Indigenous Connectedness as a Framework for Relational Healing within Alaska Native Child Welfare

Jessica Saniguq Ullrich

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2020

Reading Committee:

Maureen Marcenko, Chair

Tessa Evans-Campbell

William Vesneski

Angelique Day

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

School of Social Work

University of Washington

Abstract

Indigenous Connectedness as a Framework for Relational Healing

Within Alaska Native Child Welfare

Jessica Saniguq Ullrich

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Maureen Marcenko
School of Social Work

This study was embedded within the Alaska Native child welfare context to fill a gap in the literature that further theorized and made evident the key concepts and mechanisms of Indigenous child wellbeing. Twenty-five foster care alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents provided their perspectives and life experience of child wellbeing within ICWA preference placements. The use of directed content analysis and Indigenous storywork helped make meaning of the knowledge bearers' stories in comparison with an Indigenous Connectedness Framework. Results indicate that: 1) relational wounds and trauma must be acknowledged and addressed; 2) relational continuity is a crucial for wellbeing within child welfare, and 3) relational healing happens when children and adults *know who they are and where they come from*. This study is significant because it shifts the narrative, philosophy, values, beliefs and theory of child wellbeing within child welfare and influences how we live in right relationship with ourselves and others for the benefit of our sacred children.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am not the same person I was when I started the Doctoral Program at University of Washington. I have several people I would like to express heartfelt gratitude for helping me along this PhD journey. First, my beautiful daughters, Serenity and Raina, thank you for moving, changing schools and sacrificing time with your mom so that I could study and write, you are part of this dissertation. I would also like to thank my dear partner Jed who has weathered many storms with me and has always remained my solid rock. I'm so grateful we made it! I love you! Thank you for making this all possible! I would also like to express sincere thanks to my mother and father in-law, Becky and Larry. Thank you for opening your home to us when we transitioned to Washington, we were loud, took up space, messy, and demanding, thank you for all of your love and patience with us. I would also like to thank my entire family and closest friends for being a listening ear, providing me with guidance and being a huge support to my daughters and partner. Your love and care for us made this possible. I would also like to thank my mom, who is in the spirit world, for giving me this life, loving me and always doing the best she could. I have felt her presence with me throughout.

I have a lot of families out there that we've created over the years. To my Child Welfare Academy family, thank you for carrying the load while I took time off to write my dissertation. Thank you to the Indigenous Wellness Research Institute and Indigenous scholar family!!! You tucked me under your wing and held on when I was about to quit, thank you for helping me persevere. Thank you to my Minority Fellowship Program, Alaska Tribal/State child welfare, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Nome Eskimo Community, University of Alaska School of Social Work, First Alaskans Institute, Native Child Research Exchange, White Raven Center, Alaska Native Collaborative Hub on Resilience Research and Kingikmiut Dancers and Singers of

Anchorage/Wales families. All of you provided me with comfort, healing, hope, knowledge, fire, inspiration and friendship in a way that anchored me whenever I felt alone and adrift in academia.

I would also like to thank my community- the Alaska Center for Resource Families, Facing Foster Care in Alaska and all 25 knowledge bearers of this research study, quyana taikuutani for being with me throughout this journey. I've said to so many people that you're the ones that are actually giving me this PhD, not the university. I wouldn't have been able to complete the program without your guidance and help on this research project. I pray that I do your stories justice as we share the knowledge you gifted. I truly believe this knowledge you shared is going to make a difference in children's lives. Thank you so much for entrusting me with the wisdom you shared.

I would also like to thank my supervisory committee chair, Maureen Marcenko, for helping me understand how to do research in a good way. I appreciate the weekly phone calls, feedback, letters of recommendation and references you provided on numerous occasions. My success wouldn't have been possible without you! My supervisory committee has been an incredible source of support.

Lastly, I must thank mother Earth, the ocean, the sky, the animals, the plants, the water, the fire, the rocks, the land. I reconnected to her whenever my brain was on overload or my spirit hurt. I felt her healing energy and support as I walked along the paths of beauty. I'm so grateful for the life we get to live and the lessons learned. I love life, and I hope the generations coming long after I'm gone enjoy this wondrous place as much as we have.

DEDICATION

This dissertation was written with love for *all* of our sacred children. May the words and stories within this text contribute to personal and societal shifts that keep you safe within our protective circle.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Years ago, I sat alone at a foster parent recruitment booth at the World Eskimo Indian Olympics as an Alaska Native child protection worker. People would walk up with an interested and curious disposition, then see what the booth was about, give me a baffled look and quickly walk towards another booth. After a couple hours of this repeated interaction, an artist at a neighboring booth called me over. He had arranged carved musk ox in a circle with their sharp horns facing outward and in the center were smaller musk ox. The artist asked if I knew about musk ox. I politely said, "no" with the hopes that he would explain what this display meant. The artist said musk ox create this formation to protect their young from outside predators. He explained to me that this is the way our people have taken care of children in the past and this is what we need to get back to. This story of the musk ox left me with a lot to think about. I wanted to know what weakened the circle, how to strengthen it again and who's responsibility it was to be in the formation.

Indigenous stories are embedded with theory that provide guidance on ways to live and survive (Brayboy, 2005). In this dissertation, I listened to the stories of 25 Alaska Native alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents who answered my questions about child wellbeing. I hypothesized that child wellbeing was similar to the way connectedness was conceptualized by the People Awakening Team in southwest Alaska as "the interrelated welfare of the individual, one's family, one's community and the natural environment" (N.V. Mohatt et al., 2011, p. 444). I sought to 'test' and build upon an Indigenous Connectedness Framework I developed that was based on Indigenous wellbeing literature (Ullrich, 2019). I asked knowledge bearers questions

about family, community, environment, ancestors/future generations and spirituality as they pertained to child wellbeing.

I was motivated to speak with knowledge bearers from the Alaska child welfare system because when I began drafting a research proposal for this dissertation, a US District Court Judge found the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA, P.L. 95-608) to be unconstitutional (Brackeen v. Zinke, 2018). When I read the case decision, Judge Reed O'Connor said that the ICWA preference placement provisions, "burden more children than necessary to accomplish the goal of ensuring children remain with their tribes" (Brackeen v. Zinke, 2018, p. 29). This 'burden' seemed contrary to what I was learning about connectedness and child wellbeing. I was curious to see what knowledge bearers from the standpoint of ICWA preference placements had to teach us about child wellbeing.

This study was embedded within the child welfare context to fill a gap in the literature that 1) further theorized and made evident the key concepts and mechanisms of Indigenous child wellbeing that could reduce the need for child welfare intervention 2) centered Indigenous methodology and epistemology to make meaning of an Indigenous connectedness framework that could help Alaska Native children, families and communities on their healing journey. This study is significant because if this research shifts the narrative, philosophy, values, beliefs and theory of child wellbeing it could influence how we live and how we are in relationship with each other for the benefit of our children and the collective.

History of the Present, Past and Future

Alaska Native children are removed by the Alaska child protection system at consistently high rates. The most recent data indicates 2,085 Alaska Native children *are currently in out-of-home care* (Office of Children's Services, 2020). Available statewide data indicates that AN/AI

children are placed with relatives approximately 50% of the time (Tribal State Collaboration Group Data, 2018). Over the past decade, Alaska Native children have represented 55-65% of all the children in out-of-home care even though Alaska Native people comprise approximately 19% of the state population (Office of Children's Services, 2020; Alaska Department of Labor, 2018). The number of removed Alaska Native children has remained consistently high despite the increased knowledge of historical trauma, trauma informed care, family protective factors, adverse childhood experiences and anti-racism work (Child Welfare Academy, 2020; Office of Children's Services, 2020).

Figure 1. Cycle of Child and Collective Trauma

Many studies have shown that Alaska Native and American Indian (AN/AI) child removal has been traumatic to children and the AN/AI collective (Brave Heart, 2011; Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006; Evans-Campbell, 2008). A cycle of trauma could be perpetuating Alaska Native child removal (Figure 1). This trauma cycle began with massive group traumas such as boarding school child removals, health epidemics and loss of land rights, which lead to trauma responses, unhealthy coping and child protection removals of children (Brave Heart, 2011). The child welfare intervention of child removal from families, communities and tribes

could be contributing to an ongoing cycle of trauma that is still happening today and needs to stop. More research is needed to help people strategize ways to break the cycle of child and collective trauma.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was passed in an attempt to break the cycle of AN/AI child removal. States are mandated to provide tribes with notice of child welfare involvement with an Indian family, invite tribes to intervene and outlines how tribes can assume jurisdiction of child protection proceedings (ICWA, P.L. 95-608). Additional components of ICWA are for state agencies to provide active efforts to prevent the break-up of an Indian family, reunify a family and if a child has to be removed then the state needs to keep children with extended family, a tribally approved foster home, an Indian foster home or a tribally approved institution (ICWA, P.L. 95-608). If the child is not able to return to their parents then the adoptive placement preferences are with extended family, a tribal member or any AN/AI family (ICWA, P.L. 95-608). The hope is to keep children connected to their culture, community, family, lands, and tribal nations (Haight et al., 2019; National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2015). It is concerning that AN/AI children continue to be disproportionately removed from their homes and that numerous court cases have challenged the main tenets of ICWA (Newman & Fort, 2017). The decision by Judge O'Connor highlights the need for child welfare professionals and judges to understand what promotes Indigenous child wellbeing so that decisions are truly made on behalf of the best interest of the AN/AI child.

History is not the past alone. History is like the symbol of the ellipsis that is intertwined with the past and the future. To know our history, is to know the past, present and future, which is why history is power (Smith, 1999). When we review the data of AN/AI child removal in Alaska, we understand the history and can see that reliance on ICWA is not enough. We have to

remember that the real power lies within us. The primary intention is to provide AN/AI and Indigenous people with ideas and guidance from the knowledge bearers on what we can do to improve outcomes for our sacred children not just within child welfare, but in all areas of life moving forward.

Ginwright (2018) wrote about *healing centered engagement* as a process that changes the question from 'what's wrong with you?' to 'what's right with you?' (para. 12). Alaska Native and Indigenous people are beautifully strong, mindful and relational (Kawagley, 2006). The majority of Alaska Native children are safe and well taken care of in their own homes and communities. Tuck (2009) speaks to the need to disengage from damage-based research that always places Indigenous people in a category of disparity because this could become an inadequate theory of change (Tuck, 2009). Changing the narrative through healing centered engagement shows us what to build, embrace and recognize as our already present strengths instead of what we need to resist, avoid and not do.

This dissertation focused on what promoted child wellbeing as an attempt to bring forward the wisdom that was already present within our collective knowledge and spirit. The identification of concepts and mechanisms of wellness could lead to strategies that assist our Indigenous brothers, sisters, parents, sons, daughters, grandchildren, grandparents, cousins and community maintain wellbeing so that we raise healthy children, liberate ourselves and get organized. As Ginwright (2018) stated, "Healing centered engagement is explicitly political, rather than clinical" (para. 13). The history of Indigenous health, wellness, and recovery was, will be and is one of our greatest strengths and forces for positive change.

Theoretical Framework

An Indigenous Connectedness Framework was initially developed through a literature review that focused on the concepts and mechanisms of Indigenous child wellbeing and will be covered in more detail in Chapter 2. After the Indigenous wellbeing literature was analyzed, the concepts of intergenerational and spiritual connectedness were added to the framework. This Indigenous Connectedness Framework has actions and processes that identify what has helped children develop connectedness with family, community, the environment, ancestors/future generations, and spirit (Figure 2). Some of the actions that promoted connectedness included art, humor, stories, sharing, naming, subsistence and language. When a child is well, this Indigenous Connectedness Framework asserts that the collective wellbeing is also enhanced. This framework highlights how important Indigenous children are to generations of family, community and the earth (Ullrich, 2019) and guides the specific aims of this study.

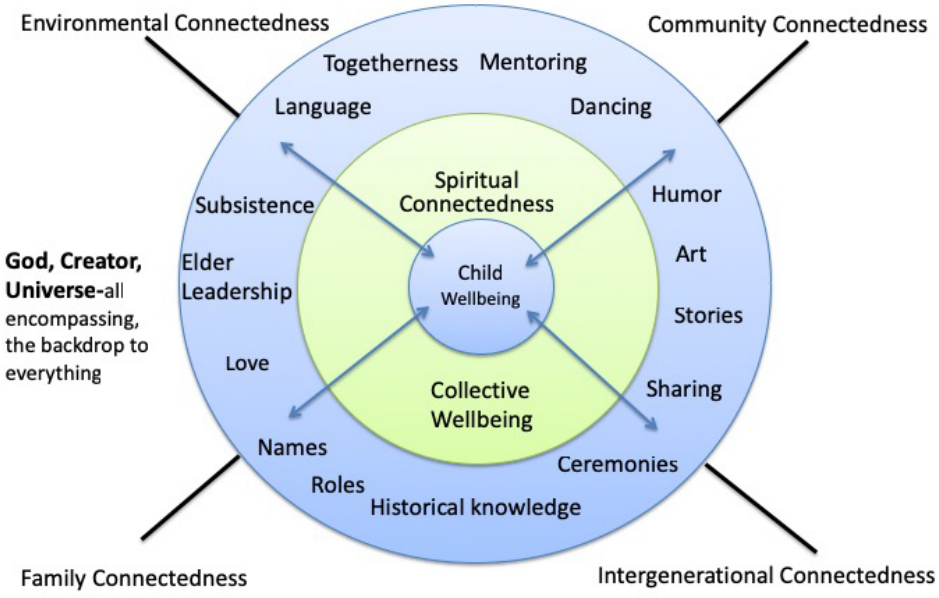

Figure 2. Indigenous Connectedness Framework

Specific Aims

Aim 1: Identify and compare Alaska Native foster care alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents' concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing with the Indigenous Connectedness Framework.

Aim 2: Describe how child wellbeing was promoted or impeded within Alaska child welfare and Alaska Native relative and foster home placements.

The first aim of this study continued theory development of the Indigenous Connectedness Framework by exploring how knowledge bearers conceptualized child wellbeing and compared their responses to 5 hypothesized concepts and relationships in the Indigenous Connectedness Framework: 1) family, 2) community, 3) intergenerational, 4) spiritual and 5) environmental connectedness. It was hypothesized that knowledge bearers would have similar concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing as outlined by the Indigenous Connectedness Framework and would provide more descriptive details that could fill any potential gaps in the framework. Understanding the mechanisms of connectedness and child wellbeing could explain how relationships are developed and maintained for the benefit of the child.

The second aim was to solicit and describe how child wellbeing was promoted or impeded within Alaska child welfare or Alaska Native relative/foster parent placements. Speaking to Alaska Native alumni, relatives and foster parents was intentional because the hope was to compare child wellbeing and Indigenous connectedness to the intention of ICWA preference placements. It was hypothesized that the Indigenous Connectedness Framework could inform what the benefits of ICWA preference placements are for child wellbeing. This information could provide guidance to child welfare parties that are tasked with making decisions on the behalf of the best interests of an AN/AI child.

The explanatory concepts and mechanisms of Indigenous child wellbeing are understudied. The conceptual framework of child wellbeing within child welfare may need to be examined and expanded upon to improve outcomes for Alaska Native children. These aims focus on Alaska Native perspectives because very few child welfare research studies have involved this population. This transformative qualitative study utilized directed content analysis and Indigenous storying to further theorize key elements of Alaska Native child wellbeing. The aims of this study go beyond the individual child and include an examination of relative and tribal foster parent's perspectives. The Indigenous Connectedness Framework could provide guidance on ways to better intervene or prevent child welfare involvement because it could shed light on what works for children, families and communities so that children are no longer maltreated or removed. This research is also necessary because it could shed light on the purpose of the Indian Child Welfare Act and deepen child welfare legal party's understanding of what is in the best interest of the child from an Indigenous standpoint.

Alaska Native Child Welfare Context

Knowledge bearers that were recruited for this study could be from any Alaska Native region, tribe or ethnic/cultural group in Alaska who have been involved in a state child welfare case. In Alaska, 20 different Alaska Native languages are spoken representing 11 diverse Alaska Native ethnic groups: Athabascan, Yup'ik, Cup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Unangax/Aleut, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2011). Many cultures and histories are represented within each Alaska Native ethnic group (Alaska Federation of Natives, 2020). Alaska has the highest proportion of AN/AI people in the state than all other states (National Congress of American Indian, 2019). Approximately 32% of Alaska's population live in 150 communities in rural Alaska (Rural Health Information Hub,

2018) and approximately 75% or more of the rural population are Alaska Native (Goldsmith, 2008). Most rural communities are only accessible by boat or plane, which makes travel challenging and expensive. The highest number of Alaska Native people live in urban areas of Alaska (Alaska Department of Labor, 2018). Anchorage is the largest urban community in Alaska and has the largest population of Alaska Native people with over 39,000 Alaska Native people living there in 2018 (Alaska Department of Labor, 2018). Figure 3 shows a size comparison of Alaska to the contiguous 48 states (Goldsmith, 2008). This context of Alaska shows how large, complex and unique this setting is.

Figure 3. Alaska in Size

Alaska has a complex legal setting for child protection procedures because of the socio-political-environmental context of tribes. Alaska has 229 federally recognized tribes, which means approximately 40% of the 573 federally recognized tribes are in Alaska (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). Alaska tribes were able to obtain federal recognition through the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and a list of federally recognized tribes in Alaska was first published in 1993 (Ford & Rude, 1999). The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, "implicitly extinguished the tribe's dependent Indian community status" and

created 13 regional for-profit corporations (Kendall-Miller, 2004, p. 469). All Alaska tribes lost their status as Indian Country or reservation status, except for one tribe, Metlakatla, which opted out of ANCSA (Kendall-Miller, 2004). Many regional corporations have non-profit tribal organizations that compact with tribes to provide child welfare services. The BIA federal registry has listed the tribal contact and the tribal non-profit contact where tribal compacts have occurred.

Congress can delegate authority to tribes to have exclusive jurisdiction without regard for reservation status and Barrow and Chevak have been approved for retaining the right of tribal exclusive jurisdiction over ICWA matters (Kendall-Miller, 2004). The remaining 226 federally recognized tribes and the State of Alaska have concurrent jurisdiction over ICWA cases (Kendall-Miller, 2004). This issue of tribal sovereignty in Alaska has been at the heart of many legal cases involving questions of legal jurisdiction in child custody proceedings. The courts have clarified through Public Law 280 that tribes still have sovereignty rights even though they have concurrent jurisdiction with the State of Alaska and that tribes don't have to receive permission from the State of Alaska to assume jurisdiction (Native Village IRA Council v. State of Alaska, 1991; State of Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana, Nulato Village, Village of Kalskag, Akiak Native Community, Village of Lower Kalskag and Kenaitze Indian Tribe, 2011).

This context of Alaska Native child welfare is explained in more detail because many people still don't know how to respond to the question about tribal affiliation. People will know that they are Alaska Native, they might know if they are a shareholder of a corporation and that they have a Certificate Degree of Indian Blood card but might give a blank stare when they are asked what tribe they are a member of. Tribes are a more recently introduced concept in Alaska with the first list of federally recognized tribes in Alaska being published 37 years ago. I created a tribal identification guide for child protection workers so that they could navigate the different

responses they might receive to the question about tribal affiliation. The hope was that tribes would get identified sooner and invited to participate and intervene earlier on in cases rather than child protection workers believing that a regional corporation was the same thing as a tribe. To protect knowledge bearers' identities, I asked about tribal affiliation, but share what region they were from so that they remained somewhat anonymous.

Alaska Native and Indigenous

Alaska Native and Indigenous people, cultures and tribes are incredibly diverse. While knowledge bearers were asked to self-identify as Alaska Native as part of the selection criteria, it was difficult to draw out conclusions that are generalizable to Alaska Native people only. I believe the term 'Alaska Native' is similar to political use of the term 'Indigenous' where it is broad in context and unique at the same time. This is why the framework presented in this study continued to be called the Indigenous Connectedness Framework. This terminology keeps the framework broader than what a specific tribal community's connectedness framework might look like, which is a limitation of the study, but it is unique enough that the implications of this study could benefit not just Alaska Native children, but Indigenous children in other parts of the world who have a shared history of child removal and colonization.

ICWA Research Literature

Prior to the start of this study, I looked for research articles that pertained to the Indian Child Welfare Act. What I found was a huge variation in the purpose of the ICWA research. Many examined ICWA compliance issues (Barth et al., 2002; Cross et al., 2013; Cross, 2006; Lidot et al., 2012; Limb & Brown, 2008; Limb et al., 2004), several looked at ways to improve child welfare practices with AN/AI families (Bussey & Lucero, 2013; Cross et al., 2010; Cross & Day, 2008; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2014; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Halverson et al., 2002; Hand,

2005; Kessel & Robbins, 1984; Leake et al., 2012; Limb et al., 2008; Lucero & Bussey, 2012; Lucero & Leake, 2016; Mindell et al., 2003), some examined the effectiveness of ICWA (MacEachron et al., 1996) and additional studies spoke in depth about the need for ICWA given the history of child removal, disproportionality or lack of trust between tribes and state (Barnes et al., 2019; Cross & Blackstock, 2012; Johnson, 1981; Mannes, 1995; Morrison, 2010; Quash-Mah et al., 2010).

I was particularly drawn to studies that engaged in research that included knowledge bearers with similar standpoints in this study or research that resulted in a theoretical or conceptual framework with implications for Indian child welfare. Halverson et al. (2002) conducted a study that involved interviews with 9 American Indian relatives/foster parents. The findings included a desire to teach children the culture, a concept of relatedness that addressed the need for child welfare to be a shared responsibility and that child removal is a 'hurt' that needed to be healed (Halverson et al., 2002).

Lucero & Leake (2016) conducted a qualitative study that involved interviews with tribal child welfare workers. One of the results was the development of a tribal child welfare practice framework that had cultural values as the foundation that shaped practice intentions and specialized practice skills that centralized Native child safety and wellbeing (Lucero & Leake, 2016). This study also provided a cultural definition of Native child wellbeing. This definition emphasized the importance of children being

> a) nurtured and protected by family, kinship network, and community; b) knowing and interacting with members of the kinship network; c) feeling a sense of belonging to, and being recognized by the tribal community; d) learning and

> participating in tribal culture; and e) developing an AI/AN and tribal identity (Lucero & Leake, 2016, p. 336).

The results of this research study seemed aligned with what I am trying to explain and capture within the Indigenous Connectedness Framework.

Limb et al. (2008) utilized the Relational Worldview developed by Cross to provide guidance to child welfare workers on the beliefs, values and practices of AN/AI families. The relational worldview of wellness is based on the medicine wheel and has the following components: mind, body, spirit and context (Limb et al., 2008). The use of the relational worldview in child welfare demonstrates the need to address all four areas when working with Native American families and that workers should be aware of contrasting values between Indigenous people and mainstream America (Limb et al., 2008). The hope was to increase AN/AI cultural competence within child welfare workers so that AN/AI outcomes could improve. The Indigenous Connectedness Framework has several overlapping wellbeing concepts as the relational worldview model.

In a study by Morrison et al. (2010), they interviewed a Wabanaki culture teacher, storyteller and youth worker that shared his story of Wabanaki social structure, the importance of language and concepts of adoption. The findings discussed the importance of belongingness, culture, community, identity, responsibility, and an extended sense of family that provided for children's safety (Morrison et al., 2010). The storyteller in this research study said, "when children are removed in these situations, the whole community is hurt" (Morrison et al., 2010, p. 115). This study also has similar concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing to the Indigenous Connectedness Framework and also draws attention to children being linked to a collective.

The review of the ICWA literature showed where I had similar intentions and aims as other research projects and it also became clearer how this dissertation research was different and contributed to the growing literature surrounding Indigenous child wellbeing. I did not find any other research projects that included interviews with foster care alumni, relatives and foster parents as knowledge bearers. Relatively few articles had conceptual frameworks that were created as a result of the research. This study is less focused on ICWA compliance, and more about understanding the underlying philosophy of child wellbeing that the Indian Child Welfare Act relies upon.

CHAPTER 2: The Indigenous Connectedness Framework

Indigenous child wellbeing is the focus of this study for significant reasons. Children have a special status in Indigenous families and communities. Many tribes view children as gifts from the creator with a sacred purpose (Cajete, 2000; Day, 2016; Red Horse, 1997). Children are the "future keepers and practitioners of sacred knowledge" (Kawagley, 2002, p. 298) and the "bringers of light and good fortune to the community" (Cajete, 2000, p. 96). Children change and create people's roles in communities. With a birth of a child, you also have the birth of a mother and a father. These roles and relationships are important because they influence the identity and development of a collective. The continued existence of families, tribes and communities relies on the presence of children (Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978). Setting an intention of raising healthy children is strategic because they will become healthy families, communities and just societies (Powers & Faden, 2006).

This dissertation is guided by a conceptual framework that was developed through a literature review process of Indigenous wellbeing literature. The research questions that guided the initial literature search were: 1) How is Indigenous child wellbeing conceptualized and how does it align with the People Awakening Team's description of connectedness in terms of the interrelated welfare of a person, a family, a community and environment? 2) What are key mechanisms for connectedness and Indigenous child wellbeing? My hypothesis was that Indigenous child wellbeing would be conceptualized in a way that was similar to an ecological framework of child, family/kinship, community, land/place connectedness and the wellbeing mechanisms would consist of activities that nurture the mind, body, spirit and context within the Relational Worldview Model (Cross, 2011).

Literature as Data

To narrow the scope, only literature pertaining to Indigenous populations from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand were included because of the shared history of boarding schools and colonial oppression that have affected generations of children. The University of Washington library and University of Alaska Anchorage consortium library databases, as well as Google Scholar were used to identify literature with the following combinations of search terms: Indigenous, American Indian, Alaska Native or Aboriginal AND wellbeing, wellness, resilience, child wellbeing, or connectedness. The literary works that were selected for review had theoretical or conceptual reference to Indigenous wellbeing, Indigenous child wellbeing, or connectedness to family, community or environment. The literature review became an iterative process where selected articles provided references that were subsequently searched, selected and reviewed. Another key piece to gathering literature was through consultation with fellow scholars, community members and research committee members. The initial search resulted in a collection of approximately 20 articles, and expanded to over 65 books, articles and dissertations for analysis. Only works that were guided by Indigenous epistemology and worldviews were included in the review process.

Analytical Approach

Conceptual analysis is a theoretical study of literature that involves an examination of core concepts, constructs and variables, and includes critical thinking surrounding the relationships and interactions that help us understand the "content of our linguistic expressions" (Petocz & Newberry, 2010, p. 126). Conceptual analysis was used to assist with the identification of common Indigenous child wellbeing concepts and as an inquiry of the mechanisms that promote the connectedness of those concepts. A Microsoft Word table was

organized by the creation of conceptual connectedness sections that tracked full references, depicted how that article applied to Indigenous wellbeing or connectedness concepts, and highlighted the theory, worldview, framework, and mechanisms that were discussed.

Results

Visual Indigenous wellbeing models were found in the literature that provided a useful comparison guide for the identification of common Indigenous wellbeing concepts. Eight conceptual models were selected for further analysis because they met the following criteria: 1) developed by and for Indigenous people, 2) focused on wellbeing, and 3) included multidimensional constructs that are dynamically connected. Table 1 was created for the examination of Indigenous wellbeing concepts presented in the 8 selected models.

