

An Exploration of Long-Term Outcomes Following Graduation from the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program

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Land Acknowledgment

This research was completed on the original lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. Treaty 1, signed in 1871, took this territory from seven local Anishinaabe First Nations in order to make the land available for settler use and ownership. It should also be noted that throughout this project, the term “Indigenous” is used to encompass First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and non-status Indian people.

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Definitions

When discussing sexual exploitation, it is imperative to clearly define the important terminology used in this project. In this context, *sexual exploitation* is defined as “Any actual or attempted abuse of position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.” (United Nations Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2017, p. 6). Using an anti-colonial lens, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (2008) highlights the two streams in which exploitation can occur “through the commercial stream that includes an exchange of food, drugs, clothing, and shelter for sex acts. Or through the non-commercial stream where individuals in a position of authority or power over another person occur where the purchasing of gifts or enticements and promises for not disclosing to anyone is used to keep victims silent” (Nelson, 2019, p. 8). The term “*at-risk*” refers to children and youth who are at-risk of being sexually exploited. Finally, the term “*sex industry*” is used instead of “sex trade” and “sex work” as it better reflects the multitude of people who profit from exploitation and avoids representing the involvement of youth in the sex industry as a freely chosen occupation (Drabble, 2019, p. 4).

Executive Summary

THE NDINAWE CHILD and Youth Care Certificate Program (NCYCCP) is a post-secondary education program for formerly sexually exploited individuals in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The program is delivered in partnership between Red River College Polytechnic and Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc., rooted in Indigenous teachings and provides holistic support to students who bring important and often difficult lived experience and life circumstances to the program. The purpose of this research project was to assess the long-term outcomes following graduation for alumni of the NCYCCP. Twenty-three alumni were interviewed from 11 of the 13 program cohorts. Of those interviewed, just over half of graduates had less than a grade twelve education at the time of enrollment, while all were receiving provincial Employment and Income Assistance. The data collected in this research shows that the NCYCCP is an important and effective program, in both human and economic terms. It supports students' financial independence and creates less reliance on government support. But its value extends beyond the public purse: it has a transformative impact on its students in all aspects of their lives: personal, familial, educational, employment, with further positive impact in their communities.

Introduction

THE NDINAWE CHILD and Youth Care Certificate Program (NCYCCP) is a full-time, Red River College Polytechnic (RRC Polytech) accredited, community-based education and training program for adults who have experienced sexual exploitation. The experiential knowledge of students is an important preventative measure in informing and promoting positive choices when working with youth, who are themselves at-risk for sexual exploitation. This program is believed to be the first step in ending a cycle of violence and poverty for most participants, many of whom are parents. Student success is enhanced using a holistic model that provides an in-depth orientation, counselling and a variety of healing supports by incorporating Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and practices in every aspect of the program.

The purpose of this project was to explore the long-term outcomes, post-graduation, with a focus on parenting, systems involvement, financial stability, mental health, general health and well-being, and employment outcomes. This was a novel approach to exploring the success of an educational program, as too often the only outcome explored following completion is one's employability. The primary source of data were twenty-three in-person interviews with alumni of the program, sampled from the eleven of the thirteen graduating cohorts. Exploring the perspective of the alumni provided ample information about how the program impacted the lives of students, their families, and their community. This project was intended to evaluate the program by achieving a clear picture of the broad impacts of attending the program as well as an appreciation of how cultures as curriculum can

impact the lives of alumni. The project is supported by the Manitoba Research Alliance, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba, via the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

This report is presented in four sections. Section 1 provides a general description of the NCYCCP, the field of child and youth care, and similar types of educational interventions. Section 2 provides information on the methodology employed in the study, including a description of the methods, participants, and procedures involved, and of the limitations to the study. Section 3 summarizes the findings, presented in the participants' own words. A detailed discussion of the demographics of the research participants is included in this section. Finally, Section 4 provides conclusions, a summary of the project, and recommendations for the future.

Section 1:

Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program – Relevant Literature and Environmental Scan

The Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program

The Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program (NCYCCP) is a post-secondary education program for sexually exploited individuals in Winnipeg, Manitoba, located on Treaty One territory. The full-time one-year college program, offered in partnership with Red River College Polytechnic (RRC Polytech), offers accredited training through course work and practicum placements in agencies serving children, youth and families throughout Winnipeg. The purpose of this program is to provide academic instruction using foundational knowledge and practical experiences to support children, youth, families and communities. Training comes from a variety of trauma-informed, relational, and anti-oppressive frameworks, as students learn to

support children and youth towards individualized growth, development, and self-motivated transformation. Students graduate from the NCYCCP with a Red River College Polytechnic Certificate in Child and Youth Care. The development and delivery of the curriculum is provided through RRC Polytech. For the majority of students, this program is the first step in ending a cycle of violence and poverty as they have the opportunity to work towards healing and rebuilding their lives, while embarking on a career that can have a direct positive impact on both their families and on children, youth and the community at large.

The NCYCCP is run under the umbrella of the larger Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc (Ndinawe). This organization, founded in 1993, is dedicated to supporting at-risk youth in Winnipeg. Ndinawe has grown to have multiple sites with interconnecting services and resources. There is a safe house where youth, aged 11–17, can self-refer if they are in need of a safe place to live. Tina’s Safe Haven is a 24-hour centre for youth experiencing homelessness to access resources, get a meal, have a safe place to stay and find someone to talk to. There is also an independent living program for youth who are about to age out of the system. This program teaches the youth life skills necessary for living on their own, while having access to supportive staff and resources. In recent years, Ndinawe opened a drop-in resource centre for older youth aged 18–27 where they can have a shower, do laundry, have some food and access assistance and resources they might need to find housing, employment, identification, or mental health professionals. Ndinawe offers cultural programming for all sites and ensures access to Elders and ceremony.

Program History

The first cohort of students at the NCYCCP began in the 2007–2008 academic year. The program was initially located in the lower level of a youth group home and then moved to a location on Selkirk Avenue in the North End of Winnipeg for the third year of the program operation in 2009. In 2018, the program moved to its current location, in the same community, on Burrows Ave. As of June 2021, 123 students have graduated from the NCYCCP. At least twenty-five have gone on to complete the second year of the RRC Polytech Child and Youth Care Diploma, two have graduated with a university degree and seven are currently enrolled in a university degree program. One graduate is in the process of completing their Master of Social Work. The graduates have become workers, allies, and advocates for children and youth in the community. By combining the participants’ real-life experience and training,

graduates are able to build unique relationships based on shared experiences, identify risk factors or signs of sexual exploitation and potentially prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth.

For those students who do not pursue further education, the majority remain working in the child and youth care field. This includes, but is not limited to: positions in residential group homes, resource centres, transitional living programs, the school system, child and family service agencies, on mobile outreach teams, and in action therapy. Due to the traumatic nature of the work that the child and youth care field entails, some graduates choose to move on to a different field of work. Currently there are alumni working in the trades, with adults with disabilities and in the agricultural sector. A small percentage of graduates do not move on to employment. This is due to a number of different reasons that could include health issues, familial responsibilities or a recurrence of trauma.

The NCYCCP was developed as part of Tracia's Trust, Manitoba's strategy responding to children and youth at risk of or survivors of sexual exploitation. It was launched in 2002 (Manitoba Family Services and Housing, 2008). It was named after Tracia Owen, a 14-year-old Indigenous youth who died by suicide as a direct result of experiencing sexual exploitation as well as being entrenched in the care of Child and Family Services for most of her short life (Denby, 2018). Denby (2018) points out that Tracia's life story is not dissimilar to most of the participants in the NCYCCP. Denby (2018) goes on to state that this program was established "under the philosophy that people with experiential knowledge (specifically with experience having been sexually exploited) if given the right educational and training opportunities, coupled with proper cultural support, can become valuable child and youth care workers for future youth and those who may be at risk of sexual exploitation" (p. 6). This philosophy continues to guide the program to this day. The experiential knowledge of students serves as an important preventative measure in informing and promoting positive choices when working with youth who are themselves at risk of sexual exploitation.

Student Population

According to the 2016 Canadian Census, Winnipeg has the highest number of Indigenous people of all urban centers in Canada, with over 90,000 respondents self-identifying as "Aboriginal" (MacKinnon, 2019).

Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are more likely to have ill health, have low educational attainment, and live in poverty... [According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2017)] 35.1 percent of Aboriginal people live in poverty compared to 14.3 percent of non-Indigenous people. Aboriginal people are almost 3 times more likely to reside in the Inner-City and North-End, where poverty is concentrated, and the rate is among the highest of urban centres in Canada. (MacKinnon, 2019, p. 2)

The links are clear that education improves poverty outcomes (Silver, 2013); however, Indigenous people lag far behind non-Indigenous people in educational attainment. In 2016, only 55 percent of Indigenous students graduated high school, compared to 96 percent of non-Indigenous students (Office of the Auditor General Manitoba, 2016). Silver (2013) provides context for the spatial concentration of those outcomes:

Winnipeg's North End, where a high proportion of the population is Aboriginal and where just over 50 percent of young people graduate from high school and as few as 20 percent in some North End neighbourhoods, compared to over 90 percent in Winnipeg high income neighbourhoods (p. 4).

Outcomes for university and college graduation reflect a similar disparity, however programs like the NCYCCP are trying to change this. MacKinnon (2019) points out:

It is not uncommon for Indigenous people to return to school as adult 'mature' students and pursue post-secondary education as part of a longer process of healing from the effects of colonial policies and programmes such as residential schools. Indigenous post-secondary students are older on average than their peers and many come with responsibilities beyond that of the typical student. It is not uncommon for Indigenous students to be juggling parental responsibilities, schoolwork and financial struggles (p. 3).

This statement reflects the reality for the majority of the NCYCCP participants.

An inclusive profile of the students was completed during a 2014 program evaluation of NCYCCP, wherein students and alumni revealed traumatic childhood histories that included multiple forms of abuse in addition to sexual exploitation (Fraelich & Giacomini, 2014). Many students experienced unsettled relationships in their families of origin and over half spent time in the care of child welfare agencies while growing up. All students had a history of substance use and reported facing "challenges associated with these past traumas as well as health issues, financial difficulties, family

responsibilities, and a lack of academic skills and experience” (Fraelich & Giacomini, 2014, p. 64). This report provided detailed demographics of the students who had attended the program up until 2013. While years have passed, the current program director of NCYCCP confirmed that this continues to reflect the students in more recent cohorts.

Program Staff and Governance

The NCYCCP operates with seven staff members. There are three college instructors from RRC Polytech. The other staff, employed by Ndinawe, include the Program Manager, Educational Assistant, Wellness Coordinator and Knowledge Keeper. The program is governed by the Ndinawe Board of Directors. Funding for the program comes from the Province of Manitoba, federal funding from Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), Canadian Women’s Foundation, and periodic small grants and donations.

The NCYCCP is rooted in Indigenous teachings within a holistic framework. Ndinawe and RRC Polytech staff work together to deliver the curriculum, infused with ceremony and teachings, to work towards educational growth, understanding and healing for all students.

The intake process for the NCYCCP begins early in the new year. Students fill out a brief application that indicates the main eligibility criteria. If they are eligible for the program based on that application, they book an intake interview with the Program Manager or Wellness Coordinator. The eligibility criteria for the program are:

- Experiences of sexual exploitation.
- Receiving Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), as the program is funded and monitored through the Department of Families within the provincial government.
- Abstinence from illegal drug use for preferably at least two years.
- No active protection file with a Child Welfare agency.
- No open criminal charges or warrants, and students cannot be on probation.
- Students must complete a criminal record check, including the vulnerable sector search, child abuse registry check and prior contact check to participate in practicum placements. It should be noted that individuals *can* participate in the program with a criminal

record. For their practicum, they would be required to submit their criminal record check and a letter of explanation to a committee at RRC Polytech who reviews and can allow participation in practicum.

When prospective students complete an intake interview and are deemed a possible fit for the program, applicants must complete a personal biography and provide three references. The biography includes their history and why they think they would make a good child and youth care worker. Upon receipt of their personal biographies and reference checks, applicants take one final step in the process and participate in a panel interview with NCYCCP staff and RRC Polytech instructors. The final cohort is chosen by the staff as a team. The application and screening process is reviewed annually to ensure that the students selected for the program demonstrate the potential to succeed and a heart for the work upon which they are about to embark. The program is currently funded for 18 spots.

Program Overview

The RRC Polytech instructors and Ndinawe staff provide a safe and supportive environment for learning, including life skills training, employment preparation, counselling, and Indigenous ways of healing and knowing. Indigenous teachings and ceremony are woven into the curriculum to provide an inclusive, holistic, and culturally relevant educational experience.

Students complete child and youth care course work from the RRC Polytech curriculum delivered by RRC Polytech instructors. To supplement their classroom learning and apply their skills while gaining practical experience, the students complete 348 hours in a practicum placement at agencies within the community. They have a 15-week block of practicum hours that coincides with a practicum course and seminar where they can integrate their learning in connection with their practical experience. The primary goal of the program is to provide education and experience working in the field of Child and Youth Care (CYC). Graduates work from trauma-informed, relational, and anti-oppressive frameworks, supporting community members towards individualized growth, development, and self-motivated transformation. Upon completion, students graduate with a college certificate in Child and Youth Care and are trained to support at-risk children and youth in the community. They are equipped to facilitate assessments and interventions that are developmentally considerate and utilize evidence-based best practice.

At the beginning of the school year, prior to the academic courses, students take part in a two-week life skills/orientation program. This period is an important time in which staff and students begin to form relationships. For the work in the NCYCCP to be successful, trusting relationships and open communication are necessary. A variety of topics are covered during this time, including time management, organizational and study tools, communication, and team building. All of this is brought together through ceremony and cultural teachings. Students participate in sharing circles, take part in a sweat lodge ceremony and at the end of the two-weeks, and go medicine picking for the sage that will be used in the classroom for the year. There is also an alumni panel discussion, during which the new students can ask alumni any questions they have about the year ahead or the field of child and youth care.

The RRC Polytech program offers this essential training by giving students the tools they need to facilitate lasting changes in their lives. The courses offered tackle subjects such as child development, abuse, neglect, substance use, and the theories and approaches child and youth care workers can use in their work. They take a course called 'A Context for Practice with Indigenous Peoples' in which the history of Indigenous Peoples and its effect on the children and youth in care today are discussed. They are given tools for effective listening, de-escalation, and how to use these everyday moments to connect with those they are working with.

Cultural components are consistent throughout the school year. The NCYCCP has a Knowledge Keeper on staff, as well as access to Elders through Ndinawe. Students are provided with cultural support and ceremony as often as needed and teachings are woven into every facet of the program. Along with the cultural support team, there is a full-time Wellness Coordinator who conducts regular check-ins with each student, both scheduled and on an as-needed basis. From these sessions, students are supported in any way necessary, whether that be in advocacy, accessing resources and/or more formal counselling/healing services, or continuing to be a listening ear. The course content can be triggering for students and both the Knowledge Keeper and Wellness Coordinator are there to assist the students through those moments, to help them find the tools and develop positive coping mechanisms to be able to succeed in the program.

Students also have access to a full-time Educational Assistant (EA) who can support their academic learning. The EA works with students on an individual basis as well as in group settings to help them understand the material and complete assignments. They follow-up with students regarding

outstanding work and attendance issues. The entire NCYCCP team work together in a positive, collaborative environment. Students know that they can speak with any staff member about an academic or personal issue.

To further provide the students with their best chance of success prior to and during practicum placements, students take part in employment preparation programming. These sessions are led by a professional hired by NCYCCP on a contract basis. Students participate in lectures, workshops, and assignments to provide them with the information, tools and support they will need to begin working in the child and youth care field. They cover resume writing, interview skills, communication, and topics specific to the workplaces they will be entering.

The Field of Child and Youth Care

To fully appreciate the impact of the NCYCCP, one must have a clear understanding of the unique field of Child and Youth Care (CYC). Anglin (1999) highlights five unique characteristics which differentiate the field from other human service professions: the focus on growth and development of children and youth, the focus on the totality of a child's functioning, viewing child development through a social competence perspective, basing practice on direct, day to day work in the therapeutic milieu, and the importance of developing therapeutic relationships with each child (Anglin, 1999). The dominant view of CYC work is that "influencing young people while there is maximum opportunity for personal change is likely to be the most effective strategy to achieve the profession's goals and aspirations for society" (Anglin, 1999, p. 148). In the field of CYC, the primary emphasis of the work is to meet the children and youth where they are in their development and experience. To do this, workers need to be "knowledgeable, skillful, sensitive, and capable of fostering fundamental changes in their lives and the lives of their families on their behalf" (Anglin, 1999, p. 148). Anglin advocates for effective training for CYC workers to ensure there are effective supports available for at-risk youth (Anglin, 1999).

The day-to-day presence in the lives of vulnerable children and youth, with an emphasis on relationship building, is what sets apart child and youth care workers from other social service professionals. It allows them to track progress, maintain connectedness, case plan, support, and advocate. Graduates of the program use their college training in combination with their life experience to show up and relate on a different level. Graduates

are hired in many different social service agencies. They work with youth in residential group homes, drop-in centres, schools, outreach teams, within child welfare agencies, and within the justice system. Daily tasks such as cooking, morning wake ups, driving to appointments, cleaning, homework, and programming, coincide with establishing relationships and bonds. The stronger they get, the more the trust grows. When this happens, youth who otherwise might not open up begin to, and thus begins the process of healing. Child and youth care workers are essential to these processes.

Environmental Scan

An extensive environmental scan was conducted to learn about other programs with aims similar to the NCYCCP. We did not find a program, nationally or internationally, that could be directly compared. NCYCCP appears to be a unique post-secondary program that is designed specifically for previously exploited individuals and is presented through an Indigenous lens. No other program that combined these two components in conjunction with a college certificate or any other formal training was found. However, the programs described below shared some key features with the NCYCCP.

The Family Support Worker Certificate Program, offered through Urban Circle Training Centre Inc. (UCTC) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, was developed for Indigenous students and offered through RRC Polytech. The program uses the philosophy of the medicine wheel to guide and support students' education. Through a culturally based life-skills program, they integrate "decolonization pedagogy as a method of cultural reclamation and healing." (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 87). There are similar courses taught in each program related to vulnerable populations, development, trauma, and addiction and all are delivered using an Indigenous lens. Urban Circle fosters a sense of belonging and community much like the NCYCCP (Urban Circle Training Centre Inc, n.d.). The students that attend the programs have similar backgrounds and current realities, including barriers to education affected by poverty, insecure housing, violence, negative encounters with the justice system and family disruption (MacKinnon, 2015). Through both the NCYCCP and the Family Support Worker Certificate Program, students learn about their history, reclaim cultural knowledge and understanding and use their experiences and education to help families in their communities. There are two main differences between the two programs. First, students enrolled at UCTC must be Indigenous. While a high percentage of Ndinawe students

identify as Indigenous, it is not a requirement for acceptance. Secondly, experience with sexual exploitation is a main requirement for enrollment in Ndinawe and not a factor for enrollment at UCTC.

Confederation College in Ontario has a Child and Youth Care program with an Indigenous Specialization, which includes Indigenous models of healing and wellness within the curriculum (Confederation College, n.d.). The Native Education and Training College of Business, Healthcare, Human Services and Technology, also based in Ontario, has an online Youth Worker Diploma program (Native Education and Training College of Business, Healthcare, Human Services and Technology, 2022). These two programs do not have a targeted population for enrollment; however, they do present an Indigenous perspective in the field of Child and Youth Care.

Across Canada, there are several Indigenous universities and colleges offering certificate and diploma programs in community service-oriented fields. Some universities also offer undergraduate and graduate programming. Their curriculum is taught with the addition of Indigenous teachings, supports and ceremony. Some examples of these institutions and their programs are Six Nations Polytechnic in Ontario and their Community Justice Services Diploma (Six Nations Polytechnic, 2021), Native Education College in British Columbia and their Indigenous Studies Certificate and Family and Community Counseling certificate and diploma programs (Native Education College, 2022), and Yellowquill University College in Manitoba with their First Nations Addictions and Mental Health Diploma program (Yellowquill University College, n.d.). Unlike the NCYCCP, these programs are open to all students who wish to apply and there are no tailored supports to ensure the success of individuals who have experienced sexual exploitation.

The RESET Society of Calgary provides a comprehensive program called EXIT for exploited women and girls over the age of 16. They help them through the initial stages of exiting and ensure they are housed, supported, counselled, and mentored until they can move on to independent living with the confidence to be free of the exploitative lifestyle long-term (RESET Society EXIT Program Evaluation, 2018). They also counsel and assist women in their educational journeys. They will help with applications, site visits and tutoring throughout the school year. On top of the support and guidance, there is the RESET scholarship fund that ensures financing is not a barrier to achieving an education. All qualifying participants will receive a grant (RESET Society of Calgary, 2017). While not offering the educational programming themselves, RESET supports their participants in a wrap-around system, much the same as the NCYCCP. Unlike the NCYCCP, they assist from the beginning stages of

the exiting process and their programming is for women and girls only and is not presented with a holistic Indigenous lens.

There is a theme of Indigenous values, methodologies, and teachings connected to some human and social service programming in Canada. In some circumstances, these programs are geared specifically to Indigenous peoples and the field of child and youth care. While some of these aspects are congruent with the NCYCCP, programs with a focus on both exploited individuals and post-secondary education could not be found. A big difference between these above-listed programs and the NCYCCP involves tuition. Students who attend the aforementioned programs need to find funding or take out student loans to be able to access their education. At NCYCCP, this financial barrier is removed for students.

Through this environmental scan, focused on Canada but extending to other nations as well, it is evident that the NCYCCP stands alone in the work that it does, providing a post-secondary education with an Indigenous lens tailored to the needs of those who have experienced exploitation. The NCYCCP appears to be in a unique position, with its focus on educating previously exploited individuals. There are programs across the country that assist people in exiting the sex industry but with no specific educational component. For the NCYCCP, the term exploitation includes childhood or adult abuse/assault, street and/or survival sex, or exploitation due to drug addiction or gang involvement. This broad definition also puts it into a unique category. To attend the NCYCCP, students need to have been free of exploitation for a period of time. Participants who are actively exploited or whose exploitation is very recent will not be accepted. Program staff believe that in order to be successful in the program, there needs to be some time reflecting on and healing from this part of their lives before their journey in the NCYCCP can begin.

Section 2:

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to:

1. Explore the long-term outcomes for alumni following graduation from NCYCCP with a focus on individual well-being, employment, further education, and relationships with their children and families.
2. Examine how this type of educational intervention plays a role in reducing complex poverty by empowering the student to use their life experience as an asset towards education, improved self-worth, confidence, and employment.
3. Provide evidence for the promotion of this type of educational intervention in terms of decreased reliability on government systems and structures and how it can reduce the “costs of doing nothing”.
4. Identify areas of service and program delivery that contribute to student success, and areas of service and program delivery that require development or improvement.

Methods

The primary source of data were twenty-three in-person interviews with alumni of the program, sampled from eleven of the thirteen graduating cohorts. Individuals were randomly chosen and invited to participate in a voluntary, confidential, sixty-minute interview. Interviews were guided by semi-structured questionnaires that provided both quantitative and qualitative data. These questionnaires are included as appendices at the end of this report. The entire evaluation plan was submitted to the University of Winnipeg University Human Research Ethics Board (UHREB) and ethical approval was received. Interviews were conducted from July 2021 through October 2021.

Interviews were the chosen method for this project as they allowed participants to share their experiences in a detailed manner (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Spencer, 1991). As Indigenous Epistemologies was the primary epistemology for this research (Nelson, 2019; Kovach, 2015; Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012), interviews were conducted using Indigenous ceremony, tradition, and protocols and a Knowledge Keeper was available before and after individual interviews to provide support as needed. Open-ended interviews as a relational exchange were chosen to give voice to a population not often heard from (Fast & Kovach, 2018; Wilson, 2008; Rowan et al., 2004). Participants were invited to share their stories in their own words. The findings of this project are presented in the words of the participants whenever possible, to honour their stories and their contributions to the work. It was hoped that this type of reflexive interview would be a benefit, as participants were able to step back and appreciate their personal evolution. By approaching the research in this way, individuals were able to own their journey and experiences and reclaim the power that had been taken from them by their exploiters, abusers, colonizers, and systems.

