

# SHAKING OFF THE COLONIAL INHERITANCE:

HOMELESS INDIGENOUS YOUTH RESIST, RECLAIM AND RECONNECT

Cyndy BASKIN

## What do you need to know?

The role of colonization continues to negatively impact Indigenous Peoples today. Legislation and policies such as the Indian Act, residential schooling, harmful child welfare practices, and the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous Peoples has left a lasting legacy and resulted in historical trauma. Today there are three times as many Indigenous children in the child welfare system than there were in residential schools at their peak in the 1940s. The child welfare system has been criticized for placing more emphasis on the removal of Indigenous children from their families than on addressing the root causes that impact Indigenous Peoples' challenges in parenting, such as poverty.

## What did the researcher do?

This chapter reports on findings from four research projects conducted with Indigenous youth either experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in Toronto. The researcher utilized a variety of Indigenous research methods in each project, including the Medicine Wheel, the sharing circle, and arts-based methods. The first project worked with 30 youth aged 15-24 who discussed how and where they grew up, what led to their homelessness, what ser-

vices they received, and what suggestions they had for the prevention of youth homelessness. The second project focused on how homelessness affects food security with 21 Indigenous mothers aged 20-30, while the third explored the connection between poverty and homelessness with 12 Indigenous youth aged 20-30. The fourth project focused on 40 young mothers aged 18-30, 15 child welfare workers and 9 substance misuse treatment counsellors.

### WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?



This chapter raises awareness about the connections between the ongoing homelessness crisis within the Indigenous population in Toronto and the past and present involvement of youth within the child welfare system. Results from four separate research projects on youth and homelessness are highlighted, particularly regarding the circumstances under which youth left their homes, the impact of historical trauma from the residential school and child welfare systems, food security, poverty, and mothering under the watch of child welfare. Suggestions for what can be done to help Indigenous youth today are provided, as well as measures that can prevent homelessness from occurring in the future.

### ARTICLE SOURCE

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# What did the researcher find?

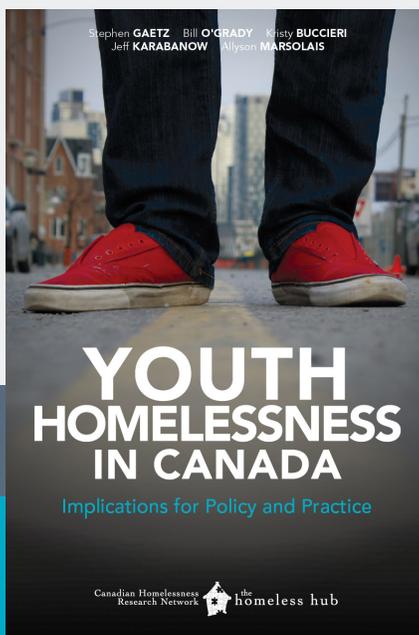
Two clear themes emerged from the four research projects: most of the participants did not grow up with their biological parents, and their grandparents and parents had had involvement with residential schooling and/or the child welfare system. Youth connected their present or recent homelessness to their personal experiences of childhood trauma, as well as a community struggling with the ongoing effects of colonization. Three categories emerged from the youth's suggestions on how to make the child welfare system more helpful to Indigenous communities. First, youth discussed the need to keep families intact and to accept alternative forms of family. This meant having children live with extended family members when it was not possible to live with their biological parents, keeping siblings together, and not being taken away from their Indigenous communities. Second, youth expressed the need to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and Indigenous social workers into the child welfare system. Youth outlined the need for more Indigenous foster families, or for non-Indigenous foster families to keep them connected to their cultures so they are not stripped of their identities. Non-Indigenous workers should also be trained so that they are sensitive to the issues affecting Indigenous communities, as well as their strengths and beliefs. In addition, having Indigenous family service agencies do the work is an empowering idea, but only if they are not forced to use the same legislation as mainstream agencies. Finally, youth expressed the need to address the effects of colonization, and for a broader understanding of the inequalities of racism, classism and sexism.

“Youth connected their present or recent homelessness to their personal experiences of childhood trauma...”

## What can we do with this research?

This research calls attention to the need for strategies aimed at preventing homelessness among Indigenous youth, particularly those who have come into contact with the child welfare system. More effort is needed to prevent Indigenous children from being removed from their families by child protection and from fleeing their adoptive and foster homes. This research can be used to advocate for three preventative strategies including keeping families together and accepting alternative forms of family,

incorporating Indigenous worldviews and social workers into the child welfare system, and addressing the effects of colonization on Indigenous families. This includes the creation of legislation and policies that are compatible with Indigenous cultures, and an understanding that part of the solution to the problems faced by some Indigenous parents involves restoring economic stability, healing from historical trauma, and returning the care of children to Indigenous communities rather than blaming individual families.



### About the researcher



CYNDY BASKIN is of Mi'kmaq and Irish descent, originally from NB, who has been living in Toronto for many years. She belongs to the Fish Clan and her traditional name translates into English as something like “The Woman Who Passes on the Teachings”. Her teaching and research interests involve working with Aboriginal communities – especially on how Aboriginal worldviews can inform social work education, Indigenous knowledges, spirituality in social work practice, anti-racist inclusive schooling, anti-oppressive theories and practices, and decolonizing research methodologies.

This free e-book is available at:

[www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessness](http://www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessness)