of how our interpretations and engagement were becoming part of the data analysis processes. In order to ensure some shared comprehension of Canada's colonial legacy and its impacts on indigenous people and their employment histories, the team received cultural competency training from the Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres.

Interviews and data generation

We conducted research in two stages, first with local employers and then with community members. In relation to the former, we approached five large Fort Erie employers. Three

expressed an interest in participating, but in the end, only two agreed to be interviewed: a private sector employer of approximately 300 employees and a public sector employer of approximately 150 employees.

In our second stage of research, we conducted four focus groups/sharing circles with (1) 6 young adult females (under 25 years of age), (2) 6 adult females, (3) 3 young adult males (under 25 years of age), and (4) 6 adult males The sample was recruited by FENFC staff members/peer researchers. The research team (two staff members from the FENFC, the PI, the postdoctoral fellow, and the research fellow) all participated in the sharing circles along with an Elder from the FENFC. Eva Jewell (who has extensive experience in Indigenous community-based research) was the focus group/sharing circle facilitator. Each group lasted for about two hours and we shared a mid-day meal with the groups.

Table 1: Focus Group Summary of Participants

Focus Group Summary Data
May 23-24, 2018
Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre

	Pseudonym	**Age**	**Highest Level of Education**	**Household Demographics (People living with the research participants)**	**Dependents**
Female Youth	Sam	21	some post-secondary	partner, expecting	expecting child
	Hannah	22	some post-secondary	partner, child	1 child
	Keira	24	some secondary	grandfather, grandmother, mother, brother	none
	Patricia	19	post-secondary	partner	none
	Charlotte	17	some-secondary	partner, partner's mother, partner's father, 2 children, expecting child	2 children
	Mia	22	post-secondary	partner, child	1 child
Male Youth	Travis	17	some-secondary	mother, father, siblings	none
	Darian	19	some post-secondary	mother, father, siblings, aunt, uncles, grandmother, grandfather,	none
	Samuel	18	some-secondary	Father, sibling	none

Female Adults	Carol	48	secondary	2 children	2 children
	Sierra	40	post-secondary	3 children, son's girlfriend	3 children, son's girlfriend
	Jennifer	33	some post-secondary	partner, 2 children	2 children
	Ruth	47	post-secondary	4 children	4 children
	Mackenzie	32	some secondary	3 children	3 children
	Lilly	48	post-secondary	3 children	3 children
Male Adults	Aaron	32	secondary	father	sister
	Derek	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Evan	50	some post-secondary	no one	1 child
	Thomas	36	secondary	aunts and cousins	none
	Steve	42	some secondary	2 children	5 children
	Caleb	35	secondary	spouse, 2 children	2 children (including 1 niece)

Data Analysis and Narratives Analysis

Our data analysis process was guided by broad principles from non-representational narrative analysis (Somers, 1994; Doucet, 2018a) and by an adapted, flexible use of the Listening Guide approach to analyzing interview transcripts and narratives (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003). This approach recognizes the reflexive positionality of researchers in relation to "data," and how there are multiple layers of narratives, including the stories that people tell, the relational contexts within which these stories are lived and told, and the conceptual narratives that researchers use to make sense of these stories.

We conducted our analysis as a team. We began our analysis immediately after conducting the focus groups/sharing circles, initially seeking input from the research team, the community Elder, and the Director of the FENFC. Following that, we worked for several days in intensive data analysis sessions, reading the transcripts aloud and building our interpretations through layered readings. During our analysis processes, we identified many key themes. In this report we focus especially on five themes, including (1) the feminization of poverty, (2) social circumstances and social knowing, (3) mental health, (4) discrimination, and (5) the importance of Indigenous resources.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Our literature review has four sections, which explore (1) the social determinants of health; (2) Indigenous Determinants of Health; (3) Centering the Strength of Indigenous Peoples; and (4) Interconnectedness.

2.1.Social Determinants of Health

It is clear in the literature on Social Determinants of Health (SDH) that income is a direct contributor to health and wellbeing, and that "income is an exceedingly good predictor of incidence and mortality from a variety of diseases. About 23 percent of excess premature years of life lost can be attributed to income differences among Canadians" (Raphael, 2009, p. 9). Of the 12 SDH identified at a national summit on the topic at York University in 2002, the first is Aboriginal (Indigenous) status, which "represents the interaction of culture, public policy, and the mechanisms by which systematic exclusion…profoundly affects health" (Ibid). In 2007, it was specified at an international summit that SDH differ altogether for Indigenous peoples (Czyzewski, 2011).

2.2.Indigenous Determinants of Health

SDH for Indigenous peoples differ for a few reasons. One point made by Raphael (2009) in his identification of "culture" as affecting SDH for Indigenous peoples is that Indigenous worldviews emerge from a sustained relationship with their lands: a connection they understand as an extension of their health and wellbeing. Another way that SDH differs for Indigenous peoples is how colonialism is collectively experienced by Indigenous peoples. Colonialism is an ongoing structure in Canada that should not be considered merely an event (Kauanui, 2016). The public policies of "systematic exclusion" that advance the Canadian agenda of settler colonialism continues through the social and economic marginalization of Indigenous peoples and the ongoing systematic dispossession of factors required to support the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples as aligned with their own worldviews (emphasizing the necessary connection to land, waters, family, culture, language, etc.). According to Czyzewski (2011), "Colonialism is the guiding force that manipulated the historic, political, social, and economic contexts shaping Indigenous/state/non-Indigenous relations and account for the public erasure of political and economic marginalization, and racism today." In our research, it is important for us to acknowledge that the findings of this report highlight issues that stem from colonialism, and the problem of the unemployment "gap" among Indigenous peoples is not indicative of a failure on their part to "fit in" to mainstream Canadian society, but rather is a result of multi-generational impacts of lived colonialism, marginalization, and Canadian Indian Act policy.

2.3.Centering the Strength of Indigenous Peoples

Despite cultural genocide, Indigenous peoples are thriving and continue to reinvigorate that which contributes to their unique SDH as well as their self-determination: gender justice and equity, language revitalization, cultural resurgence, land-based practice, and ceremonial engagement (Deer, 2015; Women's Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2013; Simpson, 2012, 2017; McGregor, 2008; Corntassel, 2012, 2018). While colonization remains a source of ongoing injustice for Indigenous peoples, it is not the central feature of Indigenous peoples' identities. In this research project, we do not intend to center colonialism's violence as the definition of Indigenous peoples' experiences and circumstances. However, we are identifying colonialism and its subsequent policies as the most significant source of injustice and barriers to wellbeing and prosperity for Indigenous peoples. We engage a "desire-based" framework (Tuck, 2009), wherein we acknowledge the strengths of those who participated in this study, while producing an analysis with the intent to address the systemic injustices that are experienced by Indigenous people as they live in Canadian mainstream society. We do so by

identifying key findings and policy implications that are necessary for Indigenous peoples' wellbeing and access to opportunities for "prosperity"—whether that is defined as education, employment, or wellbeing by Indigenous standards—particularly in the Fort Erie area.

2.4 Interconnectedness

Many of our research findings, policy implications, and recommendations are interconnected. In our analysis, we found that we could not describe one issue without referencing others that contribute to it. The barriers that Indigenous peoples face in mainstream Canadian systems are generally compounded over generations and are rooted in Canada's Federal Indian Policy. By way of illustration, a transportation issue may not actually just be about lacking a car; an individual may not have the same access to mainstream "social capital," such as credit or saved excess income, that financing or purchasing a car would require. Likewise, inadequate job readiness and lack of work experience might be due to intergenerational stressors, such as "addiction" or ritualized coping mechanisms that are directly linked to adverse childhood experiences (Stevens, 2017). Indigenous peoples face many of these stressors due to disproportionately high rates of child apprehension and the residual effects of Residential Schools.

3. KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this section we will present key findings followed by a policy recommendation.

3.1. FINDING 1: FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

Throughout our discussions, it was clear that adult women and young women face specific challenges to accessing opportunities for prosperity because of their roles as mothers and caregivers in their families. Issues related to childcare, caregiving, and exposure to high-risk circumstances were evident amongst some of the female participants.

3.1.1. Childcare

In the focus groups/sharing circles, lack of access to affordable childcare came up many times as a barrier to employment or education. Many mothers pointed to a discouraging sequence that feels pointless, saying:

"You're working to pay for daycare that you need to go to work, and it becomes a vicious cycle. Took a lot away from my home life.... I barely ever got to see my kid… it sucked." (Hannah, age 22)

Some women found it too frustrating to be stuck in the cycle of poverty. As Sierra, expressed:

"I was working, like, 80 hours every two weeks, and bringing home only, like, $150 after I paid for childcare… I think I was making $8.56 chambermaiding hotels at the time. It wasn't even worth it to work because I was paying all of my wages to childcare." (Sierra, age 40)

Childcare subsidies for mothers on assistance or in school are removed once employment is attained or during the gap between semesters. Mia said:

"They said if… I start working, they won't cover [childcare] anymore. What's the point of going to work and having to pay for daycare?" (Mia, age 22)

One mother and student, Mackenzie, relayed:

"A problem trying to get to school was a lack of childcare. The daycares around here are all filled up. I'm looking to have my son in a daycare part-time. But once my class ends here, he gets pulled out, my subsidy ends, and so come September, if I wanted to go back to school, his spot might not be there. So, I may be might be back to square one." (Mackenzie, age 32)

For Lilly, the retroactive impact of inadequate access to childcare has effects on her current experience:

"I've not really worked, I've had maybe three, four jobs in my whole life. I'm going to be 49 soon. And I've raised five children." (Lilly, age 48)

Lilly brought up a nuanced point that is important to consider when examining the link between childcare and employment for Indigenous women. Past and current Canadian policies of removing children from their families has resulted in profound stress—Indigenous mothers seem to be more concerned about having others watch their child. As Lilly says,

"[Lack of childcare is] one of the things that deterred me from wanting to work, because why would I want to pay someone else all this money to watch my child, when I could just stay home and do that?"

Indigenous women place high value on care settings in which their children can access Indigenous teachings; this points to the importance of Indigenous daycares and early year centres. The Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre's childcare program centers Indigenous teachings, values, and resources, which is greatly appreciated by the community.

Yet, some participants described the challenge of this resource's lack of capacity—while there is daycare at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, it has a limited capacity and resources for the community who needs to access it. As Sam, said: *"But even [the native centre's daycare] has a waiting list of four months to get in." (Sam, age 21)*

Lack of access to affordable childcare is an issue for Indigenous women, and overwhelmingly so among the women participants in our focus groups/sharing circles; one of the single fathers also described a similar struggle: *"I'm eagerly waiting for daycare to start in September before I can do something. My life is in a pause... right now I can't work because I don't have childcare." (Steve, 42)*

3.1.2. Caregiving

In addition to caring for children, Indigenous women are caregivers for their relatives, including aging parents. Carol described an incident where a family situation led to the loss of her employment:

"I was my mom's caretaker. And she had gotten bed bugs. And I was trying to get all of the stuff out of the house, before going to work. And I was ten minutes late. But I was a couple of times late, because I was taking care of my mom… [my manager] said, 'I'm going to have to let you go, but I will give you a good reference, because you are a good worker.'" (Carol, age 48)

Caregiving and its challenges disproportionately fall to women, and sometimes, juggling family responsibilities and work results in compromising employment, leading to the feminization of poverty.

3.1.3 Exposure to high-risk circumstances

For Indigenous women, precarious employment sometimes means making difficult, perilous choices to mitigate the dilemmas of poverty. Carol and Mackenzie described these decisions. Carol says: *"I do a lot of things on the side… I was selling, liquor, bootlegging. I don't do it anymore, but it's an easy way to make money."* Mackenzie talked about her *"early job experiences was when... I was a tobacco runner. And I didn't like it because I was put in an illegal position". (Mackenzie, age 32)*

Lack of access to income opportunities and prosperity can create precarious work scenarios for Indigenous women. Carol and Mackenzie engaged in alternative economies in order to get by. In light of the glaringly disproportionately high incarceration rate of Indigenous women in Canada, these jobs are arguably riskier for women like Carol and Mackenzie. Furthermore, when compounded with other factors, like mental health and intergenerational stress, working conditions that are psychologically toxic deter Indigenous women from seeking employment—a point described further in Finding 3.

In a time when Indigenous women go missing, are murdered, and face higher rates of violence than the average Canadian woman, a transportation dilemma caused by low income can become far more perilous for Indigenous women. Sierra described her experience hitchhiking in order to get to work (an issue related to transportation, which will be discussed further in this report), saying:

"I was working at [a hotel] in Niagara Falls, and living [a way's away]. I would leave my house at 5:00 am and walk along the parkway to go to work. And I'd make it to a nearby city at about 8:30 or 9:00 am and then hitchhike to my job. And I did that for about two months." (Sierra, age 40)

In their struggle to access adequate employment, some of our participants described how, as Indigenous women, they are habitually faced with having to make decisions that could put them in high-risk situations.

3.1. 4 POLICY RECOMMENDATION 1

Addressing the feminization of poverty will require policy changes to help alleviate the burden on women to find affordable childcare, and in the case of Indigenous women, affordable *and* culturally relevant childcare. Cultural revitalization is widely understood as an important aspect of seeking justice for the intergenerational harms created by Residential Schools. Adequate resources for Indigenous childcare centres is highlighted in Action item #12 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action (2015):

> We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

In addition to affordable and culturally appropriate childcare, it is important that Indigenous women have better access to maternity leave to provide adequate resources for postnatal care. As discussed further in the next finding, Indigenous women do not have the same "social capital" as their Canadian counterparts, meaning they do not have the same rates of time invested in employment as many non-Indigenous women do to allow them to access these benefits. Lowering the maternity leave and parental leave eligibility qualification criteria of 600 hours, or providing subsidies for maternity leave gaps would alleviate the stress on Indigenous women who find themselves working until the very end of their pregnancies to qualify for these benefits (Government of Canada, 2018). It is important to add that the province of Quebec, which has its own parental leave program, has much lower eligibility criteria (which is $2000 in earnings in the previous year or approximately 186 hours at minimum wage) (Doucet, Lero, McKay and Tremblay, 2017).

Finally, Indigenous women, in particular, are placed at risk because they lack safe and reliable transportation (see Finding 2). In a July 2018 statement, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls urged all levels of federal, provincial, and Indigenous governments to provide solutions on the matter of public transportation, citing that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ people were "forced to hitchhike…this situation puts vulnerable people at greater risk" (National Inquiry Communications, 11 Jul 2018). Indigenous women also lack opportunities to make adequate income or to pay off debts incurred through poverty. In some cases, this leads to women engaging in high risk behaviours that are linked with disproportionately high rates of incarceration, violence, and mortality. Greater access to secure employment at suitable wages, along with enhanced transportation supports would be greatly beneficial for Indigenous women.

3.2. Finding 2: Social Circumstances and Social Knowing

It was clear, after hearing the experiences of focus group participants, that there is a discrepancy between mainstream Canadian and urban Indigenous peoples' social circumstances and knowledge systems. These "gaps" in "social/cultural capital," as they are often referred to in the scholarly literature, are not, in themselves, a problem. Rather, Indigenous knowledge systems constitute different ways of knowing, developed within Indigenous cultures, values, and communities and shaped by the lived experiences of many Indigenous peoples, who must navigate systematic marginalization and colonialism. Canada's attempts to align Indigenous

peoples' ways of knowing with Western ways of knowing have proven to be epistemically violent, genocidal, and generally disastrous.

Mainstream Canadian society continues to operate with knowledge systems that are based in Western worldviews, and those unfamiliar with these social rules have difficulty attaining services or accessing resources in these systems. Dotson (2014) describes this phenomenon as "epistemic oppression," or the systematic exclusion of marginalized peoples' knowledge forms, which exacerbates issues of poverty and unemployment because these are, themselves, linked to systemic injustices through land dispossession, intergenerational stress and trauma, and assimilation—all of which compound to place Indigenous peoples' wellbeing at higher risk.

It is also the case that some people are better equipped to navigate these spaces. Through our findings, we suggest that the following factors contribute to an Indigenous individual's ability to self-advocate and successfully navigate mainstream systems:

a) their awareness and applied knowledge of their Indigenous culture,

b) a critical, Indigenous education, and/or

c) significant support from family or Indigenous community.

Those participants who identified one or several of these factors reported some capacity for maneuvering within the knowledge discrepancy between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and being; our research also highlights the need for further inquiry into this issue.

