

Education and Youth Homelessness: Radically Reimagining Educational Responses and Youth-Led Action to Prevent Homelessness in Québec

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ABSTRACT

Young people experiencing homelessness face unique barriers and are at higher risk of educational disengagement than their housed peers. Research and practice suggest schools, as institutions that most young people will engage with at some point, hold powerful potential to address youth homelessness. At the same time, schools have been and continue to be sites of harm for many young people, and reinforce normative social structures and expectations that are based in raced, classed, gendered, ableist assumptions of who students are. School policy and practices, in Québec and broadly, also regularly assume students are not homeless. Based within a collaborative research project with youth with lived experience of homelessness in Tio'tia:ke/Montréal from 2017-2021, this dissertation examines the prevention potential that education holds today. Beginning in the experiences of young people and educational policies in Québec, this dissertation focuses on the urgent ways schools must act to understand the realities of young people facing housing precarity while they attend to the historical and current realities that students face in educational institutions.

Informed by institutional ethnography, youth participatory action research, and anarchist methodologies, this dissertation also explores how responses to youth homelessness, in and outside of institutions, can be led by young people with lived experience of homelessness—and build on the work they already do to learn and survive. This dissertation illustrates how points of failure that young people face within their educational trajectories—discrimination and stigma, bullying, a lack of interventions that are grounded in diverse realities, and having to demonstrate that they are “homeless enough”—are parts of broader structural factors that organize experiences of homelessness. It also reflects on how individual choice and agency, of youth and professionals serving youth, have great impact on how young people are supported before, during or after experiences of homelessness. Through highlighting tensions with how policy and

practice are imagined within educational institutions and the experiences of young people, I argue for the need for radical change as necessary to tangibly acting to support youth homelessness prevention. With an emphasis on the educational and radical work homeless youth are doing amongst communities of peers, this research suggests how we can think of (and act on) radically different ways to build networks of solidarity for learning and youth-led change.

Les jeunes en situation d'itinérance rencontrent des obstacles uniques et courent un risque plus élevé de désengagement éducatif que leurs pairs logés. La recherche et la pratique professionnelle suggèrent que les écoles, en tant qu'institutions que la plupart des jeunes fréquenteront à un moment ou à un autre de leur vie, possèdent un potentiel puissant pour répondre à l'itinérance chez les jeunes. En même temps, les écoles ont été et continuent d'être des lieux de préjudice pour de nombreux jeunes, et renforcent les structures sociales normatives et les attentes qui sont basées sur des présomptions de race, de classe, de genre et de discrimination fondée sur la capacité physique envers les étudiants. Les politiques et les pratiques scolaires, au Québec et ailleurs, supposent régulièrement que les élèves ne sont pas en situation d'itinérance. Basée au sein d'un projet de recherche collaborative avec des jeunes en situations d'itinérance à Tio'tia:ke/Montréal de 2017 à 2021, cette thèse examine le potentiel de prévention que les écoles possèdent aujourd'hui. Partant des expériences des jeunes et des politiques éducatives au Québec, cette thèse se concentre sur les moyens urgents que les écoles doivent mettre en œuvre pour comprendre les réalités des jeunes confrontés à la précarité du logement tout en s'occupant des réalités historiques et actuelles auxquelles les étudiants sont confrontés dans les institutions éducatives.