Table 1

Conceptual Model Analysis of Indigenous Wellbeing

Wellbeing Concepts	Absolon (2010) Indigenous Wholistic Theory	Blackstock (2011) Breath of Life Theory	Cross et al. (2011) Relational Worldview	Hazel & Mohatt (2001) AK Native Worldview	Kawagley (2006) Yupiaq Worldview	Mark & Lyons (2010) Conceptual Model of Maori Health and Illness	McGregor et al. (2003) Ecological Model of Hawaiian Wellbeing	Priest et al. (2012) Socioecological Model of Child Wellbeing
Individual	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Environment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Intergenerational	X	X				X		X
Spirit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Culture	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Child focus								X
Collective	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

While all of the Indigenous wellbeing models addressed the importance of human connection with family, community and environment, the term connectedness was not always utilized to describe this relationship, yet the underlying concepts and mechanisms of wellbeing were similar. When authors discussed the promotion of an individual's wellbeing, it was often in the context of balance and wellness of a person's mind, body, and spirit in relation to the broader environment. Child wellbeing was the focus of only one model, underscoring the need for the conceptual work of this paper.

All of the authors included discussion of spirit, spirituality and culture as an important element of wellbeing. Four models referenced connection to their ancestors or the Indigenous concept of responsibility to the next seven generations as an important factor for wellbeing (Blackstock, 2011), although another four did not include this dimension. All of the models conceptualized wellbeing in wholistic, collective, or interconnected ways. Building on and expanding on this work, the very foundation of the Indigenous Connectedness Framework is the concept of *connectedness*. From this analysis of Indigenous wellbeing models, it was determined that spiritual connectedness and intergenerational connectedness needed to be included as pillars within the Indigenous Connectedness Framework. This decision to include spiritual and intergenerational connectedness was made because they have been cited as crucial domains for Indigenous wellbeing and are often missing from western theories and conceptual frameworks.

The subsequent findings presented here involve a conceptual analysis of intergenerational, family, community, environmental and spiritual connectedness and highlights the mechanisms that foster connectedness. A visual Indigenous Connectedness Framework is then presented, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the application of an Indigenous Connectedness Framework within the child welfare system in the United States.

Intergenerational Connectedness

Intergenerational connectedness has an embeddedness in a continuous history. Many kinship practices teach children how they are connected to their ancestors and future generations (Absolon, 2010; Blackstock, 2011; McCubbin et al., 2013). Naming practices, knowledge of ancient songs, and spoken Indigenous languages are examples of historical practices that link children to past and future. Senungetuk (2017) stated, "Practicing the ways of the ancestors in the time of the present, ensures that the ancestors of the future will maintain their sense of interconnectedness with Inupiaq ways of being" (p. 237). This relationship with the past and future creates an awareness of responsibility to do the best we can, not just for ourselves, but for all that we are connected to.

History is about power (Smith, 1999). Many Indigenous groups have been marginalized by colonial history (Smith, 1999). Children need to know the truth of why things are the way they are today by learning about their history from an Indigenous perspective (Wexler, 2009). Knowledge of family and community history can help youth understand where they fit in this web of cultural disruption and repair (Fryberg et al., 2013). Indigenous youth need to know about the historical colonial traumas of war, child removal, epidemics, relocation, assimilation policies and corporate harms to the earth that aren't just a thing of the past, but are still happening today (Wexler, 2009). This understanding of history can shift the gaze off the struggle of individuals to the need for a community level response (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2014; Schultz, Cattaneo, et al., 2016; Wexler, 2009). Knowledge of the truth can help move past energies of anger and fear to love and determination. This is why changing the narrative is vitally important. Youth need to be taught about their communal strength and resilience and that there is a reason they are here today.

Intergenerational connectedness is developed through an awareness of a continuous history, an ability to speak the language of the ancestors, and generational knowledge of the land. Children that have intergenerational connectedness will have a grounded identity, guidance on how to live a good life based on generations of experience and will lead to the passage of knowledge for the children to come. Intergenerational connectedness leads to an awareness that we are not alone in this universe.

Family Connectedness

A family unit can be a biological and/or spiritual relationship between 2 or more people (Red Horse, 1997). The familial relationship is established through blood, clans, adoption, namesakes, marriage, friendship and community (Absolon, 2010; Day, 2016; Kawagley, 2006; Kral et al., 2011; Red Horse, 1997). Indigenous families share a nurturing bond and mutual interdependence that extends beyond the nuclear family (Hand, 2005; Lucero & Bussey, 2016; Kral, et al., 2011). Being part of a family assigns certain responsibilities to persons based on role, generational standing, and cultural values (Hand, 2005; Red Horse, 1997). “Every age cohort is accorded respect because each fulfills critical functions in the community” (Red Horse, 1997, p. 245). In many Indigenous communities, all Elders are referred to as grandparents, all youth are brothers, sisters and cousins, all non-parental adults are aunties and uncles, and everyone is responsible for the care and safety of the children (BigFoot & Schmidt, 2010).

Families are essential to child wellbeing. The family structure provides the foundation for a child’s cultural identity as well as a conduit for passing on values, beliefs and family traditions and practices (Hand, 2005; Martin & Yurkovich, 2014). Children are socialized through their relationships with family members (Martin & Yurkovich, 2014). Grandparents provide an invaluable role of telling stories to children, which pass on tribal knowledge and values (Robbins

et al., 2005). Cajete (2000) stated, “Adult members of a child’s extended family, clan and tribe actively undertook parenting. All adults were considered teachers and any adult could guide, discipline or otherwise place a direct role in educating a child” (p. 96). Some of the tribal values that are taught by family members through stories and modeling include: love and respect for nature, respect, showing appreciation, courage, unselfishness, hard work, balance and spirituality (Robbins et al., 2005).

The mechanisms of family connectedness are developed in several ways. In one study, healthy families were “close-knit,” spent time together, helped each other, and provided a sense of belonging (Martin & Yurkovich, 2014). Another study found that family connectedness and wellbeing was promoted through good communication between family members, visits, going on the land together, sharing food, and participation in many family activities (Kral, et al., 2011). Another mechanism that promotes family connectedness are naming ceremonies because they help children maintain connections to their ancestors, relatives and link families together whether they are blood related or not (Craig, 1996; Kawagley, 2006). Overall, the Indigenous concept of family connectedness is much more broad and expansive than what many western social service policies and institutions recognize.

Community Connectedness

The concept of community has been described as a social group that is based on location and/or social relationships and provide a sense of belonging to a collective (Cajete, 2000; Goodman et al., 2014; Hill, 2006; McGregor et al., 2003; Roffey, 2011; Schultz, Cattaneo, et al., 2016; Senungetuk, 2017). Communities shape both individual and collective identities (Hill, 2006; Kirmayer et al., 2003; Priest et al., 2012). Communities have a common history that support relatedness (Haakanson Jr., 2002). Most people are members of multiple communities

(Goodman et al., 2014). For example, a child might belong to a tribal community, a school, a neighborhood, an athletic team or a LGBTQ community. Relationships grow within families and communities.

Cajete (2000) states, “Relationship is the cornerstone of tribal community, and the nature and expression of community is the foundation of tribal identity. Through community Indian people come to understand ‘personhood' and their connection to the ‘communal soul’ of their people” (p. 86). Corntassel (2012) describes personhood as the “interlocking features of language, homeland, ceremonial cycles, and sacred living histories” (Corntassel, 2012, p. 89). These same elements of personhood have been described as core elements of sovereign nations (McGregor et al., 2003). Individual and community identities overlap, and communities provide the foundation for sovereign nations to thrive.

Community connectedness is the foundation of many Indigenous social structures (Schultz, Cattaneo, et al., 2016). Communities instill cultural values surrounding responsibility and accountability (Roffey, 2011). The rules and social norms are developed by community (McGregor et al., 2003; Schultz, Cattaneo, et al., 2016). Healthy communities provide a support system and safety net (Finlay et al., 2010; Lafromboise et al., 2006). Many community organizations facilitate community connectedness for children (Priest et al., 2012). When families are unable to give children guidance and support then the community steps in because everyone has a part in uplifting the health and wellbeing of children (Lafromboise et al., 2006). Lucero & Bussey (2016) state children that “continue living in their tribal community are often able to retain their family, kinship, clan, community and cultural bonds” (p. 116). Each member of a community has a role and gift to share that ensures each person’s needs are met (Campbell, 2002). Prior to western education systems, youth were connected with community members

through apprenticeships that fostered their natural gifts and specialties (R. Atuk, personal communication, December 18, 2017; Ongtoogook, 2000). Children belong to families and communities and affect the wellbeing of both.

Several activities and common cultural practices support children's community connectedness. Communities host celebrations, ceremonies, and gatherings (Mayo, 2002). Subsistence activities often bring communities together through ceremonial processes and sharing (Noongwook, 2002). The ability to speak tribal languages support a sense of belonging within a community (Corntassel, 2012). The creation of a sense of belonging is important for children because it teaches the interdependence and interrelatedness of everything (Hill, 2006). This awareness is what shapes choices, behavior, and breaks down a barrier of false separation.

Evans-Campbell (2008) and Schultz, Walters, et al. (2016) stress the importance of expanding our health and wellness interventions to include a person's family and community. The western ontologies focus too much on the individual. McGregor et al., (2003) stated, "What happens to an individual affects the family. This in turn, affects the community, and vice versa. Thus cohesive, healthy, functional families generally produce healthy individuals, who ultimately contribute to healthy communities" (p. 110). Community connectedness breaks down individualism.

Environmental Connectedness

The environment was conceptualized as both a natural setting of land and water, and a socially determined sense of place (Kemp, 2011; McMahon et al., 2007). One place can have several names that represent the "voice of the land" with exact descriptions and instructions on how to relate with that landscape (Anungazuk, 2007, p. 190). Herbert O. Anungazuk (2007) from Wales, Alaska said, "We have an alliance with the earth. Each one of us does, and some of us as

a people have continued to grasp this alliance and have anchored it into our hearts, our minds, and souls" (p. 189). The alliance that Mr. Anungazuk speaks of recognizes how the earth provides the means for our survival through food, air, water and shelter. Bang et al. (2014) make note of the Indigenous worldview of land: "The land is, therefore we are," rather than a western worldview that would state, "I am, therefore place is" (p. 9). This relational difference is very significant because the land is not seen as a separate other.

For Indigenous Peoples, the land is inseparable from the concept of being and includes a physical and spiritual bond for the sustenance of life (Brown et al., 2012; Kawagley, 2006; McGregor et al., 2003). Even when tribal people move to urban settings, they carry their connection to ancestral lands and ways of knowing with them (Senungetuk, 2017). In Alaska, the name of the land is within many tribal people's collective names, which demonstrates the way land is at the core of Indigenous identity. The environment provides a foundation for human identity.

Indigenous connectedness to land was key to health and wellbeing (Mark & Lyons, 2010; Gran-O'Donnell, 2016). Indigenous ways of life, language, culture, and identity were constructed and learned through relationship with the land (Bang et al., 2014; Cajete, 2000; Goodkind et al., 2015; Kawagley, 2006). Walters et al. (2011) stated:

> The earth (or land) is both literally and figuratively the first and final teacher in our understanding of our world, communities, families, selves and bodies. With such understanding it can be argued that as the land or relationship to land is impacted- physically or metaphorically- so are bodies, minds, and spirits. (p. 167)

This connectedness to the land follows an ecospiritual perspective that derives from Indigenous knowledge of the environment and spirituality (Coates et al., 2006). Cajete states, "The Native

view of the landscape is a metaphoric map of place that is humanistic, sacred, feminine, in motion, creative, nurturing, and the source of all their kinship" (p. 186). The land is not simply a physical place or a separate 'other.'

Land connectedness assists with efforts to revitalize and reclaim culturally specific knowledge and practices (Goodkind et al., 2015). The interrelatedness of all of creation is taught through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge (Schultz, Walters, et al., 2016). The environment provides histories, memories, meaning, and ways to think and be in the world (Bang et al., 2014; Kemp, 2011; Mark & Lyons, 2010; Schultz, Walters, et al., 2016). Indigenous ways of life are highly specific to the land that their community has lived on for centuries (Cajete, 2000). The ceremonial practice of songs and dances represent a connection with ancestral lands and animals of a specific region and place (Senungetuk, 2017). Land contains Indigenous ancestral knowledge (Schultz, Walters, et al., 2016). An example of ancestral knowledge on the land is the existence of inuksuit, which are giant rock formations that identify places to hunt, mark passageways, or ward off intruders (Hallenday, 2000). The ancestral presence in the land also exists within tools, homes, camps and technologies that were developed and passed on to future generations (Kawagley, 2006).

Many activities promote environmental connectedness. Children need to engage in outdoor play and exploration (Kawagley, 2006). To have relationship with the land includes a kinship with animals and plants that co-exist with human beings (Absolon, 2010; Anungazuk, 2007; Brown et al., 2012; Kawagley, 1999). Subsistence skills and activities passed on to children contain land-based knowledge that has been passed down for generations in a spirit of love and respect (Kawagley, 2006). Environmental connectedness is so important for children because it acknowledges our source of life, the miracle of creation and shifts the worldview away

from a belief that the environment is an object to extract, exploit or sell. The health of the earth is linked to the health of everybody and everything.

Spiritual Connectedness

The human spirit has been described as the 'breath' (Napoleon, 1996) or life force energy (Cajete, 2000). Everything has spirit (Cajete, 2000; Wolsko et al., 2007). Feral (1998) stated that when we think about physics, there aren't any "things," only connections that exchange energy, which shows how we are all part of one "inseparable web of connections" (p. 253). While it is difficult to describe spirit in definitive ways, it is known that spirituality is a protective factor (Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006; Hovey et al., 2014; Grandbois & Sanders, 2006) and that spiritual practices help people achieve balance and harmony in their lives (Cajete, 2000; Cross et al., 2011; Hodge et al., 2009; Mark & Lyons, 2010). Spiritual connectedness has been described as the "unity of mind, body, and spirit" (Mark & Lyons, 2010, p. 1757).

People's cultural way of life and spiritual connectedness seem to be synonymous. Many cultural practices are spiritual practices. Spiritual activities include participation in ceremonies and rituals (Cross et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2007; Red Horse, 1997), connection with the land (Coates et al., 2006; Kawagley, 2006; McGregor et al., 2003), and storytelling (Cajete, 2000; Cross et al., 2011; Rountree & Smith, 2016). At an Alaska Native child welfare conference, Yup'ik elder, Harold Napoleon shared that spirits need to be fed with love, humor, truth and beauty and our ideas and ways of doing this are based on specific cultural beliefs and spiritual practices (personal communication, April 2005). The cultural way of life provides the natural laws, knowledge, set roles, and day-to-day activities that are often taken for granted. Culture and spirit can be observed and experienced through art, names, beauty, dance, songs, music, history, foods, clothing, home structures, games, transportation, science, education,

hairstyles, tattoos, subsistence lifestyle and language. Cultural and spiritual connectedness is interchangeable. While culture and spiritual practices change over time, culture and spirit never cease.

The revitalization of Indigenous languages is a mechanism for maintaining spiritual connectedness. Indigenous languages are spirit medicine, identity, life breath, and connection to the ancestors (Twitchell, 2013). The foundation of a culture and community is in the language (Pingayak, 2003). Waziyatawin (2005) said:

> In the beginning, the Great Mystery gave us our languages. Through our languages we were given a way to name, categorize, conceptualize, and relate to the world around us. Through our languages we were given a way of life…In saving our languages, we will be saving our ways of life and our ways of relating with the universe. We will save ourselves. (p. 109)

Language influences a person's ontology, axiology and epistemology (Leonard, 2011). Spiritual connectedness is influenced by Indigenous language speaking because it fosters the development of traditional knowledge, spirituality, communication skills and self-esteem (John, 2011). Language and culture are intertwined and helps people learn how to relate with one another (Martindale & Mork, 2011). For example, it's a common practice for Indigenous people to introduce themselves in their language by identifying their family and place where their family comes from and this process "makes their spirits stronger" (Martindale & Mork, 2011).

Language learning shapes who children are (Kawagley, 2011; Martindale & Mork, 2011; John, 2011). Children that can speak their Indigenous language can communicate with Elders about traditional family ties, clans, ancient stories and songs, ceremonies, subsistence skills and traditional laws (John, 2011). Speaking a language, is the same as speaking a heritage (John,

2011). The Indigenous histories are also saved through Indigenous languages (Sampson, 2011). Kawagley (2011) stated, “By maintaining our languages, we are sustaining the ultimate standard of health and endurance of the human species” (p. 276). Children need to learn Indigenous languages to have easier access to cultural and spiritual teachings.

Language also comes from the land and nature (Anungazuk, 2007; Kawagley, 2011). Kawagley (2011) states, “As we lose our languages, more and more of us begin to take part in the misuse and abuse of nature” (p. 296). Children that learn their language and their connection to place will take better care of the earth (Kawagley, 2011). Singing, dancing and drumming in the Indigenous language bring people to the spiritual level and it’s not just for the people, but also for the land and animals that make life possible (Kawagley, 2011).

Spiritual connectedness includes the day-to-day activity and expression of love. Children need love, respect and belonging for their spiritual connectedness and wellbeing (Blackstock, 2011; Day, 2016; Hill, 2006; Priest et al., 2012; Red Horse, 1997; Robbins et al., 2005). Love and respect provide the energy and foundation for a good life. These expressions vary based on the cultural practices. The messages that children need to receive to build their spiritual connectedness are that their gifts, talents, and contributions are valued and that families and communities care about them (Roffey, 2011). This process is done through close observation, spending time with youth, providing them with an education and acknowledgement of their contributions (Kawagley, 2011). Kawagley (2011) said that love balances the outer and inner ecologies of the young person (p. 307).

The balance of inner and outer ecologies is a shift from a false duality between “me” and “you” and sees the connectedness of “we” and “us” in everything. Spiritual connectedness is the integration of all the elements of Indigenous connectedness and provides a collective and

wholistic relationship with mind, body, spirit, family, community, and environment. Spiritual connectedness is collectivist wellbeing (Coates et al., 2006; McCubbin et al., 2013). Kawagley (2006) states, "…time and time again the stories have said that all of the living and non-living parts of the Earth are one and that people are part of that wholeness" (p. 11). Making a worldview shift from the individual to a collective way of being changes the way we live. Collective living involves relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility for the best interest of the land, community, family, and children (McGregor et al., 2003). To live and exist on this planet, we need to respect the interdependence and interconnectedness of all life.

Many Indigenous Peoples believe that life was made possible by a higher spiritual power that is often spoken in creation stories. Others have called this higher power a Great Spirit, Great Mystery, Creator, Universe, and God. This spirit is in everyone and everything. Elders have instructed Indigenous youth to 'know who you are and where you come from,' because their hope is that children will find their place within the web of Indigenous Connectedness. This knowledge and connection is not only for one person's wellbeing, but for all that are connected to that child.

Several authors identify spirit and spirituality as a vitally important catalyst for wellbeing (Absolon, 2010; BigFoot & Schmidt, 2010; Blackstock, 2011; Cajete, 2000; Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006; Coates et al., 2006; Day, 2016; Hill, 2006; Hodge et al., 2009; Hovey et al. , 2014; Kawagley, 2006; Limb et al., 2008; Mark & Lyons, 2010; Martin & Yurkovich, 2014; McGregor et al., 2003; McMahon et al., 2007; Mohatt et al., 2011; Priest et al., 2012; Rountree & Smith, 2016; Walters et al., 2011). Despite the stated importance of Indigenous spirituality, this is a topic that is frequently left out of social service discussions with families and communities. Some people have lost this connection and understanding of what spirit and

spirituality is. Other words are often used in place of 'spirit,' such as the word 'culture,' or 'religion.' Changing the word from spirit to something more westernized almost makes it seem like this element of who we are as spiritual beings is a choice or an option, when it's a fundamental part of what makes us *real human beings*.

Spiritual connectedness is found within all the other Indigenous connectedness concepts and brings connectedness together in a collective and wholistic way. Spirit is the glue that binds everything together. This is where the epiphany shines through that the promotion of child wellbeing is collective wellbeing, and the promotion of collective wellbeing is what leads to child wellbeing. It's important to return to Indigenous knowledges and teachings about what makes us well so that ongoing harm ceases and restoration of wellbeing can take place. Each community has their own wisdom, practices and activities that assist with these efforts.

Connectedness Mechanisms

A detailed table of connectedness mechanisms based on the literature review is summarized in Table 2. Not all of these mechanisms may be applicable to diverse Indigenous communities, but they could help provide ideas for community-based wellbeing interventions. Some of the connectedness mechanisms may be less practiced in certain communities because of colonization, so providing a sense of hope, overcoming shame and preparing to support community members with historical trauma response features may be important in revitalization efforts.

Table 2

Connectedness Mechanisms

Family	**Community**	**Land/Place**	**Intergenerational**	**Spirit**
Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
Spending time together	Celebrations	Hunting/Gathering	Part of a continuous history	Ceremonies
Relational roles	Dancing/Singing	Teaching children	Awareness of historical trauma	Cultural values
Responsibility	Ceremonies	Learning from Elders	Responsibility to future generations	Art
Namesakes & nicknames	Service to others	Exploration	Learning ancestral teachings to pass on to younger generations	Stories
Adoption	Mentoring	Observation	Participation in cultural and community activities	Love, humor, truth, beauty
Togetherness	Rules, values, norms	Travel	Knowledge of family lineage	Dance
Trust and safety	Safety nets	Care for animals		Subsistence foods
Sharing and support	Family relationships	Stories		Songs/Dance/Drum
Helping Elders	Social groups	Playing outside		Connection to ancestors and future generations
Stories, family history	Collective belonging	Access to clean water		Collective mentality
Recognition of personal talents	Cooperative teams	Fish camp		Spiritual teachings
	Subsistence sharing	Survival skills		
	Strong leadership			

Indigenous Connectedness Framework

A visual representation of the main Indigenous Connectedness concepts and mechanisms that were conceptually analyzed in this paper are represented in Figure 2 (see Chapter 1). This visual of the Indigenous Connectedness Framework is based on a circular symbol that has frequently been found in Inupiaq and Yup'ik tools, jewelry and artwork (Jones, 2003; Nelson, 1900). The intention of using this symbol is to represent connectedness concepts in a wholistic way. This circular symbol is similar to what is used in the Yup'ik Elluarrluteng Ilakutellriit model of healthy families (Association of Village Council Presidents, 2010), but the content is vastly different because their use of the circle is representative of a traditional life cycle. The Indigenous Connectedness Framework here is a symbol that represents connectedness, mechanisms of connectedness, child wellbeing and collective wellbeing.

The outer spokes represent intergenerational, family, environmental and community connectedness. The outer circle of the IC framework represents some of the key mechanisms that

build connectedness to environment, community, ancestors/future generations, family and spirit. The next inner circle represents what happens connectedness is established and the false separation between all living things collapses. This second inner circle symbolizes the awareness of a spiritual and collective identity that remains central to who we are and where we come from. The innermost circle represents the reciprocal relationship that exists between child wellbeing and collective wellbeing. To live in an interconnected, interdependent world that has children in the center of what we do, promotes the wellbeing for all.

The aims of this dissertation build upon this Indigenous Connectedness Framework by connecting with knowledge bearers within the Alaska Native child welfare system about their understanding of child wellbeing concepts and mechanisms. The Indigenous Connectedness Framework provided guidance to the semi-structured interview questions that were asked of Alaska Native foster care alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents. By identifying common etic concepts of Indigenous wellbeing, the Indigenous Connectedness Framework offers a tool that communities can fill in with their own emic stories, worldviews, history, spiritual practices, connectedness mechanisms and visual models (Hawkins, Cummins & Marlatt, 2004).

CHAPTER 3: Methodology and Methods

I embrace the long-standing practice of Indigenous scholars that states who I am and what my intentions are for this research project. I am an Indigenous relative from Alaska. I believe I have an obligation to do research that benefits community and improves the wellbeing of children, families, communities and the earth. My intention for doing this work is to help children and adults feel like they can relearn, revive, rejuvenate, reserve, recover, re-embody, return, restore, relive, retrieve, reclaim and remember what it means to *know who you are and where you come from.* My thinking and work have been shaped by the Indigenous Connectedness framework, which is about living a good life in healthy relationships with self, family, community, spirit(s) and the land. This research on Indigenous Connectedness has positively influenced my life. I feel like I have come to a more in-depth understanding of *who I am* as I study what it means to be well within an Indigenous context. I want to continue to learn about what it means to live a life of connectedness, so it can be shared with my community as we explore what we know, what to get back to, what to keep and what to create.

In this chapter, I further explain my positionality and how it influences the research. Then I review what Indigenous research methodologies entail and how they were applied to this study. Following that, I discuss what procedures were followed to recruit and engage knowledge bearers in the interview process. And the chapter ends with an overview of the methods that will facilitate the data analysis process.

Who I Am, Where I Come From

My ancestral roots are Inupiaq from Kingigin (Wales) and Sitnasuak (Nome) on my maternal side. The word *Inupiaq* translates to meaning ‘the real people.’ My great grandparents were Helen and Willie Senungetuk, my grandmother is Nancy Felton and my mom was Cathie

Maki. I also have ancestral roots from Switzerland, France and Germany on my paternal side. I did not have much contact with my biological father growing up and he passed away 12 years ago, but my grandparents Nelle and Gordon Ruck and extended family members remain connected with me. The father figure I had in my life was Don Maki, and he came into my life at age four and remained married to my mother until she passed away 10 years ago. I have four siblings, two older brothers who have a different father than me, and a little sister and little brother who also have a different father. I did not grow up in the same household as my older brothers because they were raised by their paternal grandparents. I have been married to my partner for 12 years and have two wonderful daughters, ages 12 and 10.

I primarily identify with my mother's side of the family because they raised me, and I grew up in Alaska. It is common practice for children to have nicknames and mine was 'Oona,' which means 'this one' in our Inupiaq dialect. I have travelled to Kingigin with the Kingikmiut Dancers and Singers of Anchorage. I am a tribal member of Nome Eskimo Community. I grew up in the urban settings of Anchorage and Wasilla. When I first visited Kingigin and Sitnasuak, I experienced the generational memory of these lands and waters in a way that helped my life finally make sense. I have always loved the ocean and mountains and this landscape completely surrounded these communities.

Figure 4. Kingigin (Wales), Alaska Sitnasuak (Nome), Alaska

My upbringing has created stark juxtapositions in my positionality. I have felt like an insider/outsider in many contexts; Native at home/Non-Native at school, rural at heart/urban in

my physical spaces with frequent escapes to the mountains, forests, tundra, and water. This feeling of being a shapeshifter in different settings has helped me bridge gaps between what people call “two worlds” of Indigenous and western paradigms. Now my existence lies within one wholistic sense of place and belonging.

I have 9 years of child welfare practice experience in Anchorage, Alaska working for the Office of Children’s Services (OCS). My passion has been to safely reduce the disproportionate number of Alaska Native children in out-of-home care. While at OCS, I was first a social work intern, then I worked in family services, was in an Alaska Native Family Preservation unit, served as an OCS regional ICWA Specialist and was the supervisor of the first Alaska Native Family Services unit in the state. I developed relationships with the Alaska Tribal/State child welfare community. My naïve thought was that disproportionality would end if OCS changed. I realize now that the issue of disproportionality is multifaceted, requires ongoing research and that change needs to happen both within and without the system. This past work experience influences this study because I have directly witnessed strength, healing, trauma and challenges that children, youth, parents, families, foster parents, co-workers, tribal workers, frontline workers, supervisors, managers, legal parties, judges, service providers and I have been through within the child welfare system. I am still part of the Alaska child welfare community as a child welfare trainer at the local university.

I also share a common history and understanding with many of the knowledge-bearers of this study in terms of the challenges and strengths that my own family has had in the wake of colonization and historical trauma. I have been exposed to or directly experienced problems with substance use, violence, sexual assault, suicide, separation from siblings, absent parents, health ailments, language loss, grief and depression. I have also been exposed to or directly experienced

extreme survivance, perseverance, traditional healing modalities, connection, love, cultural resilience, spiritual strength, language/dance/song revitalization, joy and peace. Who we are and who I am is more than the trauma and damage based narratives that has dominated research articles and texts about Indigenous people (Tuck, 2009).

I am aware that my positionality may present limitations in the analysis of people's interviews, but my life experience may also contribute to a more valid and credible analysis of knowledge-bearers' stories because I recognize what was shared with me at a phenomenological (lived experience) level of understanding (Brayboy, 2005; De Santolo, 2019; Fast & Kovach, 2019). Brayboy (2005) talks about how the researcher needs to hear the stories (data), attribute value to what is shared, feel the story and "get it" (p.440). My background gives me the credence and ability to speak to and listen to the knowledge bearers who participated in this study. I situate myself within this research for the purpose of "putting forth as fully as possible [my] biases, assumptions, and theoretical proclivities" in order to bring integrity and accountability to the work that is done (Fast & Kovach, 2019, p. 25).

Indigenous Research Methodology

Even though Indigenous communities in the state of Alaska and around the world are beautifully diverse, this Indigenous research framework draws together a common Indigenous epistemological stance that accentuates the wholistic relational values of respect, reciprocity, sharing and collaboration (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009, Wilson, 2008). Through relationships we can learn, guide and understand ourselves and the world. A relational Indigenous research framework requires special consideration of how to be in right relationship before, during and after the study. This study is guided by an Indigenous research framework that takes into account power, ethics, community, relationality and storytelling. It has been helpful to create an explicit

research framework so that the research methodologies (procedures and techniques) and analyses remain congruent with Indigenous and Alaska Native worldviews (Kovach, 2009).

Power

Indigenous research methodologies are emancipatory because they involve a constant examination and awareness of power dynamics with the goal of liberating Indigenous peoples from oppression (Smith, 1999). Power shows up through the development of research questions, the determination of who's voice gets heard, data analysis, interpretation and dissemination of theories (Smith, 1999). Conducting emancipatory Indigenous research in the academic context can amplify Indigenous voice to a global audience for the purpose of social justice (Brayboy, 2005). The hope for this dissertation is that the information that is shared helps shift beliefs, policies and practices for the love of our sacred children. This intention was set when participants signed the consent form to participate and it helped ground the purpose of this study in emancipatory research.

Ethics

Some Indigenous knowledges need to be protected and withheld if it could be exploited or misconstrued by special interest groups that have a set agenda to harm or disempower Indigenous communities. Indigenous methodologies require researchers to abide by an ethic of transparency, to benefit Indigenous peoples and to reframe and resist unjust colonial narratives about tribal people and communities (Brayboy, 2005; Dei, 2013; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). This study is embedded in an Indigenous methodology that purposefully weaves together an Indigenous epistemology (theory of knowledge), ontology (nature of being) and axiology (application of values) that is linked to the who-what-when-where-why-how research decisions made every step of the way (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). These decisions were

made with Elders, community members, fellow scholars, academic advisors and an internal commitment to our Indigenous collective strength and recovery efforts.

Community

Involvement of community in Indigenous research is essential for correcting past research wrongs and to stay true to the ethics of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). As a way to resist the western academic norm of distancing PhD students from their communities, I connected informally with community advisors to better align with Indigenous methodologies and engage in participatory research. The connection with community advisors was intentional because the procedures for obtaining a PhD can feel isolating when it is important for Indigenous scholars to remain connected to their community before, during and after the research study (Brayboy, 2005). In the real world, research is never done in isolation and it is recommended that PhD programs shift their pedagogical structures to a more community-based approach that is central to doctoral education. It is really the community that gives prospective PhD students their degrees because this research could not get completed without them. Having community advisors helped me stay grounded in Indigenous methodologies and motivated me to finish this dissertation.

Participatory research involves ongoing relationships, the generation of useful information and the promotion of positive outcomes for community (Fast & Kovach, 2019; Wemigwase & Tuck, 2019). The community advisors for this study included leaders from Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA) and Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF). FFCA is an organization lead by foster care alumni and it is for current and former foster youth. ACRF is an organization that provides training and support to relatives and foster care providers. FFCA and ACRF leaders met with me one-on-one and helped with the creation of this study's ethical

considerations, the development of the research questions, the establishment of a set honorarium, recruitment of knowledge-bearers and consideration of preliminary findings. The hope is that these two community organizations and the people they serve will benefit the most from the results and implications. The analyses of this study were also guided by two Elders who have experience with adopting relative children and two Indigenous scholars that have focused on concepts of Indigenous wellbeing in their research. The input and feedback from each community advisor has been integral to this study.

Relationality

Indigenous methodologies are relational and reciprocal (Brayboy, 2005; Dei, 2013; Fast & Kovach, 2019; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The direct interaction with community members and knowledge bearers is everything in a research study because it is where the magic happens. This magic is a space of being heard, sharing, teaching, listening, learning and being able to hold whatever might come up spiritually, emotionally, energetically for both the knowledge bearer (participant) and the learner (researcher). Some Indigenous scholars have reflected on this interaction and described it as reciprocal, healing and ceremony (Lavallée, 2009; Loppie, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Relational research is not a new process to Indigenous communities because it has been happening for generations through ceremony and the oral tradition of telling and listening to a story (Brayboy, 2005; Datta, 2018; Kovach et al., 2013).

Being with and part of a whole is important within an Indigenous research paradigm. Researchers cannot be extracted from Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009; Kovach et al., 2013; Wilson, 2008). Kovach (2009) used the term ‘self-in-relation’ to explain the relationality between a participant and researcher as being vital to the creation and interpretation of a story.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) provides a metaphor of the creation of a portrait where the person being painted and the artist painting the portrait co-create the final art piece as a melded story. This art of sharing and co-creating a story is interdependent.

Storytelling

The role of the person that allows and shares themselves for the world to see is who everybody learns from through the researcher's lens (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). During the research process, the academic researcher often conducts the methods and analyses that generate a deepened understanding of social phenomena based on the cumulative life experience of the researcher and the knowledge bearers (Kovach, 2009). Then the researcher steps back and thinks about what it all means, consults with community and writes the results as a story in order to discuss the implications from what was taught and learned (Jones, 2019; Kovach, 2009). Some of what the researcher learned might reflect back teachings to the knowledge bearers that shared their story to begin with. This is where the continuous reflexivity and acknowledgement of reciprocity by the researcher is important because this is what brings forth credibility and validity to the community (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

In credible and valid qualitative research, the researcher has to create a portrait that portrays what was shared in either realistic, abstract, cultural, spiritual or artistic ways and not something totally different or off base from what was said in the interviews. The researcher also has to accept the imperfection that the final written product can never fully represent the essence of the shared stories because written language cannot capture the intonation, life force, breath energy that a knowledge bearer has (Archibald, 2008). This is where the creative processes of digital stories and visual methods add value to what written products are missing in the research literature (Christian, 2019). In relational research, the researcher does not take credit for the good

things that come from the final product because it was created by all of us and belongs to everyone (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). A knowledge bearer and a researcher are more than just themselves; they are also their family, community, nations, and past and future generations (Blair, 2019). Research stories come from a collective and are for the collective (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). Being reflexive and considering everyone's positionality is a reflective inquiry into Indigenous ontology. The study of who I am, who you are, who we are, adds value to the validity of a study (Datta, 2018; Fast & Kovach, 2019).

Storytelling is intertwined with Indigenous epistemology and is an important feature of Indigenous research methods (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy, 2005; Kovach, 2010). Stories are timeless, they are ancient and new, they can be told over and over again across generations, they can teach our history and our theories (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Million, 2013; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). The core learning or meaning of a story might change because something in that story wasn't ready to be learned and the epiphany is finally happening now (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). With storytelling, you have to surrender and trust the process that whatever comes up and gets shared is meant to be at this moment in time and there might be something else to learn or share at a later time (Archibald, 2008; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). The act of sharing and listening to a story is sacred and cannot be taken for granted because the knowledge that is shared is a gift (Archibald, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Researchers have the responsibility of being a conduit of a message from a community of sovereign people and from the researcher's sovereign and collective spirit.

Specific Aims, Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following aims, research questions and hypotheses highlight the purpose and intention of this research study.

Aim 1: Identify and compare Alaska Native foster care alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents' concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing with the Indigenous Connectedness Framework.

RQ1. How is child wellbeing conceptualized by Alaska Native foster care alumni, relatives and foster parents in comparison to the Indigenous Connectedness Framework?

H1. It was hypothesized that knowledge bearers would have similar concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing as outlined by the Indigenous Connectedness Framework and would provide more descriptive details that could fill any potential gaps in the framework.

Aim 2: Describe how child wellbeing was promoted or impeded within Alaska child welfare and Alaska Native relative and foster home placements.

RQ2. How was child wellbeing promoted or impeded by Alaska child welfare and ICWA preference placements?

H2. It was hypothesized that the Indigenous Connectedness Framework could inform what the benefits of ICWA preference placements are for child wellbeing.

The pursuit of this knowledge will use Indigenous methodologies and the methods outline the exact steps and procedures that lead up to the conclusions made about what knowledge bearers shared.

Recruitment and Selection

Both the University of Washington Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Alaska Area IRB reviewed this research study and gave their approval prior to inviting knowledge bearers to

participate (Appendix A and B). Recruitment involved a search for Alaskan adults who were either 1) an Alaska Native alumnus of the Alaska child protection system that was placed with a relative or an Alaska Native foster parent; 2) Alaska Native relative care provider; or an Alaska Native foster parent for an Alaska Native child in state custody. At the suggestion of the Alaska Area IRB, recruitment flyers were developed at an 8th grade reading level using the Flesch-Kincaid grade level test in Microsoft Word and were distributed by FFCA and ACRF on their Facebook social media sites and their email listservs (Appendix C and D). According to Microsoft Word online support (2019), the formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is: (.39 x ASL) + (11.8 x ASW) – 15.59 where ASL = average sentence length (the number of words divided by the number of sentences), ASW = average number of syllables per word (the number of syllables divided by the number of words). Recruitment and selection began May 30th and the last interview was held on August 1st.

Interested alumni, relatives, and foster parents contacted both organizational leaders and/or me by phone and email. Organizational leaders forwarded any interested participants to me if the email reply went to them only. Phone screenings were conducted, and consent forms were emailed in conjunction with scheduling interviews. It was explained that all interviews needed to be face-to-face, whether it was in-person or through an internet/phone meeting platform such as Zoom, FaceTime, or Skype and that the interview would be audio-recorded and transcribed. Many of the people that were not selected to participate were foster parents that did not self-identify as Alaska Native, but provided care or adopted Alaska Native children. In this study, I made an exception and interviewed 2 non-Alaska Native foster parents that were married to an Alaska Native person because their foster home was considered an “Indian foster home” according to ICWA (ICWA, P.L. 95-608). If people did not qualify for recruitment of this study,

they were thanked for their interest, asked to keep an eye out for the results of this study and to consider other opportunities to participate in future research.

The alumni knowledge bearers were a little bit more difficult to recruit, so the FFCA leader that was helping me with this study reached out to a couple people and with permission their contact information was shared with me. I also reached out to a few tribal family services workers that I know in the Anchorage area and one tribal representative connected me with an alumnus. One relative participant also assisted me with recruitment because they knew that this study involved interviews with adult Alaska Native alumni. I also shared the recruitment flyer on my social media Facebook page and some of my research scholar friends helped me with recruiting a couple more alumni. While it took a little more effort to recruit alumni participants, it was well worth the effort because their stories are some of the most important ones we need to hear.

Instruments

Alumni and caregivers had separate interview protocols based on the positionality of the participant. The questions were developed using the Indigenous Connectedness Framework and touched on the meaning of concepts and relational or connectedness mechanisms that children/youth had with family, community, ancestral/future generations, the environment and spirituality. A complete list of the questions that were asked are available in Appendix E. Questions such as, “What does wellness/wellbeing mean to you?” and “How would you define family?” were asked with probing questions based on what was shared. In some interviews, the participants shared their story, which addressed subsequent interviews questions before the questions were even asked. The interview protocol was used as a guide rather than a checklist.

These semi-structured interviews were mostly conversational and sometimes became immersed in storytelling and listening.

Procedures

As part of the informed consent process, participants were asked to select an alternate name so that their identity was protected, but they could know what quotes came from them in the write up of the results. When an interviewee was meeting through videoconference, they provided a signature page to the consent form by scanning, emailing or texting it back to me before starting the interview. Signed consent forms were printed out and saved in a file in a locked drawer that only I have access to. This form is the only link between the participant's alternate name and real name. Some participants requested to receive a copy of the final paper and this was made note of on the consent forms. Everyone was told that they could choose to withdraw their interview from the study at any point between the time of the study and the point of publication which was anticipated to happen within the next year.

Due to the general inquiry of people's experiences within the child welfare system, it was important to offer and provide participants with counseling resources that could help them in the event that they needed to do some healing work regarding their child welfare involvement. It was not a requirement for people to receive this list because it could imply that they were lacking or needing services, which could be seen as deficit-based research. Everyone that was offered a list of resources accepted it and this list included contact information for the Indian Health Services in their region and an organization that could provide therapeutic services by telephone or video-conference and was based in the Anchorage area. While emotions did come up in a few of the interviews, all of the participants stated that they already had supportive connections and shared who those supports were in their life.

As the interviews happened, a digital audio recording was directly saved to an encrypted laptop computer as a file titled according to their alternate name. In a couple interviews, the internet bandwidth was difficult to maintain or establish through videoconference so those interviews were rescheduled for a time when the participant could obtain a stronger connection. Some interviews took place using FaceTime, Zoom, or Facebook Messenger. The in-person interviews took place in participants' homes or workplace, a public library, a university library, or my office. Young children (age 3 or younger) were present in 3 interviews and attempts were made to occupy them as to not distract from the interviews being conducted with the adult participants.

I attempted to establish trust and connection with each person during the interview process. Establishing trust happens through non-verbal communication, affirmation that the participant is being heard, ensuring that all questions are answered, pausing when emotions were expressed, laughing with participants, reflecting on their strengths and resilience strategies and practicing some self-disclosure to be a real human being to participants. This exchange happened when going over the demographic questions that established how the participant identified themselves and some of the logistical child welfare questions like what the permanency goal was and how long the child/youth was in out-of-home care. This connection and rapport did not always happen for various reasons, like when participants had limited time to talk, but for the most part, I was able to develop a genuine connection with people. This procedure or natural way of being cannot be missed or ignored within Indigenous methodologies.

The Knowledge Bearers

The goal was to recruit 30 participants with ten representatives for each recruitment group, and 25 interviews were completed. The participant demographics are captured in Table 3

and provide the knowledge bearers' positionality (AN alumni, AN relative, AN foster parent or foster parent with AN partner), the total number of participants, the current setting they live in (urban, urban/rural or rural), where they grew up and what the permanency goal or permanency outcome was (reunification, guardianship, adoption, concurrent reunification and adoption or guardianship, or aged out)

The urban communities in this study are identified as Anchorage, Wasilla/Palmer, Kenai, Juneau or Fairbanks. Urban/rural communities are what many Alaskans call 'hub' communities and consist of places like Nome, Bethel, Kotzebue, Dillingham, Cordova, Utqiagvik and Ketchikan. Rural communities are usually smaller in size and are typically located within a couple hundred miles of a hub community. Most rural communities are also tribes.

Table 3

Participant Demographics and Positionality

Role	Total	Current Urban	Current Rural	Current Urban/Rural	Grew up Urban	Grew up Rural	Grew up Urban/Rural	Adoption	Guardianship	Reunification	Reunification/ Adoption or Guardianship	Aged Out
Alumni	9	6	1	2	4	2	3	4	1	0	0	4
Relative	10	9	1	0	4	5	1	3	1	2	4	0
Foster Parent	4	1	2	2	0	1	3	2	1	0	2	0
Foster Parent with AN Partner	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0
Overall Total	25	18	4	4	8	8	9	10	3	2	7	4

All knowledge bearers were Alaska Native except for 2 foster parents who were married to Alaska Native partners. Interestingly, only 2 men were interviewed (this is an assumption made because I did not ask about gender identities) and all the relative participants were licensed. Of the 10 relatives that were interviewed, 2 have also provided care as foster parents for

non-relative Alaska Native children. The majority of the participants were currently living in urban settings and 17 grew up in a rural or urban/rural setting. Of the alumni that were interviewed, 4 were legally adopted through the State of Alaska, with 2 alumni being adopted into Non-Native homes. Almost half of the alumni had aged out of the child welfare system. None of the alumni that I spoke with were reunified with their parents. Most of relatives and foster parents had children/youth in their homes with a concurrent reunification and adoption goal or an adoption only goal.

While everyone was asked for specific tribal affiliation information, this study protects the identity of participants by reporting what region they were from rather than the specific village or tribe (Norton & Manson, 1996). All participants came from 11 of the 12 Alaska Native regions that align with the map of the Alaska Native Regional Corporations (Figure 5). The only region that did not have representation was the Aleut region. The distribution of tribal affiliation was fairly even throughout the state, with the highest number of participants coming from the Sealaska (southeast) region.

Figure 5. Alaska Tribal Regional Affiliation

To recognize and more formally introduce the knowledge bearers, Tables 4, 5, and 6 are provided so that we remember that behind the results of this research are people who shared their truth and life experiences for the benefit of Alaska Native children. These alumni, relatives and foster parents have hope that we can improve outcomes for Alaska Native children. Many of the alumni shared that they would really like to prevent children from going through what they experienced within the child welfare system. It was truly an honor to connect and listen to the knowledge bearers about their background and life experiences. Table 4, 5, and 6 are organized by positionality, the *alternate name* that was chosen, and a brief description of where they lived and what regions their tribal affiliation is in.

Table 4

Alumni Knowledge Bearers

Brienne	Brienne was adopted at age 8 by non-relative Alaska Native foster parents. She was not sure what her tribal affiliation was because her mom had been adopted and she didn't know who her dad was until more recently. Brienne lives and grew up in an urban setting.
Marianna	Marianna was adopted by non-native, non-relative foster parents at age 16. She had been in an Alaska Native relative placement when she was younger. She has tribal affiliation in the Calista region. Marianna lives and grew up in an urban setting, but also spent some time as a child in a rural community.
MHW	MHW was adopted by a non-native, non-relative foster parent at age 17 and had been in Alaska Native relative care when she was younger. Her tribal affiliation was in the Sealaska region. MHW lives in and primarily grew up in an urban setting, but lived in a rural community until preschool.
Sarah	Sarah aged out of Alaska Native relative foster care. She has tribal affiliation in the NANA region. Sarah lives in an urban setting and grew up in a rural setting.
Sarge	Sarge aged out non-relative foster care and had lived in an Alaska Native relative placement. His tribal affiliation is in the NANA region. Sarge has lives in a rural setting and grew up both in an urban/rural and rural setting.
Alita	Alita was placed with a relative that established guardianship around age 9. Her tribal affiliation is in the Sealaska region. Alita lives in and grew up in an urban/rural setting.

Temperance	Temperance aged out of Alaska Native foster care. Her tribal affiliation is in the Bering Strait region. Temperance lives in and grew up in an urban/rural setting.
Polar Bear	Polar Bear was adopted by non-relative Alaska Native foster parents when she was less than 1 years old. Her tribal affiliation is in the Ahtna region. Polar Bear lives and grew up in an urban setting and has spent time in a rural setting.
Baker	Baker aged out of Alaska Native relative foster care. Her tribal affiliation is in the Bering Strait region. Baker lives in and grew up in an urban setting and has spent time in a rural community.

Table 5

Relative Knowledge Bearers

Kuiui Flower	Kuiui Flower grew up in a rural setting and lives in an urban community. She has tribal affiliation in the Sealaska region and has taken care of 5 children (relative and non-relative) with tribal affiliation in the Sealaska region.
Maria	Maria grew up in a rural setting and lives in an urban community. She has tribal affiliation in the Doyon region and has taken care of 3 children (relative and non-relative) with tribal affiliation in the Doyon region and Calista region.
Olga	Olga grew up in a rural community and lives in an urban setting now. She has tribal affiliation in the Sealaska region and has taken care of 2 relative children with tribal affiliation in the Sealaska region.
Apee	Apee grew up in a hub community and lives in an urban setting now. She and the relative child she has cared for have tribal affiliation in the Bering Strait region.
Elmira	Elmira grew up and lives in an urban community. She and the 2 relative children she has provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Bering Strait region.
Ginger	Ginger grew up in and lives in an urban community and she and the relative child she provided care for have tribal affiliation in the CIRI region.
Hope	Hope lives in an urban community and she and the relative child she provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Sealaska region.
Krissy	Krissy grew up in and lives in an urban community. She and the 3 relative children she provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Sealaska region.
Sadie	Sadie grew up in and lives in a rural community. She and the 7 relative children she has provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Ahtna region.
Shari Dawn	Shari Dawn has licensure through the tribe. She grew up in a rural community and lives in an urban community. Shari Dawn has tribal affiliation in the Doyon region and the 4 relative children have tribal affiliation in the Doyon and/or NANA region.

Table 6

Foster Parent Knowledge Bearers

Allen	Allen grew up in a hub community and lives in an urban setting. She and the child she provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Chugach region.
Marie	Marie lives in and grew up in a rural community. She and the 2 children she provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Calista region.
Sandy	Sandy was raised in and lives in a hub community. She and the child she has provided care for have tribal affiliation in the Koniag region.
Kious	Kious was licensed through the tribe. He grew up in a hub community and lives in an urban setting. He and the 13 children he has provided care for have tribal affiliation in the ASRC region.
Betty	Betty does not self-identify as Alaska Native, but her husband has tribal affiliation from the BBNA region. Her husband grew up in a hub community and they both live in an urban setting. They have provided care for 13 children from the Bering Strait, NANA, Calista and/or Sealaska regions.
Kelly	Kelly does not self-identify as Alaska native, but her husband has tribal affiliation in the Calista region. Her husband grew up in a hub community and they live in an urban setting. They have provided care for a child from the NANA region.

All but 1 interview were completed in the summer months of June and July 2019. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 60 minutes, with 17 interviews lasting 40 minutes or longer. Figure 6 shows the total and average length of time each group spoke with me. On average, alumni interviews were shorter than relative or foster parent interviews. Disclosing the average length of interviews doesn't mean that one group provided more knowledge than another, it just shows the different levels and styles of storytelling that people were willing to engage in.

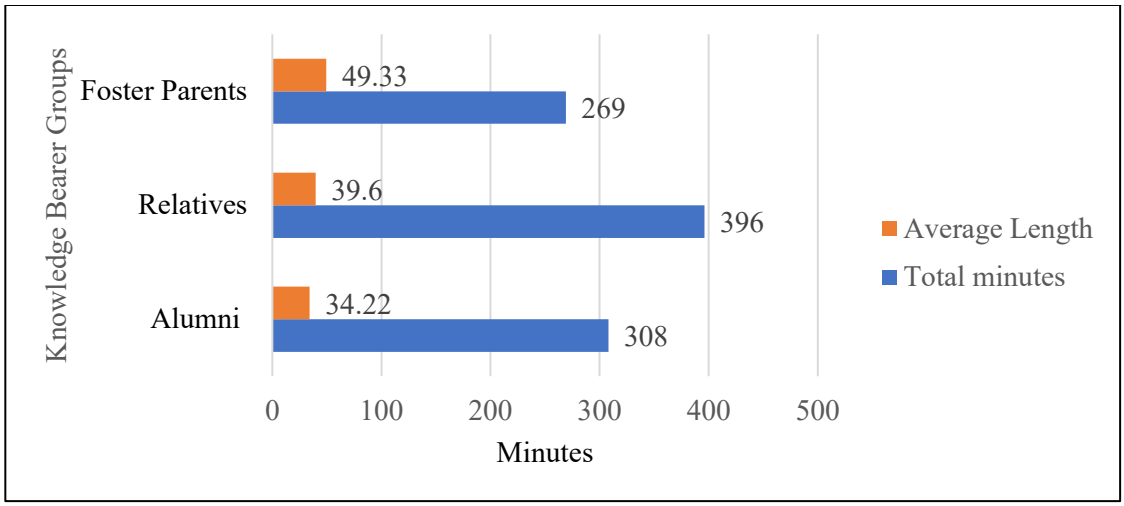

Figure 6. Length of Interviews

Data Analysis Methods

While many qualitative studies do not generate theory because they are more descriptive rather than interpretative (Gilgun, 2015; Sandelwoski, 1993), this emancipatory qualitative study is both deductive (theory testing) and inductive (theory building). First, a deductive qualitative method called directed content analysis was used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kangäs, 2007) and the second part involved an inductive Indigenous method called storying or storywork (Archibald, 2008; Archibald, 2019; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). These combined methods are aligned with the research aims that both test and build upon the Indigenous Connectedness Framework while remaining open to other conceptual possibilities and mechanisms of child wellbeing.

Empirical variations of content analysis exist that range from quantification to meaning making from a systematic analysis of text (Mayring, 2000; Neuendorf, 2017). In directed content analysis (DCA), one of the first decisions made is whether to analyze manifest content and/or latent content (Elo & Kangäs, 2008). In this study, only the manifest content in the interview

transcripts will be analyzed using DCA and the latent content will be incorporated into the storying part of the analysis process.

Hsieh & Shannon (2005) state, "The goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (p. 1281). The next step of DCA involves the creation of a deductive coding system, which includes consideration of the theoretical unit of analysis and helps with the creation of hypothesis codes (Bengtsson, 2016; Mayring 2000; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The hypothesis codes that were developed based on the Indigenous Connectedness Framework include: family connectedness, community connectedness, intergenerational connectedness, spiritual connectedness, environmental connectedness and mechanisms of wellbeing. Each of these hypothesis codes are defined in more depth in an Indigenous connectedness conceptual paper (Ullrich, 2019). Table 7 shows how these codes were conceptualized and applied to transcripts.

Table 7

Hypothesis Codes from the Indigenous Connectedness Framework

Family connectedness	This code was applied anytime there was mention of family members- parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, or anyone the participant defined as family. There was not an analysis of how strong these relationships or connections were.
Community connectedness	This code was applied anytime there was discussion about community activities, resources, non-relative connections, supports, or resources that were available in the community.
Environmental connectedness	This code was applied anytime connection with land, place, water was mentioned.
Intergenerational connectedness	This code was applied if the participant discussed feeling connected to ancestors or future generations.
Spiritual connectedness	This code was applied when spirit, God, religion, prayer came up
Mechanisms for wellbeing	This code was applied anytime there was discussion about connectedness, relationships, activities that helped participants or the children they cared for- be healthy and well.

The last steps of DCA entail simultaneous coding and an interpretation of the results (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Mayring, 2000). Simultaneous coding involves the application of hypothesis codes and creation of inductive codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Simultaneous coding is useful because of the 'multiple meanings' that are contained within transcripts (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). After this inductive and deductive process of coding is complete, the second cycle of coding merges together overlapping concepts and themes that result in the creation of main and sub-main codes.

All interview transcripts are analyzed in an encrypted online computer software program, Version 8.2.17 Dedoose (2018), which allows texts to be highlighted and coded. The sections of highlighted texts are called excerpts. Memos can also be used and applied to excerpts to document the reasoning and justification for new inductive codes or to pin a section for further analysis. After all the transcripts are coded, the number of times these codes were applied to all the text excerpts are reviewed to indicate what areas the knowledge bearers talked about the most. Examining what topics/codes came up more frequently provides guidance for what to focus on in the interpretative phase of the analysis process. Indigenous storywork or storying provides an interpretative method that helps to think about what should be learned from all of this.