Participants and Procedures

A list of all alumni over the thirteen graduating cohorts was compiled. Thirty-five names were chosen randomly, and individuals were contacted via phone, email, and/or Facebook Messenger. Using a recruitment script, these individuals were invited to participate in a confidential one hour in-person interview. A total of 23 individuals consented to participating in this project. Written consent was received from each participant prior to the start of the interview and tobacco was passed to each participant in exchange for

the sharing of their story. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Individuals were given a \$25 gift card in exchange for their participation.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this evaluation. Valuable information is presented about the nature of support and services provided by the NCYCCP, the satisfaction with the program, support and services, and the long-term outcomes and experiences following graduation. However, the information provided by participants is limited by the interview design itself, and conclusions cannot be considered representative of the views of all alumni. alumni who struggled following graduation and as a result were unreachable or unwilling to participate hold valuable information which was omitted from the findings.

It should also be noted that both researchers were known to most participants in this project. Ginelle Giacomini is a contracted instructor in the program. She teaches one to two courses a year and is an employee of RRC Polytech. Sam Hupé-Wells acted as the educational assistant in the program for years and is now the director of the program. However, as the individuals that participated in the program have all graduated, neither researcher is in a position of power over any participant. It is important to note that the decision to proceed with these researchers as insiders in the program was not undertaken lightly. Without this unique positionality in the program, it would not be possible to access these participants or conduct this research. A pre-established trust bond between researchers and participants was necessary to elicit the rich narratives required for this work. To address any concerns surrounding telling these stories through the researchers' personal lens, first-person narrative from the participants themselves was used whenever possible. This ensures the individuals' stories are shared in their own words (Kovach, 2018; Loppie, 2007).

Section 3:

Findings

Participants Demographics

Twenty-three alumni of NCYCCP were interviewed for this study. While the distribution of alumni over the cohorts was not equal and not all cohorts were represented, there is a fairly even spread over the years. *Table 1* shows the distribution of students from each graduating year.

Alumni interviewed included twenty women, one of whom identified as a transgender, two men and one Two-Spirit individual. At the time of the interviews, participant's ages ranged from 26 to 60 years with an average age of 39 years. Most participants (14 out of 23, or 61 percent) self-identified as Indigenous. Seven individuals had registered or treaty status, one was non-treaty, and six identified as Métis. Of the other nine participants, eight were white and one was Black. When asked about their current relationship status, nine indicated they were single, four were in dating relationships, one was engaged, and nine were married or in common-law relationships. Nineteen (83 percent) participants had children, with an average of 3.2 children per participant, and fifteen (65 percent) participants had some or all of their children living with them at the time of the interview.

Participants were asked about their highest level of education prior to attending NCYCCP. Two individuals had completed some college courses,

TABLE 1 Student Interviews by Graduating Year

Graduating Year	Number of Students Interviewed (N =23)
2008	3
2009	0
2010	2
2011	1
2012	1
2013	1
2014	1
2015	3
2016	0
2017	1
2018	3
2019	4
2020	3

nine had completed their high school diploma, GED, or adult education diploma, and twelve had less than a grade twelve education.

When asked how they found out about NCYCCP, thirteen (56 percent) said word of mouth including from other agencies and from alumni of the program. Often, marginalized adults who are considering adult education chose a program based “on the experiences of friends or family who had themselves attended and spoken highly of the experience” (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 139) who assure them the program is safe and supportive. This appears to be the case at NCYCCP. Eleven (47 percent) had learned about the program through print media, including posters in the community or community newspapers such as the Coffee News.

Participants were asked if anyone in their family had attended residential schools, Indian Day Schools, or were involved in the Sixties Scoop. Out of 14 Indigenous students, 13 (93 percent) indicated that they or their family members were impacted. Most participants said that their relatives, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and/or parents, had attended residential schools in Manitoba. Two participants said that their parents had attended Indian Day Schools and two mentioned being victims of the Sixties Scoop, including one participant herself. One individual highlighted the impact that this had had on their family:

TABLE 2 Education Attainment Prior to Beginning NYCCP

Participant	Highest Level of Education
P01	Grade 10/GED
P02	Grade 11
P03	GED
P04	GED
P05	Grade 7
P06	Grade 9
P07	Some university
P08	GED
P09	Grade 8
P10	Grade 9
P11	Grade 12
P12	Grade 11
P13	Grade 7/GED
P14	Grade 8
P15	Grade 8
P16	Grade 11
P17	Grade 12
P18	Grade 9
P19	Grade 12
P20	Grade 11
P21	GED
P22	Grade 12
P23	Some college

My mother attended residential schools and I was part of the Sixties Scoop. It impacted my whole life 100 percent. My grandmother was able to escape residential schools, but my mom got put in it. Now there's no love, no communication. Alcohol addiction consumed my family. It didn't give us a fair chance at life. (P09)

Seventy percent of participants indicated someone in their immediate family, including themselves growing up, had been in the care of Child and Family Services.

Findings – In Their Own Words

Prior to Starting the Program

Alumni who participated in the interviews were asked about what they felt were the greatest challenges they were confronting when they enrolled in the program. Responses indicated that students were dealing with a variety of challenges that were both personal and practical in nature. Concerns about being in toxic relationships and parenting challenges was mentioned five times. Dealing with the emotional impact of past trauma, problematic substance use, and breaking habits from their past were also frequently mentioned challenges. Some shared that they struggled with financial instability, access to affordable housing, and accessing and affording childcare. The most common challenge facing students, mentioned by six individuals, was their past academic performance and fears about not being ready to attend a post-secondary program.

I haven't been in school since I was very young, so it's been 30 or 40 years so I think that was the biggest challenge. I never wrote an essay before so those were the kinds of things I worried about... Feeling like I could or couldn't do the work (Po1)

When asked if the program staff helped them deal with the challenges that they experienced upon enrolling in the program, twenty participants said they felt the staff had been integral in supporting them through these challenges. This assistance included personal and spiritual counselling, academic support, advocacy, and daily encouragement. Participants reported being referred to appropriate agencies as needed, with the staff providing assistance navigating various government systems, including housing, the child welfare system, and the justice system. Some also mentioned the fact that there was always food and practical supplies available to the students, which reduced their stress about food security and running a household.

There were so many resources available that were never presented to me without the program. We got food from the school, either toilet paper, juice, bread. If someone needed something, we got it. [The wellness counsellor] would always make us a little care package. That makes the difference. Knowing that someone is there, than not having anyone at all. (Po9)

Without this program I don't think I would have been able to deal with what I was going through very well. Without the support that I had from all the teachers at Ndinawe because I was very honest with them about the

relationship I was in and things like that. And the space that was created to share that information was beyond amazing. And I don't think I would be able to move on and complete the program without that support. (P19)

Five of the students had enrolled in the program more than once, meaning that they took two years to complete the program. They had left during the first year they attended and then returned at a later date. Two individuals experienced losses in their family and began to struggle to keep up with the demands of the program. One individual had health issues and needed to take time to heal. One individual fell back into their old lifestyle and another stated that she realized that she was just was not ready to attend school yet. When asked why they returned to complete the program, responses included the desire to finish what they started, wanting to get a job and reduce reliance on government assistance, a desire to make a difference in the community, and a love for the program itself. Support and encouragement from family and from the staff at NCYCCP were also suggested as reasons for returning.

Encouragement from people in the program, partly. Family. And just not wanting to leave another thing unfinished. Just didn't want another that I picked up and put down and didn't see through. Mostly wanting to see it through. And I have actually become very interested in wanting to do this kind of work. (Po2)

I wanted to finish and do something with my life instead of just living on assistance. (Po6)

I loved the program and I wanted to work with kids in care. There was one girl in my neighbourhood and I wanted to finish the course for her. (P15)

Alumni who participated in this project were also asked to share what they believed were their greatest strengths when they began the program. Some mentioned that they were sober, had spent time in therapy and were actively working to deal with their past trauma. Multiple participants felt their motivation, courage, determination, family support, and prior academic achievements were strengths. Others were active in the community and recognized the need that the program filled. Some suggested their lived experience was a strength they brought to the program.

My lived experience is a strength. My determination to not give up even though I was turned down from like three schools before coming here because of my criminal record. (Po3)

Being connected to and involved in Indigenous cultures was also mentioned as a strength by multiple participants.

I was involved in culture, very active in my drumming. I was engaged in the community and the services that are provided to women who were previously exploited. (P05)

Resilience was the most frequently mentioned strength, suggested by six participants.

I was resilient. I was a strong woman. I was starting to become a strong woman. (P15)

It is noteworthy that one participant felt that she did not have any strengths when she entered the program, but as she attended, these feelings evolved.

To me, I felt weak at the time and then throughout the program, I felt stronger. Because of that group of people that lifted us up. I didn't think that I was strong at all. I think it was — strength in numbers. Knowing you're not alone, going through this shit. (P09)

Integral Aspects of the Program

As detailed in Section One, NCYCCP embraces a holistic approach to education, with a strong Indigenous cultural component as well as a variety of supports for students. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe what aspects of the program they felt were integral to their successes. They shared the importance of the integration of Indigenous cultures and traditions, having an opportunity to heal, the academic and practical supports and the creation of a proxy family within the program. Participants were also asked to specify what they felt was the most helpful and/or important part of the program. Again, they highlighted the cultural aspects, the academic work, the opportunity to heal, the support of the staff, and the alumni program. Four individuals were unable to choose one specific aspect and suggested every aspect of the program worked together to foster their success. Throughout this portion of the interview, participants repeatedly stressed the fact that this program gave them a unique opportunity and they felt that they would not be where they are today without the program. These sentiments are shared at the end of this section.

Indigenous Teachings

The impact of the cultural component of the program was integral to the success of many of the participants. This finding is supported by the work of MacKinnon (2015) and Silver (2013). The presence of the Knowledge Keeper as well as visiting Elders, smudging daily, drumming and sitting in circle were all mentioned as important aspects of the program.

Cultural, wellness, the drum singing group. Sharing circles we had. Full moon ceremonies we had. Everything. (P09)

The Indigenous knowledge and traditional ceremony piece really helps with the trauma. (P09)

One participant suggested that they could not imagine attending a program without this kind of immersive cultural support.

The cultural aspect I thought was beautiful. \ I think I would not have wanted to come back to college, reflecting back, in any other capacity than I did here. (P01)

For many, the program was the first time they were exposed to traditional Indigenous ceremony teachings, and history. Even though it was a challenge for some students to learn about this, they recognized that it was necessary.

I think it got me in touch with my Indigenous culture. It taught me how to work with Indigenous people, which is a focus point. I work fully with Indigenous people now. It got me to recognize my own culture. And it gave me academic proficiency. (P20)

Being someone who's not Indigenous, just the different cultural teachings of all the different aspects of that, like when we go to the sweats and you actually participate in all that, that's very very important for you to experience and learn so you can bring that into your job. (P11)

There were some hard parts of the program for me. Especially surrounding Indigenous culture. The stuff that I'd learned in school previous was so so far from the truth that it was a shock to me and I can actually remember being really upset and crying in class a lot. It's changed my empathy greatly towards Indigenous people. I didn't know a lot before I came into the program. Now I would consider myself more spiritual and religious and it's more of a culture that I identify with than my own. (P11)

An Opportunity for Healing

MacKinnon (2015) refers to the importance of healing the spirit first when approaching Indigenous adult education. Eight participants highlighted the fact that they were given the opportunity to heal during their time at the program. Not only did they gain an education, but they were also able to process their past exploitation, traumas, problematic substance use, and abuse.

They allowed me to heal. I am going to use the word heal. Again, the space that was created, and I felt comfortable. I think the program really started a healing process for me. (P19)

I was able to heal more from my trauma in ten months than I ever had in my entire life. Not just the education piece, but there's so much more that you get out of this place than any other institution. That's the huge difference there. That's the difference. (P09)

I think this place is the best place to start, not just your education journey but your healing journey too. Which some people don't even realize how much they need to heal until they get here. Which was me. So, overall, there would be no other place that could have helped me the way this program did. If I went to a school somewhere it would have been different. If I went to a healing program or a circle it just wouldn't have been all that Ndinawe is. (P13)

I really did change my life... [it] forced me to work through the ugliness of my past and the things I did while entrenched in my addiction. (P23)

Some participants felt that they realized that it was in fact their past traumas which would make them an asset to the field of child and youth care. They no longer viewed their past as a barrier or something to be ashamed of and they could now apply their life experiences as they supported vulnerable children and youth in the community.

Our past will become one of our greatest assets. And it's so true. But we're empowered here. When we are sitting in circles. A circle of women and sometimes men who come from the same life. We've all got our stories. They might be different but there's the similarities. (P08)

Academic and Practical Supports

Central to any academic program is the academic education students receive. Participants highlighted the value of this education, within the context of

Indigenous teachings and the community they live in. MacKinnon (2015) highlights “the importance of integrating decolonizing pedagogy into education and training programs” (p. 141) which is what has been done at the NCYCCP.

Just the education part. Um, I literally feel that without taking a program like this it would be very hard to work with Indigenous youth, especially the ones that have family members or have experienced the fallout from residential schooling and any of that. Like I said, you don’t learn any of that in high school. You don’t, you’re not even able to grasp any of the things that were done or suffered through until you take a program like this. (P11)

One participant found the practicum component of the program, linked to working directly in the field, especially helpful.

The opportunity to go straight to employment from the course is really helpful. Sometimes it can be hard for people to go from school to finding a job, so this is a very good transition. (Po2)

Not only did staff and instructors provide academic instruction, but they also supported students in other practical manners, including earning a driver’s licence, accessing food hampers and meeting other basic needs. Staff advocated for students to receive necessary funding and safe housing, and ensured they were able to navigate the Employment and Income Assistance system with ease. In one case, staff provided a student with an alarm clock so that she would no longer be late for class.

They helped me pay for my driver’s license when I was here. Applying for student aid. I had not done that before. I was overwhelmed. But they helped me. (Po7)

The help in acquiring the funding. You don’t get that in a mainstream institution. That really helps. (Po5)

The support I had was a lot of advocating. For sure. Support if I needed help with... I was struggling too with food. I was on EIA and the program was able to help me with some groceries, which was so helpful. When I moved, I had that support. [The wellness counsellor] went above and beyond to help me move. That was amazing and the help was unreal. (p22)

Creation of a Proxy Family

Every participant interviewed suggested that the actions of the staff (both support staff and instructors) were integral to their success, both during the program and following graduation. It is evident that this support was unconditional and without judgement, as the staff and students functioned as a proxy family. The importance of relationships within the program, as well as ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment, is consistent with other research on Indigenous adult education (MacKinnon, 2015; Silver, 2013).

Basically, I found a family in the program that I didn't have before. (P11)

So supportive. It's one big family. You are always there to help, especially if we're struggling to learn something or we just don't get it. Everyone is so helpful... You track us down if we don't come to school. Sometimes it was really annoying! I just wanted to sleep all day! (p15)

The relationships... I think those relationships and then the instructors' relationships, like you know, the wonderful warrior women here (Po4)

One participant noted that staff did not let things slide, but instead encouraged students to take a break to work on themselves and then return when they are ready. This again reinforced the idea of unconditional acceptance.

You've had to let students go, if we're not ready you don't tell us or kick us to the curb and say you're no damn good. It's we love you but now's not the time. You know. Yeah. Building us up. Teaching us about what's needed out there. (Po8)

One participant expressed gratitude for the commitment of the staff:

I'm just really thankful for it. The people they have running the program, like I don't know yourself or the new people. Ndinawe couldn't have asked for better instructors. Better directors. I think [director] and [instructors] all did phenomenal jobs. (P11)

Some participants acknowledged how the instructors and support staff balanced understanding and high expectations.

The teachers were tough but fair. They were understanding. [Instructor] gave me grief more times than I could count but she made me try harder and do better. It's a really good support team here. (P11)

Multiple participants reported staff going above and beyond to ensure student success.

[The director] was with me when I gave birth to my son. (P11)

The people that run the program are all great. Some of my favourite people... They like go above and beyond to help you. They do a lot. They really do a lot to help. (P02)

There were times throughout the year when times get tough and you don't want to go. And I think that the biggest benefit of the program is that there's that support that tells you it's ok. You can get through it and there's a hump. You'll either get over it or fall back. You don't want to fall back, you want to go forward. The help and support from you guys push all of graduates. There's that time in the middle where you're like, I don't want to be here, this is too much but you get over the hump. (P09)

When stuff got really really hard, like academically or emotionally, we just had the best caretakers. The best people to help us through. You know? Like, even if I didn't want to be here or if I didn't come no one was letting me. Someone is sending an email or a phone call... Ndinawe is my roots. This is my family. (P13)

Some highlighted the importance of being able to be authentic and honest, knowing that they were in a safe space and would not be judged by program staff.

To be able to go to [the director] and be like, oh, how are you today? And she's like, you know what, I am not good today. Hearing [the director] being able to admit that things are not always ok or seeing that the people with these big jobs or the people that are like teaching us also have these shitty days and just being really really real with us, that was really helpful. Because I never felt that I had to fake anything here. I never had to come here being sunshine and rainbows when shit's going down at home because I wasn't scared. Before I was scared for anyone to know anything because I was terrified of losing my kids because, just my experiences, you know? Whereas here I could go meltdown and it was ok. Having a group of staff that just really took care of us and admitted when shit was not ok for them either. And let us break down. We didn't have to worry about someone calling CFS after, you know? Like, that to me was just really important (P13)

They were just always there. You know, it is a hard course to take. It brings some things up, right? So, always having somebody there to support you and not judge you and include you, always made me never feel like a question was a bad question or a dumb question. I always felt I could ask things. Always felt comfortable with every staff. (P18)

You're in a place where you're facing so much of your trauma already, you know you want to be surrounded by a safe place right? I definitely felt like I had that. (P18)

According to the alumni who participated in this project, this staff support, and proxy familial bonds extended beyond graduation. Twenty participants reported remaining connected with the program staff following graduation, and all 23 participants reported staying in touch with their former classmates.

And just know that these ladies are always here. I can come five years after not seeing them. And just the bonds made... You can't replace the whole class. I still think of all of them. It's been almost 10 years now since we've graduated but I still think of every one of them. It was a bond that was made with, I think there was a dozen of us or whatever, and I just still feel so blessed that there is a program like this to help people like us. And then we're going on and you know helping others. That are in the same boat we were in. So I think that's the best part about this program. (P12)

I've built lifelong friendships from being here that I don't think will ever leave my life. I think that there are other people that have that too. I personally think that it is a beautiful program. I really do. (P01)

Most Helpful Aspects of Program

Participants were asked to specify what they believed to be the most helpful part of the program. Some highlighted the importance of the cultural aspects of the program:

The support and the cultural and um the sharing... it helped with the cohesiveness and connectedness. (P01)

The best was the sharing circles and the dealing with trauma that happened. (P06)

All of the kind of like healing parts. So, the sharing circles we did on Fridays. And the first two weeks of the program where we met and did all these things. Going to the sweats. Making ribbon skirts. (P17)

Smudging every morning. (P15)

Having it Indigenous-based and learning about those traumas and why people are the way they are. Why it's like that. Some of what we learned was so deep, but it needs to be taught. I thought that it's so crucial. We need that. That's so important. (P22)

The academic aspects of the program, including the accredited college program, the instructors, the course material, and the holistic approach to education, were highlighted by four participants.

The instructors were phenomenal. If I didn't get it, like I said earlier, I struggled in school. I had failed, failed, failed. Um, and I always thought I was a failure. I thought that I was born with this inability to learn. So, if I was hearing something and I'm not getting it, I was able to approach the instructors and they took the time for me. Or I went to the TA and she would take even more time. And I was never forced and I was never rushed, unless I had to have the assignment in and they wanted to get out of the door. (Po8)

The training about how the kids' minds work. That did it for me. (P16)

The fact that the program staff created a safe space for education, growth, and healing was suggested by five participants as the most beneficial aspect of the program.

The work you do on yourself. I think you can't help others if you haven't helped yourself. So yeah, definitely, that was imperative to being a youth care worker (P12)

It taught me, there were things that I still needed to work through, so it actually opened up things that actually helped me heal. So, I can be better as I am now. (P18)

Before, I went to a school where I experienced a lot of racism. And I didn't want to go to science class because people would be tripping me because I was Indigenous. Being called racist slurs almost every day at school. I didn't want to go to school. So, this program, it changed my actual view of education. (P19)

One participant suggested that the weekly alumni meetings, which has since lost its funding and is no longer offered, was most helpful for them.

I would have to say an after-care program. I recall there being an alumni group. When we first graduated there wasn't any of those supports available to us. Once we graduated that was it, it was done. But having had the alumni program, it was really meaningful in a sense that we were able to maintain connections and use this as a safe space to take care of ourselves and one another. Very much needed. (Po5)

Four participants were unable to specify what specific aspect of the program was most helpful, and instead suggested that all aspects of the program worked together to be beneficial to students.

You can't go wrong with educating women. (P20)

It was definitely like a learning experience. The sweats. Life changing. Completely life changing. Everything about the program is just definitely life changing. The supports, everything. You asked you got it. (P12)

We had home cooked meals. We had [the wellness counsellor] to talk to when things got hard. We had you to help with our papers. We had [the director] all over. We had Reiki there...It's such a different thing because when you have so many people that have had a history in trauma come together, it's just. There was always support so that actually is a really hard question for me to answer. I personally, when I look back at my experience, I don't think I would have changed anything. I think it was wonderful all around. (P18)

Individuals, they carry a lot of experiences. They've been here, they've been there. But I think it's those extra hardships. The addictions. The dysfunctional families. The poverty. The gang violence. All that. I think turning that around and using it as a strength, as skills, I think it was crucial. And that program did that. And it brings people like myself to work with vulnerable youth. And they need that. It's important. (P19)

Life Changing Opportunity

Throughout the interviews, participants consistently stated that this program was a life-changing opportunity, and they did not know where their lives would be if they had not attended.

You are giving people that didn't have an opportunity to do a certain kind of work, an opportunity to do a certain kind of work. Um, you're giving them skills that can help not only themselves financially and professionally but like at home, in their lives. That's the thing. These things that we learn, it's like 'oh it's for work' but it's not just for work. It's not. So it's helpful. And it's at the cost of nothing. It's at the cost of the effort you put into it. I mean you can't really say enough about that. I mean I never thought that I would go to college. Yeah, it's giving people opportunity. It's empowering people. It empowers people to make positive changes that are tangible in the outside world. (P02)

I don't know which way I would have gone if I didn't find here. I don't know where I would have worked. If I would have gone back to my old lifestyle. (P03)

It changed everything. I think that if I didn't enter this program, I would not be where I am. Physically, mentally, emotionally where I am today. If I hadn't done this program, I think that I would be still sitting on welfare or working a dead-end minimum wage job with no future ahead... I wouldn't have the self-confidence... I'd feel very weak and low. It's changed my whole life. (P09)

I was no longer ashamed of where I had been or what I had done. If I hadn't done those things, I wouldn't be here today. I wouldn't have those strengths. That's for sure. (P09)

The positives are endless. I'm a completely different person today than I was before I graduated. My belief system is completely different. I have more value in myself as a person. I am able to actually form positive connections in relationships that aren't toxic. I gained a lot more knowledge, relationships in the community. I have a job. (P11)

Oh, it's life changing. It's a tool and an opportunity to go from living a completely different way than you were. A lot of people can't afford four years of school. A lot of people can't make it in regular mainstream schooling and the fact that programs like this exist where it's more condensed and you can actually be given a chance to have a profession, yeah that's my answer for that. (P11)

I was at a place when I joined the program that if I didn't change, I wouldn't be sitting here. So, I think yeah, this place really does have a special place, so I get very emotional talking about it. It's truly. It was a blessing. This program is a blessing. (P12)

It's a life changing program. If you do the work and if you truly put the effort, that I felt was required, there's no — you can't put a value on what it does to somebody. I was in the lowest of low and now I'm golden really. And it's not something that I ever thought I would ever be. I never thought I would amount to what I am.

If it wasn't for the ladies here, I don't know where I would be. This gave me so many tools to be able to do anything. I don't know where my life would be. (P14)

It changed my whole life. I became a better parent, partner, friend. I became a better person. From the program. The program opened up my eyes to self-

reflect on myself and how I was creating my own chaos. It made me realize a lot of positive things... Ndinawe is my life saver. I was living cheque to cheque, not happy, not happy with my parenting. When I came to school, everything changed. I realised the effects my parenting was having on my children. If it wasn't for Ndinawe, I don't know where I'd be. I'd be dead or in jail for hurting my kids because they drove me crazy. (P15)

It gave me a whole new opportunity. A new life. I never thought that I would be driving; on Wednesday I pick up my brand new 2021 Honda Accord. Like I never thought I'd be driving a brand-new car. I never thought I'd have my own home. I never thought I'd be seeing my kids as much as I do. All these things. And it goes back to someone believed in me and gave me a chance. And because of that I am where I am. So, it impacted me. I can't even say how grateful I am for the program. The fact that I can say to people, the government also saw something in me where I for two years went to school and college and they paid my rent, they paid my living costs. They paid all this so I could focus on my education and having a college diploma. I can show my kids that you can have a hard time in life, but you can turn things around. Like I said, this thing fell in my lap. I wasn't even looking for it. It showed up to me and I am just very grateful for that. (P18)

Long-Term Outcomes Following Graduation

As the goal of this project was to explore the long-term outcomes in the lives of alumni of the program, questions were asked about how alumni were doing in specific aspects of their lives, including their family, educational attainment, employment, and physical, mental, and spiritual health. Participants were also asked about their long-term connection to the program, including both staff and fellow students.

Education

Seventeen of the alumni interviewed for this project pursued further post-secondary education following the completion of the NCYCCP (See *Table 3*). Eight individuals reported that they were currently attending university, with a focus on social service/humanities programs. One individual graduated from university with a degree in Urban and Inner-City Studies after completing the NCYCCP. Seven went on to complete the year 2 diploma of the Child and Youth Care program at RRC Polytech.

TABLE 3 Educational Attainment Following Graduation from NCYCCP

Participant	Further Education Following Graduation
P01	2nd Year CYC American Sign Language Courses
P02	None
P03	2nd Year CYC
P04	None
P05	Carpentry
P06	None
P07	2nd Year CYC Bachelor of Social Work (in progress)
P08	None
P09	Indigenous Studies (in progress)
P10	None
P11	Bachelor of Urban and Inner-City Studies
P12	None
P13	2nd Year CYC Bachelor of Social Work (in progress)
P14	2nd Year CYC
P15	2nd Year CYC (did not finish)
P16	2nd Year CYC (did not finish)
P17	2nd Year CYC
P18	2nd Year CYC
P19	Conflict Resolution (in progress)
P20	2nd Year CYC Some Social Work courses
P21	2nd Year CYC (did not finish)
P22	Addictions and Mental Health Counsellor (in progress)
P23	Bachelor of Social Work (in progress)

Without prompting, students provided feedback on their experiences transitioning from the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care program into the second year offered at the main campus of RRC Polytech.

I made it through year two but it's not the same connection. It's not the same support. It's not the same. Ndinawe is my roots. This is my family. Whereas year two, I don't speak to anybody from there. Like not staff. Not students. (P13)

I did the two year. I paid for myself to do the second year at the college. It was hard to transition. I went from a 4.0 at Ndinawe to a 2.9. It dropped my GPA to a 2.4. It was hard. It's a rough transition (P14)

I came here [Ndinawe] to do my homework for second year. But I literally, like when I was falling apart for year two, sat in [the director's] office and did my portfolio on her floor. I was like ready to throw in the towel and then had to come here and sit on the floor and just get it done. And that's what I mean, like, there was a couple of girls that went to year two that didn't complete it. And they would have if they were here, you know. (P13)

Three participants attempted to make the transition to second year at RRC Polytech but were not successful:

I tried to do second year, but nope. It didn't work out. (P15)

I went to the main campus, and I did go for the whole year. But there were some things I did lack on due to the situation I was still in. I had a conversation with the teachers there and my GPA would be affected, and I did not want my GPA to be affected because I wanted to go to university. I decided to drop out just before the end. I think a month before. The papers, they were piling up and with my mental health, I wasn't able to. I just wasn't in the right head space to finish it. (P19)

Multiple participants who attended the second year at RRC Polytech expressed a desire for the NCYCCP to run the second year of the program as well, incorporating all aspects of the holistic model with the academic material offered in the second year.

You guys don't have a year two. That's what's missing. Because I would have loved to be here for the second year and just keep going with you guys. And I think, to be perfectly honest with you, the other women I went to year two with probably would have been successful. (P13)

Not having year two so I had to go to a normal college. Which sucked a lot. But then I went to second year and I cried a lot because I was so used to Ndinawe, so in a way that program, like I was expecting to feel the same in my second year. I was expecting to feel belonged and confident, and I lost all that in second year because I knew no one. And I sat alone my entire year. And it was really hard. So, year two would be great. (P17)

Work

A natural indicator of the effectiveness of an educational program is the employment of its graduates (See *Table 4*). While employment outcomes were not the focus of this project, it is nonetheless a noteworthy indicator of success following graduation.

TABLE 4 Current Employment

Participant	CYC Field	Current Employment	Full or Part Time
P01	Yes	Wellness Counselor & Mentor/Youth Care Worker	Full-time
P02	No	n/a	n/a
P03	Yes	FASD Support Worker	Part-time
P04	Yes	Transitional Housing Case Manager	Full-time
P05	No	Finishing Carpenter	Full-time
P06	n/a	None	n/a
P07	Yes	Youth Care – Shift Supervisor	Full-time
P08	No	Community Service Worker	Full-time
P09	No	Artist & Jewelry Maker	Full-time
P10	No	Professional Packer & Sex Worker	Seasonal
P11	Yes	Youth Care Worker	Full-time
P12	No	Agriculture	Full-time
P13	Yes	Action Therapist	Full-time
P14	No	Owner/Operator – Purolator	Full-time
P15	n/a	n/a	n/a
P16	Yes	Youth Care Worker	Full-time
P17	Yes	Youth Care Worker/Group Home Supervisor	Full-time
P18	Yes	Settlement Worker in Schools	Full-time
P19	Yes	Action Therapist	Part-time
P20	Yes	Life Coach (young adults with disabilities)	Full-time
P21	Yes	Community Coordinator & Peer Research Associate	Full-time
P22	Yes	Youth Care Worker	Casual
P23	Yes	Wellness Counsellor & Program Coordinator	Full-time

Twenty-one (91 percent) of the alumni interviewed for this project were not on any form of government assistance at the time of the interview, while two (9 percent) were receiving employment insurance (EI). Twenty of the 23 (87 percent) alumni interviewed were employed at the time of the interview. Sixteen (70 percent) were working full-time hours, two were working part-time hours and two reported having casual/seasonal work. Nineteen (83 percent) were able to maintain consistent employment since graduating the NCYCCP and fourteen had taken on a leadership role in their career. One individual shared that they were actively working as a “positive sex worker”.

Fourteen (61 percent) of those interviewed for this project were working in the child and youth care field at the time of the interview. Ten (43 percent) participants highlighted the fact that the education they received at the

program prepared them for the work they do in the field of child and youth care. Specific mention was made of the fact that the exploitation which they experienced in their past was reframed as an asset in the field.

Can you imagine how many people you can connect with when you walk the same life as them? Compared to someone who just read books about it? (P03)

You take people from the community and put them into the workforce. I was once in the community, and instead of going back to jail or like being dead, I'm doing something good. (P03)

The problems that teenagers, and especially youth in care, deal with in the community, especially in the North End, are astronomical. And I don't think most people looking from the outside really get it. They just see bad kids right, and they don't understand what led them to be, to get that way. You know what I mean? So, programs like this just create workers that are better able to provide the support to the people, the youth in the community. (P11)

I'm not saying that people without experiences are not valuable and don't do a good job, but I know that these young people and people with lived experience out there do good heart work. Like, they really do. And the more people we can get out of that lifestyle and help. And help them see their worth. Because there are so many people that I just like, if you just knew how special you were. We need more of this. (P13)

You're putting more life-experienced CYC workers out there which is what children in care need. (P15)

It gave me some skills, physical and mental skills. To re-enter the workforce in a different way. I was able to take my nurturing gift and my shitty life experience and turn it into something really positive. When I speak about my experiences, to youth, I don't see it as negative as I used to. (P16)

I think it's nice having youth care workers who actually experienced. Lived through the childcare system or abuse. Rather than people who just learned through books. I personally think they are better youth care workers. I'm not saying the ones that learned through books are not good but it's different. Reading about it and living it are different. (P17)

Some participants shared that they have now become mentors to both at risk youth in the community as well as their own family members.

Thanks to the program I have a set life path now. I did not have that before. I have literally saved multiple lives with my own hands... I have had youth come to me and say thanks to you I am going to college to do the type of work that you do, and I want to do that because of you. (P02)

My sisters are more motivated to go to school. There's options out there. If one thing doesn't work for you, you can try something else. I think that they can see that education can make a difference. (P07)

Family

Nineteen (83 percent) participants had children, with an average of 3.2 children per participant, and fifteen (65 percent) participants had some or all their children living with them at the time of the interview. Thirteen (53 percent) alumni who participated in the interviews acknowledged the impact that attending the program had on their children. They reported feeling empowered as parents, as they were now able to advocate for their family. Some reported being a role model for their family, having been the first to access post-secondary education. Breaking generational cycles of abuse and poverty were also highlighted as familial impacts. Consistent with this finding, MacKinnon (2015) found that “those who manage to complete longer-term degree or certificate programs are more likely to be employed in good jobs, have more stable lives, are less likely to re-enter the short-term training/unemployment loop, and are more likely to have broken the intergenerational cycle of poverty” (p. 163).

I think it, for my kids, it made me a better mom in a way. I was already the mom. But like I said earlier, it helped me learn why they do the things they do. And so I was able to be a little bit more patient and a little bit more understanding towards that. And then just in that way. Being a better parent helped my family. (P17)

If you're participating in the program and you have children at home or if you have children in care, um, being here can help you get your family back. My children were never in care but I wasn't around for them, so this program gave me the skills to kind of like, get back in their life. So, again, this program is good, not only for the students that participated but their families. It mended my family with my parents and all that. So yeah, I think it's great. (P12)

It was a ripple effect in my family. My sister was going through some shit with CFS and I was able to go fight for her. Together, we got a voice, because we've

been through some shit. Since then, since I got my shit together, she got her shit together because she's always in competition with me. We support each other through it. I get frustrated but I know what to do. It's hard in this area to parent. It's frustrating with my daughter to know that she needed help and no systems would listen to me. But being able to be their biggest advocate. Every meeting, I am there. I know more shit than their social worker. (P20)

I'm the only one in my family that's actually gone to college and I'm the one in my family that was definitely the black sheep. So, it makes me feel like I've accomplished something. Things can always turn around. (P18)

It gives them a sense of pride. [My kids know] my dad worked really hard for this. I remember before they went to school, struggling paycheque to paycheque and then you go to school. I think it would affect the families more. The ripple effect. (P15)

Breaking cycles of not going to school at all. For myself personally, being one of the first to graduate from any post-secondary education. My family suffered from intergenerational trauma, so I had a lot of family proud of me. It brought a value to being able to show that to my children too. (P22)

It probably strengthens families because it shows them that mommy and daddy are doing something with their lives instead of drinking and doing drugs. Or selling their bodies or doing whatever. Let's face it, a lot of people that came in to the program came from a survival work base right? Like they were street. A lot of them were street, right on the streets here. And I'm not saying that they are worse than anybody or better than anybody. I'm not saying I am better than anybody, but it gave them a sense of empowerment right? Like it helps them parent their children better. When you feel good about yourself, you're going to parent your children better. It's just common sense. You feel good, you're going to be passing on those good feelings to people that you love. (P10)

Living in poverty is tough. And it really affects your mental health and how you live. So, just being able to feel good about yourself and work and provide and have an income that's not hurting you. Of course, it makes your family life better. Just being healthier and having the knowledge that you have about your babies and their little minds and their hearts and behaviours and how it all works together. (P13)

Health

Health outcomes can be important indicators of an individual's well-being following graduation. Specific questions were asked about participant's current physical and mental well-being as well as how these feelings may have evolved following graduation. Participants reported that the program played a role in improved eating habits, increased physical activity, and overall lifestyle change.