Informée par l'ethnographie institutionnelle, la recherche-action participative des jeunes et les méthodologies anarchistes, cette thèse explore également comment les réponses à l'itinérance chez les jeunes, à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des institutions, peuvent être dirigées par des jeunes ayant une expérience vécue en itinérance et s'appuyer sur le travail qu'ils font déjà pour apprendre et survivre. Cette thèse illustre comment les points d'échec auxquels les jeunes sont confrontés dans leurs trajectoires éducatives - la discrimination et la stigmatisation, l'intimidation, le manque d'interventions qui sont fondées sur des réalités diverses, et le fait de devoir démontrer qu'ils sont "suffisamment itinérant" - font partie de facteurs structurels plus larges qui organisent les expériences d'absence de chez-soi. Il réfléchit également à la façon dont le choix et l'agence individuels, des jeunes et des professionnels au service des jeunes, ont un impact important sur la façon dont les jeunes sont soutenus avant, pendant ou après les expériences de l'itinérance. En soulignant les tensions avec la façon dont la politique et la pratique sont imaginées au sein des institutions éducatives et les expériences des jeunes, je plaide pour le besoin d'un changement radical comme nécessaire pour agir concrètement pour soutenir la prévention de l'itinérance chez les jeunes. En se concentrant sur le travail éducatif et radical que les jeunes font au sein de communautés de pairs, cette recherche suggère comment nous pouvons penser à (et agir sur) des manières radicalement différentes de construire des réseaux de solidarité pour l'apprentissage et le changement mené par les jeunes ayant une expérience vécue en situations d'itinérance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Canada, there are 35, 000-40, 000 young people who experience homelessness in a given year, according to most recent available data (Gaetz et al., 2016), and the actual number is likely much higher. Youth face unique barriers and experiences in institutions, and homeless youth face additional precarity and institutional harm, including in schools. As homeless youth's experiences with education are often disrupted, inaccessible, harmful, or irrelevant to their day-to-day realities, (Courtney et al, 2014; Gaetz, 2014; Hallett & Skrla, 2017 Liljedahl et al., 2013) they must find ways to learn in spite of barriers to accessing the State institutions that are responsible for teaching them. Schools have been highlighted as a major point where interventions may emerge to better support young people experiencing homelessness (Mackenzie & Thielking, 2014; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020), though this must be approached cautiously and grounded in knowledge of the ways schools (and intersecting State systems) may actually push youth into precarity (Nelson, 2021). Despite this, across Canada and globally, young people living in situations of precarity and homelessness are surviving, learning and resisting. They are organizing, together, to refuse their marginalization within educational institutions, instead creating spaces of “daily and spontaneous resistance” (Cruz, 2014, p. 210).

In this dissertation, I focus on the trajectories of young people and their education within and outside of schools, to try to answer the question of how young people might be better supported by educational institutions—before, during, and after periods of housing precarity and homelessness. Schools may be powerful sites of homelessness prevention, as most people attend school at some point in their lives (Gaetz, 2014), but schools are also sites of harm for many young people (Au, 2015; Annamma et al., 2019; Nichols, 2019; Wun, 2017). Through examining the prevention potential that schools hold today (McKenzie 2018; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020) I focus

on the urgent ways schools must be acting to do better, while also understanding why “the onus should not be on the education system alone” (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). This dissertation also attends to the fraught histories (Howard, 2016; Suissa, 2006; Taylor, 2012; Toulouse, 2015) and current realities (Blackstock, Bamblett & Black, 2020; Deschênes, Bellot & Abdel-Baki, 2020; Edwards, 2020; Hagopian, Au & Rooks, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020) that young people face in schools, and how we might think of radically different ways to build networks of solidarity for learning and youth-led change.

As a young person navigating housing precarity more than fifteen years ago, I knew that schools were not equipped to support youth experiencing homelessness. I knew from my own experiences, and those of my friends, that many teachers did not have the capacity or understanding to act preventively on severe mental health struggles, problematic drug use, or incidents of self-harm, and that many school staff discriminated against students based on sexuality, race, and class. I also knew that for many of us, in different and intersecting ways, schools were not safe and, when interventions did happen, they often led to engagement with harmful systems like child/youth protection. Coming into this project, I still held onto beliefs that my educational disengagement was my own fault—I had not interrogated longstanding ideas communicated throughout my adolescence that the responsibility for struggles to attend and graduate from secondary school fell exclusively on my shoulders. This research has been a space where I can make sense of my own educational trajectory, in addition to learning from the experiences shared by 38 young people in Tio’tia:ke/Montréal and 4 youth researchers I collaborated with and learned from. Our work together has been an educational experience that anchors the following analysis in what I knew, and what young people today know and experience in schools. Now, I can also reflect on the different ways I have or have not fit into

notions of an ideal student across my life, and how educational structures have and continue to organize access and stability in important ways.