Indigenous storywork or storying derives from the methodology of storytelling (Archibald, 2008; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). This is different from narrative inquiry because the purpose of the analysis is not to identify narrative type, sequence, poetic structure or an evaluation of what the story's meaning is (Wells, 2011). In some ways narrative inquiry keeps the research subject separate from the researcher. Whereas Phillips & Bunda (2018) define Indigenous storying as "the act of making and remaking meaning through stories" (p. 7).

Storying involves listening to "build, develop, and share our own stories with those who have shared their stories with us" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017, p. 378). My engagement in Indigenous storying methods shifts my role to both researcher and co-knowledge bearer through the re-telling of an interwoven story. In some ways, the knowledge bearers in this study are also co-researchers as they contemplate what stories they decide to share with me. This intertwined modality of storying is important to conceptualize in order to be clear about the methods used to analyze the data.

Storytelling and storying are complex and hard to explain as a research method because so much of it is intuitive, spiritual and metaphysical (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). For example, having a grasp on the deeper meaning of a story sometimes involves the subjective surfacing of knowledge from a collective consciousness through dreams, prayer and ceremony (Kovach, 2009). This method of meaning making might look different depending on what individual researchers feel most connected to. In this paper I outline the steps that personally helped me conduct the storying process so that I can share my interpretation and deeper meaning making as a method after interviews were completed, transcripts were reviewed, and coding was done.

These steps are not in sequential order. For me, finding the deeper meaning was like an eagle flying high above, dropping down closer to the earth, going back up into the sky again, sitting in a nest or on a branch for a while, connecting with the elements, sustaining self, weathering storms and going to the ocean and forest for confirmation and verification.

Step 1. Hearing the stories

I first heard the stories when I interviewed people. I heard them again as I read through the transcripts. I went back and listened to the audio-recordings to continue to capture the sounds

of what was shared with me. The transcripts do not capture the emotion behind some of the words. Listening to the sounds of people's voices helped me stay closely attune to feelings and emotions (both theirs and my own) that were attached to what was said. Also, I could visually see the knowledge bearers as they spoke, which is important because I could 'listen' to non-verbal communication in this way.

Step 2. Memoing

As I heard and read the stories, I created memos on my personal reflections of what was taught to me. I examined what was similar or different from my own thinking or life experience. I compared what was said to me to what I understood as the Indigenous Connectedness Framework. I looked back and read my memos to help me continue to go deeper into what this all means across the three different groups of participants within an Alaska Native context.

Step 3. Getting out in nature

I had the biggest epiphanies and a-ha moments about the deeper meanings within the stories happened as I walked through a forest, picked berries, watched a sunrise or sat by the ocean in the beautiful summer and fall time settings of southcentral Alaska. After I realized that being out in nature was part of my analysis process, I started taking pictures of these environments so I could share them in future presentations of this research story. Being in nature is where I tap into spirit or the dream world and I believe that much of what I share in this dissertation comes from this realm. I stumbled upon this form of meaning making by stepping away and taking a break from the research. How ironic that this process of getting away from the research brought me closer to it.

Step 4. Teaching, presenting, connecting

I am a trainer and I would have a-ha moments as I trained child welfare workers about trauma informed care, the Indian Child Welfare Act, cultural humility and the history of Alaska. My co-workers would often see me jotting down thoughts and insights as quickly as I could on a post-it note or in a notebook as we were training. I was reflecting on the deeper meaning of the research. I also attended a Native Child Research Exchange Conference to present preliminary findings to help me confirm or verify what I was learning from the knowledge-bearers. Conference attendees, and my community advisors gave me feedback that helped me think about gaps of information and better ways to explain the research methods. I realize that my community was also part of the storying process.

For the results section, I reconnected with a few knowledge bearers who invited me to make additional contact. In hindsight I wish I had built into the study more of the intention of re-connecting with more knowledge bearers who shared their story, so it was a continuous process of learning and exchange. However, I accept that I had time limitations for completing this dissertation and I remain committed to doing better in the coordination of the next research study design. Hopefully outlining these steps of storying are helpful to other Indigenous scholars that are in the planning phase of their research or trying to explain how they came to the interpretations and conclusions they have.

Cycles of Analysis

The first cycle of analysis utilized directed content analysis (DCA) for initial coding of the interview transcripts. The second cycle of DCA was the process of merging codes, identifying core concepts and examining the frequency with which each concept was mentioned by participants. The third cycle of analysis consisted of Indigenous storying. This process

involved a return to the knowledge bearers' stories to bring breadth and depth to the meaning of concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing after giving attention to the trauma and challenges that were discussed. From this third level of analysis, the Indigenous Connectedness Framework was expanded upon and reconstructed. The fourth and final cycle of analysis weaves the stories together by sharing a lengthy excerpt of a knowledge bearer's story in an attempt to bridge an academic epistemological gap between analytical separation and holism. This process draws out the latent content and interpretive findings in a way that hopefully helps the consumer of this knowledge move from a place of logic and reasoning to an energetic space of healing and heightened awareness that is the foundation of Indigenous storying (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000).

CHAPTER 4: Results

The following chapter covers the results of listening to 25 sacred life experiences, worldviews and stories in relation to my own life and the aims of this research study. Any good that comes out of this section belongs to the knowledge bearers. Anything that seems erroneous or misguided belongs to me. While it is difficult to fully capture the essence of what people gifted through sharing their story, this chapter weaves together a learned understanding of Alaska Native child wellbeing within an Indigenous Connectedness Framework in the context of the Alaska child welfare system. Every person's story is full of intricacies, commonalities and differences. These stories span generations, lands and cultures and have something to teach us.

The central aims of this research are to describe child wellbeing from the perspective of Alaska Native foster care alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents and to compare their perspectives to the hypothesized Indigenous Connectedness Framework. The yield of this work is a more fully developed Indigenous Connectedness Framework that is informed by the literature and confirmed, expanded, or refuted by the people who are most knowledgeable about and affected by the Alaska child welfare system. The results of this study are organized by the methodological processes that led to the bigger picture understanding of child wellbeing.

First Cycle of Analysis

The first cycle of initial coding involved the usage of hypothesis codes, creation of descriptive codes and process of simultaneous coding (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The original Indigenous Connectedness Framework (Ullrich, 2019) informed the creation of this study's 6 hypothesis codes: 1) *Intergenerational connectedness* was applied if the knowledge bearer discussed history, ancestors, Elders or future generations. 2) *Family connectedness* was applied if siblings, extended family, parents, relatives, or whomever they considered a relative

was discussed. 3) *Community connectedness* was applied if community, resources or non-relative supports were mentioned. 4) *Environmental connectedness* was applied if the knowledge bearer spoke about land, water, animals, plants, nature or important places. 5) *Spiritual connectedness* was applied if God, higher power, religion, ceremony, spirit or aspects of a higher self were discussed. 6) *Mechanisms of wellbeing* as a code was used anytime someone talked about a way to promote child wellbeing, such as helping children feel like they belong, or engaging children in certain activities.

Descriptive codes were created as directed content analysis was conducted with the application of hypothesis codes. These descriptive codes attempted to capture the words and concepts used by the knowledge bearers in the interviews. What came up in the interviews were not just concepts of child wellbeing, but also challenges that made it hard to achieve child wellbeing, so these were captured in the descriptive codes as well. Table 8 provides an overview of the 22 descriptive codes that were developed in addition to the hypothesis codes.

Table 8

Descriptive Codes in Alphabetical Order

Assumption of Responsibility	When a participant talks about the obligation to provide care for children in need.
Barriers to Wellbeing	Specific issues that are more systematic/institutional in nature that made it harder for a child/youth to be well
Caregiver Supports	Supports caregivers talked about that helped them continue to provide care for a child
Cultural Connectedness	Use of the term culture, values, identity, cultural activities
Culture as Spirit	Talks about culture and spirit together
Cultural/Tribal Accommodations	Whenever foster parents or relatives talk about their own cultural/tribal background in comparison to the children and any accommodations they made to keep the children connected.
Grief and Loss	Anytime death is discussed of a parent or family member

Assumption of Responsibility	When a participant talks about the obligation to provide care for children in need.
Knowing Who You Are and Where You Come From	Identity formation, relationships, knowing place/environment they come from, belonging, or connection
Language	Anytime they talk about their Indigenous language
Observed Wellbeing Outcomes	Specific outcomes of child wellbeing that people have seen, i.e., happiness, security, expanded family, reunification
Permanency for Wellbeing	When participants talk about adoption, guardianship, reunification, etc. as a way to promote child wellbeing
Reciprocal Relationships	When caregivers feel that children/youth have helped them heal or connect and vice versa
Relational Continuity	Helping children/youth stay in contact with relatives, siblings, foster parents so they know people don't disappear from their lives
Resilience	Doing well despite the odds, intrinsic characteristics that help them keep trauma and false beliefs at bay
Resources for Wellbeing	Whenever alumni or caregivers talk about specific resources that helped them
Sense of Safety/Stability	When participants talk about the need to help children establish a sense of safety and stability
Struggles	Struggles with family, OCS, tribes, or with being a caregiver
Substance Abuse	Anytime a participant talks about the ways substance abuse affected their lives
Trauma as a Challenge	When participants talk about their trauma, or children's trauma and the ways it affected their lives
Tribal Support	Anytime a tribe is talked about in a supportive and helpful way
Urban/Rural Differences	Whenever the participant describes differences in child wellbeing in rural or urban settings
Western Lifestyle	Anytime they talk compare Indigenous and western ways of living and being

Simultaneous coding was used to apply more than one code to an interview excerpt and indicate the multiple meanings that an excerpt could entail. For example, the following excerpt had four codes applied to it: *family connectedness, knowing who you are and where you come from, community connectedness and mechanisms of wellbeing*. This was the response I received when I asked Sadie a probing question about what culture and traditions provide children:

Sadie: I guess a bigger idea of how they belong in the universe, I think… And, so teaching these kids that they were my nieces and nephews that they actually belong to this huge group of people was really nice for them to see how they fit in, and that, you know, people would tell them, 'I'm your aunt. I'm your uncle. I'm your cousin.' You know, and, like you have all these family members; even though you don't know them, they know where you came from. They know your grandma. They know your mother. They, I mean, they would constantly get told, 'Oh, I went to school with your mom,' or 'Your grandma raised me,' or stuff like that. So it helped them understand that they, like, belong to everybody.

I attempted to apply all potential codes to the excerpts to assist with the more in-depth interpretive analysis that would come later. The exact location of the applied codes was not precisely pinpointed in the excerpts, but it should stand within reason that the applied hypothesis and descriptive codes are linked to what the knowledge bearer said. For example, in the excerpt above, *family connectedness* was applied because the knowledge bearer spoke about youth learning who they are related to. *Knowing who you are* was applied because as they learn about their relatives, they learn who they are and where they come from which is family, community and the universe. *Community connectedness* was applied because the knowledge bearer said that as they meet their relatives, youth learn 'they belong to everybody.' *Mechanisms of wellbeing* was applied because knowing they belong and fit in seems to be an important way of promoting child wellbeing. This process of coding and directed content analysis has descriptive and interpretive elements throughout, which is both an inductive and deductive process.

This first cycle of analysis involved both inductive (hypothesis) and deductive (descriptive) coding. This process drew me in closer to the data as I took a variable-oriented approach to cross-case comparisons between what each knowledge bearer shared and the Indigenous Connectedness Framework (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). I also did variable-oriented comparisons across the 25 knowledge bearers' stories and experiences. This allowed me to find commonalities that needed further focus and attention and could possibly be generalizable to broader contexts (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). I created memos throughout the data

analysis to capture why certain descriptive codes were created and what some of the insights were that I gained about child wellbeing as codes were applied or created.

Second Cycle of Analysis

In the second cycle of analysis I began to identify core concepts and themes of child wellbeing by merging and grouping the codes that were developed in the first round of data analysis. I am calling the main codes that were identified 'main codes' and any codes that fit under that 'sub-main codes.' This approach was taken so I wouldn't need to re-code all 25 transcripts with brand new developed codes. Grouping and merging codes allowed me to take was created and begin to deepen my understanding of the core concepts and mechanisms.

This analysis resulted in 9 main codes: community connectedness, environmental connectedness, family connectedness, intergenerational connectedness, spiritual connectedness, concept of wellbeing, cultural connectedness, mechanisms of wellbeing and trauma as a challenge. These main codes became the main concepts that were focused on in the next step of data analysis. The sub-main codes that were grouped under main codes provide additional insight on the meaning of the core concepts identified in this study. Table 9 shows what sub-main codes were grouped under the main codes. A key finding from this is the importance of relationships under the main code mechanisms for wellbeing.

Table 9

Main Codes with Sub-main Codes

Main Codes	Concept of Wellbeing	Cultural Connectedness	Mechanisms of Wellbeing	Trauma as a Challenge
Sub-main Codes	Observed Wellbeing Outcomes Sense of Safety/ Stability	Culture as Spirit Language Urban/Rural Differences	Assumption of Responsibility Caregiver Supports Cultural/Tribal Accommodations Knowing Who You Are Permanency for Wellbeing Reciprocal Relationships Relational Continuity Resilience Resources for Wellbeing Tribal Support	Struggles Barriers to Wellbeing Grief & Loss Substance Abuse

As a part of directed content analysis, the next step examined the number of times the codes were applied to the transcripts to ensure that the most frequent elements were addressed in subsequent analyses. Figure 7 depicts the frequency of main codes after merging the main codes and sub-main codes.

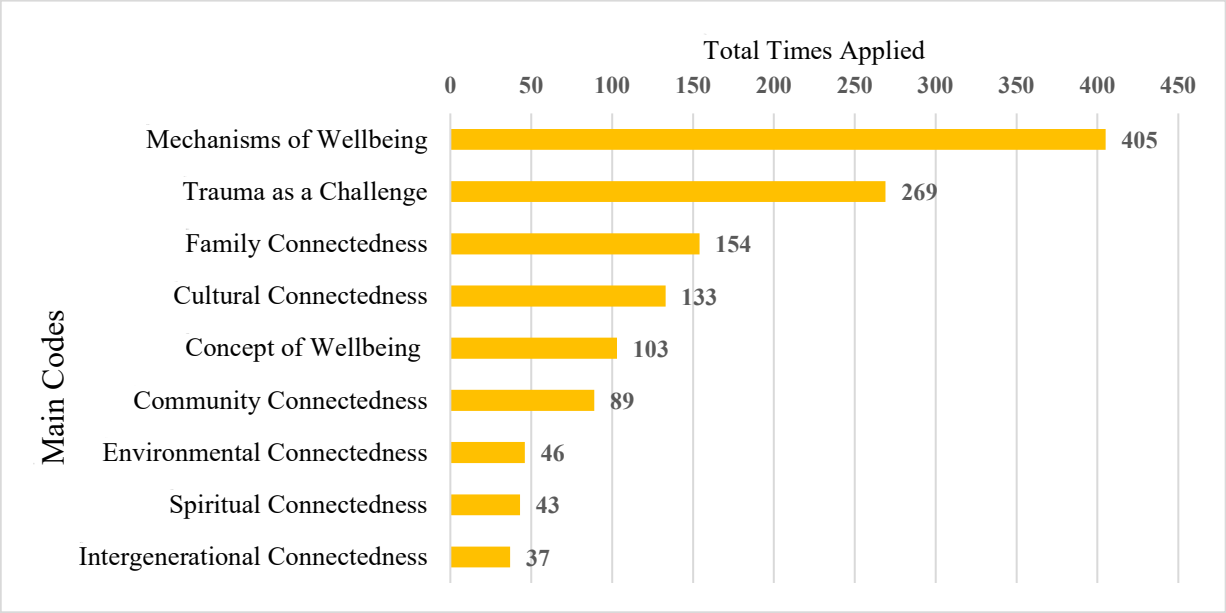

Figure 7. Frequency of Main Codes

This graph shows the most frequent topic discussed in all interviews were *mechanisms of wellbeing*. It is not enough to identify concepts or theories of wellbeing; we must also understand how wellbeing is actualized for a child. What this frequency chart also indicates is the need to pay attention to people's trauma cannot be bypassed or ignored as we deepen our understanding of Alaska Native child wellbeing within the context of child welfare. Overall, this second cycle of analysis pointed me in the direction of the mechanisms of wellbeing and trauma as a challenge. I also started thinking about what hypothesized connectedness concepts might need to change or expand to better fit the knowledge and wisdom that was shared in everyone's stories by utilizing methods of Indigenous storying.

Third Cycle of Analysis

Indigenous storying is a process of meaning-making that is not linear and sequential like directed content analysis was. Indigenous storying helps us grow our awareness about the world and life we live and often involves an energetic shift. Indigenous storying is intuitive, spiritual and relational (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). The directed content analysis helped me see what to needed to be focused on and Indigenous storying helped me identify some of the key lessons we could learn from the knowledge bearer's stories. My process of Indigenous storying involved listening, reflecting, getting out in nature and connecting with people about preliminary findings. I paid attention to the main concepts that were talked about in the interviews, I thought about why those main concepts were brought up, I reflected on the bigger picture lessons to be learned and how these lessons could actualize child wellbeing. This process took me about 5-6 months to complete. The three main lessons I learned were: The importance of acknowledging children's trauma, disconnectedness and relational wounding; maintaining relational continuity

and connectedness for child wellbeing; and internal and external relational healing and the Indigenous Connectedness Framework. Within each lesson, I bring forth the meaning-making of child wellbeing concepts and mechanisms that is embedded in the knowledge bearers' stories.

Lesson 1: Acknowledging Children's Trauma, Disconnectedness and Relational Wounding

While this study's focus was on child wellbeing within the Alaska Native child welfare context, every knowledge bearer in this study spoke about the need to acknowledge and know about children's trauma, struggles, barriers to wellbeing, substance abuse, or grief and loss that created disconnectedness from important relationships in their lives. These challenges are acknowledged and included within the IC Framework because in order to heal, we need to know what happened, continues to happen and what needs to be prevented, resisted and resolved. Many of the traumas that knowledge bearers discussed are wounds that are experienced by many people today and could stir up emotions. But as Sarge says, it's important for us to hear this:

> *Sarge:* Everybody seems to treat it like a hush situation when, in all reality, it shouldn't be. It shouldn't be at all. People should have the right to know what is going on with little ones in our communities and stuff. And it only gives them a chance to maybe step up and help out as much as they want. Or it gives that opportunity.

Trauma has affected everybody involved in child welfare. Trauma can become a relational wound that affects children's connectedness to the environment, family, ancestors and community. The challenges that knowledge bearers brought up are issues of disconnectedness that affected all levels of an Indigenous person's wellbeing. As much as caregivers and alumni spoke about the trauma and challenges, they also had the wisdom of relational healing, trauma recovery and mechanisms of wellbeing interwoven in their stories, which will be covered in the next section. The knowledge bearers teach us that we must acknowledge the trauma AND know that we are more than the trauma.

Children's Trauma

One of the biggest challenges that came up from caregivers was the issue of knowing how to parent a child that had experienced trauma and child maltreatment. Marie provides an example of what a child experienced and what they did to help her:

Marie: Yeah. She'd wake up crying…I don't know if it was in her sleep or when she got up. But by the time I got there, she was awake and crying like – so scary. It would shake our hearts. Then, she was crying like a traumatic cry… something probably that she went through before, because there were stories that I heard locally, because [we] were from the same town. But then as the days and the months would go by, she improved and got better. And even – the kids had their own room. They [two siblings] had their own twin beds. They slept together. And I didn't break them apart or nothing. As long as their room was up to code and everything, they could always sleep on the same bed.

Many caregivers wouldn't be sure why a child was responding or behaving in certain ways because they didn't fully know what the child had been through, so a lot of effort was made to accommodate and adapt to the children's needs.

Kious: That's always a challenge on not necessarily knowing what trauma they may have experienced, how to necessarily respond to that. Some kids literally wouldn't sleep for two or three days at a time, and you'd have to figure out a system that you could put in place that would let the parent sleep at night, but still keep the kid safe. Whereas, other kids would sleep 16 hours a day. So, trying to find that balance of wellbeing, I guess.

One foster parent had children who were almost needing a therapeutic level of care, so she decided that she would go through the training on how to be a therapeutic foster parent rather than have them get separated and moved again.

Kuiui Flower: I'm up for it. I can do it. I've come this far. And the reason is in the TDM- you know what a TDM is? [Team Decision-Making Meeting to discuss a potential change in placement]. In one of their meetings they said these boys really should be in a therapeutic foster home. And the little light came on, I gotta do this. I don't want some judge to say oh, they can't be placed in your home, they're not striving, they're not – whatever. And so, I was I'm going to get my therapeutic foster care license.

When children had multiple placements, they often experienced a relational wound that made it difficult for them to trust that their caregivers would be a safe, secure and consistent presence. Caregivers had to learn how to respond to children that had experienced removal and separation.

Ginger: I've learned that time outs don't work. Time in. Time outs don't work. You have to have time in with them. It's more important bringing them closer than putting them in a corner or on a chair for behavior. That's one of the most important things. That's why I identify what I've learned parenting (Child name) has been counterintuitive. What works with a child you're clearly bonded with doesn't work with a child that has trauma in their history.

I learned through her that she'll self-sabotage. And it still happens now. I've learned that when you have disruptions in your routines, like when school ends for the summer, I can expect a meltdown within a week or two 'cause they feel unsafe. I've got to where I can write it on the calendar. When we have long days, daylight times change. When it gets darker in the winter, and I guess lighter in the summer there'll be an impact, and it's with kids that have attachment issues. Any changes in their routine can – I've learned how to recognize that.

It can feel heartbreaking to see a child go through a removal and multiple moves. The intervention that is designed to save lives and protect children can sometimes add to the harm they have experienced because placement disruptions can affect a child's ability to trust caregivers. The knowledge bearers in this study provide hope and guidance on the ways they helped children navigate these traumas and challenges. A lot of parenting research was done alongside caregiver's commitment to help the children.

Betty: So we – I feel like I've done so much parenting research it's not even funny, but even with all the things that we've looked into, just finding ways for open communication is really key. And then making sure that they are culturally involved.

Disconnectedness from Siblings and Family

Three alumni spoke about how they were assisting their younger siblings who were still in state custody. This feeling of responsibility for younger siblings was sometimes a source of stress because they didn't know where to go or what to do to help because they didn't have the

power and control over where their siblings lived or what resources they could access. Another alumnus spoke about how her younger brother really struggled with everything that had happened in their lives and he got into drugs and passed away a couple years ago. Separation from siblings after child welfare involvement was a major source of grief and loss for another alumni.

> *Temperance:* And then, that's when my trauma started really flowing in with everything that was going on with OCS at that time. I was nine when I started raising my siblings, and then, it stopped when I turned 11 when OCS permanently separated my siblings from me...

If children are separated and disconnected from their siblings, parents and extended family members, this can become a major source of trauma and relational wounding. When I asked one alumnus about what environments they felt connected to or liked to be in, they responded by saying, "Anywhere my siblings were. I didn't really have a place, so just wherever they were." – MHW. When I asked another alumnus this same question, they had a similar response, except that they never felt like they were able to connect to an environment or place because they were separated from their siblings.

> *Temperance:* No, I was too hurt, angry. I couldn't focus on anything else other than trying to get my siblings back into my care at that time. I was so blinded with hate and anger and pain. I didn't really start getting connected with the land until I started participating in the activities at the [tribal organization].

These examples of pain and trauma need to be heard so that every effort is genuinely made to keep siblings together, meet children's need for healing and recovery and for their relationships to be maintained.

Disconnectedness from Environment

Another way that trauma and child welfare involvement created disconnectedness for an alumnus was in regard to their connection to the environment. Polar bear spoke about how she had been to her adoptive family's ancestral lands, but had never been to her own ancestral lands:

Polar Bear: …I've thought about this and it's kind of funny because how I feel now is I'm kind of like I don't have a real connection anywhere. Because like I don't feel very connected to like my [adoptive] mom's region but I also don't feel very connected to like my biological family's region 'cause like I said, I've never even been there. So I've kind of been like on my own, if that makes sense. And even as a mother now I'm like we're just kind of like our own little thing. We don't feel very connected anywhere. And which can be kind of hard sometimes I feel like. 'Cause I feel, I see it in other people and like even my biological family and my adoptive family I see how just as like an observer how they are very connected to their area and I don't feel that way.

Polar Bear felt like she didn't have a real connection anywhere and now that she is a mother, she is wondering what she is going to pass on to her children. This example of what she experienced begs the question- what can we do to ensure children involved with child welfare maintain a connection to their ancestral lands? Part of the reason why Polar Bear hasn't been back to her ancestral lands and community is because the cost of travel to most rural communities in Alaska is very expensive.

Challenge: Disconnectedness from Community

Sarah speaks about the and the disconnect she felt in her community where she was placed with an Elderly grandparent:

Sarah: And then, when they say villages are connected, I felt like our village wasn't really connected. There's a lot of depression and anxiety to our people there. When different people look inside to our culture, and they say, 'Oh, you guys are really connected, and you guys spend a lot of time with each other.' Well, why wasn't my family like that then? When we were growing up, they would not show emotions. They told us not to show emotion, just don't talk about it, don't say this, don't say that. Just don't talk about it. And even to this day, my mom doesn't show emotion. And so, it took me a while to be able to show emotions and talk about feelings…Maybe some other

> families are connected and stuff, but we weren't. I didn't have no one to talk to, or it was just how they- I don't know what it was, it was just probably that cultural thing. But I didn't feel connected, and I feel connected to my community now- now that I'm in Fairbanks and I'm in a different community. But there, we were not connected, and there's so many- there's such a high suicide rate of Alaska Natives, and it got really bad in the village. This little kid, he was 14, he shot himself. A girl, she was maybe 15 or 16, she shot herself too. It's really bad. I think when I was looking at the issue, I was thinking what can we do to help?, and I think we need more connecting together because people think all native cultures are connected, but some really aren't connected.

Knowledge of history and the truth of what led to some of the struggles we see today is important, so children and youth don't become confused about why people are acting the way they are. On the surface it looks like everyone is disconnected and not willing to show emotions or talk. At a deeper level, the behaviors people display are inherited survival strategies. Children and youth need to know about the epidemics that wiped out 60% of several Alaska Native communities, and that children were removed to boarding schools and orphanages. Children need to know that many of our community members, parents and grandparents have struggled with internalized oppression due to colonization and felt like no matter what they did it was wrong. A lack of knowledge of our true history could be a set up for a false belief system that dysfunction is our identity of who we are, our way of life, our culture and that this is the way it will always be.

Disconnectedness from Spiritual and Cultural Connectedness

Many forms of colonization have disrupted spiritual and cultural connectedness. Residential schools forbade children from engaging in cultural and spiritual practices. This disruption happened in this century and many Alaska Native people who attended residential schools in Alaska are still living today.

> *Olga*: Unfortunately, the majority of the spirituality in southeast was stomped out by the schools in my great grandmother's day. It's making a comeback but there's still a lot

> of fear around it because there's still people living who were in the residential schools.

The stomping out of spirituality involved forbidding the use of Indigenous languages and banning ceremonial practices that included singing and dancing. The reclamation process of cultural, spiritual and historical knowledge is still ongoing and is at different levels of recovery around Alaska.

Sarah speaks to the spiritual and cultural disconnect that she has observed and what she believes is associated with it. This is part of the narrative or story that is alive today:

> *Sarah:* I was thinking why don't our village have that kind of stuff? Like Inupiaq dancing and language- it's because the history of Alaska really got to us, the colonization, racism really got to us, and I think that's why as a people, we're so oppressed, and we have the highest statistics of violence, being missing or murdered, suicide, and all that. That's what I think.

What Sarah speaks to here is vitally important to reflect upon. People from Alaska Native communities are making the link between colonization, racism, oppression, lack of cultural engagement and the poor social outcomes that involve violence, murder and suicide.
This narrative brings up the belief that active cultural revitalization like dancing and language is linked to wellbeing.