I'm a lot better because I'm able to take care of my body and take care of my children.(P20)

It definitely helped me have more of a clear lens of what was going on in my life and understand. My grades were kind of affected by the relationship I was in. The environment that I was in. The lack of sleep, lack of eating. Again, back to that fight or flight response my body was constantly in. It was exhausting. (P19)

My health was decent before, but I wasn't managing my diabetes and when I was in my active addiction, it was so poor, it wasn't good at all. I wasn't taking care of my diabetes. When I got out of it [the program] I started to take care of myself and I'm doing a whole lot better now. (P22)

In terms of mental health outcomes, the majority of participants felt that the skills they learned and healing that they did while in the program benefited their long-term mental health.

It helped me deal with a lot of my problems. It gave me support and tools to deal with things in a different way than running to alcohol or drugs. (Po6)

It made me aware of my mental health. It made me realize that my family had gone undiagnosed with mental health for a very long time. And it just made me way more aware... A lot for the positive. That's when I started watching what I eat, eating healthier, exercising. That's when I lost all my weight too. (P15)

It really benefited my mental health all around just to have the peers around you know. Because I was partly agoraphobic, so I didn't really have friends. I maybe had one friend so when you have your basic needs met and you're being social and stuff it really helps your mental health. I feel like my mental health was way better from the time that I started. (P21)

I thought I was dealing with things that I thought I had dealt with but didn't. So it helped me to work through them. And forgive the people that did bad

TABLE 5 Self Esteem Scale (adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, 1989)

Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Mean Rating
On the whole, I am satisfied with my life	87%	0	4
At times, I think I am no good at all	9%	61%	2.3
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	100%	0	4.3
I am able to do things as well as most other people	96%	0	4.4
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	0	91%	1.6
I feel useless at times	17%	70%	2.1
I feel that I am a person of worth	96%	0	4.3
I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	0	91%	1.7
I have a positive attitude towards myself	87%	0	4

things to me. If I didn't I wouldn't have been able to move forward because I would still think about it. And I don't anymore. (Po6)

It impacted everything. My mental health, my ability to get a good job and provide for my family, my healing journey, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, everything. I feel like my mental health struggles right now but it's a lot better than it was before. I was really suicidal before Ndinawe and after Ndinawe I am not. So, I felt a lot better compared to before. (P17)

The program did good for my mental health. It brought up a lot of unresolved trauma that I didn't deal with. Stuff that I needed to do that I didn't. I was able to work through it in a safe space. (P22)

The alumni who participated in the interviews perceived the NCYCCP as having a positive impact on their mental health and self-esteem (See *Table 5*). The mean rating for all items on the Self Esteem Scale was 4.0 or high for statements in which “agree or strongly agree” indicated a positive outcome. Importantly, 100 percent of participants felt they had several good qualities, 96 percent felt they were able to do things as well as most people and that they were a person of worth. Eighty-seven percent felt they were satisfied with their lives and that they held a positive attitude towards themselves. For items in which 2.0 or lower indicated a positive outcome, the majority felt that they were not inclined to feel that they were a failure. For the other three outcomes in which 2.0 or lower indicated a positive outcome, the mean rating skewed more towards a neutral outcome.

Eight participants specifically mentioned an improvement in their self-esteem as a result of attending the program.

I think my self-esteem and self-confidence improved. From the beginning especially to the end. I think my abilities... I never thought that I'd be able to handle it. But I can! (P03)

I am more confident. I have less low self-esteem. Um, yeah confident in all aspects of life; work, personal life and just having the tools to be able to get out of dark places whenever I feel like I'm drifting. (P04)

Being able to, getting self-esteem there. Learning some shit. I graduated valedictorian – it gave me self-esteem and financial independence. (P20)

It definitely boosted my self-esteem in that I could accomplish something and be good at something. (p18)

It is so great. It is huge value. It is building confidence and giving people a sense of belonging. And when you give someone a sense of belonging, the healing that can happen from that is just huge. (P21)

One participant shared that they struggled following graduation, as they continued to work through their trauma, suggesting that working in the field continued to be retraumatizing.

It made me aware of all my trauma from when I was younger... It impacted my mental health negatively after the first few years working in the field. Only because I've lived with trauma myself. So you're working, you think you're done with it, and then a few years later, you're getting attacked from teenagers and the yelling and screaming and that triggers you. You start getting night terrors at night and you sweat at work, so it affected me. (P14)

Culture

As most participants suggested that the Indigenous aspects of the program had a positive impact and were integral to their personal success, it is not surprising that many mentioned the long-term impacts that embracing Indigenous cultures has had on their well-being. For some, the program was their first exposure to Indigenous cultural practices, such as sitting in circle and smudging. Many participants said they continued to use Indigenous ceremonies and traditions that they learned about in the program long after graduation, which appears to have a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.

I do ceremony. That's my mental health support. I smudge every day at home. Especially if I'm feeling anxious or stressed. (P09)

My mom is Indigenous and they all lost their culture. Most of them are Christians. She'd talk about it and tell me that's who I am and give me a little bit about it. But I never in- depth knew anything too much besides what I learnt in jail. And that was just smudging. And they'd drum and sing and I'd always bawl and felt so connected. When I got here, it opened the door. Now I smudge and do it with my kids. (P03)

I had no spiritual and cultural experiences before that, before coming here. So, I do live in ceremony now. I do attend ceremony. I do walk that road now. Which is something I never experienced before or probably wouldn't have even done before because even though I am Métis, let's be honest, I am white. So, I never would have felt like I could have even been involved. Whereas now I have such a good ceremony family and such good people in my life and teachings and it's huge for me. And that started here you know? (P13)

I was never a spiritual person but now I embrace my culture. I smudge regularly, I collect our hair – no one gets our hair or toenails or finger nails. I try to participate in all the full moon ceremonies, I try to get to sweats at least three times a year, but I feel like that's enough. It isn't enough. The program reconnected me back to my culture. (P15)

I feel like it made me more grounded. More in touch with... I [smudge] almost daily and I also incorporate it into my children's lives. So, I feel a lot more grounded compared to before (P17)

I really found my identity. The Aboriginal culture is something I more identify with. I love the way that they are and the things they practice and the things they stand for. And so, being able to come back to Winkler now and actually advocate for the Aboriginal community. (P18)

Overall Impact

As shown in *Table 6*, most alumni who participated in the interviews perceived that the NCYCCP had a positive impact on their lives. The mean rating for all items was 4.0 or higher. One hundred percent of students felt that following graduation, they were learning to think about goals for themselves, they were starting to achieve some of these goals and they had changed since coming to the program. One hundred percent of participants also felt they had a more positive attitude towards education and employment and felt more confident, hopeful, and positive about the future. As well, one hundred

TABLE 6 Student Perception of Program Impact

Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean Rating
I am learning to think about goals for myself	100%	4.6
I feel I am starting to achieve some of my goals	100%	4.6
I feel I have changed since I came to the NCYCCP	100%	4.7
The program has been related to my reduced use of alcohol/drugs	84%	4.5
My job/school performance has improved since being in the program	91%	4.5
I have a more positive attitude about my job/school since being in the program	96%	4.5
I have a more positive attitude about education since being in the program	100%	4.8
I have used things I learned in the program in my everyday life	100%	4.8
I am more confident since being in the program	100%	4.7
I am more hopeful and positive about my future since being in the program	100%	4.7
I feel I have more control over my life since being in the program	91%	4.4
I feel better about myself since being in the program	96%	4.7
I feel more independent since being in the program	87%	4.4
I feel less alone since being in the program	91%	4.3
I am making better choices for myself since being in the program	100%	4.6
I have healthier relationships with others since being in the program	96%	4.5
I am more satisfied with my relationships with others since being in the program	96%	4.4
My life is better now than before I came to the program	96%	4.7

percent of students felt they were now making better choices for themselves since attending the program.

Throughout the interviews, participants highlighted ways that they felt the program had impacted them. The following statements are related to the broad impacts of graduating the program.

I have really good coping skills now. I didn't then. (P01)

It made me stronger. Especially with the work I do and the children I help, you know what I mean. I think for me, I am able to cope because I understand. I can prepare myself. I was given skills here to help me do that. (P01)

I thought I'd be on welfare forever. It gave me an education, which gave me a job, which meant I can independently provide for my family. (P03)

I built really good relationships. Learned a lot about myself spiritually. All my experiences. Made peace with my past. Healed from that. Got employed. Learned how to use the skills that I already... I didn't think I had through my personal lived experience that I actually ended up benefiting me in the

work that I do now. And it's weird, that whole cliché, a mess to a message, but that is exactly what this program did for me (P04)

I gained lots of tools, the ability to look within myself and face what I had gone through. They're dead and gone, so I don't have to drag that baggage anymore. I don't have those titles. I don't say "I used to be an alcoholic" or anything like that. I say "there was a time in my life when I used drugs and sexually exploited myself". I don't click with those titles. Sometimes I can tell those stories like I'm narrating it and not actually a participant in it. (P16)

I don't think that you can put a price to giving someone financial independence. When I got to tell my EIA worker that I was done. It was so satisfying. Being the first woman in my family to stand on my own two feet. Not government help, not a man helping. Just doing it. Raising my kids, making my money, doing me. (P20)

A lot of pride. Certain communities... reserves, the communities within Winnipeg. A lot of people think Indigenous people... Those stereotypes. Being able to say "I'm Indigenous and I graduated from college". (P22)

Suggestions for Improvement

The final section of the interview asked participants to share any suggestions for additional supports that could be offered through the NCYCCP to help students and alumni or realistic changes and improvements to the program. Adjustments to the admission process were suggested by four participants, all of whom had concerns about student readiness when entering the program.

More in-depth interview process for how long people have been off the streets. Girls were still getting their probation letter signed. Random drug tests. You need to be sober. This is why I think it should happen because these people are being hired to work with people's kids. There was a girl in my class who had her kids taken away, living in a sober living class and she was taking the program. So it's stuff like that. You've been off drugs for a year? Maybe it should be longer than that. I didn't feel prepared to be exposed right after, so if you're fresh on sobriety.... Look at Maltreatment and Trauma. It's hard. How many people were struggling? Those triggers? (P14)

Other supports for students which were suggested by alumni include a desire for Ndinawe to offer the second-year diploma, more cultural programming, continuing to provide ongoing practical assistance and supports for students,

ensuring food security, providing meals during the school day, resume building guidance and more addictions support. While their program costs are funded and an allowance is provided for students, some felt that more funds should be available for students. An on-site daycare for students was suggested, which addressed the barrier of childcare that was mentioned by numerous students as an issue when they entered the program.

Bursaries. Bunch of money... Stuff needed for employment. (P04)

Food security. I think that was huge and that bothered me that some students really had a hard time making it with the food thing. Living on EIA and having enough food and that bothered me. (P16)

Put a daycare in the basement for the students so that no one has to worry about daycare for their kids. I mean, you have the space. Ensuring that there is access to food security. EIA gives \$82 for two weeks for a single person to feed themselves. If you have a person who is reliving some shitty shit and they go home and decide what to eat that can of tuna with. They need the food for the brain power. This is bottom of the triangle here. It has to be addressed. Personally, I had to help out some students and that is the way that it is. The food, the daycare. It wasn't so bad dealing with EIA because we had our own buffer EIA person to help, but I don't know why they fought about that. (P16)

It would be good if they had some kind of daycare or partnership with someone that did. I am sure a lot of people don't go because of childcare reasons. I was so lucky to have my daughter's dad watch her while I was in school. (P20)

What are the main challenges when people come for school? Why are they dropping out? May be working with other organizations to have active care, getting housing. Working with another organization to put aside spots for childcare. Dealing with childcare is hard. And I know that not having stable housing is a big issue. This is not motivating to go to school. I remember I was given an alarm clock. That was so small but so important. (P07)

One participant suggested the need for increased marketing and community awareness for the program, so that more people would be able to access this type of education.

Another individual felt that the program did not do a good enough job in describing all aspects of working in the child and youth care field, and as a result, they were unprepared when they entered the workforce. They

suggested a more realistic portrayal of some of the more practical workforce requirements that aren't related to the therapeutic milieu.