The ways that we worked together as a research team--Laurence, Maxime, Mickey, Naomi, Shayana¹ and myself (the Youth Action Research Revolution, or YARR, team)--have also illuminated the lived knowledges that allowed us to survive and organize during complex pathways before, after, and during periods of housing precarity and homelessness. Five of us have lived experiences of homelessness and engaged these experiences to build and understand what youth shared with us. Five of us are also queer, non-binary and/or trans. The ways we worked as a team demonstrate how peer work², or learning from each other's shared and diverse experiences, must resist rigid hierarchies of knowledge, and instead encourage "flattened hierarchies" (Frederick, Daley & Zahn, 2018, p. 253). While imperfect (Graeber, 2004; Kaba, 2021; Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016) the ways that we built knowledge were imagined as reciprocal and contributing to a shared understanding of how we must address youth homelessness differently.

Much of this dissertation attempts to figure out how to think of structures, or new institutions, that might value, and build on knowledges in the ways that YARR intentionally modelled over the course of the research—in ways that attempted to centre trauma-informed practices, and beginning in strong relational ties we built within the first few months of working together. This is also grounded in approaches which value lived knowledges as essential to

¹ All names of participants used throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms, while the names of our youth co-researchers have not been changed. This research was reviewed and approved by McGill University's Research Ethics Board: REB File #: 338-0119.

² While some scholars intentionally use "peer" to denote research done by members of a community to signal the importance of valuing lived experience (Smith, 2020), others complicate and critique the ways that peer work can ensure that those with lived knowledges/in community are underpaid, exploited and prevented from wielding professional authority in their field (Reynolds, 2021, Shiwharran, 2020). Throughout this dissertation I use the term peer, as it was often used by young people, but do so knowing it is a complex and imperfect term for the work people are doing in communities with lived experiences of homelessness.

working toward justice (Spade, 2020) and keeping “human connection in situations of oppression” (Reynolds, 2021, p. 4). Smith (2021) has discussed how working as a peer researcher, exploring the experiences of young people in schools, led to her understanding that what happened in her life while she was homeless was not her fault—and instead understand how her experiences fit into structures and systems which organize precariously housed youth’s trajectories toward compounding instabilities and harm, as well as reinforcing moral ideals of deservedness from a very young age.

This dissertation and the research that has contributed to it, rooted within my work with the YARR team exploring young people’s experiences across a variety of State systems, has included tracing how my own experiences are shaped by social relations from which I have both benefited and been excluded—part of how the “very same social relations that produce one person’s experiences of inclusion, safety, and privilege are implicated in another person’s experiences of exclusion, risk, and oppression” (Nichols, 2019, p. 5). Over the course of this project, I have also continued to learn from broader networks of others with lived experiences—sometimes similar to mine and sometimes vastly different—to ground the work presented here. This learning has included building formal and informal networks of solidarity to continue to navigate educational institutions as safely as possible, including building shared knowledges from our own experiences and taking direct actions to address how systems continue to fail to act on issues of youth homelessness.

The research

This dissertation draws from YARR’s collective work asking how young people might be better served in institutions with an aim prevent youth homelessness, undertaken in Tio’tia:ke/Montréal. The questions guiding this research were:

1. What barriers to education are young people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity currently encountering?
2. What provincial and federal policies and institutional practices shape these experiences?
3. What types of educational interventions will address homeless youth's unique needs and experiences in the context of Canada's shifting political-economic conditions?

Ultimately, these three questions led to the findings presented in this dissertation and inform how I propose we must move forward in imagining different educational interventions for young people experiencing homelessness. These questions, building from the things I have experienced and known to be true in my own life, also contributed to exploring how things were not getting better for homeless youth in schools and asking what young people were doing to survive, learn and resist.

