

Cultural Skills of Aboriginal Youth Aging Out



Centre for
Youth & Society  UVic

Cultural skills can address negative impacts of colonization and are part of optimal development for Aboriginal adults.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Aboriginal youth aging out of foster care benefit from having both mainstream life skills and a skill set that is specific to their own culture.

KEY POINTS

- ❑ Aboriginal youth are overrepresented in the foster care system.
- ❑ Youth who have aged out of foster care are more likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, homeless, addicted, and to have mental health problems.
- ❑ Youth who have aged out often leave school before completing their secondary education and become parents at a young age.
- ❑ Most profound harms of historical, intergenerational and personal trauma are relational in nature and involve attachments.
- ❑ A high percentage of youth coming from child welfare services will need welfare support sometime during their adult lives.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- ❑ The overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in foster care is a direct and indirect consequence of colonization and the disruption of traditional ways of life.
- ❑ Residential schools and the “Sixties Scoop” (the widespread forced removal of aboriginal children from their homes to be placed in foster care or adoption) continue to impact Aboriginal youth today.
- ❑ Cultural vitality is linked to building a broad range of life skills in Aboriginal youth.
- ❑ It is important to create culturally appropriate programs to support the development of strong cultural identity and the reconnection and revitalization of culture among youth.

It is sometimes difficult to understand the foundational role of culture in relation to other survival needs especially for those who have not suffered the effects of cultural discontinuity.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- ❑ From an Indigenous perspective, culture, family, language and religion are fundamental to the individual's well-being.
- ❑ Culture has been identified and celebrated as a protective factor against the negative impacts of colonization.
- ❑ Spirituality is a cornerstone of the cultural beliefs of many Indigenous peoples. For example, engagement in daily prayer and ritual along with awareness of harmony and interconnectedness is a protective factor for foster care alumni.
- ❑ Cultural vitality is a significant variable in the well-being of Aboriginal people and it might be an important protective factor for Aboriginal youth.

This research was part of the Youth and Family Community Research Exchange, supported by the Victoria Foundation, UVic and the Centre for Youth & Society.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- ❑ When addressing the topic of culture in regard to Indigenous communities, it is important to stress the diversity of these cultures.
- ❑ Defining successful adulthood is cultural. Some Indigenous concepts include: soft-spoken manner and good listener; prominence of traditional tribal values; strong faith and spiritual belief system, family or tribal-centred values; assertive; healthy lifestyle.
- ❑ Interconnection with community and culture, the importance of spirituality and connection to a spiritual practice and navigational skills in relation to moving between two distinct cultures are known to be helpful for youth aging out.
- ❑ Indigenous community leadership is important in cultural skill development.
- ❑ Cultural involvement can be used as treatment and a factor of resilience and strength.

In addition to understanding the historical context, pain and struggle of Aboriginal people, it is equally important to acknowledge the power and strength of Indigenous communities and cultures to endure and survive despite these challenges.