3.2.1. "Cultural capital" or epistemic oppression

Participants in focus group/sharing circles provided insights that express the differences in what Indigenous peoples know and value, and what is required to maneuver through mainstream systems for employment and education. Employers from the private and public sectors also contributed perspectives from a more mainstream (or Western) point of view, which describe these differences in knowing and values as "gaps," "issues," and experiential dimensions that are "lacking."

Sierra reflected on her challenging pre-education experience of not knowing which services were available to assist her as an employee. She said: *"If I had known how to advocate for myself to get transportation and childcare services way back then, like, how… you know my life probably would have been a whole lot different." (Sierra, age 40)*

Sierra articulated her experience as "pre-education" and "post-education," the latter representing her current self. However, access to post-secondary education is significantly lower for Indigenous peoples, compared to other Canadians. Indigenous Canadians' access rate to education is 28 percentage points lower than native-born Canadians. They also have a lower rate of persistence and a higher drop-out rate when in university (Finnie, 2011). Clark et al. (2009) explain that despite equal opportunity to access college, Indigeneous Canadians are one-third as likely to achieve a university degree (Vaccaro, 2012).

When asked about what might contribute to high numbers of unemployment amongst Indigenous peoples, Trevor, a representative from a public sector organization employer, described a lack of "soft skills" or "higher level skills." His view, based on our interpretation of our interview with him, is that this divergence in social knowledge of Western interpersonal relationship norms ostensibly prevents potential Indigenous employees from ascending in mainstream systems and employment opportunities. As Trevor expressed:

"Is it a cultural challenge that has some candidates lacking on the soft skills? Interpersonal relationships, leadership issues… dealing with change… the technical stuff you can teach. I can sit someone down in front of a computer, and they can learn how to use a computer… but they can't necessarily learn how to negotiate, or how to manage performance… I'm thinking more along the lines of problem solving, situational judgement, which comes with experience, team leadership… these are higher level skills, but at some point, if you want to find full-time employment, and keep it and progress… those are the types of soft skills you're gonna need." (Trevor, public sector organization)

Yet, the importance of attaining skills to maneuver through mainstream systems is not always a priority for Indigenous peoples, particularly as urgent calls for cultural resurgence and decolonization prompt reflection on the meaning of a capitalist society superimposed over Indigenous ways of being. Sierra articulated the different values between Indigenous ways of knowing and those that are valued in the mainstream Canadian society:

"You have to be a good economic person in Canadian society. ...I talk about decolonizing a lot, and what the heck does that actually mean, decolonizing? And for my internal mechanisms, I have to think of it as decolonizing my own thought process to how I believe to the original instructions… so I have to not think that having a job title is related to success. Because I have to believe that I'm only here on a human journey. And my spirit's going to go back and do something else. And it has nothing to do with [a job]. 10,000 years from now my spirit's going to be like, what job? Who cares? (laughter) But, instead, what did you learn? What did you do?" (Sierra, age 40)

Sierra's point elucidates how some Indigenous peoples' epistemologies and knowledge systems are not quantifiable or commodifiable in a capitalist mainstream structure. Indeed, in many ways, they challenge these structures and point to the enduring incommensurability between these two ways of life.

3.2.2 Social knowing and social capital

We use the terms "social knowing" and "social capital" in this section to reflect a) the social knowing that emerges from lived experiences, culture, and social norms; and b) for "social capital", the accrued social currency with which one navigates mainstream neoliberal systems. Capital, described by Bourdieu (1986), is accumulated labour which, when secured on an "exclusive basis," enables members of the group to appropriate and influence social energy. Put differently, when groups have collected capital over time, they are more adept at navigating and reproducing the expected and implicit social norms and characteristics of particular social

spaces; these include relationships, opportunities, trust, and understanding of social nuances amongst one another, which are not always made explicit in society.

For some Indigenous peoples (in both urban areas and those living on reserves), the social rules of mainstream capitalist Canadian society are not always part of the social knowing of these groups. Navigating systems of employment and education often require advocacy and/or the ability to speak up for oneself in the face of institutional power.

Mackenzie described her experience on disability assistance and her desire to go to school. She feared advocating for herself due to her expectation of harm from the system:

"… I had no idea, I had this understanding that if I'm on disability I have to be disabled… and I can't, I'm not supposed to go to school and greater myself or anything like that. And so I remember having the conversation with [my caseworker], and like 'fessing up, saying, well I've been going to school for 3 months now, and I'm actually volunteer driving for them, and they give me an incentive to volunteer drive, I don't know if I'm supposed to be reporting this… and she was like, 'No, no, no, those are all really good things.' And she was like, 'What do you plan on doing in the future?' And I was like, 'Well I hope to plan on going on to college, one day' and she was like, 'Nope that's all good, just keep me updated.' So I guess it would be helpful if there was more information provided. Because when I first got on disability I don't remember anybody giving me a walkthrough saying, okay, so [these are] your options."(Mackenzie, age 32)

In Mackenzie's experience of social knowing, mainstream Canadian assistance systems are not compassionate spaces to navigate. Mackenzie went on to describe her fear that the safety net would be withdrawn if she attempted to go to school, prompting real concerns and anxieties:

"I need to sit down with a caseworker and find out, how do I transition from being on assistance to working? ...and the assistance I'm on is disability, so I'm not sure if that's different than Ontario Works, or a gradual change… or if it's something like you're booted off disability and then you go to work. And that scares me to think… well what if I fail?… I just need to make the call. And I have no idea who I need to call or what." (Mackenzie, age 32)

We heard from many participants that Indigenous resources were highly accessed and important resources in the urban Indigenous community (discussed further in Finding 5). However, participants noted that sometimes they were unaware of services that were offered, Sierra told us:

"I've never really had any trouble getting jobs… I've had trouble… like… when I talked about how I was walking to work, and then they said that there's this Apatisiwin program that can help you, I know at the time, I should have been really thankful. But at the time I was like, 'What the hell? I've been in this community for 20 years and I'm just finding out about this program now?' Like… this could have helped me with transportation… like… you know? This whole time? And with other things… I was grateful for the opportunity to have the help, but I was aggravated too…being on the other side of the fence, not being an [employee at the centre], it's like, you can't get services by just walking in. It's like, you have to know somebody to get services." (Sierra, age 40)

Sierra's experience illuminates how social knowing and social capital can diverge, creating missed opportunities for Indigenous peoples who are in need of services. In Sierra's case, as was

described in Finding 1, she opted to hitchhike, unaware that there were services that could assist her in transportation to work.

In this exchange between Hannah and Patricia, Hannah explains that she missed out on employment opportunities because she was not trained in certain areas. Patricia points out to her that Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB) is a service for Indigenous peoples that provides training supports, and would have covered costs of training:

"Just to make a point, I didn't know about any [of the training resources available]. Because there's been plenty of times where I've had to get my food handlers… or the one to serve alcoholic beverages, and I'd just never get it, and ended up leaving the jobs, because I couldn't afford it or CPR, because I'm pretty sure CPR is pretty expensive." Hannah (age 22):

"Yeah NPAAMB can cover those things as well." Patricia (age 19):

"Yeah I had no idea of any of that."(Hannah)

Not only are mainstream Canadian systems difficult to navigate for Indigenous people, where resources do exist in Indigenous organizations, they seem to be known and accessed by those who are in close proximity to these organizations—potentially leaving out those in need. This suggests that social knowing does indeed has an impact on access to resources, training, and subsequent employment opportunities.

3.2.3 Education and employment experience

Differences in social knowing and social capital can create barriers when Indigenous peoples attempt to access employment opportunities. Education, training, and prior employment experience are expected by potential employers, and as significantly less Indigenous peoples have completed high school or post-secondary education compared to other Canadians (Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2011).

For Thomas, who possesses a strong skill set based on job experience, education is a barrier to finding the job that will make use of his skills. As he relayed:

"I have a grade 12 education, but, after high school I went and I started working at a lobbying firm, and I learned the business very well. So, in terms of skills, I have more skills than some professional designations… in terms of communication, business development, community development… but unless I run my own business, no one will hire me because I don't have the credentials." (Thomas, age 36)

Sam, in the female youth focus groups/sharing circles, pointed out that for the limited jobs available in the Fort Erie region, many had strict qualifications requirements:

…when you go to a job board [in Fort Erie]... there's jobs but not very many of them, and there are jobs but they are very specific in what you need to have…(Sam, age 20)

When it came to experience, Travis, a participant in the youth male focus group, expressed uncertainty about the process of getting the job he really wanted at a big-box retail store. He told us: "*I don't know what kind of training I would need." (Travis, age 17)*

Training opportunities are important for Indigenous peoples, but Sam described how the standardization of such training reflects unilateral mainstream approaches, particularly in a chain restaurant:

"The way they train their people… it's one way… that goes back to colonization and conforming and being forced to conform into a society…." (Sam, age 21)

Caleb reflected on the issues his younger relatives have had with lacking experience for jobs:

"You know, I have nieces and nephews and I know a bunch of young people that should have had the whole world at their fingertips, yet they're having trouble getting into work because of lack of experience or lack of training... and places to go get it. Even getting to college can seem like a huge thing, with transportation... just being able to make it there all the time. So, I think if the Centre could offer kids training and internships with different businesses and things like that... that would help." (Caleb, age 35)

Lilly shared that as opportunities arise, background checks can accompany them. This task can become a challenge under certain social circumstances and without appropriate social knowing. She stated:

"Right now I was offered to come in and work here [at the Friendship Centre], to work with the kids, and teach crafts, like beading and moccasin making. But I have to get [a background check], and… I have to go there and get it… and I don't know how much it's going to cost, I haven't really looked into it… is it $75?" (Lilly, age 49)

Both training and educational opportunities appear to be limited for Indigenous peoples in the Niagara region. In the cases where they are available, Indigenous people find it challenging to access for reasons related to their social circumstances and social knowing.

3.2.4 Transportation

Transportation for Indigenous peoples in the Niagara region came up many times as an issue related to finding and maintaining employment. It became evident that the public transportation system is unreliable and expensive in the Niagara Region. In Fort Erie alone, a single bus ride is $2.75 while a 30-day bus pass is $85.00.

Personal transportation is also difficult to maintain for those unemployed and underemployed. As personal transportation requires either a lump sum steady income, or good personal credit to purchase or finance a vehicle, it's easy to see how this problem is greater among Indigenous peoples with lower rates of income. When one adds in insurance, gas, and maintenance costs, and personal transportation quickly becomes unattainable for many who are struggling to make ends meet. For example, Sam notes that the price of fuel plus the additional fines for missing payments just exacerbated the issue of having a vehicle:

"So when I moved from [a nearby city] back home, and finding out I was pregnant, I was unemployed… I wasn't going to travel to [work] for 3-5 hours with the prices of gas, it just wouldn't make sense. And I had my own car, for two months I couldn't pay my insurance. So not only did I miss my insurance payments, but then the fees for missing your insurance payments… that was a big thing for me. Just trying to bring in any money I could to pay for my insurance, even though I didn't have money to put gas into my car to drive it." (Sam, age 21)

Keira described how the transportation system, specifically in Fort Erie, is a barrier due to its unreliability:

"I was actually going to move to Fort Erie, but it was actually transportation that stopped me. I worked, in [a nearby city], and I was assistant manager there, so I didn't want to get rid of that job. And I thought about finding something, seeking something in Fort Erie, but because of lack of employment [in Fort Erie]. So, I actually let go of the house [in the co-op I had been approved to move into], because I couldn't rely on transportation, because the bus system is terrible." (Keira, age 24).

Patricia recalled the treatment she and her sister received by education staff due to transportation issues:

"… we used to walk around town everywhere we went, uhh especially when our mom didn't have a car… Getting to school we were always late and teachers would yell at us." (Patricia, age 19).

Jennifer explained that when her car broke down, she wasn't able to rely on the transit system in the Niagara region. She said:

"My car broke down and I'm working out of town, how do I get there? And it would just be too tough and I'd end up getting out of a job… because I couldn't rely on transportation, public transportation, and I couldn't rely on my parents, so I guess it was just like, okay now I have to find another job." (Jennifer, age 33)

The cost of obtaining a driver's license presents a challenge for those who are unemployed and underemployed. Caleb reflected on the cost and how he got his driver's license through a program at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre:

"I was just, I was bad. I drove around for years without a license... Years ago, there was a program here that helped you get your license... So basically, they paid for your beginner's test, which included your road test after that. And they paid for Aapex [driving academy], which helps [reduce] insurance [costs]... That was huge, I know a lot of people took advantage of that. I got my license, through Aapex. And everything was covered. It was incredible, it definitely helped out. I couldn't drive to work, but now [I can], because of that." (Caleb, age 35)

Lack of access to adequate income contributes to transportation challenges, which in turn hinder securing employment for adequate income. The cycle can become frustrating. However, it appears that when resources are made available through the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, they can alleviate some of these barriers.

3.2.5. Poverty

Across Canada, including Ontario, Indigenous peoples have lower income levels and higher levels of unemployment compared to other Canadians (Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2011):

> There is a substantial income gap between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginals. In Ontario in 2005, the average annual income of Aboriginal people was $25,963—about $12,000 less than the non-Aboriginal population ($38,318). (Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2011, p. 35)

Poverty, often intergenerational, is a significant social circumstance that has impacts on a person's ability to secure and maintain employment. In many ways, poverty is interminable for those who are struggling within it. Steve described how poverty and social assistance affect the outlook of those who grew up within it, saying:

"You know, people who are struggling on welfare, they think that's the only way they can live, and then their kids see that, and fall under that too. You know, 'I grew up on welfare, I'm probably gonna die on welfare.' You know what I mean?" (Steve, age 42)

Poverty is often an inherited circumstance. Mackenzie reflected on her family's intergenerational poverty and illuminates its correlation with addiction (discussed further in the next Finding):

"... for my dad, he was a self-employed artist. And I can remember when I was very young he had a couple of jobs working with backhoes, and equipment and stuff like that, he was also an alcoholic. And as a kid I don't know what led to him not working in that job anymore. But it got to the point when he didn't job search anymore - and began carving. And I've been thinking about this a lot lately, since I've been thinking about, 'Okay Mackenzie, you've been on assistance for 10 years now', and why am I so comfortable on assistance? And I can relate it to my dad that it was never really a problem, because he displayed to me, and talked to me that it was normal, or acceptable to rely on assistance to get your rent paid, or get grocery money, and it wasn't really unacceptable... So, I think that for him, his reason why was just because, how he was raised with. I know, his dad, he was a stone carver, and an alcoholic as well, and that's probably why my dad followed in his footsteps, in what his dad had shown him. (Mackenzie, age 32)

Mackenzie's story is a powerful example of the ways that social knowing and epistemic oppression are passed through generations for Indigenous peoples. Yet, Mackenzie showed resolve and ambition to change her situation when she said:

"My step mom was in my life up until I was 12. And I've seen her work full time, every day, and then at 12, I didn't see her anymore, this is when I went with my dad. So then when I was introduced to welfare... this is where I kind of got introduced to that, '[welfare is] okay', or that, 'you've gotta do what you gotta do.' There were many other things, illegal things, that I was exposed to. But these were the kinds of things that I learned to survive, or to get by. And, I didn't finish high school, I dropped out. My dad said it was okay that I drop out, on the grounds that I work, that I'd be working self-employed like him. He did pow-wows. So, he said I gotta do

beadwork, you gotta put in some work and then on the weekends we are going to go sell it. So, this is how I kinda got taught how to be an adult. So, life goes on, and not until recently, when I got back in touch with my step mom, and I realized, I seen her success, like she's had a successful life, that's what I wanna do. And she's always filling [me] with that, like I totally can [do that too]. So, [I'm] trying to go back to school. And trying to think that I'm still capable. [I see] how much parents have an effect on what we are taught. So, when your parents are working, you're raised to believe you need to work for life, or this is how you are, and how you function as an adult. And so… [a spiritual advisor told me], you have to go to school because if you don't your kids are going to end up following the same path I went, and they'll probably think that, 'oh well it's okay if you don't finish school, it's okay if you don't work, it's okay if you spend your life on assistance'. And I don't wanna teach them that, right?" (Mackenzie, age 32).