I think they need to be more transparent about what the job actually entails. All the stuff about logging and stuff, ya that's important, but I am washing walls, doing laundry, bandaging kids, picking up kids that have overdosed. They don't... I wasn't prepared for the physical part and the amount of work I was doing while I was being a CYC [Child and youth care worker] – answer the phone, do the intake, write the report. They didn't tell us. While I was doing this, monitoring medications, that I would be dealing with the physical needs of the kids. That was the first six months, I was doing the front desk and doing all the cooking and the meds. It was crazy, I wasn't prepared for it. (p16)

Alumni Aftercare

The most frequently suggested improvement for the NCYCCP program was developing an ongoing after-care program and ensuring long-term support and connection for graduates. Suggestions included check-ins following graduating and offering long-term counselling.

I did have a fellow student say to me that they felt like it just dropped off. In some ways. Not that they couldn't have reached out. But for some reason they felt that they didn't have or feel that the full support was there. This particular person was facing hiring issues based on past issues law-wise and history of what is on their whatever, so I think he (it's a he) meant advocacy. He didn't feel he had the advocacy he needed at the time. I think that's just like a check in. You know, how are you doing? Do you need anything?... . You get a lot of support here but as soon as that ended it's kind of like they're on their way and we're doing our next thing. But at the same time, like I see people come in and out, so it's not like there isn't support here in all different capacities but that particular person I guess needed something different. So I think the reach out would be good. (P01)

More formal aftercare, might help people. That could help – continued check ins. I think working in the treatment program, that long term ongoing check in helps.... Maybe calling and asking following up about the second year... (P07)

It should be noted that there was a weekly alumni meeting offered by NYCCP up until 2018. This is no longer offered due to a loss of funding.

I really liked alumni [program] and it sucks that it's not there. It's good for me to check in like that. (p20)

Keep the alumni going. It was sad that alumni lost funding. I think it was a good space for people to vent and for moms to, even if they brought their children, there was childcare. They got a sense of connection. (p21)

Other Programming Options

Participants were asked if a similar program was offered, catering to individuals who experienced exploitation and incorporating Indigeneity, what area of study would they suggest. Three individuals focused on more cultural training and programming, and one suggested a culinary arts program. Programming related to human services was the most suggested programming option, including community outreach, educational assistant, mediation, life skills, family support worker, harm reduction, mental health, and addictions support.

More focus on addiction because our city is in such crisis but I mean I know we cover it here but maybe more of the addiction and mental health part of it. I know that the city, our mental health and addiction crisis is worse than any covid crisis in my opinion. Systems need to change. If our workers and front line workers had more experience working with addictions and mental health it would be better because we wouldn't have to rely on the calling the police and other avenues. We could kind of focus on that ourselves. (P13)

Three individuals suggested that a program focused on justice would be beneficial.

Justice and women-based stuff in the sense of even, not only having to work with children, it could be adults in some sort of supportive role. That type of thing. Because there are people that have come through here, and I've heard it more than once over the two years, "I don't want to work with children, I want to work with adults or I want something different. And justice is a big one I think. But also maybe through addictions and counselling. Those types of things. (P01)

The trades were also suggested as a programming option, with six individuals pointing to a need for this type of program tailored to students who have experienced exploitation and are looking to learn in a holistic and cultural educational environment. It was also acknowledged that some people that

would benefit from this approach to education are not interested in working in human services.

I think women should become more involved in trades. There is a lack of the presence of women in the field. I think women in trades would be great. (P05)

I would say trades. First off there's a huge demand for trades. Women and men can do trades. And it's not that they'd be triggered with trauma. There's so much — women are good with hand eye coordination. Some are so used to making a ton of money, coming from drug dealing, so a trade where they're making a ton of money. I know people who dread going into such a stress day in this field. (P14)

Section 4:

Conclusions

THE PURPOSE OF this project was to explore a range of long-term outcomes for graduates of the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program, to appreciate the role that this type of educational intervention plays in reducing complex poverty and reliance on government systems and structures. Further, areas of program delivery and service which could be developed or improved to ensure student success were examined. To this end, the perspectives of alumni (N=23) who graduated from the program were solicited through interviews.

Summary

All alumni who participated in the interviews identified challenges they were facing when they entered the NCYCCP. These included toxic relationships, parenting challenges, past traumas, problematic substance use, financial instability, housing, and childcare. Twenty participants felt that the support and assistance of the staff at the program had been integral in supporting them through these challenges. This assistance included personal and spiritual counselling, academic support, daily encouragement, advocacy, and providing food and household supplies as needed. Participants also

detailed the strengths they brought to the program. Resiliency was the most mentioned, while others cited their lived experience, sobriety, previous healing work, motivation, courage, determination, family support, and prior academic achievements.

It was imperative to understand what alumni who participated in the project felt were the most important aspects of the program in order to appreciate how this unique education model contributes to the success of the alumni. Participants stressed the importance of the integration of Indigenous cultures and traditions, including the presence of the Knowledge Keeper as well as visiting Elders, smudging daily, drumming, and sitting in circle. Given that of the fourteen Indigenous participants in this project, thirteen were intergenerational survivors of the residential school system, a cultural genocide which stripped generations of Indigenous people of their traditions, ceremonies and language, the importance of incorporating Indigenous practices into the program is immeasurable, to both the participants of the program as well as their families.

Silver (2013) highlights the importance of this approach to education: “Educational strategies for Aboriginal adults must be holistic... and must also be transformative, seeking to enable students to understand the sources of their pain and to develop the means to transcend it and to find their place in the dominant culture” (p. 7). Michell (2013), writing about Indigenous women and adult education, stressed that understanding one’s culture and history “enables us to figure out that our various problems are much less the result of our personal failings than they are the result of what colonization has done to all Aboriginal people” (p. 23).

Participants also mentioned having an opportunity to heal as well as the academic and practical supports. The creation of a proxy family within the program is noteworthy, as many of those in the program come from families of origin with multigenerational trauma and a history of violence, neglect and/or disruption. For many, this was the first time they were experiencing a safe space with unconditional non-judgmental support. This sense of belonging is a key in areas of personal and social importance, (Fiske, 2006; Fiske & Taylor, 2013), including measures of academic outcomes (Yaeger, et al., 2014). It is reasonable to assume this strong sense of belonging has played a considerable role in the successes of graduates. Participants also repeatedly stressed that this program gave them a life changing opportunity, and they felt they would not be where they are today without the program, with some suggesting they would still be in active addiction, experiencing exploitation, and living in poverty. It is evident the program provides

students with the resources they need to make significant changes in their lives. Without this program, many would likely still be involved in multiple government systems and dependent on financial aid.

Of the 23 individuals interviewed, twenty reported maintaining an ongoing relationship with the staff at the program as they continued to access supports. All 23 individuals reported remaining in contact with at least one of their peers in the program. In terms of what was needed for an individual to successfully end their exploitation permanently and be able to develop a fulfilling, satisfying and economically stable life for themselves, it is evident that the NCYCCP is effectively addressing these needs. Proficient and encouraging staff in a non-judgmental atmosphere can and do have “a simple yet profound impact... their actions showed transitioning people that others care about and believe in them” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2014, p. 25).

Participants were asked to share what they believed to be the overall impact that graduating the program had on their lives. Participants reported having effective coping skills, increased personal strength, greater empathy, better personal relationships, and increased pride in themselves, their culture, and their community. Many felt empowered to continue onto further education. Seventeen of the 23 alumni interviewed for this project pursued further post-secondary education following the completion of the program. Seven alumni went on to complete the year 2 diploma of the Child and Youth Care program at RRC Polytech and provided feedback on their experiences transitioning from the NCYCCP into the second year offered at the main campus. Eight individuals reported that they were currently attending university, with a focus on social service/humanities programs. One individual graduated from university with a Bachelor of Urban and Inner-City Studies after completing the NCYCCP. These individuals broke a cycle of low educational attainment and changed the trajectory of their families’ lives by continuing to pursue post-secondary education. Finally, a reduction in poverty, moving away from system involvement and support and financial independence were reported.

Recognizing that Canada’s education system has historically failed to meet the needs of Indigenous learners (Smylie, Williams & Cooper, 2006), the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2010) advocated for curriculum that incorporates cultural values and traditional knowledge. Education is key to ensuring Indigenous people can access healthcare and live healthier lives (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010). For education to be effective, it must “redress the intergenerational trauma of residential schools and re-establish the notion of education and

schooling as healing and empowering” (Korpál & Wong, 2015, p. 141), which is one of the reported outcomes of the NCYCCP.

Having exited a life of exploitation, individuals need a viable and legitimate way to earn a living. Providing those who have been sexually exploited with formal educational training allows them to obtain an income in a healthy and safe way (Kingsley & Mark, 2001). Quite often, these individuals have never had the chance to obtain this type of education. “They need support to obtain the type of employment they were originally blocked from after growing up in unstable, abusive homes, which negatively impacted their original path through formal education systems” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2014, p. 23). Education, confidence building, linking up with agencies, outreach workers and other support services, life skills training and social skills training are all necessary in order to allow a woman to become economically independent and succeed in the legitimate job market (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2014). All of this must be done in a culturally appropriate manner, as is done at the NCYCCP.

Participants reported the NCYCCP was of high value to their family. They reported closer and healthier relationships with their children, increased family pride and increased financial stability. The education that students received led to an improvement in their parenting ability; students become role models for responsible behaviour and academic achievement for their children. They also became role models for others in their families to attend school or to begin their own healing journey. MacKinnon (2015; 2013) describes this as a ripple effect – when Indigenous parents have positive educational experiences, their children also tend to do better in school. Not only are parents better equipped to emotionally support their children, because of the education they have received, but they are better able to financially support them as well. They can provide long-term stability for their children in a way that they were unable to while living on government assistance.

Breaking an intergenerational cycle of system dependency and low educational attainment was mentioned as a familial outcome. For many participants, they were the first in their families to earn a post-secondary degree. Improving a parent’s education is linked with health benefits for not only for themselves, but for their children and their community as well (Johnston, Lea, & Carapetis, 2009).

Twenty (90 percent) of the 23 alumni interviewed for this project were employed at the time of the interview. Sixteen were working full-time hours, two were working part-time hours and two reported having casual/seasonal work. Nineteen participants were able to maintain consistent employment

since graduating the NCYCCP, and fourteen had taken on a leadership role in their career. One individual shared that they were actively working as a “positive sex worker”. Fourteen of the alumni were working in the child and youth care field at the time of the interview, with ten highlighting that the education they received in the program prepared them for the work they do in the field. Specific mention was made of the fact that the exploitation which they experienced in their past was reframed as an asset in the field. There is the perception that frontline staff who are survivors of sexual exploitation are less judgmental and more understanding than other staff (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2014), which allows youth at risk to develop relationships based on trust and openness with these workers.

Those working in the child and youth care field, including alumni of the NCYCCP, have both the educational foundation and their unique experiential background, which allow them to support vulnerable children and youth at risk and prevent the next generation from lifetime government system involvement. When working with children and youth at risk, individuals who have experienced exploitation can speak to the youth in a way that others cannot (Kingsley & Mark, 2001). The Native Women’s Association of Canada (2014) also highlights the importance of having women who have experienced sexual exploitation as front-line youth workers. They can recognize risk factors in children and youth, based on their own lived experience (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2014). In their work, graduates of the NCYCCP are actively preventing the next generation of Indigenous youth from experiencing sexual exploitation. The Native Women’s Association of Canada (2014) advocate for:

Using frontline workers who are former experiential people to engage trafficked and exploited women and youth, ensuring support programs are flexible and set in judgement-free environments, anyone seeking to effectively engage with trafficked and exploited women, youth, and children have understanding attitudes, education, and training and support on the frequent and common issues and causes for their exploitation – for Aboriginal contexts this requires awareness of additional, systemic factors (understanding colonial roots of violence, Indian Residential School intergenerational trauma, community-wide poverty, etc.) (p. 23).

Higher educational levels are also associated with positive health outcomes (Hart, Moore, Lavery, 2017; Korpala & Wong, 2015; Baker et al., 2011; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010; Johnston, Lea, & Carapetis, 2009). Long-term health outcomes were explored in this project and overall, alumni who participated in this project reported the program had a significant

impact in improving their physical and mental health. Participants reported that the program played a role in improved eating habits, increased physical activity, and overall lifestyle change. The majority felt that the opportunity for healing and skills they gained in the program improved their mental health and their self-esteem rose because of completing the program. When individuals are healthy, in body and mind, they are less financially dependent for the necessities of life. They can earn a living wage and are less likely to be reliant on government systems for support.