An Alaska Native child's experience with intergenerational trauma within their family and within foster care can lead to further disconnect from their culture and spirituality. One alumnus spoke about how she began to associate her culture with a lack of safety and her survival strategy was to distance herself further from Alaska Native culture.

> *Marianna:* …I believe that if I had continued to be placed in more Native homes, just because of where my mind was at that time, I don't think it would have benefited me 'cause I was just like – my walls were completely up. It took years and years and years of my adoptive mom telling me that there's good and there's bad in every culture, there's beauty and there's ugly, and her working on me and working on me and working on me, and like giving me little tidbits here and there, trying to keep me connected in

> some kinda way and trying to get me reconnected. But she also knew when to back off, 'cause I would just shut down.

Part of what this shows us is the need to get clear about what our culture is, what it is not, how we want our culture to evolve and the importance of persistence. If a child only sees substance abuse, violence and child maltreatment committed by their family and community and then news articles that continue to send the message that all Alaska Native people are like this, then it can become a belief that this is what Alaska Native culture is. If people distance themselves from what they believe is Alaska Native culture to protect themselves, it could also close the door on Alaska Native spirituality. This defense mechanism is important to recognize, honor, acknowledge, and overcome.

Multiple Child Removals and Relational Discontinuity

In child welfare the term 'removed' is typically used when children are removed from their parents. As caregivers shared their knowledge of child wellbeing, they began to share their experiences of grief when children were removed from their care, whether the reason was for reunification or to live with relatives. What knowledge bearers shared was a lack of relational continuity that happened after caregivers had loved, bonded with and cared for the children. Many caregivers spoke about how they weren't allowed to keep in contact with the children after child welfare involvement ended.

Kuiui Flower: So we've had these kids almost two years and we grew to love them just like our own. We were so close to adopting them. Their dad, he didn't complete the parent training. He didn't complete nothing. He got a lawyer and OCS returned the kids back to him right away like in a matter of days. Just ripped them out from us. They were with us almost two years. I went into a deep severe depression from that. Yeah, and it was like just being in my room for a whole week not coming out for weeks at a time. I'd come out and eat something, you know, but other than that, and then, go right back to the room. Turn the TV on, windows are closed, curtains closed, it's all dark in there. So I went through that severe depression.

This heartbreak and depression that Kuiui Flower speaks of cannot be ignored. Parents, foster parents, relatives and children experience this grief when the children are removed multiple times without the maintenance of a continuous relationship with the people that care about them.

The lack of relational continuity was also brought up from an alumnus that wanted to have ongoing contact with her foster parent after she moved in with her relative and this connection didn't happen again until she was an adult.

> *Alita:* Maybe just having former foster parents like info on children cases if they – because foster parent, you know the foster parents I was with were really, really happy to have us in their home because they couldn't have kids. They were really upset when we got taken away. She ended up making a really big photo album for me and my brother with all of her info on it, her name, her phone, and her address, everything. So I was able to get a hold of her through Facebook after a week or two. Just reconnecting with her is really, really awesome.

It can be relationally wounding when children, parents and caregivers feel like they have no say or power in the placement decision and the child's relationship with those caregivers abruptly discontinues and reconnection never occurs. A different relational approach for child welfare may be necessary to prevent further heartbreak from happening for all involved.

Lesson 2: Maintaining Relational Continuity and Connectedness for Child Wellbeing

While knowledge bearers spoke about traumas and challenges, they witnessed or experienced, they also spoke about ways to overcome them. This next section of Indigenous storying takes a closer look at core connectedness concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing to begin to formulate what would remain and what would be changed within the Indigenous Connectedness Framework. Each of the hypothesized connectedness concepts and mechanisms are studied to learn from the ways these concepts were discussed or defined by knowledge bearers. From this process it was determined that *spiritual connectedness and cultural connectedness* needed to be combined and that the *concept of wellbeing* helped to convey child

wellbeing in greater detail. Overall, it was found that connectedness is a means for establishing relational continuity in a child's life which helps them feel safe and stable, which is key for trauma recovery.

Family Connectedness

Family connectedness was conceptualized in multiple ways. Knowledge bearers often spoke about the importance of maintaining sibling relationships for the children's wellbeing.

Kuiui Flower: We were very adamant and very vocal that [Older brother] and [Younger brother], they're the boys, that they be reuniting together here. We took in [Older brother] first and then we learned he had a little brother and a little sister. So, we advocated to get him moved into our house and we really stress how important that is to us.

Sibling relationships provide a sense of stability and continuity. Kuiui Flower further discussed how keeping siblings together helped them in their trauma recovery. The children needed someone in their life that knew them and understood what they had been through.

One foster care alumnus who had been placed with an older adult sibling talked about how it was comforting to have a familiar environment and said,

Baker: …It just felt like home. Even though that it wasn't in our house that we grew up in, it was nice to have something familiar. And just them sticking with our schedule and making sure that everything could try and be as smooth as possible.

This quote shares an automatic knowing that comes with sibling relationships. They know each other's strengths, personalities, non-verbal cues and expectations in terms of routines and rules in the home. This relational continuity facilitates a sense of wellbeing despite everything going on with their parents and involvement of child welfare officials. Siblings don't have to explain or re-hash their trauma history with each other because they often went through a lot of the challenges together.

Similarly, relatives can provide continuity for a child because the relative caregiver already knows the parents, the family's background and they have a strong commitment or assumption of responsibility for their niece, nephew, grandchild or cousin.

Hope: Because she was our family, I didn't even think about it. You know, I said yes right off the bat when they called my house…You know, not even to think twice about like, 'Oh, my God. Let me think about this and call you back.' No, that's our family, you know, someone who needs us. You know, it changed our whole world, you know, to add another child into our life. I mean a teenager, of course, because at the time we had a nine-year-old and a six-year-old, so it's like definitely world changing, but you know, to not have to think about even should we take this kid, what will happen. We didn't even – I didn't even consider thinking about it. I knew she needed somewhere immediately, and I knew that we would be, hopefully, a good fit for her.

One alumnus spoke about how placement with relatives was helpful for him because he was with people he already had pre-established relationships with and it meant he could keep in closer contact with his mother.

Sarge: I felt more of a family environment. It was more of a comfort knowing that I was around basically my people, my – people that I know and I'd known for a while. It was good though. I mean it was just good to know that, if anything, my parents weren't very far away from me. My mom mainly. My dad walked out of my life when I was a baby so there wasn't really much there. But just knowing that my mom was right there, and I mean even though I couldn't live with her at the time, to be able to stop in and see her wherever she may have been at the time was – that was comforting. And then going back with sober relatives and whatnot, it just made the experience a little easier. But then again, for a few nights after getting placed into a new home with relatives and stuff, that's sort of the norm, it took a few nights of just trying to adjust and adapt and realize that it's not really your home, but you're home.

From what Sarge shared, it's still an adjustment for a child to be placed outside of their home, even if they are staying with people they know and care about, but from his experience, being with relatives made it a little easier.

A non-relative caregiver wanted to ensure that the child remained connected with family because family provided positive identity development, history and expanded the web of support:

Sandy: Well, you know, it's important that he knows where he comes from and who his family is. He has those, he already had those connections with his grandparents. He calls his grandma mom and they were such a huge part of his life up to this point so it's really important to continue those connections and building those relationships and having that support system for him has been really important. So, it's not too huge of a change, you know, just kind of cutting everything off and having this new family. It's kind of a big, blended family is what we have. All together he's got, I believe it's like five grandmas now and like four grandpas. It's just kind of growing that web of support that he has.

Sandy shared how both the foster parents' family and the biological family expanded themselves to become a blended family for this child's sense of relational continuity. This ability for a child to remain in contact with people that care about him lets him know that he has people he can trust and count on and that they don't just disappear out of his life after child welfare involvement is over.

Children involved with child welfare were often a catalyst for relative caregivers to rebuild connections with each other, which strengthened family relationships:

Ginger: It was like the stars had to be in alignment for this all to happen. And when you say spiritual that's it – nobody would ever believe me, but I know that there was an intervention that made this happen. And in part of the process I also, when (Child) was being made available for adoption, because my mother was the seventh of 13 children, and I connected with all of the family, and they're scattered everywhere. I connected with all of them and said, "You know, there's a little girl that's available for adoption." And wherever I could, I went and met with cousins and told them just in case there was somebody that felt more inclined – I wanted everybody to know in case there was somebody that really wanted a small child. We've all stayed in contact since then.

When families know each other, remain in contact and support one another, the children's wellbeing is simultaneously supported because the children have connections to people that can encourage and teach them that they have people they belong to.

Family was also something that went beyond biological relations, for example one participant said that their dance group was their extended family as well.

Elmira: Well, you have your nuclear family, or your immediate family, brothers and sisters, mom, dad, but our family extends to aunts, uncles, everybody that we – like you have your dance group family. Everybody is caring of one another, and really care on how well everybody's doing, and wanting to help out with one another if people aren't doing so well, or looking out for whatever. Like I moved into this new home, and there are people from the dance group who are giving their towels, hand towels, or pots and pans, dishes, what have you. So it's just everyone who's looking out for one another.

People that are in relationship with each other and are committed to helping each other and looking out for one another is someone that could be considered family. This concept of family is important to recognize for children because what might seem like an arbitrary relationship on the surface is actually a relationship that is as important and as deep as a family bond.

Summary of Family Connectedness Mechanisms

From what most knowledge bearers shared, children need to be connected to family and siblings because it was important to maintain those bonds and relationships in order to help children feel safe and secure. Some of the alumni spoke about how being with family members put them more at ease as they went through the removal process because they stayed with people they already knew and had formed relationships with. Family connectedness provided continuity, history and identity. Some relatives discussed an assumption of responsibility for providing care of children, which demonstrates how important children are to families and that the care for children is how families remain whole and connected to one another.

Community Connectedness

Community connectedness was considered an important component for child wellbeing through multiple modalities. One of the ways community supported child wellbeing was by looking after each other’s children, even if they are not directly related.

Sadie: And you know, cell phones weren't a huge thing back then yet. And so I was counting on people to let me know if they saw him doing something or if they, if, you know, good or bad saw him doing anything.

Other caregivers discussed having neighbors that would correct children, or say something if they thought the child was doing something wrong. Caregivers rely on other adults and sometimes older children to help look after the younger children and maintain their safety and wellbeing.

When community members believe they have a responsibility for every child's safety and wellbeing, then they are more likely to step up and help out when needed.

Kious: It's not a "It takes a village to raise a child." It's being connected to that community and knowing that if there's an issue, that community will step in and help. I think that when you hear the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child," it's easy to dissociate yourself from the responsibility of being able to connect with other individuals within the community…

From what Kious stated, it doesn't take a village to raise a child, it takes a connection and a relationship. In order to establish this community-child relationship, children need to know who their community is and understand their place in that community. Without this connection, that sense of responsibility dissolves and children could feel invisible and adults might think it's not their place to say or do anything, which could leave children in unsafe situations.

Many knowledge bearers that grew up in a rural community or were living in a rural community stated that they felt like their whole community was their family.

Olga: Realistically, the majority of our community is family. We have the community at large, of course, my husbands from the East Coast so he doesn't have any family up here. But I have a very large family and he just kind of got absorbed into it. And so, that's the majority of our community.

Rural communities are distinctly different from large urban areas where people can remain somewhat anonymous. For example, a child could walk through a store in Anchorage and not

know a single person that they came across, whereas in a rural community everyone is recognized and known.

Community can be a source of strength for both caregivers and children. For example, in one rural community, a foster parent used the community radio to make a request for baby items and everyone in the community heard it and met this foster parent and child's needs.

Shari Dawn: Yeah. And, you know, we have VHF at home, like a CB radio. And so I was able to get on there and borrow other people's baby equipment, jumpers and swings, things like that, so that was really nice. And as soon as I was done, they went back to the parents.

Community connectedness provides tangible resources for families when people share and work together for the benefit of children, families and community members.

Another foster parent shared that she received encouragement and gratitude from rural community members when they found out she was providing care for two children involved with child welfare.

Marie: But I knew I was their caregiver, but never a parent. I knew their parents were working on what they had to and we were the caregivers. Just to make sure they were safe and getting what they needed. And there was like so many people in the community that would be like, "Thank you. I heard what you're doing. Thank you so much." "So good of you." "They're in the right place."

The community influenced how this foster parent saw her role in this community. The positive reinforcement she received for stepping up to make sure the children remained in their community of origin made a difference. In small communities, the roles are probably clearer because everyone knows everyone, so the community holds each other accountable. Many of the foster parents in rural communities never had to make an official announcement about the care they were providing children because everyone already knew. When people already know what is going on, this could be a mechanism for wellbeing because parents, children and caregivers

have nothing to hide and perhaps community members step up to provide extra support to community members in need.

A community is made up of multiple families living in one distinct place. If community is a place where everybody knows you and has a responsibility to you, it could shape the way a child or adult behaves in that community. In this passage, this alumnus had someone that might not have been available to be foster parents to him, but they were able to teach him important skills about hunting and subsistence activities.

Sarge: But I did have a family that I got really close with. They never offered to foster me or anything, but I didn't really know them until after I moved in [with foster parents]…Tom did a pretty damn good job as far as taking me in and understanding my background a little more. And so, on weekends, he'd make sure [my brother] and I had our homework done and all of that. He was pretty strict about it. And then as long as we had it done, he'd throw us on the snow machines and take us out in the country for some type of game or some rabbits or some foxes or something. So, yeah, he was one to make sure that we got to get out and do those kinds of things.

This was important knowledge to pass on so that the community had reliable hunters that could provide food for survival. This was an extremely important source of resilience for this alumnus. When community members step up to pass on skills and knowledge to children, this becomes a mechanism for not only child wellbeing, but also community wellbeing.

Many knowledge bearers referred to community connectedness in terms of activities they participated in with people and places they visited or resources that could be accessed. Community gatherings were referred to quite often as a way to build community connectedness.

Marie: My husband was off of work in the winter and we'd got to community events. We'd go to watch basketball, wrestling, like everything that happened. Eskimo dancing, performances, Christmas plays. Take pictures, send them to their mom.

When children tag along with the adults to these events, it provided an opportunity for the child to get to know who all lives in the community and for the community to get to know them. Some

children then decided they want to participate in those activities and learn additional skills like communication, teamwork and they gained confidence in being in front of people.

Summary of Community Connectedness Mechanisms

Sometimes community was thought of as everyone that was not considered a family member and some people referred to the entire community as family- depending on what community the they were living or raised in. What community should be is a formed social support network that provides supervision, reinforces social norms and encourages people to do the right thing. Being part of a community involves action and participation that allows people to be themselves and contribute their unique gifts for the wellbeing of all.

Intergenerational Connectedness

One of the ways that knowledge bearers spoke about intergenerational connectedness was to ensure that children had access to and connection with Elders. This connection was important so that the children could learn cultural, spiritual, historical, ecological and Indigenous knowledge.

Sadie: And then we'd go to culture camps where Elders would tell stories and stuff and they got to know a lot of the Elders. And part of our culture, is to serve Elders and be respectful of the Elders and listen to them and stuff. So they got to know a lot of people at the potlatches and they'd be seen around helping out. You know, and they'd always get compliments or encouragement for doing such a good job helping and serving coffee and tea, making sure the elders had food. And so they connected with them that way, and then I would try to take them to anything that an Elder was speaking at so they could listen.

This connection with Elders also taught children how to listen and learn. If children do not learn from Elders they might miss out and then not be able to pass that information on to future generations of children.

A big component of intergenerational connectedness was about learning the history so that children understood why things are the way they are today. This knowledge of history helps children know who they are in relation to others.

Elmira: I feel like I am trying to learn more about our past as, like, Inupiaq people, and trying to have more of a connection with it. I have a niece, and I'm really trying to make sure she's as involved with our culture, because she has two different communities from Alaska where she's – her family is from. So trying to make sure she also knows our community and our gatherings, trying to make sure she's getting involved at a younger age, younger age than we did, because we didn't – from the line of siblings in my family, we didn't start to become involved until, like, teenagers.

Many adults are working on retrieving and sustaining this historical and cultural knowledge for the benefit of children. The hope is that children will learn the skills and knowledge at younger ages, so they have a head start on being connected with their history and culture.

The ancestors passed on songs and dances, spoke the Indigenous language, lived off the land and were guided by cultural values. Having ancestral knowledge is seen as a source of strength for children because it can teach them how to live a good life in relationship with the land and with each other.

Sandy: He's interested in like the dancing and just learning about his background and the connections to the ancestors here on the island. You know taking him to – my husband was born in [community name], which is a rural community so taking him back to his home and teaching him about growing up in that setting. Being out on the water and out on the land and instilling the cultural values especially stewardship and respect. And just kind of instilling those values and teaching how it relates to our modern day life living.

When knowledge bearers talked about ancestors, there was also an acknowledgement that things change as a natural progression of life and adaptation to the present time period. Intergenerational connectedness bridges gaps between the ancestors and the people and children that are alive today with the foresight that this ancestral knowledge needs to be retained and passed down for future generations.

One of the purposes for passing on knowledge through the generations was for ongoing strength and survival.

Sadie: And then the thing with the traditional medicinal plant use that I teach everyone in my home so that they know what they can use and can't use and what we can- what medicinal part, like, if you get hurt out in the field and stuff, things you can use. You know, that just shows them that knowledge was passed down to me through generation after generation…But I think just that whole generational lineage makes them understand they're from somewhere and they can always come back here.

Children and adults become the conduits for sacred knowledge and these links provide a sense of connection that goes beyond the scope of western concepts of time. This intergenerational knowledge shapes children's identities.

Sarah: The importance for me is to know where I came from and to know who I am, and just being me, because in this world without my culture, and without my language, and without the stuff I know, I feel lost. Who am I? Was I supposed to be someone different? Then I should learn those things and it's just really important to me to know that stuff so I can pass it down to my children, because it's who we are. And it's really important to have with us.

Sometimes intergenerational connectedness was discussed in terms of breaking cycles of trauma and abuse from one generation to the next in order for future generations to be free from that. One alumni (Alita) said that they wished they had more connection with their ancestors, but their main focus right now was setting a good example for the children. Some of the ways that a connection with the ancestors could be built is through family history, participation in cultural activities, language learning and engaging in subsistence activities.

Summary of Intergenerational Connectedness Mechanisms

Intergenerational connectedness is a link between ancestors, Elders, adults, children, and future generations. This connection happens through stories, knowledge, history, cultural ways of being and values. When children have this sense of a generational connection, it helps them understand their role, purpose and place in this world.

Environmental Connectedness

Concepts of the environment include lands, air, streams, rivers and oceans. One alumnus spoke about her connection with the environment:

Alita: Yeah you know I'm sitting here…and I'm staring at my channel. There's cruise ships out here, it's beautiful, there's other islands across there that people live at. This is definitely home. You know my grandma would always get the kids all together and we would all go takes walks on the docks all the time. So that's a really big connection I have with [this community], taking walks and the smell of the ocean, it's home.

When children develop connection to the land and water it provides a sense of home and belonging into adulthood. As Alita looked out at the beauty in her environment, she also felt a connection to community. This connection happens when children are taken on walks and spend time in nature where memories are created of certain smells, textures and sounds that become familiar and then become a relationship.

Another way connection to the environment was discussed was in terms of children playing outside and being in safe neighborhoods.

Maria: They play outside like that all day, and all of my neighbors have kids…And so I feel like the neighborhood is safe, because there's nobody driving like maniacs in here, 'cause we all have kids and we all watch each other's kids…But yeah, they all play, and they're all good kids.

Playing outside gives children something to do with other children. When children play outside, the neighborhood behaves in a way that is cognizant of them and ensures that nobody drives unsafely around them. Children are not only shaped by their environment, but the environment also shapes them.

One alumnus described his connection with the land as a source of strength and resilience.

Sarge: That was important just to be able to take a minute or two and just forget about the situation that I was in. Just get out in the country and free the mind and the soul and just – it was huge for me. And it still is. I mean like I said, growing up in that situation, you got a lot to think about. And there's a lot – most of it is a lot of negativity. It's like what did I do to get here? What did I do wrong? Why am I here? And to be able to take that moment and that break and to get out and be one with nature, it was very soothing.

The importance of environmental connectedness is it can provide a safe haven for a child that is experiencing a lot of upheaval and turmoil. For Sarge, getting out on the land was a source of freedom, spirituality, positivity, mental health and a huge component of wellbeing. His link to the environment kept him thinking more positively despite everything that was going on with regards to child welfare involvement.

Participation in subsistence activities was essential to some of the alumni and caregivers because it provided a connection to a cultural and ancestral way of life, to the animals and environment, to family, and to community.

Sarge: So, I mean I was always driving a boat by the time I was six and seven and going out and about in the country and it was a rich part of what he had to teach me, is the subsistence way of life. And you don't always have to be rich to buy food from the store. It's cheaper to get up and get it yourself. So, yeah, I appreciate where I come. I love who I am to this day, I still really – I'm just thankful I came out of that way of living there. I mean they – I don't dwell on it. I'm more thankful – I'm more thankful about it than I ever dwell on it because if I never experienced it, I really think I probably would have a boring life.

Again, this connection to subsistence is a mechanism for child wellbeing because it provides resilience and pride in who they are. The subsistence skills and knowledge need to be taught to children so that they feel anchored in their identity as an Alaska Native person.

Summary of Environmental Connectedness Mechanisms

The environment provides food, identity, history, culture and a place to belong. Connection with the land and water provides a sense of home and freedom for their mind and

spirit. For some people it is hard to imagine not being connected to the environment and for others, they were removed and haven't made it back 'home' to that environment yet.

Spiritual and Cultural Connectedness

Some of the hypothesis and descriptive codes overlapped with one another. In the first IC Framework, *spiritual connectedness* encapsulated the concept of culture. After speaking with knowledge bearers and conducting DCA, it seemed like the concept of *spiritual connectedness* needed to expand or be called something different. Participants often spoke about spirituality in terms of culture, religion, both or separately. The following excerpt highlights the way a knowledge bearer navigated the question of spirituality:

Allen: Loosely. I grew up Lutheran, so we went – I grew up going to church at a Lutheran church, and my mom grew up Russian Orthodox, 'cause that's what my grandmother practiced. And so, I also went to church with my grandmother on occasions, and celebrated Russian Christmas, and Russian Orthodox Easter, and so, we still celebrate Russian Christmas, and if there's people who make Easter bread and go to church at midnight mass, it's nice to be involved in that in some way. But in terms of any cultural traditions, we don't really have any cultural traditions beyond what I feel like are more intrinsic things that I can't really put into words, but I feel like are more nature-based in terms of the way we harvest, the way we eat, the way we regard the animals that we take, and thank for their sustenance. But there's also a spiritual aspect in just sitting, connecting, whether you're having tea with somebody, or you're sitting with them beading. The kind of communal, shared spirituality, I really believe in.

While I asked about spirituality, Allen responded with religion and culture. Spirituality was described as intrinsic and difficult to put into words, but it resembles a feeling or an energy that is exchanged between self and others. Another storyteller had a similar response for the way they conceptualized spirituality:

Elmira: I feel like our Native Games are pretty spiritual to us. For some of the events, we have the seal oil lamp, and that is kind of – it can be a spiritual way of, like, tying back into our roots by using that, by the smell, but the – we don't go to church. I mean we'll, in a way, pray with a group of people if there's something significant going on, whether it's a more special gathering, good or bad, and usually someone

> will pray in their language, their Native language, and then sometimes translate it into English, but no.

If knowledge bearers asked what I meant by spirit or spirituality I asked them to reflect on whatever their understanding was because I wanted to learn what this concept meant to them. Through the process of DCA, I came to a conclusion that spirituality and culture overlapped and could better be described as *spiritual and cultural connectedness* in the Indigenous Connectedness Framework. Cultural connectedness was coded more than double the amount of times spiritual connectedness and significantly overlapped with each other.

The following excerpt further exemplifies what *spiritual and cultural connectedness* means and how the concepts of spirituality and culture overlap:

Kious: …Then there's those that absolutely have to have a relationship with God. And whatever that God might look like, whether it's their higher power, and that humbleness of not necessarily being in control. I think from a spirituality perspective, those people are really easy to find, because they're just humble. They don't have to be in control and they're just grateful, period. They're simply grateful, and they're willing to share whatever they have or whoever they are of themselves with anybody. And that was a real journey for me, personally. And you can't go on a whaling hunt and not see God present. So, on the back of my card is all my contact information, and on the front of my card is all of our values, and when you go on a whaling hunt, you see those values in action. And you can't help but see it, you can't help but feel it, you can't help but see the best of a culture in action. And my desire would be just to always see those values in action every day. We shouldn't just limit our values to Sunday, we shouldn't just limit our values to whaling. We need to commit to those values, and I think we do a really good job of measuring everything that's wrong with the world: infant mortality, fatalities, domestic violence, we do a really good job at measuring everything that's bad. We do a really lousy job at measuring everything that's good. And so, when I think of child wellness, I think how many times has that child heard this week- I love you? It's not something that you can just say on Sunday. It's something that you gotta say every day. And it's not something that you could just say the words, "I love you," it's a conversation. "How do you know that I love you? What is it that I do that shows you that I love you? And what is it that I do that makes you question that? And are you willing to evaluate that behavior?"

Mechanisms of Spiritual and Cultural Connectedness

From what I learned from Kious and the knowledge bearers, *spiritual and cultural connectedness* is how people live, a connection to a higher power/God, participation in cultural activities, love, sharing, gratitude, tied to our roots, language, gatherings, prayer, harvesting animals, sitting with somebody, journeys, humbleness, an intrinsic feeling and is difficult to put into words. Many people spoke about spirituality being their culture, or their culture being their spirituality. Within the conceptualization of *spiritual and cultural connectedness* are the core mechanisms of child wellbeing. As I have heard some people say in different conference venues, 'our culture is our medicine,' we can say also that our culture is our pathway to healing and wellbeing.

While spirituality and culture seem to be inseparable, and religion could fit within this concept, most participants spoke about culture and religion dichotomously. Religion was typically described as a denomination that involved certain beliefs, gatherings, and practices. However, when people spoke about culture, they spoke about Alaska Native games, dancing, subsistence activities, getting out on the land, art, roles, foods, names, or language, and religious denominations were never part of that discussion. Religion is valid and important to billions of people's wellbeing on this planet. It is separated out from the concept of *spiritual and cultural connectedness* because if it did come up as an example of spirituality, it was usually not something that people were actively engaged in as a way to keep themselves or the children they cared for healthy and well. When most people spoke about culture, they discussed different ways they were living their culture. This distinction between spiritual/cultural and spiritual/religious is captured in Figure 8.

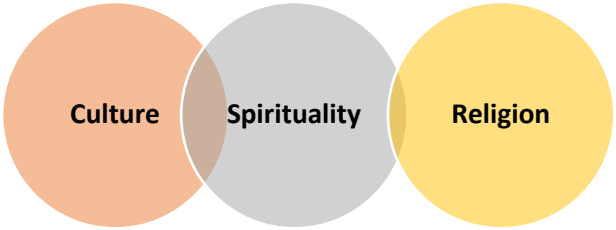

Figure 8. Spirituality, Culture, and Religion

What is conceptualized as spirituality is different from the concept of spirit on its own. Spirit is intrinsic, an energy, sacred and part of a vast universe that is exercised and strengthened through cultural practices. Everyone is born with their unique spirit that is at the core of who they are and goes beyond culture, religion and our comprehension.

Core Concept of Child Wellbeing

An important concept for the IC Framework that came from the DCA process was the way people responded to what they believed child wellbeing meant and looked like. Because this is a study involving people who had interactions within the child welfare system, it is not surprising that a sense of safety and stability frequently came up a core component of wellbeing. These are some of the responses I received when I asked knowledge bearers, "What does child wellbeing mean to you?"

Apee: Their whole sense of stability, I mean down to knowing when they're thirsty and - yeah. Their whole wellbeing…I mean her understanding about her.

Baker: Definitely thinking of how the child is affected by the change, and just meeting their needs, whether that be making sure that they get to school, having adequate living situations, and just making sure that the child is having the best possible transition and that it doesn't affect them too much.

Kuiui Flower: To me, it means taking care of a child, letting them know that they're loved, they're wanted, that they will be taken care of and will have a good sense of stability.

Krissy: I am making sure that they have a stable life. I want my feet planted. I want their feet planted. I want them to be able to come home and know that we're not moving again. This is their home.

When a child is removed from their own home, stability is something that happens through the establishment of a routine, connection to a new home environment, and maintenance of important relationships to the child. As Apee stated, it was important for her granddaughter's whole wellbeing to keep a steady understanding of herself. Much of a child's identity is in the relationships of the people around them. When children maintain a stable sense of self in relation to their family, community and home, it also helps them establish a sense of safety.

In this quote, Marie discusses the importance of keeping a child in touch with their friends and family as a way to conceptualize child wellbeing.

Marie: Well, when I think of that, I think of their environment, their mentality, their self-esteem, their surrounding. Who is surrounding them? Are they getting the care nutritionally? Are they getting their daily meals? Are they spending time with friends and family? Because I wouldn't keep them away from like their grandparents or extended family.

This relational continuity helps a child feel more secure and shows them that they have people in their life that have a steady presence even after child welfare involvement. For many of the knowledge bearers in this study, keeping children connected to their family was a way of establishing a sense of safety and stability.

Olga: I think to me, child wellbeing is just- are they physically and emotionally comfortable and safe? And the emotional is as important as the physical. Because physical safety is great but if they're constantly stressed out and unhappy its gonna affect them negatively in the long run.

Physical safety is important, and so is psychological or emotional safety. Safety and stability are core components for trauma recovery and are often taken for granted for overall wellbeing.

Another element that surfaced in response to this question of child wellbeing was the overall health of a child, which has components of physical, mental, emotional and relational health.

Alita: Food in your stomach, clothes on your back, roof over your head, you know- loving family.

Brienne: I'd say having a healthy relationship, eating healthy, being active, yeah, I guess.

According to the knowledge bearers, children need their basic needs met, safety, stability, belonging, love, knowledge, sense of self in relationship with others, physical/emotional/mental/spiritual health and acknowledgement of each child's unique strengths and needs. Based on what I was also learning from the knowledge bearers, I also heard them speak to the importance of children knowing the truth of what has happened and finding ways to provide a shield of resilience that protects their whole being which is embedded in an identity of who they are and where they come from. To capture what was shared by the knowledge bearers about the concept of child wellbeing, Figure 9 depicts the child in the center with wellbeing concepts surrounding the child. This figure will be included in the edited Indigenous Connectedness Framework.

Figure 9. Concept of Child Wellbeing

Lesson 3: Internal/External Relational Healing and the IC Framework

Much of what the knowledge bearers in this study shed light on were ways to promote relational healing so that children could recover from the relational wounds that have happened in their life. This final section of Indigenous storying covers what was learned about the strength

that Alaska Native children, families and communities have and can use to help people embark upon the wellness journey for the benefit of children and the collective.

Knowing Who You Are and Where You Come From

After close examination and analysis of everything to this point, I realized the most fundamental component of child wellbeing is what Elders have been instructing younger generations to learn for generations: to know who you are and where you come from. This instruction is linked to a sense of identity that is both internal to each unique child and also connected and in relationship to the external world. Learning and knowing who you are and where you come from is important and happens in multiple ways.

Several knowledge bearers spoke about the importance of a child's identity development for their wellbeing.

Kelly: …so we're just happy to talk about our experience, 'cause we think it is really important for there to be Native kids in Native homes or at least homes that understand. If you don't know who you are it's completely devastating. It's not just a blip and you're gonna be fine. You can't be fine if you don't know who you are.

If a child doesn't know who they are, they might feel lost, disconnected and uncertain about how to live. All children are born with an identity that is shaped and maintained by their interactions with their external world and culture influences how this interaction takes place. Culture facilitates and teaches children about who they are and their place in this world. Kelly goes on to talk about what she calls a cultural identity.

Kelly: So yeah, I think that sense of cultural identity is really important, 'cause I know what it's like to not know who you are, and my husband knows that, or to – you look a certain way, and so people expect things out of you, but you don't have any of that, because your parents were like, "We're not doing that." So we're really big into cultural identity as a component of that, 'cause I think it's easier to feel loved and accepted if you know who you are and you feel like it's okay to be who you are, so that's really, really, really important to us. And with our foster daughter, she's got disabilities, and so I think it's a different way of understanding, but I think it's so

> important for her, especially because I feel like she's got memories of [the community] and I feel like she has memories of that culture that she grew up around, and so for us, it was really important that we find other people from [the community]…

Kelly wants to keep this child connected to her culture and community so that the child feels loved, accepted and knows it's okay to be who she is. Even though this child was placed in an Alaska Native foster home they still had to help her stay connected to her own community because it was different from the foster parent's tribal community. Children have an identity that is culturally unique to them.

When I asked what the importance of culture was for youth, knowledge bearers often mentioned it was for the child's identity development.

Hope: I think for our youth it's their identity of who they are. You know, they can show their peers who they are and what they love to do. Something that, you know, even on their darkest day they can go have a dance performance and something like that will make their whole day turn around. Lift their soul, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you see that happen with your niece?

Hope Yeah. Yeah. I think for both of us, you know, like when we had our hard days we sure loved to go have dance performances, because that's what made us feel so much better.

Culture is an external way of expressing an internal identity that can help the child's spirit stay healthy and well. Cultural practices are active and have to be lived. Hope had the same cultural identity as the youth in her care and their participation in dance was helpful to both of them.

Marie: The importance of culture is knowing who you are, knowing where you came from the values taught by the Elders…With kids when they're young, we've got to take them by the hand and give them those good experiences, good memories and that's what my parents taught me. And I have eight sisters, no brothers. I think I mentioned that earlier. We all know how to hunt. We all know how to drive boats. I used to pack my own stove oil…We go bird hunting. We go seal hunting. I can set a net…cut the fish. Everything. My daughters too. The kids, they start small. They'll even start practicing on little smelt. It's like science out there. We give them those good memories to look back on as they're growing up. They'll go back and they'll be like, "Oh we went clam digging." Because we went, we know how to do those things.

Children need people in their life that can teach the cultural practices to them so that they can pass that knowledge on to the next generation of children. Having cultural knowledge and skills provides children with a security of navigating and surviving off the land and waters and knowing how to be in healthy relationships with others. Children and youth need this knowledge to feel confident and grounded in their identity. Cultural identity is anchored in cultural, environmental and intergenerational knowledge and skills that give children a solid foundation for knowing who they are and where they come from.

Another important piece of identity development are the relationships and connections that children have. Kious discusses the importance of teaching children how to relate and how relationships lead to connection to a collective that help a child know that they are more than just themselves.

Kious: I think my hope would be just that in their interactions with us and our system and the higher beings- that we've provided a framework that teaches children how to connect to each other, to others, to people who are different than they are…it's more about have you taught them how to connect?...I think it's really important that people have really strong relationships with their children and their parents, and their teachers, and all of that, their coaches. But what's more important in my mind is have I taught them or left them with a sense or a feeling of knowing how to connect? And being able to reach out to those, whether you're in need, or whether you're in a position to be able to help. So, if you see somebody struggling, and have taught them how to connect, then they will recognize when somebody is struggling, and offer their support. Or if they need help, that they are comfortable with knowing how to recognize that A: they need help, and B: asking for help shouldn't be all that scary. So, we're just people and not everybody's gonna have the answer, but three minds are always gonna be better than one, and no matter how big you think your problems are, they get smaller when you bring in support, whether it's support from your higher power, whether it's support from your community, whether it's support from OCS, or the Native Village Hospital, or the Native Medical Center, our problems get smaller the more minds you put on it.

When children know who they are and understand that they are a piece of a whole, they will be more comfortable with reaching out when they are struggling and supporting someone else when they need help. This relational reciprocity develops healthy identities and connectedness.

Family relationships help children and youth be comfortable with who they are and what they are going through within the child welfare system. Part of a person's identity is embedded in their closest relationships.

Sarah: What was really helpful, I think to where I am and who I am is because I have my sister with me, and she's my twin sister, and she's always there for me to talk to, and we're always with each other to talk to each other about anything. I trust her and so I feel like children in foster care should always have someone to talk to, all the time, like a counselor who has similar values like you…It helped me to have someone to talk to all the time. Maybe if it wasn't for me to have that connection to my sister, I probably would have – I don't know what I'd be doing right now.

Relational continuity is important for children in child welfare because our roles and relationships provide a sense of identity. Our relationships become a piece of who we are. Sarah is and has a twin sister and this identity doesn't change no matter what legal processes are happening within child welfare.

Knowing who you are and where you come from can be a struggle for children who have had their environments and relationships altered through child welfare. Some children in child welfare may start to question their worth and how they fit into this world when their external reality is continuously changing. Sarge gave advice on how to address this.

Sarge: Just try to find outlets for easing the mind a whole lot more. Group activities or even little side jobs or something. Something to make themselves feel worthy of something else. I mean you've got to feel worth in this life. And stepping into the State of Alaska's custody, you've got somebody else making your own choices for you. Where you're going to live. When you're going to live there. When you can go home. Who you can visit. When can you visit. And whether it's got to be supervised or not with somebody sitting alongside you. So, through a lot of that you're thinking what did I do wrong? What did I do? I mean it's – a lot of it relies on self-blame and the child thinks that it's their fault that they're there. And truly, in all honesty, it's not. And there's no way a child should end up in that situation seeing themselves doing something wrong. That's what parents are supposed to be there for is to correct that…It's all about finding their abilities and once they find their abilities and they find out what they're actually capable of doing and what they love doing, I think it creates more of a drive for them wanting to invest in themselves and their abilities later and further on down the road. Like for me, I love woodworking. Woodworking and doing anything with wood and carving stuff. I found that I'm pretty good at it.

> And so, I always found ways to involve building something or helping somebody build a shop or whatever. I mean just finding their own worth in this real world is pretty important.

Easing a child's mind involves the development of an identity that helps children find their gifts and abilities that provide a sense of self-worth.

A person's trauma can transfer over to their sense of self in relation to others and their culture. If children and youth have turned away from who they are as an Alaska Native person as a survival strategy, it is possible to return to this aspect of themselves with time, patience, healing, learning, mentoring and synchronicity.

Marianna: So just seeing him (adoptive brother) be proud of who he is and my mom (adoptive mom) instilling that into all of us – just be proud of who you are – and just continuing to reiterate there's ugly and there's beauty in every culture, and giving us tidbits is really extreme for me. I don't know. I don't think I could have been adopted. I know I couldn't have been. I couldn't have been adopted by a Native home just because I was so shut off. It would have been really detrimental to me.

> There was a time – it was on my first job. I was working at JC Penney's, and this man and his family, they were so sweet. It was a Native family, and he was talking to me, and I was professional, but on the inside I was still like, "It's a Native person." And he was just so cordial, just so – such a sweetheart, and he said something that just really resonated with me... He was like, "Not all of us Natives are like that one. Not all of us drink. Not all of us are abusive. It's such a bad stereotype." And that's part of what started helping me in that direction as well.…I wish someone would have said what that man said to me when I was little. 'cause like there was the caseworker, and she was the obvious person who was a healthy person, but I didn't see it. Yeah, she's Native. She's like Native. Why did I not see that? Why did I not make that correlation? But, then again, there was also that side of me that "This may just be who she is while she's at work. I don't know how she is when she goes home." So I really do wish that somebody would have said what that man said to me a lot sooner and kept reiterating it. And that I would have kept having those examples pointed out. 'cause, you know, especially as a kid – but people in general – you do get something in your mind; that's what it is until somebody shows you something different or tells you something different and then backs it up. Had that Native home that I was in actually said, 'Well, we don't drink. We don't do that. We don't do this,' it would have been like, 'Huh, you don't do that? Huh? You are taking care of your kids? Huh?' I've never seen your husband put his hands on you or you put your hands on him, or their other kids because they were very, very family oriented.

The reconnection that happened for Marianna is incredibly humbling because it doesn't seem like chance that she met a person that spoke directly to what she needed to hear. Marianna needed someone to tell her and show her that there was 'beauty' in her culture to counteract the internalized beliefs that were linked to trauma. Marianna's beliefs changed when she was ready. Identity development shouldn't be premature or forced. Marianna's experience demonstrates the need to help children develop healthy concepts of who they are in relation to a group of people that share a history, an ancestral background, a community and a culture. Marianna supports decisions being made for children on a case by case basis because what works for one child might not work for another. Every child's trauma experience is different, and their external world needs to adapt to their unique internal world to help them recover and heal.

Identity development is an ongoing process and evolves over time with age and wisdom. One caregiver had recently adopted a young child and was already thinking about the story that they wanted this child to hear about who they are and where they come from.

Allen: …just knowing that historical trauma, generational trauma is a living thing that whether or not, what you feed it, I guess depends on how it grows or doesn't grow. That's something that's been weighing on me. And how I proceed in raising [child's name] and what I share with her, and what her story is, and how to help her take ownership without feeling embarrassed. It's okay to feel sad about it, but not to take on the troubles of our generations as our own. And so that's a current thing that I'm working through right now.

What Allen shared was a recognition of the need for acknowledging the truth as the child grows up about what happened in a way that the child doesn't internally take on the hurt and pain as an identity. This foresight and intentional act of teaching this child their story involves Indigenous pedagogy that shapes a healthy relationship with history, family, culture and identity.

Kious, who had been in foster care as a youth and became a foster parent as an adult eloquently spoke about the struggle of knowing what kind of person he wanted to be or how to parent after separation and disconnect occurred:

Kious: … it was easy to figure out the kind of person I didn't want to be, no freaking clue on how to figure out the kind of person that I wanted to be. And having some training out there to help people hone-in on that, I think that could go a really long way…It's easy to say, 'Here's all the things that you shouldn't do.' It's easy to say, 'Don't do drugs, don't hit your children, don't do this, don't do that.' But nobody teaches us how to be a parent. We can be better than that.

Trauma might show a child who they don't want to be or how they don't want to live, and it has the potential to disrupt the transmission of knowledge and teachings that provide children/adults with a solid identity and foundation of how to live a good life. This could be part of the reason why Elders instruct younger generations to know who they are and where they come from at a level that is deeper than the physical and external realm and includes the spiritual and inner realm. What Kious is sharing is the how vital it is for children and adults be taught how to be a good person and a good parent so that they can have a solid foundation for healthy relationships.

Children are born with an identity that is further taught to them by people, the environment, relationships, culture/spirit and these components overlap with one another. A child's inner world is shaped by their external environment and a child's inner world can shape their external environment. This relational element between our internal and external worlds is key to *knowing who you are and where you come from*. When children achieve healthy identity development and are in right relationship with themselves then they are set to be in right relationship with everyone and everything in their life. This is the most fundamental component of Indigenous connectedness.

Updated Indigenous Connectedness Framework

The Indigenous Connectedness Framework (Figure 10) now represents the relational aspects of a child's inner and external identity and what it is that helps relationships heal, recover, reconnect, or remain healthy and strong. In the two central circles is a representation of the child and their individual, unique, sacred inner world. A child's inner world includes their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, knowledge, skills, gifts that influences their identity of *knowing who they are and where they come from*. A child's inner world will include challenging emotions and thoughts at times, but hopefully the relationships and environment in a child's life can help them stay balanced and whole. The outermost circle represents the mechanisms that help a child build environmental, community, intergenerational, family and cultural/spiritual connectedness. The outer ring represents the resilience children can build up to keep the disharmony and disconnectedness away from becoming a child's internal identity.

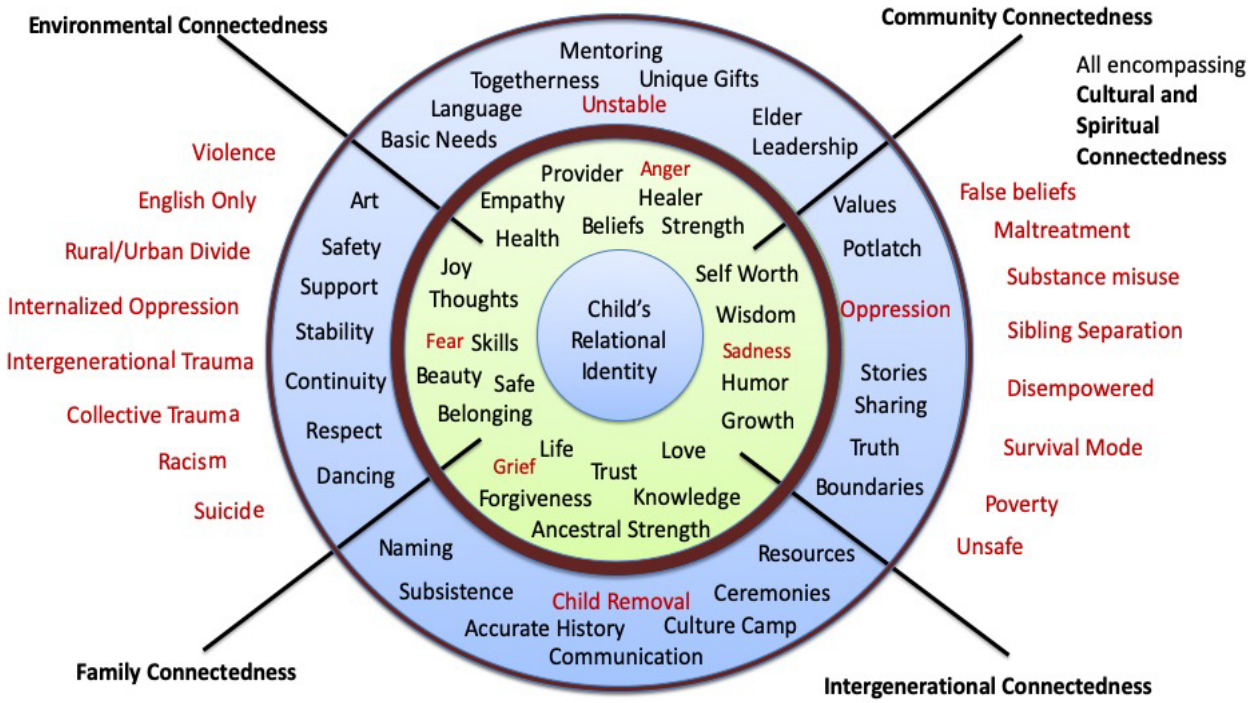

Figure 10. Updated Indigenous Connectedness Framework

The red words represent potential trauma and challenges that children face in terms of environmental, community, family, intergenerational and cultural/spiritual disconnectedness. I don't know if our Indigenous ancestors prior to colonization experienced these challenges like what Indigenous children face today. Some of the strategies for building and maintaining connectedness has to acknowledge these challenges so that children know how to prevent, heal from and resist these challenges from infiltrating their sense of self. The hope is that we help children keep those challenges from creating relational wounds or becoming internalized false beliefs about who they are. With child welfare involvement, sometimes those challenges will begin to cause feelings of fear, anger, or sadness, and our hope is that we can buffer those effects so that the child is well despite the circumstances that are outside of their control.

Fourth and Final Cycle of Analysis

The final cycle of analysis portrays a story that wholistically ties the separated Indigenous connectedness concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing together in a way that connects the mind with the heart. This is important in Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy because it has the potential to bring about an energetic shift that is healing for the storyteller, the recipients of the story and the greater collective. This next section is an uninterrupted excerpt of Polar Bear's story that centers the reader on her experience that is free of the researcher's analytical commentary. This is a purposeful Indigenous methodological move because the hope is that recipients will connect with the story in a way that goes beyond words and explanation. Polar Bear's story was chosen because it touched on something that could be essential to child and collective wellbeing. Reading the story, is different from listening to the voice, pauses, and emotion, but the hope is that this story will reveal some of the magic that happened within all of

the knowledge bearer interviews. As a little bit of a background for this story, Polar Bear was adopted as an infant by an Alaska Native family within her same cultural background.

Putting it All Together- Polar Bear's Story

Polar Bear: When I was like seeing, okay, so this is digging even deeper. When I was seeing that adoption person when I was like a teenager, he knew I was a Native person, he was White. And he knew that my family had experienced a lot of trauma. So my biological father died by suicide when I was like six or seven. And then, my biological mother had attempted suicide when she was pregnant with me. And then, on top of that all of like the alcohol and issues. So there was a lot of trauma. And so he knew these things about me and he wanted to help and he felt like me talking to a, I think what they would call themselves like a medicine man or a medicine – it was a woman – would help me. And so, I talked to her. She didn't know too much about me, but she knew that I had a lot of traumatic experiences and that I was adopted and was having a hard time. 'Cause this was when I was like in my troubled teens.

So she came to talk to me in person and we just started talking and she started talking about how my biological – she basically was like telling me things that I didn't tell her but were true. And so it was just kind of like whoa, you know like she was able to see these things. I wouldn't say I'm superstitious like oh, she's like a psychic or anything but I couldn't explain the things that she knew about me. And then, she started explaining too, about like my biological father and she said like oh, he's here and he's saying that he does check up on you sometimes and he knows. *[crying]* Sorry.

But he mostly spends time with your mother and she explained that like he talked to my mom, my adoptive mom about me and said that like it was like the best decision he ever made to give me up for adoption because he didn't want me around all that bad stuff. And so, I don't know, I guess that she had said these things and like knew these things that I hadn't told her and was able to bring me some kind of peace, I guess, with like unanswered questions. It made me feel like somewhat spiritual, I guess. I don't know how to explain it. I just came to peace after meeting with her about some of these hurts and pain and like unanswered questions.

And so, that was really meaningful to me. I feel like that kind of made me feel like more spiritual and more like things do happen for a reason. And the things that I went through even though they were painful like helped me in a way. And like even helped, you know like I feel like helped me in my generation. So, for example, I feel like if I hadn't been adopted like I would have been stuck in like this really unhealthy place.

But being adopted I was able to have a better environment and push myself with my education and get a PhD and have a career. And now, as a mother, I can like pass that on to my kid. And so, it kind of like stopped those things from --

Interviewer: A cycle.

Polar Bear: Yeah, cycle, that's the word.

Interviewer: I really honor that and I've heard it described that way too like the spirit and spirituality. It makes sense. Like this is the answer to what children are needing in terms of addressing the traumas that have been experienced.

And that's where I just feel like there are assumptions made sometimes that newborns that are adopted- like there's no trauma at all. It's like well, there's still connections and families and spiritual things that are with the child whether they're in a healthy environment. You know, there's still things that – I'm getting goosebumps talking about it – that spiritual piece is a huge component it sounds like, and that was a big piece to- I don't know if you would call it a healing experience?

Polar Bear: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I think having that experience when I was young was definitely healing. I think that was part of the reason why I started becoming such a problem child and I just didn't know it. And even now like as an adult, I've had to learn how to like, I guess, and I wouldn't say it's so much just being adopted but just in general like dealing with the trauma and stuff I've had to learn how to be an adult, you know.

And I don't know maybe this is partially because of being adopted but I think for me, there was always a kind of like this emotional baggage, I guess, inside of me. And something the adoption specialist mentioned that I agree with is that those feelings are always gonna be there. Like even now, you know, I cry about it because it's just so emotional for me.

And so, I think I've had to learn how to like accept that about myself like some of those things are always going to be inside of me, like those feelings. But just learning how to deal with it in a healthy way and understand that the reason I might feel a certain way in relationships or whatever just knowing why I feel those certain ways can help me be better about it. And not act like the way I did when I was a teenager.

So, it was definitely healing but it's kind of for me it's like an ongoing process that will never end. It's just like how to be emotionally damaged, I guess, but not be an unhealthy person because of it.

Interviewer: Got it. That's what I hope we can teach everyone that goes through that and I feel like it's a collective issue as well as each child.

At this point of the interview I would just ask if there's anything else you'd like to add or mention? Did I miss asking you a follow up question or like anything else that you would like to speak to in terms of child well-being and how to promote that?

Polar Bear: I think like I mentioned, just having someone to talk to about the things were really helpful. And also, I just I know for me and I don't know what other people's

> experiences but I was really grateful for the Indian Child Welfare Act just because, like I said, it gave me this whole connection I've been able to have that many people that are adopted just in general don't have. And so, like I was really grateful for that.
>
> Even though there was like a lot of issues with being adopted and all that stuff, I was still really grateful to stay with an Alaska Native family. When I was seeing the adoption specialist, I saw a lot of other people that were adopted like we'd have groups and stuff like that. And many of them, including myself, had like that identity issue. You know, like they were Asian or something and came to a white family and so they just felt like out of place for their whole life. And so, I feel like I was lucky in that sense to have that kind of connection.

Every person's wellness matters, whether they are the child or youth, the caregiver or a child welfare team member because our connections and relationships with children influence their sense of self and their place in the world. This chapter concludes with much gratitude for every family, community, earth connection and ancestor that each knowledge bearer, story, and sacred life represented in this study. Through this knowledge, I hope we continue to shift and heal relational wounds for our sacred children.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

Every Indigenous child, family, community and environment has unique histories, cultures, traumas and relationships and is connected to a universal whole. The health and wellbeing of us all is interconnected. It is up to each of us to do our part to heal the wounds within our lives so that we improve the health and wellbeing of children and the collective. Child welfare or child wellbeing is a shared and collective responsibility. This study explored the collective knowledge that has sustained child wellbeing for generations among a sample of Alaska Native people. The discussion and implications are organized by the two primary aims. Following the implications is a discussion of limitations, future recommendations and conclusion.

Aim 1 involved the identification of child wellbeing concepts and mechanisms from Alaska Native foster care alumni, relatives and foster parent perspectives and then compared their responses with the Indigenous Connectedness Framework that was developed based on Indigenous wellbeing literature. The knowledge bearers provided more depth and meaning to wellbeing concepts and connectedness relationships that maintain child wellbeing. The hypothesized concepts of Indigenous connectedness and mechanisms of child wellbeing were expanded and changed based on what was learned. Key changes included: spiritual and cultural connectedness; the importance of a child's relational identity that involves *knowing who you are and where you come from;* and an acknowledgement of the traumas and challenges that could become mechanisms of disconnectedness.

Aim 1. Implications

Cultural and Spiritual Connectedness as a Protective Factor

To paraphrase what my co-worker Elsie Boudreau stated, our ancestral ways of life were more than trauma informed care, they were also healing informed care (personal communication, 2020). The stories, teachings, lessons and values equip us with knowledge about how to be in right relationship with all of life. Our ongoing existence and transmission of this Indigenous knowledge is embedded in *knowing who we are and where we come from.* Our resilience derives from being part of an interconnected cultural and spiritual collective. Spiritual and cultural connectedness is the conduit for relational healing and child wellbeing.

Some criticisms of the term resilience are that it means we should adapt to dysfunctional relationships and systems that perpetuate trauma. What was learned from the knowledge bearers is that this dysfunction has to be acknowledged in order to resist it from becoming an identity. As Indigenous peoples, we need to promote resilience as we simultaneously resist, decolonize and shift power structures that have been challenging and creating relational wounds for over 200 years in Alaska, and 500 years in other parts of the country. The hope is that someday our children will not need to be resilient anymore to the traumas that we see today. Unfortunately, we are not there yet and there is a lot of healing work to be done.