This research contributes to an emerging body of literature by scholars with lived experience of homelessness. The barriers that have historically prevented people who've been homeless from participating in—or more importantly, leading—research and academic work on homelessness (Jarrett, 2016; Leblanc & Malenfant, 2021; Loignon et al., 2018; Nelson, 2020; Yarbrough, 2020) are intimately linked to the educational and institutional barriers I outline in this dissertation. They are also linked to intersecting barriers faced by researchers and scholars who are women, Black, Indigenous, scholars of colour, trans scholars, and those navigating poverty and/or disabilities (Alfred, 2010; Ben-Moshe, 2020; Bey, 2020; Kumashiro, 2002; Maynard, 2020; Smith, 1987). I draw on the work of those who begin their scholarship in their own knowledge, and standpoint (Smith, 1990), in attempts to push back and transform exclusionary, institutionalized research. Throughout this dissertation I position myself in conversation with literature, whenever possible, coming from scholars and community researchers with lived experience of precarity, poverty and oppression. This citational posture

reflects a belief that research should be led by those most impacted by social issues (Jarrett, 2016; Nelson, 2020; Smith, 2020).

This research also sits uniquely at an intersection of anarchist and abolitionist scholarship that calls for the urgent restructuring of violent State systems (Armaline, 2009; Bey, 2020; Graeber, 2004; Kaba, 2020; Rouhani, 2012) alongside and intersecting with scholarship that explores policy-based changes to support young people through trajectories of precarity and homelessness (Allen, Reupert, Oades, 2021; Hallett & Skrla, 2017; Mackenzie & Thielking, 2014; Nichols, 2019; Nichols & Doberstein, 2016; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). While seemingly contradictory, an anarchist-informed analysis of State policy makes sense to me because illuminating the oppressive nature of State structures and forces can be a powerful tool, but also necessitates we take urgent action to change those structures and forces. Looking to the work of McLelland and Dodd (2016), another anarchist-informed examination of policy responses in the context of HIV/AIDS work, we see how tracing out the organization of the State can function to understand how neoliberal, capitalist institutions function to kill members of our communities as well as how “addressing social problems must come through a dialectical relationship between concerned groups of people over time” (2016, p. 6).

This approach—to think of how State responses in schools can be reformed tomorrow while ultimately looking to radically imagining how they must shift moving forward--stems from the urgency of premature death, institutional harm, and the irresponsibility of our current systems to care for many. I have lost over a dozen close friends since I began this dissertation, and I know of many more formerly homeless youth who are no longer with us. We must examine and understand how we operate within the “shell of the old” (Graeber, 2009) in order to actively imagine and shape new interventions and possibilities, based on what people are already doing to

survive and take care of each other every day. This also requires education to build solidarity across diverse experiences and standpoints (Spade, 2020), including educating those who do not have lived expertise. This must happen not through exploitation and objectification of experience, but by learning together how to create networks of solidarity and mutual aid to bring greater capacity to our shared efforts (across policy reform and radical organizing) to better support youth in situations of homelessness.

From Points of Possibility and Failure to Points of Action

Since YARR began working together as a team, we found it useful to organize our understandings of our own and others' trajectories within the notions of "points of failure" and "points of possibility" (Sauvé et al., 2017, p. 2), to think of how we can pinpoint particular moments in the trajectory of young people where something may have happened differently to prevent their experiences of homelessness. Points of failure may constitute a moment where institutional processes fail to serve a young person, such as hospital staff discharging a youth into homelessness or school staff not believing a student is experiencing abuse at home. Points of possibility may be points where youth felt supported, for example through connecting with a teacher who was willing to advocate for them with school administration. Points of possibility may also suggest where a different response may have been possible, such as when a young person reaches out to a guidance counsellor for help—whether or not that counsellor acts. In many cases, the points we recognized are both of failure and possibility, and as such have devastating impacts on the trajectories of youth. While I continue to use the framing of points of possibility/failure, I also recognize the complexities in how longer trajectories unfold and compound, where different points make up a longer thread in the pathways of young people through institutions—complexities that must also inform our responses. What is evident in the

things young people were telling us is that points of failure also compound, and significantly shape how willing young people are to trust institutions like schools moving forward. For example, building bonds with a school staff member or social worker and subsequently losing that connection (due to staffing shortages, relocations, etc.) has lasting impacts on youth's ability or willingness to trust that the system can do anything to help, and reinforces that it will only cause harm.