In this reflection, Mackenzie encapsulates the interconnectedness of many of the points we contend have an effect on Indigenous peoples' poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and overall challenges in accessing wellbeing and prosperity. Mackenzie's realization that she has the power to interrupt the cycle of poverty that her children stand to inherit reflects the same hope that so many Indigenous peoples embody despite the marginalization they face. We hear in Mackenzie's aspirations that she, and many others like her, require access to spaces where compassion, trauma-informed approach, and Indigenous social knowing are centered as values.

3.2.6. **POLICY RECOMMENDATION 2**

Due to epistemic exclusion and divergence in social knowing, Indigenous peoples often do not possess the type of social capital required to navigate and benefit from mainstream Canadian systems. In fact, these systems are daunting to navigate for some Indigenous peoples, and for this reason it is important that Indigenous organizations are equipped to provide adequate advocacy and resources to assist in mitigating these challenges. Allocations for communicating about services that are available and strengthening visual campaigns to reach Indigenous peoples would be an important resource for Indigenous organizations.

Further, due to the epistemic oppression and exclusion of Indigenous social knowing, we stress the importance of action item #57 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action (2015) for public servants:

> We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

In addressing transportation issues, it was evident that programs like driver's education is a helpful resource for young people beginning their journey into employment, as well as for adults who need to address this hurdle.

For Indigenous peoples to actually implement and live by their epistemologies/worldviews (education, training, Indigenous businesses, Indigenous languages, land-based preservation, and

cultural practices), there needs to be a systemic change in Canada toward honouring treaties, land rights, and Indigenous values. In the Niagara region, specifically, the principles of the Two-Row Wampum—one of the first treaties made with European settlers—eloquently expresses this sentiment. It reads:

> We will not be like Father and Son, but like Brothers. [Two rows] symbolize two paths or two vessels, travelling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Indian People, their laws, their customs, and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws, their customs, and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will make compulsory laws nor interfere in the internal affairs of the other. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel (Keefer, 2014).

Social knowing reflects a blend of values and circumstances for Indigenous peoples. Mackenzie's story illuminated the important link between role modeling and imagining the potential self. In this way, job shadowing opportunities for Indigenous people and youth are important and critical education opportunities are vital, as awareness-raising actions, such as media campaigns that communicate programs, services, and resources. Research shows that Indigenous youths' perceptions of their potential selves increase when they are exposed to images of Indigenous people in professional roles (Fryberg, et al., 2008). This points to the importance of self-representation, role modeling, and social knowing in access to opportunities for prosperity.

3.3. FINDING 3: MENTAL HEALTH

Our discussions with focus group participants illuminated the unique mental health needs of Indigenous peoples in urban settings. In our findings, we assert that access to culture is an important factor to attaining wellbeing as it pertains to employment opportunities, as well as critical Indigenous education opportunities and adequate support systems. Indigenous peoples face particular challenges in employment due to mental health issues such as toxic work environments, intergenerational stress, and addiction that stems from the stress of marginalization.

3.3.1. Access to culture

In the focus groups/sharing circles, we heard that participants valued and needed access to culture, but that sometimes these were incommensurate with their employment. Sierra places priority on cultural events to ensure her children are exposed to the culture:

"Working in mainstream, the problems are that they don't understand the uniqueness of Indigeneity… I will not miss a pow-wow with my kids, I won't." (Sierra, age 40)

Involvement in ceremonial practices is a locally specific, land-based endeavour. It is not like going to a local faith community on a weekly basis. Depending on which ceremonial community one is involved with, attending Indigenous ceremonies can sometimes require extensive travel to a specific location and require 3-4 days off from work, up to 4 times a year or more. Derek

describes the tension of maintaining employment and the time it takes to engage in ceremonial activities, saying:

"My issue is trying to get back to my culture. Missing some time off for some ceremonies… I'm afraid to go do that, because they want constant work. And I know my rights, and I can legally go, but they'll find any small excuse to get rid of me." (Derek, age N/A)

Sierra and Derek's reflections point to the struggle that Indigenous peoples face when trying to balance time to engage in cultural and ceremonial events with employment.

3.3.2 Psychologically toxic work environments

While psychologically toxic work environments may be a wider labour issue in Canada, for Indigenous peoples, they can present particular challenges when compounded with issues of systemic discrimination, oppression, and poverty.

Carol recounted times when she endured verbal abuse from a supervisor:

"I had an abusive employer. I worked at Tim Horton's, the owner, got in my face and says 'you need to straighten out your attitude!' He was like this (leans toward peer) this close… that abusive employer, it's just… I didn't appreciate that. I don't like being talked down to like that… I should have charged him or something, but I'm not that kinda person." (Carol, age 48)

Patricia mentioned that in her experience her training was inconsistent, which placed her in challenging situations:

I've been in so many jobs that I haven't been trained properly, and then people get mad at me [for it]. (Patricia, age 19)

With the many hurdles that Indigenous peoples face in navigating systems, accessing qualifications, and seeking and maintaining employment, work environments that are distressing can be yet another challenge.

3.3.2. Intergenerational stress and mental health

For Indigenous peoples, intergenerational stress as a result of Federal Indian Policy and epistemic exclusion is frequent. This has effects on individuals' ability to not only maintain employment, but to obtain it in the first place.

Mackenzie shared her experience of struggling with her mental health, and subsequently feeling discouraged at the lack of support from her employer. She told us:

"The last time I was employed, it wasn't in Fort Erie it was [in a different province], but...I had struggled with was my mental health, and I don't think my employers helped, or were supportive of it. They were supportive to some degree, so, when I had came [sic] *to them and I said, 'I don't think I'm doing a good job, I can't handle it, I can't do it anymore'. I kept having anxiety attacks...I was a cashier and as soon as the line would go past three people I would... just flake*

out. There were many other factors going on, to why my anxiety got so high. But when I approached my boss and told him I'd wanted to quit. I don't know… if he should have been more supportive to say something like, oh well we can accommodate this, or we can do something about this. It was just, 'fine, okay.' And I was surprised because I was with them for about a year and a half, and all up to that point they were really supportive, and had full faith in me by putting me in that manager position. So, I thought they may have tried talking me out of it, or giving me other responsibilities. So, I guess that was a problem, it wasn't much support for that." (Mackenzie, age 32)

Steve described the effect of intergenerational stress and trauma as a result of colonization, and his efforts to change the harsh conditions for his children:

"I think it's been proven over decades, the ripple effect of the injustices against our people. Even before the residential schools, even just the whole process... from 1492 to 2018, there's still stuff going on. I've never been to a residential school, you know, but my family has. And you strip it down to alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, penitentiary sentences, all in my family. And I'm sure we all just didn't wake up one day and say 'okay we're gonna be drunks and violent inmates' and stuff. There's a reason why the majority are like that. The high incarceration numbers speak for themselves. We have a very low population, low population in the whole country, but a very high prison population in the prison system, so those numbers don't add up right. I know there's bad people and there's good people, you know, that chose to live like that. And there are people who had no choice, until they figured it out, that, 'I gotta change for the next generation, I can't keep doing this'. My father was incarcerated, I was incarcerated, and thank god, you know, my kids weren't. And you know that's my job as a father, having teenage boys, is to keep on them, to get their lives in order now, you know, don't sit around and until your 42 years old like me. I only wish I was 17 years old or 21 years old again, and do it right while you can now, don't waste 20 years down the road. Figure it out right now. I tell them the stories and everything, and I scare them onto the right path, not to fall down into jails and prison." (Steve, age 42)

Thomas illustrated the issues of mental health and violence in Indigenous communities, and the need for profound change:

"I think that one of the big issues for our communities is access to mental health services and ensuring that… because of the social illness a lot of our communities are facing, a lot of our communities don't have access to treatment for residential schools… or domestic violence. The man just has to go to jail. There's no halfway house… I just think there needs to be more opportunities to access public service. And instead of, like, criminalizing our people, we need to find ways to support them in their needs. And it makes sense to me, but it just seems like the furthest thing we want to do in our society, is take care of our people. Our young men, they have no power, they haven't been empowered, and it's just awful. And thank god for organizations like this, but we have a long way to go. Because we need to make a drastic shift." (Thomas, age 36)

3.3.3. Addiction

Addiction is, of course, a condition that affects many beyond Indigenous populations. It is a ritualized and compulsive seeking of comfort for those with Adverse Childhood Experiences

(Stevens, 2017). For Indigenous peoples, addiction has roots in intergenerational stress, trauma, and social circumstances, all caused by colonialism. Dr. Gabor Maté (2014, p. xvi), renowned expert on addiction states:

> Addiction cannot be understood from an isolated perspective. It is a complex condition, a condition rooted in the individual experience of the sufferer and also in the multi-generational history of his or her family and--not least--also in the cultural and historical context in which that family has existed. The shameful statistics of addiction prevalence among First Nations people are not attributable to any genetic flaw, but to the historical trauma endured by the Aboriginal populations of North America; the horrendous multi-generational legacy of the residential schools; and the ongoing social, economic and cultural ostracization that continues to be their lot.