Healing modalities do not have to be formal and expensive. Anytime there is a gathering of people the conditions for healing are present. Tenaciously examining our thoughts and subconscious beliefs while cultivating mindfulness only requires our time and intention. The act of listening to a story can be therapeutic for both the storyteller and recipient of the story. Many cultural traditions, activities and teachings that help us develop into *real human beings* are already part of our daily life. It's time to create what is possible rather than continuing to operate

in silos or getting stuck behind bureaucratic barriers. The time has come to reform our circle of protection for our sacred children by being in right relationship with ourselves and with each other.

Relational Wounding and Disconnectedness

Relational wounding has resulted in disconnectedness from key relationships that could provide protection and resilience. For example, some mechanisms of disconnectedness could include a lack of safety and stability, maltreatment, intergenerational trauma, oppression, racism, violence and separation. Many of the knowledge bearers in this study brought up these examples of relational wounding that lead to disconnect from their environments, families, communities, culture and ancestors. Disconnectedness could lead to an internalized state of fight/flight/freeze, anxiety, fear, mistrust, hopelessness or internalized oppression which becomes a mechanism of a false sense of identity and further disconnect. It could be that maltreating parents experienced disconnectedness in multiple domains in their life which knocked them off balance, distanced them from a state of wellbeing and resulted in unhealthy relational dynamics that affected child wellbeing.

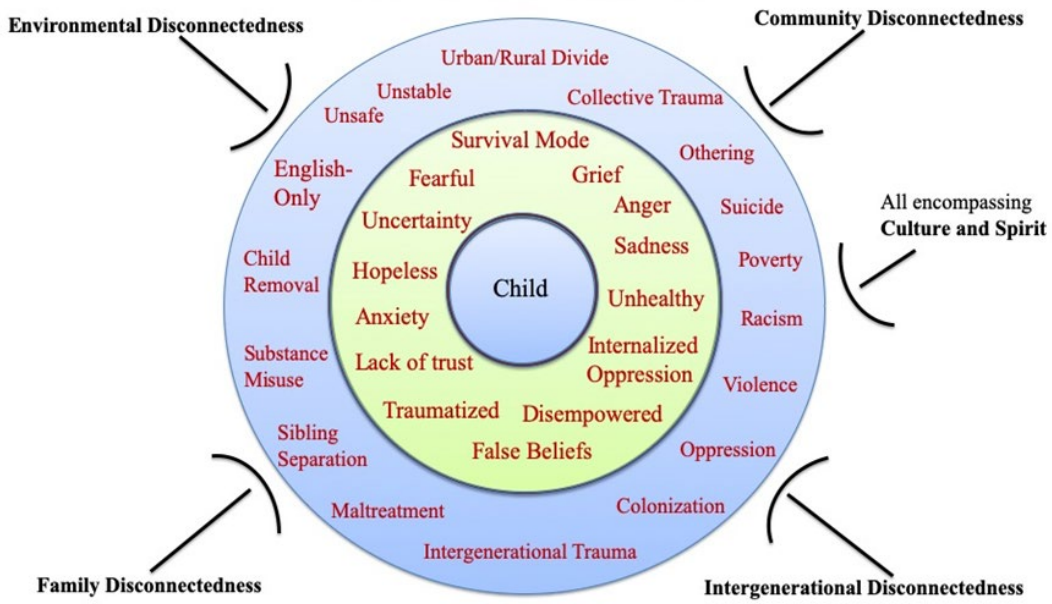

Figure 11. Disconnectedness Framework

This framework of disconnectedness (Figure 11) is representative of what could happen to a child's internal state if they do not have healthy relationships with parents, family, environment, community, culture/spirit and the generations before and after them. The red words in the outermost blue circle represent the mechanisms/actions/unhealthy coping behaviors/policies/practices of disconnectedness. The green circle represents what could happen internally if a child experiences disconnectedness through their relationships that could form a trauma identity that is not truly *who they are or where they come from*.

The knowledge bearers made it clear that we as Alaska Native and Indigenous people need to acknowledge the disconnectedness that has happened through colonization, intergenerational trauma, separation, substance misuse, suicide, lack of trust, false beliefs, grief, anger, internalized oppression. Many of us have been both a victim and perpetrator of relational wounds, and the knowledge bearers in this study shared how we can engage in the relational healing process so that this cycle of wounding discontinues. It is important to remember that we also contain the medicine/knowledge that can help us reconnect, repair and heal the relationships

in our life. It starts with each of us collectively doing our part and making an intentional shift in how we heal ourselves and how we raise our children.

This understanding of disconnectedness is more explanatory and detailed than that shown in Figure 1 in the first chapter of this dissertation that described a cycle of child and collective trauma. When we look at the root or cause of child maltreatment and child removal and see that it is a symptom of trauma, an adoption of false beliefs, and disconnected/wounded relationships with self and others, we begin to see that child welfare is a relational issue. The solutions for child welfare issues involve looking at and repairing the relationships both within and outside of the child welfare system. Systems and policies do not change outcomes- people and connectedness relationships do. Millions of dollars have been spent on interventions and treatment modalities that haven't changed the disproportionate number of AN/AI children removed and placed in out-of-home care because it could be that they are lacking this relational understanding. Having a clearer understanding of the strength, concepts and mechanisms of wellbeing, as well as the relational pain and suffering that Indigenous people are currently experiencing gives the helpers an idea of what we need to address, rebuild and heal within ourselves, our children, our families and communities. The healing process involves a revelation of who we are at the core and a discovery of the abundance of opportunities for healing through Indigenous connectedness.

Aim 2 involved taking a closer look at how child wellbeing was promoted or impeded within Alaska child welfare and Alaska Native relative and foster home placements. Mechanisms of connectedness and disconnectedness were explored as multiple perspectives were heard. Lessons were learned regarding: 1) children's trauma, disconnectedness and relational wounding within the child welfare system; 2) the importance of maintaining relational

continuity and connectedness for child wellbeing and 3) that relational healing happens through an internal and external process of identity development.

Aim 2. Implications

Relational Continuity in Child Welfare

According to the IC Framework, children should never feel like they are being removed from everyone and everything they know. Parents, relatives or communities should not have children removed from them as a solution for child maltreatment because child removal could inflict an additional and deeper relational wound. The ICWA requires state child welfare agencies to prevent the removal of AN/AI children and to preserve AN/AI families and communities through active efforts and ICWA preference placements. This is a necessary policy given the atrocities that happened within federally mandated boarding schools and unwarranted child welfare adoptions into Non-Native families that left generations of children feeling lost, traumatized and disconnected. Part of the intention of ICWA has been to help AN/AI children remain an inseparable unit of their parents, family and Indigenous community or what I call an Indigenous connectedness framework. Despite 42 years of ICWA, a largely disproportionate number of AN/AI children are still maltreated, removed from their parents, placed in non-relative or non-tribal care and adopted by Non-Native families. We need to stop the maltreatment and we need to stop the removal of children from continuing to happen. The philosophy of child wellbeing needs to change so that children are seen as an inseparable unit from their connectedness network within child welfare, which is aligned with the intention of ICWA. If children cannot be with their parents, then they need to stay connected with healthy family members and their community that can teach the child who they are and where they come from.

As a result of this study, it was learned that when a child is temporarily cared for by someone other than their parent, the child's *relational continuity* to siblings, parents, extended family, tribal community, environment and culture/spirit needs to be maintained for the child's wellbeing. If child welfare places AN/AI children with relatives, tribal foster parents or stranger foster parents, then the child's connectedness network has to be expanded. All members of the child's connectedness network should see themselves as a newly blended family that is caring for this child together. This approach of becoming a blended family is similar to what happens when people get married and the spouses' relatives become 'in-laws.' This relational expansion should shift the way the adults work together and reduce the stress put on children as a result of child welfare placement. A couple of caregivers in this study talked about how they were still in contact with the children's birth parents after reunification was successful and that they received pictures and updates about the (young) children, which is an indicator of an expanded connectedness network for the children. A couple of the caregivers in this study also spoke about the grief of loving a child only to have them removed with no further contact. Some of the foster care alumni wished they could have stayed in contact with their previous foster parents and a couple alumni wished the ongoing contact with their siblings and birth family was better maintained for their overall sense of identity and wellbeing. If all adults look deeply at what is in the best interest of the child, the adults should see that children need to trust and know that the people that love them won't disappear from their lives.

As knowledge bearer Kious stated, it doesn't take a village to raise a child, it takes a relationship. Everyone is a caregiver to children as a parent, a relative or as a community member. I am responsible for the children I gave birth to, I'm also responsible for your children, and you are responsible for mine because they belong to all of us in whatever community we live

in. A shared responsibility for children ensures child safety because it's everyone's duty to keep them safe. When everyone assumes the responsibility for children, then any misconduct by the child or the people in their life should be corrected so that healthy relationships are maintained. As the results of this study indicated, when children have a strong sense of safety and stability, they form positive identities about themselves and engage in healthy relationships that help them build resilience and wellbeing.

All relationships for children involved with child welfare need to be therapeutic in nature, which means that the team and network surrounding the children need to recognize their part in helping the child, family and community relationally heal from whatever traumas have occurred. The therapeutic care of a child's relationships simultaneously promotes the wellbeing of all. The term 'therapeutic' has been so individualized and needs to include a person's entire connectedness network because trauma and healing happen through relationships. Right now child welfare workers likely continue to develop case plans for children and parents that miss the therapeutic need for relational healing. Instead parents are referred to substance abuse services that do not allow children to be with them, parents attend parenting classes that are based on a nuclear family model, and parents are referred to mental health services that diagnose and prescribe medication. The use of an Alaska Native based cultural resource guide is necessary to overlap services with spiritual and cultural mechanisms of relational continuity and relational healing.

Children and parents need family and community to support them as they heal. It is going to take all of us and a relational framework that is focused on helping children, families and communities heal their relationships and trauma to change the trajectory of child outcomes. In order for ICWA to be successful, the focus needs to go beyond the child and parent unit within

child welfare and shift to the relationality and connectedness of our existence so that wellbeing can be a collective lived experience. Before state child welfare, communities had protocols in place to address issues before things escalated and got out of control. Everyone had a shared responsibility for children. In Alaska, child protection teams have been developed in communities like Kwigillingok to support children and parents before there is a need for child welfare involvement (Alaska Public Media, 2016). This community model sometimes involves children staying with extended family members as parents get the support they need, which promotes relational continuity. Many families already engage in these protective interventions on their own. This sort of prevention does not involve child removal. When children are able to stay with safe family members and/or community members, this prevents the relational wound of disconnect from schools, daycares, neighborhoods, siblings, parents, extended family and a healthy sense of self.

The three top priorities of child welfare: safety, permanency and wellbeing could not exist without relationships. This study sheds light on the mechanisms of relational wounding and healing. One of the most important and longest relationships that a child establishes in their life is with themselves. We want children to cultivate a healthy inner ecology so that they have a healthy outer ecology (Kawagley, 2011). This Indigenous worldview of relationality means that the consideration of a child's physical safety is not enough and problematizes unjust child removals if the child's relationship with themselves and others become more wounded than before child welfare's involvement. Relational continuity is the opposite of child removal. This theoretical shift and reprioritization of relationships within child welfare could help change the paradigm so that child removal doesn't continue to happen and inflict relational wounds and disconnectedness in a child's life or connectedness network.

Limitations

This study does not assert that all ICWA preferences placements promote child wellbeing, but it fills a theoretical gap in the research literature that could clarify why the Indian Child Welfare Act has preference placements and could provide guidance to families, communities and child welfare teams that are making decisions on behalf of children's wellbeing. The importance of relationships or what is called connectedness in this dissertation cannot be understated within Alaska Native or Indigenous child welfare. Child maltreatment is a relational wound and it takes healthy connectedness relationships to repair or heal the wounds that children may have experienced. The Indian Child Welfare Act recognizes that the promotion of child wellbeing is simultaneously the promotion of family, community, spirit/culture, generational and environmental wellbeing. To promote child and collective wellbeing, we must acknowledge the relational wounding that has happened, prevent further wounding from occurring through relational continuity and engage in relational healing by *knowing who we are and where we come from* at a deeper spiritual and cultural level.

Generalizability

Very few research studies have focused on Alaska Native child welfare. Alaska has a unique social and political context from other Indigenous groups around the world. While the knowledge bearers came from all but one region of Alaska, the results do not represent all Alaska Native people. The Indigenous Connectedness Framework has been expanded upon and filled in with the wisdom of knowledge bearers who come from an Alaska Native context. However, this framework should be filled in and expanded upon even more with specific tribal and cultural knowledge because each Alaska Native community has deep history, language and knowledge that pertains to them. The intention is to provide ideas on what has worked, what we

can get back to and what we can further learn and understand for the benefit of children and the collective.

Rural and Urban Dynamics

Rural communities in Alaska are often small and only accessible by boat or plane. The rural Alaska context is different from an urban Alaska in many ways. One day as I was thinking about this difference between rural and urban communities, I was sitting in a coffee shop and felt completely anonymous because I didn't recognize or know any of the people that were sitting around me. I could not imagine what it would feel like to sit in a place and have every single person know who I was. Very real and tangible differences exist between rural and urban communities. Some of the stories that were told of child wellbeing, relational wounding and relational healing applied to both rural and urban settings, and in other stories it seemed like connectedness would be much harder to achieve, especially at the community level because of this lack of knowingness among community members.

This study did not examine the differences and similarities between urban vs. rural child wellbeing. Many knowledge bearers who shared their story in this study were living in urban settings and they grew up in rural or hub communities. The Indigenous Connectedness Framework may need more clarity about the rural vs. urban context in order to best design interventions or curriculums. One of the challenges of designing urban Alaska Native interventions has been the very real diversity in cultures, so keeping the IC Framework broad might be more beneficial in an urban setting.

No Cross-Group Comparison

The positionality of foster care alumni is different from that of a caregiver. I decided not to compare alumni stories to caregiver stories because it did not seem to fit the aims of this

research study. It would have been interesting to see the differences between the two groups with regards to what child wellbeing meant to foster care alumni and what it meant to relatives and foster parents. This may need further exploration in future research.

Missing Birth Parent's Stories

It would have been even more informative to hear from birth parents about what they believe child wellbeing is. Parents' voices need to be heard as a matter of social justice. They could provide insights into what worked and didn't work for them within child welfare and help us understand Indigenous connectedness even more than what is presented in this study. One of the questions I have about relational healing is how to help parents heal their relationship with their child after child maltreatment has occurred.

Lack of Triangulation in Data Analysis

In most qualitative research studies, the issue of validity and reliability is addressed by triangulating the researcher's coding processes with another researcher. This did not happen because of the lack of funds and time. However, this issue was addressed in a couple of ways. My positionality provides some credibility to the study. My past life experience is advantageous for the interpretation of knowledge bearers' stories. I also consulted with community for feedback on the written methods and results chapters to ensure that I did not misrepresent the stories that were shared. One lesson learned in regards to Indigenous storying is the importance of a back and forth communication process with knowledge bearers to ensure that the overarching research story that is told is as close to what knowledge bearers want portrayed as possible. In future research I will be more intentional in the research design to include knowledge bearers in the analysis of results to present even more valid and reliable results.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research should include parent voices of their experience with the child welfare system and look at their perceptions of Indigenous connectedness and/or disconnectedness. I am curious about parent's adverse childhood experiences as relational wounds and whether focused attention on helping them heal and reconnect could lead to generational healing and wellbeing within their children. I would also recommend that more focus be spent on the healing modalities that people feel would be most beneficial for child, family and community wellbeing. I also think it would be worthwhile to focus on alumni's sense of home and environmental connectedness because it seems like children involved with child welfare could feel disconnected from their homes and ancestral connection to the land/earth, which could influence their identity development.

Conclusion

We all need to hold ourselves accountable and responsible for the wellbeing of our sacred children, and to do this we need be in right relationship with ourselves and others so our children can follow our example. Our ancestors created teachings, tribal laws, customs, ceremonies and cultural values to keep children safe through connectedness relationships. Relational wounding and disconnectedness distanced us from our Indigenous wisdom in many ways and we are actively rebuilding this connection so that we can get back to wellness. Child wellbeing is a reciprocal relationship, they need us to be healthy and we need them to be healthy because we are inseparable. Together we will definitely create a world where our children no longer have to heal from our wounds and we will collectively be in right relationship with ourselves and others. The promotion of Indigenous child wellbeing simultaneously promotes the wellbeing of all children. The health of Indigenous communities, promotes the health of all.

References

Absolon, K. (2010). Indigenous wholistic theory: A knowledge set for practice. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, *5*(2), 74-87.

Alaska Department of Labor (2018). Population estimates: Race and Hispanic origin. Retrieved from: http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm

Alaska Federation of Natives (2020). Alaska Native Peoples. Retrieved from: https://www.nativefederation.org/alaska-native-peoples/

Allen, J., Mohatt, G. V., Fok, C. C., Henry, D., Burkett, R., People Awakening Team (2014). A protective factors model for alcohol abuse and suicide prevention among Alaska Native youth. *American journal of community psychology*, *54*(1-2), 125-39.

Anungazuk, H. (2007) in Fienup-Riordan, A., & Kaplan, L. D. (Eds.). (2007). *Words of the Real People: Alaska native literature in translation*. University of Alaska Press.

Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork : Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Archibald, J. (2019). Indigenous storywork in Canada. In Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L.T. (Eds.) *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology* (pp.17-21). London: ZED Books.

Association of Village Council Presidents. (2010). Elluarrluteng ilakutellriit. Retrieved from https://www.signup4.net/Upload/USTR10A/20111498E/APRIL%207%20Healthy%20Families%20Yupik%20Style.pdf

Bang, M., Curley, L., Kessel, A., Marin, A., Suzukovich III, E. S., & Strack, G. (2014). Muskrat theories, tobacco in the streets, and living Chicago as Indigenous land. *Environmental Education Research*, *20*(1), 37-55.

Barnes, A., Constantine Brown, J., & Mccarty-Caplan, D. (2019). The unintended consequence of the Indian Child Welfare Act: American Indian trust in public child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review, 98*, 221-227.

Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. Oscar. (2011). *Sharing our pathways : Native perspectives on education in Alaska*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Center for Cross-Cultural Studies.

Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open, 2*(C), 8-14.

Bigfoot, D. S., & Schmidt, S. R. (2010). Honoring children, mending the circle: cultural adaptation of trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy for American Indian and Alaska Native children. *Journal of clinical psychology*, *66*(8), 847-856.

Blackstock, C. (2011). The emergence of the breath of life theory. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, *8*(1), 1-16.

Blair, N. (2019). Lilyology as a transformative framework for decolonizing ethical spaces within the academy. In Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L.T. (Eds.) *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology* (pp.171-174). London: ZED Books.

Brackeen v. Zinke. (2018). Retrieved from: https://turtletalk.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/166_order.pdf

Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (2011). Historical trauma among indigenous peoples of the Americas: Concepts, research and clinical considerations. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43(*4*), 282-290.

Brayboy, B. (2005). Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education. *The Urban Review, 37*(5), 425-446.

Brown, H. J., McPherson, G., Peterson, R., Newman, V., & Cranmer, B. (2012). Our land, our language: connecting dispossession and health equity in an indigenous context. *CJNR (Canadian Journal of Nursing Research)*, *44*(2), 44-63.

Bussey, M., & Lucero, N. (2013). Re-examining child welfare's response to ICWA: Collaborating with community-based agencies to reduce disparities for American Indian/Alaska Native children. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(3), 394-401.

Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishing.

Campbell, D. (2002). Show respect for others-Each person has a special gift. In *What the Elders have taught us* (pp. 21-25). Portland, OR: Graphic Art Books.

Christian, D. (2019). Indigenous visual storywork for Indigenous film aesthetics. In Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L.T. (Eds.) *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology* (pp.171-174). London: ZED Books.

Coates, J., Gray, M., & Hetherington, T. (2006). An 'ecospiritual' perspective: Finally, a place for Indigenous approaches. *British Journal of Social Work*, *36*(3), 381-399.

Corntassel, J. (2012). Re-envisioning resurgence: Indigenous pathways to decolonization and sustainable self-determination. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society*, *1*(1), 86-101.

Craig, R. (1996). Challenges in Alaska Native education today. Native languages in Alaska. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 49-54 and 61-65). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Cross, S.L. (2006). Indian family exception doctrine: Still losing children despite the Indian child welfare act. (Author abstract). *Child Welfare, 85*(4), 671-690.

Cross, S.L., & **Day, A. G**. (2008). American Indian grandfamilies: Differences in the perception of the kinship care relationship. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 17* (1). 82-100.

Cross, S.*,* **Day, A***., & Byers, L.* (2010). American Indian grand families: A qualitative study of twenty-nine grandmothers and two grandfathers who provide sole care for their grandchildren. *Journal of Cross- Cultural Gerontology, 25.* 371-383.

Cross, S., Day, A., Gogliotti, L., & Pung, J. (2013). Challenges to recruit and retain American Indian and Alaskan Natives into social work programs: The impact on the child welfare workforce. *Child Welfare, 92*(4), 31-53.

Cross, T. (2002). Spirituality and mental health: A Native American perspective. *Beyond Behavior*, *12*(1), 10-11.

Cross, T., & Blackstock, C. (2012). Special Foreword: We Are the Manifestations of Our Ancestor s Prayers. *Child Welfare, 91*(3), 9-14.

Cross, T. L., Friesen, B. J., Jivanjee, P., Gowen, L. K., Bandurraga, A., Matthew, C., & Maher, N. (2011). Defining youth success using culturally appropriate community-based participatory research methods. *Best Practices in Mental Health*, *7*(1), 94-114.

Datta, R. (2018). Traditional storytelling: An effective Indigenous research methodology and its implications for environmental research. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 14*(1), 35-44.

Day, P. (2016). Raising healthy American Indian children: An Indigenous perspective. In Weaver, H. N. (Ed.), *Social issues in contemporary native America: Reflections from Turtle Island* (pp. 93-112). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

De Santolo, J. (2019). Indigenous storywork in Australia. In Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L.T. (Eds.) *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology* (pp.171-174). London: ZED Books.

Dedoose [Computer software]. (2018). Version ***8.2.17***, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data. Los Angeles, CA: SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC. Retrieved from: www.dedoose.com.

Dei, G. (2013). Critical Perspectives on Indigenous Research. *Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes, 9*(1), 27-38.

Drisko, J. W., & Maschi, T. (2015). *Content analysis*. Pocket Guides to Social Work Research Methods. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Drywater-Whitekiller, V. (2014). Family Group Conferencing: An Indigenous Practice Approach to Compliance With the Indian Child Welfare Act. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 8*(3), 260-278.

Duran, E., & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American postcolonial psychology*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(1), 107-115.

Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *23*(3), 316–338.

Evans-Campbell, T., & Walters, K. L. (2006). Catching our breath: A decolonization framework for healing indigenous families. *Intersecting Child Welfare, Substance Abuse, and Family Violence: Culturally Competent Approaches. Alexandria, VA, CSWE Publications*, 266-292.

Fast, E., & Kovach, M. (2019). Community relationships within Indigenous methodologies. In

Windchief, S., & San Pedro, T. *Applying indigenous research methods: Storying with peoples and communities* (pp. 21-36). New York, NY: Routledge.

Feral, C. H. (1998). The connectedness model and optimal development: Is ecopsychology the answer to emotional well-being?. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *26*(1-3), 243.

Finlay, J., Hardy, M., Morris, D., & Nagy, A. (2010). Mamow Ki-ken-da-ma-win: A partnership approach to child, youth, family and community wellbeing. *International journal of mental health and addiction*, *8*(2), 245-257.

Ford, M. J. W., & Rude, R. (1999). ANCSA: Sovereignty and a just settlement of land claims or an act of deception. *Touro Law Review, 15*(2), 479-495.

Fryberg, S. A., Covarrubias, R., & Burack, J. A. (2013). Cultural models of education and academic performance for Native American and European American students. *School Psychology International*, *34*(4), 439-452.

Gilgun, J. (2015). Beyond description to interpretation and theory in qualitative social work research. *Qualitative Social Work, 14*(6), 741-752.

Ginwright, S. (2018). The future of healing: Shifting from trauma informed care to healing centered engagement, *Medium*. Retrieved from: https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c

Goldsmith, S. (2008). Understanding Alaska's Remote Rural Economy. *Understanding Alaska*, *10*, 1-12. Retrieved from: https://iseralaska.org/static/legacy_publication_links/researchsumm/UA_RS10.pdf

Goodkind, J. R., Gorman, B., Hess, J. M., Parker, D. P., & Hough, R. L. (2015). Reconsidering culturally competent approaches to American Indian healing and well-being. *Qualitative health research*, *25*(4), 486-499.

Goodman, R. A., Bunnell, R., & Posner, S. F. (2014). What is "community health"? Examining the meaning of an evolving field in public health. *Preventive medicine*, *67*, S58-S61.

Gran-O'Donnell, S.M. (2016). *Being, Belonging, and Connecting: Filipino Youths' Narratives of Place(s) and Wellbeing in Hawai'i,* ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Grandbois, D. M., & Sanders, G. F. (2009). The resilience of Native American elders. *Issues in mental health nursing*, *30*(9), 569-580.

Gustavsson, N., & MacEachron, A. (2013). Managing Child Welfare in Turbulent Times. *Social Work, 58*(1), 86-89.

Haakanson Jr., S. (2002) Pray for guidance- Many things are not known. In *What the Elders have taught us* (pp. 63-67). Portland, OR: Graphic Art Books.

Haight, W., Waubanascum, C., Glesener, D., Day, P., Bussey, B., & Nichols, K. (2019). The Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies: Reducing disparities through indigenous social work education. *Children and Youth Services Review, 100*, 156-166.

Hallendy, N. (2000). *Inuksuit: Silent messengers of the Arctic*. Vancouver, BC: D & M Publishers.

Halverson, K., Puig, M., & Byers, S. (2002). Culture Loss: American Indian Family Disruption, Urbanization, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. *Child Welfare, 81*(2), 319-336.

Hand, C. A. (2005). An Ojibwe perspective on the welfare of children: Lessons of the past and visions for the future. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *28*(1), 20-46.

Hawkins, E. H., Cummins, L. H., & Marlatt, G. A. (2004). Preventing substance abuse in American Indian and Alaska Native youth: promising strategies for healthier communities. *Psychological bulletin*, *130*(2), 304.

Hazel, K. L., & Mohatt, G. V. (2001). Cultural and spiritual coping in sobriety: Informing substance abuse prevention for Alaska Native communities. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *29*(5), 541-562.

Hill, D. L. (2006). Sense of belonging as connectedness, American Indian worldview, and mental health. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, *20*(5), 210-216.

Hodge, D. R., Limb, G. E., & Cross, T. L. (2009). Moving from colonization toward balance and harmony: A Native American perspective on wellness. *Social Work*, *54*(3), 211-219.

Hovey, R. B., Delormier, T., & McComber, A. (2014). Social-relational understandings of health and well-being from an Indigenous Perspective. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, *10*(1), 35.

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277-1288.

Indian Child Welfare Act P.L. 95-608 (1978), retrieved from, http://www.nicwa.org/Indian_Child_Welfare_Act/ICWA.pdf

John, T.A. (2011). Multicultural Education: Partners in Learning Yugtun Qaneryararput Arcaqertuq. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 281-291). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Johnson, B. (1981). The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978: Implications for Practice. *Child Welfare, 60*(7), 435-446.

Jones, S. (Ed.). (2003). *Eskimo Drawings*. Anchorage: Museum of History & Art.

Jones, C. (2019). Indigenous law/stories: an approach to working with Maori law. In Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L.T. (Eds.) *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology* (pp.120-135). London: ZED Books.