To organize how experiences and education of young people were interconnected around these points I began conceptualizing them, as I do in this dissertation, across three points of action. These intersecting points of action speak to points of failure and possibility we have identified in this research:

1. We must ground our efforts to address youth homelessness in learning from the experiences of youth.

The starting point of all this work then is the lived experiences of young people—grounding our actions in what young people know, creating spaces for youth to share their expertise, and shifting how we organize our research process to enable young people to teach us about what these systems actually do. This point is the basis of Chapter 4: Young People's Experiences in Schools.

2. Based on those experiences, we must create robust training for teachers, staff, and students in schools on the realities of youth homelessness, to both combat stigma and increase potential for early intervention and homelessness prevention.

This second point of action is work that must be done in schools right now—particularly mobilizing the knowledges of young people to shift policy and create curricular tools, teacher training, and programs that are grounded in more comprehensive education around the realities

of youth homelessness. This point of action is explored in Chapter 5, *Beyond Learning: Fostering Points of Possibility in What Schools are Doing Today*.

3. We must think differently about how to pursue educational interventions within contemporary (racist, colonial, heteronormative, ableist) State institutions, and mobilize educational efforts and (youth-led) mutual aid³ in order to radically imagine a different future.

The ultimate aim of all of my work is to actually shift how we conceptualize and organize education—an aim that is both incredibly urgent and requires work that has been, and will continue to happen, over many years. I explore this in Chapter 6: *Out of the Ruins, Radically Re-Imagining Education and Peer Learning*.

Outline

The following chapters contextualize and follow both the guiding questions as well as the points of action outlined above. Chapter 2: *Topic Review* provides an overview on the topic of homelessness, youth homelessness and education within a Canadian context, outlining literature that has grounded and shaped this inquiry. In order to contextualize the findings presented here, this chapter provides an overview of relevant literature on homelessness policy and theory, as well as outlining literature on current interventions, effectiveness of responses, and barriers particularly impacting youth.

³ In a context where “government policies actively produce and exacerbate the harm, inadequately respond to crises, and ensure that certain populations bear the brunt of pollution, poverty, disease and violence...more and more ordinary people are feeling called to respond in their communities, creating bold and innovative ways to share resources and support vulnerable neighbours. This survival work, when done in conjunction with social movements demanding transformative change, is called mutual aid” (Spade, 2020, p. 1)

In Chapter 3: Methodological Groundings and Research Methods, I expand on the modes of inquiry that have shaped my approach to research and the approaches we have used as a research team. I lay out how these methodological groundings have informed my work and our development and planning of different phases of the research project, examining the intersecting influences of Youth Participatory Action Research, Institutional Ethnography, and anarchist methodologies on this work. I also outline the design and implementation (over three phases) of the research that took place. This chapter also speaks to why lived experience and peer work was important in the development and implementation of our research, and learnings we may employ moving forward.