Maté's (2014) analysis, informed by years of research and experience, is an important part of understanding how the prevalence of addiction affects not only Indigenous communities' access to employment, but their health and wellbeing in general.

Thomas shared that while he had achieved many accomplishments, his addiction caused major struggles in his success:

"I think my biggest problem is myself. Because you know I worked as a sole proprietor, and owner of a consulting firm for over the past decade. And I was very successful. But I ran into problems, personal problems, which spawned from addiction. And basically, I lost my business, I lost my house I lost my car. I lost lots of things, my dignity. And I just couldn't find my place anymore. And that's kind of why I came here, to Fort Erie, so I could heal. So that I could find myself again." (Thomas, age 36)

Carol expressed how her addiction was worsened in coping to deal with loss. It became a cause for difficulty in employment, but she described the support she receives from her community:

"I forget easily, you know… I think it's due to my addiction. And I was really into my addiction after my mom passed… and I tried to get help, and I got sober, but, our [First] Nation [Non-insured Health Benefits], is limited to how many visits you can get to a psychologist. I had like 6 visits and then it stopped, and I needed more. So, I went into the AA program, and I got a sponsor, and I'm doing the steps, and that's very helpful to me… it's not for everyone, but for me. My sponsor, I call her every day, or I try to… and I meet with her and sit down on Saturdays and go over the steps. And she calls me on my crap… you know?... The mental health… is an issue with me. Because my brother passed away last year, my mom two years ago… and I was just very… just masking the pain. And it was hard for me to get employment because of my addiction. Now that I'm sober, it's getting better, much better. I'm actually, if I wasn't taking this class I coulda been working more. But, [the Ukwe Restorative Justice Program] is helping me, so I work when I can. I'm working today actually." (Carol, age 48)

For Mackenzie, her goals for success are the inspiration to maintain control over her addiction:

"Success to me, for me success right now is staying clean and sober. Because that's something that tore my life right apart, took everything away. So that's my version of success. Thinking ahead, my version of success would be going to school, and I wanna go for a social service worker. And I want to successfully finish that. And that's when I set my next goal, and then success will be, okay, getting a job and obtaining the job, and keeping the job, all the while, maintaining my home." (Mackenzie, age 32)

For Indigenous peoples struggling with addiction issues sourced in trauma, stress, and pain, community resources offered by Indigenous organizations are vital in the journey for wellbeing.

3.3.4. POLICY RECOMMENDATION 3

Access to culture is a vital part of achieving wellness for Indigenous peoples. The importance of attending cultural and ceremonial gatherings for Indigenous peoples needs to be understood m with appropriate time allocated by employers for Indigenous peoples to attend cultural events. This is another reason why Friendship Centres are important resources for urban Indigenous communities—they often provide ceremonial and cultural resources. Ensuring adequate funding for these types of events and activities will alleviate access issues for Indigenous peoples in urban areas as well as contribute to improving their mental health and wellbeing.

For those struggling with mental health, finding and maintaining employment is challenging. Compounded with issues in poverty, intergenerational stress and addiction are overwhelming and difficult to cope with. As such, there needs to be more support for culturally-relevant mental health care, especially for Indigenous peoples, who experience extensive trauma due to ongoing systemic issues such as higher rates of incarceration, apprehension, and unemployment. Treatment of mental health must also take into account the holistic worldviews of Indigenous peoples, and be accessible in Non-insured Health Benefits (NIHB) or Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). The urgency of action item #18 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action (2015) becomes clear on the topic of mental health, which reads:

> We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

Additionally, we would add that this important work must be Indigenous-led, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed in its approach.

3.4. FINDING 4: DISCRIMINATION

Indigenous peoples experience challenging situations related to the discrimination they face based on their heritage. Based on an earlier research (with 172 survey participants) conducted by the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre (2017) it was found that of the 29 respondents who identified as Indigenous, 27/29 (or 93%) reported that they had personally experienced racial discrimination. This research produced a report, "The FRIEND Project Report" (2017) that argues that, for many Indigenous peoples in Fort Erie, racism is a factor in the creation and maintenance of barriers to employment, housing, healthcare, and other points of access for

Indigenous people. This Report also asserts that racism is evident in, for example, long standing stereotypes about Indigenous people and media biases. Our research found that discrimination is rooted in the stigma of the General Education Diploma (GED), which we observed at work among private and public sector employers. Other experiences revealed overt racial discrimination faced by the participants in our focus groups/sharing circles.

3.4.1. General education diploma (GED)

In our research, we discerned that the GED is not perceived as having the same legitimacy as the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), despite the two being equivalent designations. One employer suggested that the GED was accepted everywhere, stating:

"This is a general statement, and I'm sure it applies to folks in the Aboriginal community as well… our minimum requirement for sort of an entry level labour position is an OSSD or a GED. So, we do accept the GED, unlike some of the other employers." (Tom, public sector employer)

Yet amongst those who attain GEDs, there is a perception that this is a lesser qualification than the OSSD. Lilly told us:

"Ok well… the biggest thing is you need your diploma… and then they say a GED is an equivalent, and now they say no a GED isn't as high as you need, you need a diploma, so a lot of people are wasting a lot of their time to get this GED to fast track or whatever, to get their diploma, and then now they are finding it's a barrier to them because… you need the actual diploma… " (Lilly, age 48)

Another employer pointed out how the GED is among the "basic" requirements for employment:

"We have two basic requirements from any new hire. One of them is that they have a grade 12 or GED… To me, unfortunately, if a candidate doesn't have [their GED], we don't proceed any further. Because it's the one and only basic requirement we require… and the other is that they pass criminal, educational, and employment background checks, so we tend to lose a few people every hire because for one reason or another they don't meet that criteria. And I'm not saying the Aboriginals would be any different, but I can just go by what happens when we do our regular, general hire. Those are the two areas we seem to lose people in… before they start." (Pam, private sector employer)

These nuances point not only to the discrepancies in the privilege of access to social capital, but the stigma associated with a GED as being "basic." Several of our research participants suggested that some employers do not accept the GED, though the same was not said about an OSSD. In Finding 2, we discussed challenges that Indigenous peoples face in attaining educational qualifications. If Indigenous peoples are obtaining GEDs more frequently because they are more accessible than university degrees, and if there is a stigma attached to a GED, it is likely that Indigenous people will face additional discrimination associated with this level of educational certification.

3.4.2. Diversity as a "nice to have"

Amongst employers, diversity is perceived as "nice to have." This sentiment lacks the urgency with which it is desired by Indigenous peoples, who are disproportionately represented in the country's unemployment rates. As one employer expressed:

"I think diversity is a nice thing to have. You know, especially in a large population such as ourselves. We just… umm… yeah, I think there would be a benefit to it. It's not something… it's not something… we don't have problems filling positions here. If anything, we have a problem with an overabundance of applications. Being one of the major employers in the area. So, we've never had a problem in that aspect of it. But you know, in diversity, perspective, it might be something we could look at." (Pam, private sector employer).

Another employer relayed:

"We are trying to be more culturally aware, if you will, as an employer...it's one of those things that's on the wish list, one of those 'nice to do' things." (Trevor, public sector employer)

When asked if employers saw value in having Indigenous peoples and/or more diversity in their organizations, Trevor expressed the duty of the public sector to lead by example in this area:

"We are a public sector employer... we are expected to lead by example, set an example for the private sector on how to do things right and in the public interest, opposed to making a profit. We are different in that respect. And I think there is a moral obligation to sort of, you know, do it the right way, and respect diversity, and respect the values that come with having a diverse workforce, and project that out into the greater Fort Erie community. You know, for what it's worth... but I think It's important messaging, for all members of the community. That there's value to be had in diversity in the workplace…" (Trevor, public sector employer)

For Pam, who works in the private sector, diversity seems more difficult to achieve and thus the benefits are not as clear:

"I always like to have, you know, different cultures in the plant. Our plant tends to be, not as… how can I say this… we have an established workforce… and Fort Erie is of a certain ethnic variety, and that's where we draw from… but I always think it would be beneficial to have other cultures in the plant. Even just from a, an understanding of diversity kind of thing. Not having had that many Aboriginals here, I really, it's just an educated guess more than anything." (Pam, private sector employer)

While our sample only included two employers in the Niagara region, it was clear in these organizations that diversity in general, let alone representing Indigenous peoples within these workforces, is not an issue of great concern.