Kawagley, A. O. (2006). *A Yupiaq worldview: A pathway to ecology and spirit*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Kawagley, A.O. (2011). Nurturing native languages. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 295-299). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Kawagley, A.O. (2011). How does the crane keep its language? In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 273-276). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Kemp, S. P. (2011). Re-centering environment in social work practice: Necessity, opportunity, challenge. *British Journal of Social Work*, *41*(6), 1198-1210.

Kendall-Miller, H. (2004). ANCSA and Sovereignty Litigation. *Journal of Land, Resources, & Environmental Law, 24*, 465-613.

Kessel, J., & Robbins, S. (1984). The Indian Child Welfare Act: Dilemmas and needs. *Child Welfare, 63*(3), 225-232.

Kirmayer, L., Simpson, C., & Cargo, M. (2003). Healing traditions: Culture, community and mental health promotion with Canadian Aboriginal peoples. *Australasian Psychiatry*, *11*(sup1), S15-S23.

Kirmayer, L. J., & Gone, J.P., & Moses, J. (2014). Rethinking Historical Trauma. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, *51*(3), 299-319.

Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational method in Indigenous research. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, *14*(1), 123-136.

Kovach, M. (2010). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Kovach, M., Carriere, J., Barrett, M., Montgomery, H., & Gillies, C. (2013). Stories of Diverse Identity Locations in Indigenous Research. *International Review of Qualitative Research, 6*(4), 487-509.

Kral, M. J., Idlout, L., Minore, J. B., Dyck, R. J., & Kirmayer, L. J. (2011). Unikkaartuit: Meanings of Well-Being, Unhappiness, Health, and Community Change Among Inuit in Nunavut, Canada. *American journal of community psychology*, *48*(3-4), 426-438.

LaFromboise, T. D., Hoyt, D. R., Oliver, L., & Whitbeck, L. B. (2006). Family, community, and school influences on resilience among American Indian adolescents in the upper Midwest. *Journal of community psychology*, *34*(2), 193-209.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2005). Reflections on Portraiture: A Dialogue Between Art and Science. *Qualitative Inquiry, 11*(1), 3-15.

Lavallée, L. (2009). Practical Application of an Indigenous Research Framework and Two Qualitative Indigenous Research Methods: Sharing Circles and Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 21-40.

Leake, R., Potter, C., Lucero, N., Gardner, J., & Deserly, K. (2012). Findings from a National Needs Assessment of American Indian/Alaska Native Child Welfare Programs. *Child Welfare, 91*(3), 47-63.

Leonard, B. (2011). Learning Dinaxinag: A personal journey through higher education. Native languages in Alaska. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 31-40). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Lidot, T., Orrantia, R., & Choca, M. (2012). Continuum of Readiness for Collaboration, ICWA Compliance, and Reducing Disproportionality. *Child Welfare, 91*(3), 65-87.

Limb, G., & Brown, E. (2008). An Examination of the Indian Child Welfare Act Section of State Title IV-B Child and Family Services Plans. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 25*(2), 99-110.

Limb, G., Chance, T., & Brown, E. (2004). An empirical examination of the Indian Child Welfare Act and its impact on cultural and familial preservation for American Indian children. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*(12), 1279-1289.

Limb, G. E., Hodge, D. R., & Panos, P. (2008). Social work with Native people: Orienting child welfare workers to the beliefs, values, and practices of Native American families and children. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *2*(3), 383-397.

Loppie, C. (2007). Learning From the Grandmothers: Incorporating Indigenous Principles Into Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(2), 276-284.

Lucero, N., & Bussey, M. (2012). A collaborative and trauma-informed practice model for urban Indian child welfare. *Child Welfare, 91*(3), 89-112.

Lucero, N., & Bussey, M. (2016). Preserving Native families, preserving Native cultures. In Weaver, H.N. (Ed.), *Social issues in contemporary native America: Reflections from Turtle Island* (pp. 113-128). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Lucero, N., & Leake, R. (2016). Expressions of Culture in American Indian/Alaska Native Tribal Child Welfare Work: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 10*(3), 327-347.

Mannes, M. (1995). Factors and events leading to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act. *Child Welfare, 74*(1), 264.

Mark, G. T., & Lyons, A. C. (2010). Maori healers' views on wellbeing: The importance of mind, body, spirit, family and land. *Social Science & Medicine*, *70*(11), 1756-1764.

Martin, D., & Yurkovich, E. (2014). "Close-Knit" Defines a Healthy Native American Indian Family. *Journal of family nursing*, *20*(1), 51-72.

Martindale, V. & Mork, V. (2011). Perspectives from a Lingit Language Instructor. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 173-180). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 1*(2), 1-9.

Mayo, W. (2002). Introduction anchoring values. In *What the Elders have taught us* (pp. 15-17). Portland, OR: Graphic Art Books.

McCubbin, L. D., McCubbin, H. I., Zhang, W., Kehl, L., & Strom, I. (2013). Relational well-being: An indigenous perspective and measure. *Family Relations*, *62*(2), 354-365.

McGregor, D. P. I., Morelli, P., Matsuoka, J., & Minerbi, L. (2003). An ecological model of well-being. In H A Becker & F. Vanclay (Eds.), *The international handbook of social impact assessment: Conceptual and methodological advances* (pp,109-126).

McMahon, A., Reck, L., & Walker, M. (2007). Defining well-being for Indigenous children in care. *Children Australia*, *32*(2), 15-20.

Microsoft Word Online Support (2019). Get your document's readability and level statistics. Retrieved from: https://support.office.com/en-us/article/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2#__toc342546558

Miles, M., Huberman, A. M, & Saldaña, Johnny. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis : A methods sourcebook* (Third ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Million, D. (2013). *Therapeutic nations: Healing in an age of indigenous human rights* (Critical issues in indigenous studies). Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Mindell, R., Vidal de Haymes, M., & Francisco, D. (2003). A Culturally Responsive Practice Model for Urban Indian Child Welfare Services. *Child Welfare, 82*(2), 201-217.

Mohatt G. V., Rasmus S.M., Thomas L., Allen J., Hazel K., & Hensel Chase. (2004). "Tied together like a woven hat:" Protective pathways to Alaska native sobriety. *Harm Reduction Journal, 1*(10), 1-12.

Mohatt, N. V., Fok, C. C. T., Burket, R., Henry, D., & Allen, J. (2011). Assessment of Awareness of Connectedness as a Culturally-based Protective Factor for Alaska Native Youth. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *17*(4), 444–455. http://doi.org/10.1037/a0025456

Morrison, C., Fox, K., Cross, T., & Paul, R. (2010). Permanency Through Wabanaki Eyes: A Narrative Perspective from "The People Who Live Where the Sun Rises". *Child Welfare, 89*(1), 103-23.

Napoleon, H. (1996). *Yuuyaraq: The way of the human being: with commentary*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

National Child Welfare Association (2015). Setting the record straight: *The Indian Child Welfare Act Fact Sheet.* Retrieved from: https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Setting-the-Record-Straight-ICWA-Fact-Sheet.pdf

National Congress of American Indian (2019). Demographics. Retrieved from: http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes/demographics

Native Village of Venetie I.R.A. council v. State of Alaska. (1991). Retrieved from: https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=4745923664711360997&q=Venetie+state+of+alaska&hl=en&as_sdt=6,48

Nelson, E. W. (1900). *The Eskimo about Bering Strait*. US Government Printing Office.

Neuendorf, K., Skalski, Paul D., Cajigas, Julie A., & Allen, Jeffery C. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook* (Second ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Newman, M., & Fort, K. (2017). Legal challenges to ICWA: An analysis of current case law. *Child Law Practice*, *36*(1), 13-15.

Noongwook, G. (2002). Take care of others-You cannot live without them. In *What the Elders have taught us* (pp. 79-82). Portland, OR: Graphic Art Books.

Norton, I., & Manson, S. (1996). Research in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities: Navigating the Cultural Universe of Values and Process. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(5), 856-860.

Office of Children's Services (2020). Count of Children in Out-Home-Placement during each reporting period. Retrieved from: http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/statistics/Webdata/mainOohMo.pdf

Oongtoogook, P. (2000). Aspects of traditional Iñupiat education. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing our pathways* (pp. 93-102). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Phillips, L., & Bunda, Tracey. (2018). *Research through, with and as storying*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Powers, M. & Faden, R. (2006). *Social justice: the moral foundations of public health and health policy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Priest, N., Mackean, T., Davis, E., Briggs, L., & Waters, E. (2012). Aboriginal perspectives of child health and wellbeing in an urban setting: Developing a conceptual framework. *Health Sociology Review*, *21*(2), 180-195.

Quash-Mah, S., Stockard, J., Johnson-Shelton, D., & Crowley, R. (2010). Fulfilling the hope of ICWA: The role of community context. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(6), 896-901.

Red Horse, J. (1997). Traditional American Indian family systems. *Family Systems & Health, 15*, p. 243-250.

Robbins, R., Scherman, A., Holeman, H., & Wilson, J. (2005). Roles of American Indian grandparents in times of cultural crisis. *Journal of Cultural diversity*, *12*(2), 62.

Roffey, S. (2011). Enhancing connectedness in Australian children and young people. *Asian Journal of Counselling*, *18*(1), 15-39.

Rountree, J., & Smith, A. (2016). Strength-based well-being indicators for Indigenous children and families: A literature review of Indigenous communities' identified well-being indicators. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research (Online), 23*(3), 206-20.

Rural Health Information Hub (2018). State Guides: Alaska. Retrieved from: https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/alaska

Sampson, R. (2011). Native languages in Alaska. In R. Barnhardt & A.O. Kawagley (Eds.), *Sharing Our Pathways* (pp. 111-124). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

San Pedro, T., & Kinloch, V. (2017). Toward Projects in Humanization: Research on Co-Creating and Sustaining Dialogic Relationships. *American Educational Research Journal, 54*, 373-394.

Sandelowski, M. (1993). Theory unmasked: The uses and guises of theory in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health, 16*(3), 213-218.

Schultz, K., Cattaneo, L. B., Sabina, C., Brunner, L., Jackson, S., & Serrata, J. V. (2016). Key roles of community connectedness in healing from trauma. *Psychology of violence*, *6*(1), 42.

Schultz, K., Walters, K. L., Beltran, R., Stroud, S., & Johnson-Jennings, M. (2016). "I'm stronger than I thought": Native women reconnecting to body, health, and place. *Health & place*, *40*, 21-28.

Senungetuk, H. A. (2017). Creating a Native Space in the City: An Inupiaq Community in Song and Dance. Retrieved from https://wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/etd_diss/80

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Aboriginal peoples*. London, UK: Zed Books Ltd.

State of Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana, Nulato Village, Village of Kalskag, Akiak Native Community, Village of Lower Kalskag and Kenaitze Indian Tribe. (2011). Retrieved from: https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=2830118738535928103&q=State+of+alaska+tanana&hl=en&as_sdt=6,48

Tribal State Collaboration Group (2018). Statewide/Regional Data Indicators. Retrieved from: http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/icwa/indicators.aspx

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409-428.

Twitchell, L. X. (2013). Alaska Native language revitalization: Transforming the fabric of our people. In B. Leonard, J. Breinig, L. Carpluk, S. Lind, & M. Williams (Eds.), *Alaska Native Studies in the 21st Century* (pp. 147-170). Minneapolis, MN: Two Harbors Press.

Ullrich, J. (2019). For the love of our children: An Indigenous connectedness framework. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 15*(2), 121-130.

Walters, K. L., Beltran, R., Huh, D., & Evans-Campbell, T. (2011). Dis-placement and dis-ease: Land, place, and health among American Indians and Alaska Natives. In *Communities, neighborhoods, and health* (pp. 163-199). New York: Springer.

Wemigwase, S., & Tuck, E. (2019). Research before and after the academy: Learning participatory Indigenous methods. In Windchief, S., & San Pedro, T. *Applying indigenous research methods: Storying with peoples and communities* (pp. 76-85). New York, NY: Routledge.

Waziyatawin, A. W., & Yellow Bird, M. (2005). *For Indigenous eyes only: A decolonization handbook*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Wells, K. (2011). *Narrative inquiry*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wexler, L. (2009). The importance of identity, history, and culture in the wellbeing of Indigenous youth. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 2(*2*), pp. 267-276.

White, M. D., & Marsh, E. E. (2006). Content analysis: A flexible methodology. *Library trends*, *55*(1), 22-45.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony : Indigenous research methods*. Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.

Windchief, S., & San Pedro, T. (2019). *Applying indigenous research methods: Storying with peoples and communities*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wolsko, C., Lardon, C., Mohatt, G. V., & Orr, E. (2007). Stress, coping, and well-being among the Yupik of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta: the role of enculturation and acculturation. *International journal of circumpolar health*, *66*(1), 51-61.

Appendix A- Alaska Area IRB Approval

Alaska Area Institutional Review Board
4315 Diplomacy Drive - IRB
Anchorage, AK 99508

DATE: May 2, 2019

TO: Jessica Ullrich, PhC
Principal Investigator
8050 Pioneer Drive #202
Anchorage, AK 99504

FROM: Alaska Area Institutional Review Board (IHS IRB #2)

STUDY TITLE: [1402735-3] An examination of Alaska Native child wellbeing within ICWA preference placements

IRB REFERENCE #: 2019-03-027

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: ACKNOWLEDGED

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 30, 2019

Dear Ms. Ullrich:

Thank you for submitting the New Project materials for the above research study. The Alaska Area Institutional Review Board (AAIRB) has ACKNOWLEDGED your submission. No further action on submission 2019-03-027-3 is required at this time. This project will be added to the May 2019 AAIRB agenda.

The following items are acknowledged in this submission:

- Amendment/Modification - Recruitment flyer for youth .pdf (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)
- Amendment/Modification - Recruitment flyer for youth edited 4 29 19.docx (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)
- Amendment/Modification - Recruitment flyer for caregivers.pdf (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)
- Amendment/Modification - Recruitment flyer for caregivers edited 4 29 19.docx (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)
- Amendment/Modification - Screen Shot 2019-04-30 at 5.49.04 PM.png (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)
- Consent Form - Revised Informed_Consent_Form_4 30 2019.pdf (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)
- Cover Sheet - AAIRB Revisions Cover Letter.pdf (UPDATED: 04/30/2019)

If you have further questions for the Alaska Area IRB you may contact us at akaalaskaareaIRB@anthc.org or call (907) 729-3917.

Sincerely,

Eric Hatleberg
Alaska Area Institutional Review Board
IRB Coordinator

Appendix B- UW IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON
HUMAN SUBJECTS DIVISION

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

May 1, 2019

Dear Jessica Ullrich:

On May 1, 2019, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Type of Review:	Modification/Update
Title of Study:	Alaska Native child wellbeing within ICWA preference placements
Investigator:	Jessica Ullrich
Submission ID:	MOD00004101
STUDY ID:	STUDY00007145
Funding:	None

Exempt Status

HSD determined that your proposed activity continues to be human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Category 2).

- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
- This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.

If you consider changes to the activities in the future and know that the changes will require IRB review (or you are not certain), you may request a review or new determination by submitting a Modification to this application. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the **GUIDANCE: Exempt Research**.

Thank you for your commitment to ethical and responsible research. We wish you great success!

Sincerely,

Jenny Maki
IRB Review Administrator
(206) 543-4798 | makij2@uw.edu

Appendix C- Recruitment Flyer for Foster Care Alumni

RESEARCH STUDY

Of Alaska Native Child and Youth Wellbeing within Alaska Native Placements

RECRUITMENT FOR ALASKA NATIVE ADULTS WHO WERE PLACED WITH ALASKA NATIVE RELATIVES OR ALASKA NATIVE FOSTER PARENTS

The purpose of this study is to understand how Alaska Native relatives and Alaska Native foster parents helped children in state custody.

Eligible participants would be interviewed for about an hour.

Benefits of the Study

The knowledge and information gained from this study may help improve child welfare policies, practices and training.

Eligibility Criteria

1. **Are you:** Alaska Native? Yes ☐
2. **Are you:** 18 years of age or older? Yes ☐
3. **Have you:** Lived with an Alaska Native relative or an Alaska Native foster parent? Yes ☐
4. **Were you:** In State of Alaska Custody? Yes ☐

If you checked yes to the above criteria and would like more information please contact **Jessica Saniguq Ullrich at 907-301-2779** (cell) or **jullrich@uw.edu**

Each participant (one per household) will get a $35 gift card.

Appendix D- Recruitment Flyer for Caregivers

RESEARCH STUDY

SEEKING ALASKA NATIVE RELATIVES AND ALASKA NATIVE FOSTER PARENTS

The purpose of this study is to understand how Alaska Native relatives and Alaska Native foster parents helped children in state custody.

Eligibility

1. Do you self-identify as Alaska Native?
2. Have you provided care for an Alaska Native child in state custody within the last 10 years?
3. Were you, or are you currently an Alaska Native relative care provider or Alaska Native licensed foster parent?

If you answered yes to the above questions, I would love to hear from you!

This study involves in person interviews that could last up to an hour. Every person interviewed will a $35 Amazon gift card (one per household).

For more information, please contact:
Jessica Saniguq Ullrich
PhD student at University of Washington
School of Social Work
Phone: 907-301-2779
Email: jullrich@uw.edu

Appendix E- Post Feedback Interview Questions

Alaska Native Adults Previously in AN Relative or AN Foster Care

1. Interview Questions: Descriptive data
    a. Name, preferred pseudonym, preferred pronoun
    b. Tribal affiliation (will not identify tribe in the research, but will specify the region the tribe is in if it's an Alaskan tribe: ASRC, NANA, Bering Strait, Doyon, Chugach, BBNA, Calista, CIRI, Aleut, Sealaska, Ahtna, Koniag).
    c. Race/Ethnicity
    d. Age and How old they were when they entered custody.
    e. Length of custody
    f. What was the permanency goal for the youth when they were in care and was it established (adoption, guardianship, APPLA, fit and willing relative?)
    g. At what point the alumni was placed with a relative or AK Native foster parent. (Beginning, middle, end).
    h. Currently live in rural or urban setting?

2. Semi-structured Interview Questions
    a. I'm interested in the promotion of wellbeing. What does wellness/wellbeing mean to you? How did you participate in wellness activities? What is a challenge you saw in promoting your wellness when you were in care?
    b. What resources supported your wellbeing while you were in care?
    c. Elders often instruct younger generations to "Know who they are and where they come from" what identities do you feel you most strongly connected to? Do you feel like you have learned about who you are and where you come from your relative or AN/AI foster care providers? How so?
    d. Can you tell me about any cultural traditions or activities that you participated in? How about any spiritual activities or ceremonies? Did you participate in these activities while you were in care?
    e. In what ways did you stay in contact with your extended family? Do you feel that your placement in a relative or AN/AI foster home helped you maintain or develop relationships with your extended family? How important are your extended family relationships to you?
    f. What does community mean to you?
    g. What do you think about intergenerational connections- was this something that you were taught?
    h. What does wellness mean to you? Can you give me some examples of how you stay healthy and well?
    i. Can you tell me about any important places or environments that you have felt connected to?

j. Did you participate in any spiritual activities or ceremonies?
k. In what ways did family or community support you while you were in care?
l. Is there anything that could have made the process of being in relative or foster care any easier?

Alaska Native Relatives and Alaska Native Foster Parents

1. Interview Descriptive Data
    a. Name, preferred pseudonym, preferred pronoun
    b. Tribal affiliation (will not identify tribe in the research, but will specify the region the tribe is in if it's an Alaskan tribe: ASRC, NANA, Bering Strait, Doyon, Chugach, BBNA, Calista, CIRI, Aleut, Sealaska, Ahtna, Koniag).
    c. Race/Ethnicity
    d. Live in urban or rural setting?
    e. How long did you care for the child in your home?
    f. Were you: an unlicensed relative care provider? A licensed relative care provider? A licensed care provider, non-relative?
    g. What was the permanency outcome for the child (reunification, adoption, guardianship, APPLA?) OR Is the child still in state custody? What is the permanency goal?

2. Semi-Structured Interview Questions
    a. I'm interested in the promotion of wellness in your family. What does wellness mean to you? How did youth in your home engage in wellness activities? Do you feel this environment helps children thrive? What is a challenge you see in promoting wellness for children in your home?

    b. What do you consider to be some of the most important cultural traditions that your family participates in? How often do you participate in these traditions? In what ways do the children in your home also participate?

    c. How would you define 'family?' How often do you connect with extended family? What are the ways your family participates in the community?

    d. What are some of the resources you access to support wellbeing? Do the children receive formal and/or informal resources?

    e. Does your family engage in spiritual activities or ceremonies? Did the child you provided care for participate in spiritual activities- in what ways?

    f. In what ways have family or community supported you to care for the children in your home?

g. Has your family made changes in activities to better fit the child's background?

h. Is there anything that could make the promotion of child wellbeing easier?

i. Overall, how has the child/youth's placement in relative/AK Native foster care been a benefit to them?

Appendix F- Codebook

Codes	Apply if the knowledge bearer discusses:
Intergenerational Connectedness	History, ancestors, or future and future generations
Family Connectedness	Siblings, extended family, parents, relatives, whomever they consider a relative
Community Connectedness	Community, resources, non-relative supports
Environmental Connectedness	Land, water, place, animals, plants, nature, important places
Spiritual Connectedness	God, creator, higher power, religion, ceremony, spirit, higher self
Mechanisms of Wellbeing	Anything that implies a way to promote child wellbeing, i.e., belonging, activities, etc.
Concept of Wellbeing	An individual/sovereign concept of mental, physical, emotional health
Cultural Connectedness	Use of the term culture, values, identity, cultural activities
Culture as Spirit	Talks about culture and spirit together
Observed Wellbeing Outcomes for Children	Specific outcomes of child wellbeing that people have seen, i.e., happiness, security, expanded family, reunification
Language	Anytime they talk about their Indigenous language
Urban/Rural Differences	Whenever the participant describes differences in child wellbeing in rural or urban settings
Western Lifestyle	Anytime they talk compare Indigenous and western ways of living and being
Cultural/Tribal Accommodations	Whenever foster parents or relatives talk about their own cultural/tribal background in comparison to the children and any accommodations they made to keep the children connected.
Assumption of Responsibility	When a participant talks about the obligation to provide care for children in need.
Caregiver Supports	Supports caregivers talked about that helped them continue to provide care for a child
Knowing Who You Are	Identity formation, relationships, place/environment, belonging, or connection
Permanency for Wellbeing	When participants talk about adoption, guardianship, reunification, etc. as a way to promote child wellbeing
Reciprocal Relationships	When caregivers feel that children/youth have helped them heal or connect and vice versa
Relational Continuity	Helping children/youth stay in contact with relatives, siblings, foster parents so they know people don't disappear from their lives

Resilience	Doing well despite the odds, intrinsic characteristics that help them keep trauma and false beliefs at bay
Resources for Wellbeing	Whenever alumni or caregivers talk about specific resources that helped them
Sense of Safety/Stability	When participants talk about the need to help children establish a sense of safety and stability
Tribal Support	Anytime a tribe is talked about in a supportive and helpful way
Trauma as a Challenge	When participants talk about their trauma, or children's trauma and the ways it affected their lives
Barriers to Wellbeing	Specific issues that are more systematic/institutional in nature that made it harder for a child/youth to be well
Grief and Loss	Anytime death is discussed of a parent or family member
Substance Abuse	Anytime a participant talks about the ways substance abuse affected their lives
Struggles	Struggles with OCS, Tribes, family or being a caregiver

Curriculum Vitae

Jessica Saniguq Ullrich

Education

PhD University of Washington, Spring 2020
Social Welfare

MSW University of Alaska Anchorage, Spring 2005
Advanced Generalist

BA Gonzaga University, Spring 2003
Psychology and Philosophy

Awards & Fellowships

Native Child Research Exchange Scholar
Indigenous Wellness Research Institute, ISMART fellow
Council on Social Work Education, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Association, Minority Fellowship Program
Doyon Foundation Competitive Scholarship
American Indian Graduate Center Scholarship
Graduate Opportunity and Minority Achievement Program Presidential Fellowship- 1st and 5th year fellowship
State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services "Star" Employee

Research Interests & Experience

Interests

* Indigenous Child Wellbeing
* Child Welfare Prevention
* Language revitalization
* Substance Abuse Prevention
* Decolonization, Historical Resilience
* Community Based Participatory Research
* Policy advocacy

Research Experience

5/2019-2/2020	Indigenous Connectedness as a Framework for Relational Healing
9/2019-present	Indigenous Language Use and Positive Mental Health
1/2018-present	Alaska Native Collaborative Hub on Resilience Research
1/2017-2/2019	Indigenous Connectedness Framework
3/2016-10/2016	Economic Disconnectedness of Child Welfare Families
1/2016-1/2017	Partners for Our Children, Strive Project, Research Practicum
9/2004-5/2005	Alaska Native Fatherhood Values: A Qualitative Study
5/2004-9/2004	Child Welfare Evaluation Alumni Study

Conference Presentations

4/2020	National Indian Child Welfare Association Conference
3/2020	One Health Conference
11/2019	UAF Tribal Government Symposium
9/2019	Native Child Research Exchange Conference
10/2018	First Alaskans Institute Elders and Youth Conference
4/2018	National Indian Child Welfare Association Conference
11/2017	National Association for the Education of Young Children: Tribal and Indigenous Early Childhood Network Forum
9/2017	National Native Health Research Training Conference
9/2017	Native Child Research Exchange Conference

Teaching Interests & Experience

Interests (Advanced Generalist)

* Human Diversity in Social Work Practice
* Child Welfare Policy and Practice
* Historical Trauma and Resilience
* Practice I and II classes
* Human Behavior in the Social Environment
* Social Welfare Policy
* Program Evaluation
* Introduction to Social Work
* Indigenous Research Methods

Teaching Experience

8/2018-12/2018	SW 206: Introduction to Social Work- Instructor
8/2018-12/2018	University 150: Preparation for College Success- Instructor
6/2018 2 weeks	University 190: Preparation for College Success- Instructor
1/2018-5/2018	SW 206: Introduction to Social Work- Instructor
1/2017-4/2017	Social Work Policy Analysis- Teaching Assistant
9/2016-12/2016	Diversity in Social Work Practice- Teaching Assistant
1/2016-3/2016	Introduction to Social Work- Teaching Assistant
9/2015-12/2015	Human Behavior in the Social Environment- Teaching Assistant
8/2015-12/2015	Child and Family Inequalities- Teaching Practicum

Publications

Ullrich, J. S. (2019). For the love of our children: an Indigenous connectedness framework. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180119828114

Salazar, A., Roe, S., **Ullrich, J.** & Haggerty, K. (2016) Professional and youth perspectives on higher education-focused interventions for youth transitioning from foster care. *Children & Youth Services Review*, *64,* 23-34.

Practice Experience

7/2018-present	Child Welfare Academy
1/2014-8/2014	Cook Inlet Tribal Council
7/2005-12/2013	Office of Children's Services
5/2004-10/2005	Southcentral Foundation Transitional Living Program
6/2004-8/2004	Raven's Quest Summer Institute
6/2003-8/2003	Institut National de la Sante et de la researché medicale
12/2002-5/2003	State of Washington Child Protection Services
10/2000-5/2003	Gonzaga Indian Education Outreach Program
6/2002-8/2002	Washington Internships for Native Students

Academic Services and Professional Affiliations

UW PhD Social Work Social Justice Committee, Past Member
Native Organization of Indigenous Scholars, Past Co-President
UW School of Social Work Equity Council, Past Member
UW 'Grow Our Own' Race & Equity Initiative, Past Member
Alaska Native Collaborative Hub on Resilience Research, Steering Committee Member
National Indian Child Welfare Association, Student Member
Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, Student Member
Council for Social Work Education, Student Member
Society for Prevention Research, Student Member