In Chapter 4, Young People’s Experiences in Schools, I aim to answer the first research question by describing common themes young people shared across their educational trajectories, with an emphasis on the barriers to education they experienced—in the form of stigma, institutional processes and actions, and refusals—that may underly many of the issues youth face in schools. I outline themes in research participants’ narratives, including the processes of “homogenization and hierarchy” (McClelland & Dodd, 2016, p. 6) that reinforced idealized notions of who students were, difficulties obtaining (correct) learning disability and mental health diagnoses, equity and accommodations in schools, and the unclear, inaccessible institutional processes that schools expect students to navigate in particular ways. I expand on the first point of action, grounding this work in the experiences of youth, firmly in the experiences of young people outlined in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, Beyond Learning: Fostering Points of Possibility in What Schools are Doing Today, I address the second question by examining policies and practices that shaped young people’s experiences in schools, with a particular focus on Québec and Montréal, where

fieldwork for this research was carried out. Spanning federal policy addressing homelessness and prevention to policy in individual schools and school service centres/boards that, while not explicitly related to housing precarity, “brush against the issue” (Smith, 2019) of youth homelessness, I point to policies that could be leveraged to ensure schools do better to support all young people. I also examine research literature outlining the work of advocates and teachers, as well as programming and practices that young people we interviewed described as particularly promising. In doing so, I ask how policy can support capacity building -- specifically opportunities for teachers, staff, and students in schools to learn about the realities of youth homelessness, learn how to combat stigma, and develop early homelessness interventions in schools.

Chapter 6, *Out of the Ruins: Radically Re-Imagining Education and Peer Learning* attempts to build from the perspectives of youth, peer supports, advocates and professionals in schools to imagine how we can (and must) act differently and explore how young people were describing their educational work in communities. I highlight young people’s experiences of taking care of one another, participating in organizing and activism, and learning together to make sense of their lives as integral to their education and how they maintain wellness in their communities. This chapter positions the work that young people are already doing to learn and survive with their peers as direct action and grounded in notions of mutual aid, which aims to not only address and illuminate the inadequacies and illegitimacy of the system (Spade, 2020), but actively imagine how things may be otherwise. This chapter takes up the third point of action, that we must think differently about how to pursue educational interventions of the State, while mobilizing youth and community educational efforts to radically imagine a different response.

Conclusion

When viewed through an anarchist lens, my inclusion of policy analysis and a radical imagining of a different society may appear at odds with one another (Graeber, 2008). However, the urgency that faces young people who are experiencing homelessness today necessitates that we act on any “points of possibility” (Sauvé et al., 2018, p. 2) that we can. Focusing primarily on changing policy without addressing the inherent violence of the State is insufficient and legitimizes that violence (Graeber, 2004; Spade, 2020). On the other hand, focusing only on imagining a radically different future can ignore those who are currently underserved and/or harmed by policies and institutions today. A focus on challenging the current institutional order *and* imagining spaces outside this order must take place simultaneously in the interest of building new forms of education in the shell of the old (Graeber, 2011).

Finally, throughout this dissertation I hope to emphasize the need to ground any interventions and approaches in the experiences and leadership of young people themselves. This is important not only because they know what is happening and can provide “expertise” to those who may not have lived knowledge of housing precarity, but also because they understand the urgency and necessity to be creating supports, communities and approaches that are radically different. Young people we spoke with in this project proposed radical shifts: centering community, enabling direct actions, and restructuring societal responses to homelessness with an emphasis on social justice. Following youth leadership to shift our means—how we learn together, how we support young people, how we conceptualize prevention, pedagogy, or precarity—to be in line with the ends we wish to see (Milstein, 2010), can radically inform our work to address the underlying structures of power that create youth homelessness in the first place.

CHAPTER 2: TOPIC REVIEW

In order to contextualize the findings presented here, this chapter provides an overview of relevant literature on homelessness policy and theory. I also outline literature on current interventions, effectiveness of responses, and barriers for youth. I position this body of contemporary literature within a broader context of research and interventions to address homelessness in Canada from the 1980's, where we can see a shift to different groups of people being served/recognized, the impacts of the drawback of State services during the 1980's, and the shifts in "effective" strategies to respond to homelessness, including a growing emphasis on prevention. Literature is explored to situate homelessness in Canada as occurring within a broader global and national neoliberal and settler-colonial context, one that is necessary as a backdrop to the experiential, practice, and policy analyses outlined in the following chapters.