3.4.3. Racial discrimination

There is, of course, the issue of racial discrimination that Indigenous peoples face. The Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre produced a study as part of their anti-racist work "The FRIEND Report Project," wherein several Indigenous members of the Fort Erie community reported facing racism and discrimination:

> Further investigation revealed racism as a factor in creating barriers to employment, housing, healthcare, and other points of access for Indigenous people. A number of areas of concern ranging from long standing stereotypes, media bias, and differences in generational approaches to race were considered as areas to address. A further identified issue was the inability of concerned organizations to find ways to build relationships and access information to help with positive approaches to racial discrimination. (2017, p. 5)

The findings of this report detail numerous instances of racial discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples. In the focus groups/sharing circles, this issue was also raised as a critical factor in attaining employment.

In one focus group, Darian suggested that he might try to conceal the fact that he's Indigenous in order to get a job:

EJ: "So [self-identifying as Indigenous] is an advantage [at the Friendship Centre], but outside of here… you wouldn't mention it?"
Darian: "No."
AD: "Because it could [be a] disadvantage?"
Darian: "Sometimes."
AD: "So, in that sense you've heard about racial profiling…"
Darian: "Like, 'they're good for nothing, they're lazy, they drink too much…'" (Darian, age 19)

The public sector employer explained that he understands that it may be difficult to self-identify as an Indigenous person as a result of stereotypes and racism. This might mean that some people will have difficulty accessing services meant to help them. As Trevor explained:

"… so, you know, now we are in a situation where we have a program that's intended... it's well intended to provide employment opportunities to members of the Aboriginal community, who don't want to self-identify at the start of the process, for fear of the stigma, the stereotypes, the racism, the discrimination that goes along with having [an identifiable Indigenous name] or identifying themselves as Aboriginal... so I don't know what the answer is to that..." (Trevor, public sector employer)

Derek described his experience when applying for a job where his employer made discriminatory comments and excluded necessary forms based on misinformation and stereotypes:

"Well recently I had a racial event happen back in 2016. In my interview, the owner of the company said, 'we had one of you people work here before but it didn't turn out so well because he didn't wanna work'... also, during my interview, when I was finally signing the papers and all, they didn't bring out the tax forms. And when I asked, he said, 'I thought you guys didn't pay taxes.'" (Derek, age N/A)

When asked if his Indigeneity created any challenges in finding work, Travis made note of his white-passing appearance in comparison to his brother, suggesting that there is privilege in not appearing Indigenous:

Travis: "I don't know honestly…(looks down at his arms, and skin) because I don't really look that Indigenous, I don't really think people would be able to tell… so I don't think it does for me…I have [a] little brother [who has] way darker skin than I do...he might be mistaken someday, and have that racial profiling happen to him..." (Travis, age 17)

One of the participants suggested that she sometimes felt like she was filling a quota as the "token Indigenous person" in a company. This also adds a different perspective to the idea that diversity is "nice to have." As Jennifer expressed:

"I've never really had any issues in the workplace… I think because of, I've always been the filler of "native quota" in the company. So, I'd get a lot of people interested, and really nice to me...because I'd always be the only native person. And I knew I was filling a spot, a number, for that summer, that they needed, so that they could feel better about themselves as a company, and think they are doing their part." (Jennifer, age 33)

Samuel shared his experience with racial discrimination more generally, though the reflection has implications in employment:

"This one time, me and my dad were... in the Sobey's, we were grocery shopping, and all of these employees thought we were shoplifting, and they wouldn't stop following us around. Nobody was stealing anything. My dad had money in his pocket, we were just filling up the shopping cart. We were just being normal, just grocery shopping. And we had like 6 of these employees trying to go through our bags, and we wouldn't let 'em, because we weren't stealing. That's just how some people are I guess." (Samuel, age 18)

It is likely that every Indigenous person has a story of discrimination, whether personally experienced or within their family. This reflects the broader issue that among many Canadians, the historical narrative and social knowledge of Indigenous peoples as being socially deviant continues.

3.4.5. POLICY RECOMMENDATION 4

From the interviews, it appears that the public sector perceives itself to be a leader in equity. In this way, the public sector may be an important ally or potential site of opportunity for addressing discrimination. However, "The FRIEND Report Project" provides evidence that despite diversity efforts, many Indigenous workers have faced discrimination in their employment experiences. This is not surprising when diversity is considered merely a "nice to have" item.

We stress that Indigenous-designed curriculum on the topic of treaty relationships and Canadians' responsibility within these relationships must become part of core curriculum, as per item #62 from 94 Calls to Action (private sector employment improvement):

> We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:
>
> i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
>
> ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
>
> iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
>
> iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

Further, it is imperative that representations of Indigenous peoples in the media cease being biased. Reporting on Indigenous issues and news items must include Indigenous voices and representations, as per item #86 from the 94 Calls to Action, which states:

> We call upon Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal– Crown relations.

In addition to Policy Recommendation 2, which brought forth TRC Action Item #57, we recommend developing incentives for the private sector to engage in the same cultural competency training that is called upon by all public sectors.

> We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

Further, TRC Action Item #53 calls upon the Federal Government to produce a National Council for Reconciliation, whose mandate includes promoting public dialogue, public/private partnerships, and public initiatives for reconciliation. The Private Sector has a crucial role in truth and justice for reconciliation.

3.5. FINDING 5: IMPORTANCE OF INDIGENOUS RESOURCES

It was apparent amongst the focus group participants that Indigenous organizations are vital resources for cultural access and general wellbeing because community-focused resources, programs, and services tend to be developed and delivered by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples. It was clear from many of the participants' experiences that these resources provided

much needed support in areas of advocacy, employment, education, income, housing, cultural access, and childcare.

3.5.1. The role of friendship centres and Indigenous services

Friendship centres provide an important point of access for urban Indigenous peoples, yet they often lack communication resources to address community needs that result from epistemic exclusion. In our focus groups/sharing circles, we heard about the importance of programs such as "Courage to Soar," which assists participants in achieving their OSSD, the NPAAMB (Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board), which provides important opportunities for entry-level employment for Indigenous youth, Apatisiwin, which "offers a variety of employment programs, education and services designed to provide opportunities for urban Aboriginal people of Ontario to better their economic lives through culturally based services in an employment focused partnership environment" (FENFC Website), and Ukwe Restorative Justice Program, a program for those negatively involved with the law to rebalance via Indigenous values and responsibilities.