Economic and Social Costs

This program reduces economic costs from governments providing social supports. Twenty-one (91 percent) of the alumni interviewed were no longer on any form of government assistance at the time of the interview. Only two (9 percent) were receiving EIA when interviewed, the receipt of which was a requirement for entering the program. This is further evidence that attending and graduating from the NCYCCP played a major role in allowing these individuals to move away from government assistance, gain financial independence and give back to their community. Everyone benefits.

Eleanor Thompson, founder of Urban Circle, completed a cost-benefit analysis of the fiscal savings for Manitoba as a result of their program's work. As explained in Silver (2013), she calculated

a cumulative net saving of \$53.3 million to taxpayers from 1990 to 2010, and she projects that by 2015, with increases in the number of students enrolled, this figure will reach \$114 million. The calculations are based on cost-savings that result from moving a single parent with two children off social assistance and into the paid labour force, from the time he or she gets off social assistance to the present, plus a very conservative estimate of annual taxes paid by each graduate, from which is subtracted the amount that Urban Circle has received from the various levels of government for operating costs from 1990–91 to 2009–10. (Silver, 2013, p. 13)

These findings reinforce the importance of investment in these forms of adult education.

Further, the economic costs of children and youth in care is high. The Canadian Women's Foundation (2014) outlined potential public sector costs, including emergency room visits, long-term medical care, victim support services, long-term mental health supports, legal costs, social assistance costs, and intergenerational costs.

The total cost of youth sexual exploitation is estimated to be just over \$1,000,000 per individual (in 2012 dollars) (Barrett, 2010). This figure includes societal, labour market and personal costs. Barrett (2010) estimated the cost of pain and suffering over two years for a woman who is sexually exploited in Canada at \$500,000. The total societal costs related to substance use directly related to sexual exploitation is about \$50,000 per woman. The “estimated earnings loss to a Canadian who drops out of high school is approximately \$111,164 over a lifetime, with nearly \$7,466 accruing in lost tax revenue and an individual cost increase of \$225,557 in health care expenditures” (Barrett, 2010, p. 53). Further, the impacts of sexual exploitation are intergenerational. Children of those who have been sexually exploited are more likely to experience intimate partner violence, neglect and child abuse (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2014; Barrett, 2010), and “the economic costs of child abuse in Canada [are] over \$15 billion” (Barrett, 2010, p. 53).

Many women experiencing sexual exploitation are not able to parent their own children. DeRiviere (2006) found that of the women in her study, over 75 percent had children living in other care arrangements. The economic costs associated with growing up in care are beyond the scope of this paper, but one can assume they are high. So too are the social costs and impacts.

DeRiviere (2006) examined the fiscal impacts of youth sexual exploitation and found that the government easily recoups its funding of prevention strategies that are aimed at preventing young people from being sexually exploited. Her research was conducted in Winnipeg, where there were, at the time of the study, approximately 400–600 youth being sexually exploited at the street level. She states: “these cost assessments have implications of paramount importance for evaluating the priorities of public policy on investments in prevention programs” (DeRiviere, 2006, p. 181). These costs included medical intervention, social services utilization, income assistance and housing subsidies, lack of potential labor market participation, and justice system involvement.

Graduates of the NCYCCP prevent at least some at-risk children and youth from experiencing exploitation. Also, many of the graduates have regained custody of their own children, removing them from a life in government care (Fraelich & Giacomini, 2013). Hepworth (2000) estimated that the total cost for a child in care until the age of seventeen is \$511,500. These numbers are now almost twenty years old and one can assume they have risen since. By raising their children and supporting at-risk children and youth, NCYCCP graduates are actively working to significantly lower this cost. Everyone benefits.

Recommendations

Several valuable suggestions to improve the services provided through the NCYCCP were made by alumni who participated in interviews. Realistically, implementation of most of these suggestions would only be viable with considerable financial resources and may only be considered when funding becomes available in the future. Improving financial support for students and alumni, such as bursaries, improving food security, and providing more addictions counselling would require additional funding. The suggestion to provide on-site childcare for students, although of great value to students, may be considered outside the mandate of the NCYCCP, however this may be something to explore, as it would benefit not only the students in the program but also to the community at large.

Other suggestions were less resource intensive, addressed specific areas of concern, and could be implemented within the scope of the existing program. For example, the development of an ongoing after-care program, which could ensure long-term support and connection for graduates of the program, could fall within the scope of the wellness counsellor and knowledge keeper. Changes to the admission process could be considered to ensure applicants are ready to do the work in the program. There may be a need for continued annual reviews of the application and screening process with changes to their process and to the selection criteria as required. Specialty grants may provide financial resources to revive the weekly alumni program to allow for further ongoing connection. Suggestions to increase the time allotted for cultural teachings may be achieved by utilizing occasional lunch hours. Ensuring the broader community has awareness and access to this program could also be attained by changing the way the program is marketed to the community.

Finally, recognizing that not all individuals who have experienced exploitation are interested in going into the child and youth care field, alumni who participated in this project were asked what they believed would be a useful alternative program to develop for experiential individuals. Programming related to human services was the most suggested option, including community outreach, educational assistant, mediation, life skills, family support worker, harm reduction, mental health, and addictions support. A justice-focused program was also suggested. Trades was mentioned numerous times, as this acknowledges that many do not want to work with people at all and would prefer to work with their hands. Trades certifications also typically result in very well-paid jobs, which some mentioned as beneficial.

Conclusion

The NCYCCP is an important and effective program, in both human and economic terms. Its value extends beyond students and families to the community. Student success generates pride in the community and results in cost savings. Students contribute positively to their communities. The community benefits immensely by having trained child and youth care workers who understand the issues faced by youth in the community who are at risk for sexual exploitation.

The NCYCCP reduces systems involvement and individuals' reliance on those systems. It reduces the "cost of doing nothing". The economic and social impacts of sexual exploitation in Canada are great. Public sector costs, including emergency room visits, long-term medical care, victim support services, long-term mental health supports, justice involvement, legal, and social assistance are reduced when people are no longer exploited. The intergenerational impacts as well as the impact they have as child and youth care workers supporting at-risk youth is beyond measure.

It is therefore evident that there is a substantial economic impact of not developing and providing effective interventions for those who have experienced exploitation. Those who have graduated from the NCYCCP no longer contribute to these costs. They are no longer reliant on systems for support and are not contributing to economic and social costs. By completing this program, there is an intergenerational impact, ending cycles of poverty and intergenerational trauma. The social and personal cost of not providing effective support and intervention is high.

This research makes it clear that the NCYCCP has had a positive, long-term impact on the lives of its graduates and makes a valuable contribution to families and communities long after graduation. The strengths of this holistic program and the delivery of high-quality services by dedicated staff has contributed to improved health outcomes, familial outcomes, education outcomes, and work outcomes, as well as an increased connection to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Further, it is apparent that this program plays a role in reducing complex poverty and reliance on government systems for its graduates.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedule for Alumni

Demographic Information

1. What year did you graduate from the NCYCCP?
2. How old are you?
3. What was the highest grade/level of education that you have completed? (prior to the program)
4. What is your current relationship status:
Married ____ Separated/Divorced ____
Common-law ____ Single ____
Dating ____ Widowed ____
Other (specify) _____
5. Do you self-declare as BIPOC?
 - a. If yes/indigenous
 - i. Métis?
 - ii. Treaty?
 - iii. Non-status?
 - iv. Inuit?
6. How would you describe your gender identity?
7. Did anyone in your family attend Residential Schools or Indian Day Schools or were part of the Sixties Scoop?
8. Was anyone in your immediate family in care?
9. How did you find out about the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program?

10. What do you think were the greatest challenges you were confronting in your day-to-day life when you joined the program?
 - a. Did the program staff help you deal with these challenges? What kind of problems did they help you deal with?
11. What strengths did you have when you joined the program?
12. How many years did it take for you to graduate the program?
 - a. If more than one year, why did you experience an interruption in the program? (pregnancy, health issues, return to street, incarceration/arrest (please specify))
 - b. If more than one year, what brought you back to the program?

Parenting

1. Do you have any children?
 _____ Yes _____ No
 If yes, how many? _____
2. How many of your children live with you?
 All _____
 Some _____
 None _____
3. If some of your children live elsewhere, where do they live?
 (With the other parent? Grandparents? CFS – temporary or permanent placement? Grown up and moved out?)
4. Are you currently caring for any other children under the age of 18?
5. Were your children involved in CFS, prior to attending the program?
 If yes:
 - a. Have you since regained custody of your children?
 - b. Can you describe the role that the program played in that process?

Mental Health

1. How is your mental health right now?
2. Can you tell me about how it has changed since graduating the program?
3. How do you feel the program has impacted your mental health?
4. Are you currently accessing any mental health supports?
 If yes, has this changed as a result of attending the program?

5. Using the following scale, I'd like to learn about your general feelings about yourself. (*adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale 1965*)
Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement:

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree

- On the whole, I am satisfied with my life
- At times, I think I am no good at all
- I feel that I have a number of good qualities
- I am able to do things as well as most other people
- I feel I do not have much to be proud of
- I feel useless at times
- I feel that I am a person of worth
- I am inclined to feel that I am a failure
- I have a positive attitude towards myself.

General Health and Well Being

- How is your health right now?
 - Has it changed since graduating the program?
- How do you feel the program has impacted your health?
- How has being in the program impacted your spiritual health and wellbeing?

Employment

- Are you currently employed?

If yes:

 - What is your occupation?
 - Are you full time? Part time? Casual?
 - Are you working in the child and youth care field?
 - If yes, where are you working?
 - If no, why did you leave the field? Where are you working instead?

- d. Have you been able to maintain consistent employment?
 - i. If no, how come?
 - e. Have you moved up in the ranks?
 - i. If no, what do you feel has gotten in the way?
 - f. Have you taken a leadership role?
2. Are you currently in school?
 - a. If yes, what are you taking?
 3. Did you pursue further education after graduating from the program?
 - a. If so, tell me about this
 4. Are you currently on EIA/social assistance?
 - a. If no, when did you come off?

Impacts of the Program

1. Tell me how you feel attending the program impacted your life? (positive and negative?)
2. What were the best aspects of the program in your opinion?
3. What do you feel was missing in the program?
4. What supports did you access while you were in the program? (EA? Cultural? Wellness? Other?)
5. Did you access any support from the program following graduation?
6. Have you remained connected with the program following graduation?
7. Have you maintained relationships with fellow classmates?
8. When most students graduate, they leave feeling proud of their accomplishments and feeling that their past is no longer something to be ashamed of, but is instead a strength to be used in the field of CYC.
 - a. Did you feel this way?
 - b. As time has passed, have these feeling changed? How so?
9. Are there any supports the program could have offered that you can think of that would have helped you, following your graduation?

10. Do you feel that you have something worthwhile to offer the world?
Think about some of the effects the program has had on your life. Please indicate the degree to which you feel the following effects have happened for you, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree

- a. Since I started this program I am learning to think about goals for myself _____
- b. I feel I am starting to achieve some of my goals _____
- c. I feel I have changed since I came to the program _____
- d. The program has been related to my reduced use of alcohol and/or drugs _____
- e. My job/school performance has improved since being in the program _____
- f. I have a more positive attitude about my job/school since being in the program _____
- g. I have a more positive attitude about education since being in the program _____
- h. I have used things I learned in the program in my everyday life _____
- i. I am more confident since being in the program _____
- j. I am more hopeful and positive about my future since being in the program _____
- k. I feel I have more control over my life since being in the program _____
- l. I feel better about myself since being in the program _____
- m. I feel more independent since being in the program _____
- n. I feel less alone since being in the program _____
- o. I am making better choices for myself since being in the program _____

p. I have healthier relationships with others since being in the program _____

q. I am more satisfied with my relationships with others since being in the program _____

r. My life is better now than before I came to the program _____

(If you did disagree with any of the above statements, please explain.)

Overall Perception of the Program

1. What are the most helpful parts of the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program?
2. What are some of the least helpful parts of the program?
3. What is the overall value of the Ndinawe Child and Youth Care Certificate Program to:
 - a. Students
 - b. Families
 - c. Community
4. What types of realistic changes could make this program better?
5. If the program were to offer a training in a different field, what would you suggest?
6. Can you think of any additional services that could be offered to graduates by the program to help people in situations similar to yours? Explain.
7. Is there anything else that has helped you in this program?



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