Mackenzie expressed her gratitude for the community and services that FENFC provides, saying:

"I'm really, really happy to be a part of the Friendship Centre. I think that's helped my family a lot. There are a lot of programs in the centre. I'm really grateful for the educational opportunities [and] youth programs for the kids." (Mackenzie, age 32)

Thomas spoke about the importance of accessing restorative justice (which center Indigenous concepts of restitution). He expressed:

"Oh yeah… [I've used the Ukwe] Restorative Justice [a program at FENFC] …there's been a lot of programs here that are just all around really great. Great places to be, and all around great personal support." (Thomas, age 36)

Sierra described the benefit of living in the Niagara region, as well as what enables her family to live there:

"I like that I live close to the water… water is very calming for us… and there is a lot of Indigenous opportunities… with the Friendship Centre, there's NPAAMB, there's the Niagara Trust of Native Women, and there's housing. And if I wasn't part of the housing I probably would have left a long time ago." (Sierra, age 40)

Patricia shared a story of how impactful a NPAAMB program was in her employment experience:

"My first job in a kitchen was originally funded through NPAAMB… it's an organization to help people find jobs and training and employment. And they have a station out here in Fort Erie. And they compensated my pay while I worked there in the summer. And I ended up working there for 3 years after the program with NPAAMB ended. And it was a good experience… I was in grade 8 when I got the job and it was good to get that experience in the field and it was really

good, NPAAMB was there to help… It was a very small, family business run restaurant, and it was just an awesome experience to have that support through NPAAMB." (Patricia, age 19)

In Caleb's experience, NPAAMB was foundational for his current full-time employment He said:

"Yeah, I got my current job [through NPAAMB]. I was actually on paternal leave and I had a previous job, and [a company] contacted me to [work] for them. And they got NPAAMB, they offered… So, I got 6 months with them. And then another 6 months after that through a different program through NPAAMB. I guess more training dollars and funds…. And then that actually helped me get hired on full time with [this company]. After working there for a year, and staying with them, and obviously them seeing how I worked, and obviously they liked my work and the things I've done. And that actually led me into getting in there full time ....there's a couple guys that are getting a little bit older, in their 70s, looking to retire… and so NPAAMB helped me get into there, they were there for me… I think NPAAMB, and programs like NPAAMB with funding, is really great and beneficial." (Caleb, age 35)

Sam, one of the young women, had a positive experience using Indigenous services and supports. She found, however, that lack of funding inhibited her employment success:

"I definitely accessed NPAAMB, as well as Apatisiwin. So [Apatisiwin] gave me an allowance to go and buy work appropriate clothing, which was very helpful, especially with this pregnancy too, because everything I had didn't fit, so I was really appreciative of that…with NPAAMB too, that is how I worked at [a fast food restaurant] through a NPAAMB contract, but...When providing workplace experience programs, they don't do franchises. Or anything like that, anything corporate, it's local, small businesses where they can do one on one contracts, right? If you work with a non-profit I think they can subsidize your entire pay. And if you work somewhere where they are making a profit they can cover 60% of your wages… so when I worked at [the fast food restaurant] they paid 60% of my wages there. But, the employers were only interested in having me as long as the money was coming in." (Sam, age 20)

It is clear that the services NPAAMB provides are heavily accessed and effective for Indigenous people in the Fort Erie community. In some cases, the employment is a good fit and the individual is able to move into spaces left by retirees, as in Caleb's case. On the other hand, Sam felt that employers sometimes take advantage of this free or subsidized labour and have no interest in continuing an individual's employment beyond the hiring program incentives.

3.5.2. Adequate access to Indigenous focused essential services (housing, childcare, education, and training)

In our focus groups/sharing circles, we heard many references to the importance of subsidized housing for the community. For some, like Sierra, it was the reason to have settled in the Fort Erie region. When focus group participants had access to affordable childcare, it was usually through the "Under the Rainbow" child care centre located at FENFC. Access to both of these resources was thought, by the participants, to have contributed greatly to Indigenous people's wellbeing in the region. As this research project was focused on employment issues, NPAAMB was frequently mentioned as an important resource, as was Apatisiwin, which

provides assistance and funds for job readiness. Additionally, some participants discussed how Restorative Justice through the Ukwe Program assisted them in mitigating their involvement with the law.

3.5.3. POLICY RECOMMENDATION 5.

We cannot stress enough the importance of Indigenous-focused, developed, and delivered programs and services for Indigenous peoples. Researchers and Indigenous scholars alike have long identified self-determination as a necessary component to Indigenous health, success, and wellbeing (Ladner, 2009; Deer, 2015; Fryberg, et al., 2008). Previous research findings reveal that when Indigenous communities have greater control and access over their services, high risk social indicators such as youth suicide rates decrease (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008); this, in turn, points to how profound challenges in Indigenous communities are mitigated when Indigenous communities can promote culture, wellbeing, and prosperity *from their worldviews* through their services. The FENFC has expressed that if more of its funding was discretionary, there would be greater opportunities to apply funds in ways that make sense for the community's needs.

Indigenous peoples still do not have adequate funding for the vital resources described above. As the frequent use of programs like Apatisiwin and NPAAMB indicates, Indigenous organizations must deal with extensive needs among their community members. We recommend increasing allocations to Indigenous organizations to develop culturally-relevant and community-responsive programming according to the needs of the peoples they serve.

We found that epistemic exclusion of Indigenous peoples has also contributed to a widespread lack of access to services. We recommend augmenting funding to Friendship Centres and other Indigenous programs, including resources for media and communications with the aim of increasing awareness of their current programs.

Additional resources for Indigenous programs that support employment, such as urban housing co-operatives for Indigenous peoples, urban Indigenous child care centres (like Under the Rainbow), NPAAMB, and Apatisiwin, will greatly improve access to income and employment for Indigenous peoples.

CONCLUSION

We found that Indigenous peoples do, in many ways, access opportunities for employment, training, education, and/or wellness. Yet, they face challenges in navigating these resources and spaces due to epistemic exclusion and issues related to poverty, mental health, intergenerational trauma and addiction, all of which are intricately connected to colonialism and Canadian Federal Indian Policy. Our research confirms that when Indigenous peoples have access to cultural knowing, critical Indigenous education opportunities, and a strong support network (whether through family or an Indigenous community), they are better able to access and advocate for employment opportunities, well-being, and prosperity. The most successful services are those that are imbued with Indigenous social knowing, epistemologies, and values and that have a clear understanding of Canadian colonial social circumstances and contexts and what it means to live as an Indigenous person in Canada. Our research participants judged these services to be highly effective, widely accessed contributors to their well-being and prosperity. Often, however, these services are stretched as a result of their attempts to meet the high needs of the communities they serve with limited capacity. We conclude that such programs require more resources and discretionary funding to better address the localized and unique needs of different Indigenous communities. Further, we urge that all levels of government—as well as employers, schools, and community organizations—continue their responsibility in implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, some of which relate to the findings we have discussed in this Research Report.

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APPENDIX A
EMPLOYER INTERVIEW GUIDE

These questions were used as a basic guide during the interviews with employers.

- How many employees do you have?
- As our project is focusing on Indigenous employment, do you know if any of your employees identify as Indigenous?
- Do you have any Indigenous employees in management levels or relatively high levels?
- Have you made an effort to attract Indigenous employees? If not, why not? If yes, how have you done this?
- What barriers do you face in attracting/retaining Indigenous employees?
- What supports/services do you offer to help retain your Indigenous employees? Or what supports/services do you think might be helpful?
- Did you know that Indigenous unemployment is higher than non-Indigenous unemployment in this area? Why do you think that is the case? Do you think something should be done? If so, what?
- If you were asked to sit on a task force to address the issue of high Indigenous unemployment and underemployment, what kinds of questions and issues would you want to see explored?
- What other issues do you think are important to consider in our exploration of the reasons for high Indigenous unemployment in this region?

APPENDIX B
FOCUS GROUP/SHARING CIRCLE GUIDE

We divided our questions into 6 themes, so we could ensure exploration of different issues and ideas. This question was used as a guide, and was adapted throughout each focus group/sharing circle.

1. Life in Fort Erie
- What's it like living in Fort Erie? What are a couple of things you like about it?
- What do you like about living in Fort Erie?

2. Barriers/Problems/Conflicts and Employment
- What key barriers have you faced in finding work? (E.g., Child care? Elder care? Maternity or parental leave? Limited job experience? Limited job search skills? Previous experience with challenges or anxiety about problematic work environments?)
- What barriers or problems have you faced on the job, or keeping a job?
- Have you had conflicts at work, and if so, how have you dealt with them?
- Do you think your parents or grandparents faced barriers in their employment experience?

3. Success
- In your view, what does it mean to be a "successful" person? How is employment connected to that?

4. Support and Employment
- Did you have support as you applied for and stayed in particular jobs? What kind? What was helpful? Please provide specific examples if possible.
- Have you used any of the employment programs offered through the friendship centre, or the job gym?
- If support was missing, what kind of support would you like?

5. Employment Experience

- To date, what has been your favourite job? Why? (tell us about this). Least favourite? Why (tell us about this).
- What is your ideal work environment? (or) In an ideal world, what kind of work would you engage in? In an ideal world, what kind of environment/supports would enhance your possibilities for long term/sustainable employment?

6. Employment and Health and Well-being
- How do you feel when you are employed vs. unemployed?
  - We are thinking about your wellness as it's related to employment.

Is there anything that we haven't asked about your employment experiences that you would like to share with the group?