Approaches to Homelessness in Canada: 1980-Present

While historically, homeless populations were made up primarily of single, older men (Gaetz et al., 2016), and many popular imaginaries of homelessness continue to reflect this, the demographics of Canadians experiencing homelessness have increasingly included women, youth, and families. Not only has the demographic make-up of those experiencing homelessness shifted, but the number of people experiencing homelessness in Canada has increased (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019, 2017; Gaetz et al., 2016). This increase is not happenstance, and particular government policies—for example, the cancellation of the National Housing Policy in 1993 (Gaetz, 2014, p. 1), in tandem with neoliberal shifts to massively defund housing programs and cutting back social welfare funding (Courtney et al., 2014), contributed to the rise in homelessness nationally.

Following defunding by the government, responses to homelessness have included a patchwork of emergency services (which address the symptoms of homelessness⁴, rather than causes) and law enforcement efforts “that functioned to criminalize homelessness” (Gaetz et al., 2016, see also Chesnay, Bellot & Sylvestre, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016, p.13, O’Grady et al., 2013; Quirouette et al., 2016; Douglas 2011). The latter include policies such as the Safe Streets Act (Government of Ontario, c.9: 1999), which continues to contribute to the criminalization of poverty and homelessness (Blondeau, 2020), as well as reinforcing negative stereotypes of homeless youth (Bernier et al., 2011, Gaetz, 2014).

The relatively recent support of Housing First in federal responses to homeless (in theory, Doberstein and Smith (2015)) marks a shift in these approaches, characterized by increased recognition of the human to right to housing (Canada Without Poverty, 2016, Farha & Schwan, 2021, Leijten & Bel, 2020), the need for low barrier services (Pauly, 2008, Pauly et al., 2013, Wusinich et al., 2019), and services and responses for particular populations (Kidd et al., 2019, Abramovich 2017, 2016, Stewart, 2018) including youth (Gaetz et al., 2018, Sauvé et al., 2018). In 2018, a new National Housing Strategy was announced, marking a possible shift in policy to better address the current realities of housing and homelessness. While this NHS also speaks of ending homelessness, “there still is no international consensus on what an end to homelessness actually involves, and what indicators and targets will be necessary to confirm that we have actually achieved this goal” (Gaetz et al. 2016, p.25)⁵. These approaches may also fail to speak to the unique ways that young people experience housing precarity and homelessness (Gaetz, 2014).

⁴ “An initial goal of serving people impacted by homelessness quickly reveals that racism, colonialism, immigration enforcement, ableism, police violence, the foster care system, the health care system, transphobia, and more are *all causes of homelessness or causes of further harm to homeless people.*” (Spade, 2020, p. 15, emphasis my own)

⁵ Québec does have some recent housing policy that attempts to outline indicators, targets and evaluations of homelessness prevention provincially, outlined in more detail in chapter 5.

Traditional Conceptualizations and Stereotypes of Youth Homelessness: Individual Trajectories, Rebellious Teens and “Runaways”

While historical conceptualizations of those experiencing homelessness have typically centered on older, single, adult males as uniquely making up this population, there are longstanding stereotypes of youth as runaways. Policies in shelter spaces, as well as laws, often still use the terminology of “runaway,” a term which suggests youth who experience homelessness are simply rebellious, looking for adventure or independence, or are brats resisting their parents’ rules (Gaetz, 2014). More recently, the research literature has shifted to reflect more complex ideas about youth who experience homelessness, but historically the terms runaway and homeless youth were used interchangeably in research as well (see Boivin, 2005).

The conflation of homelessness with running away is problematic because individualized narratives about youth “running away” fail to address issues of autonomy or agency in the decisions of young people as they obscure the gravity of issues youth may be dealing with in their homelives (Schwan et al., 2018). Leaving a particular living arrangement can be seen as an act of autonomy for youth who are in dangerous, harmful, or precarious situations, wherein the “act of running away is a way of establishing control” (Courtney et al., 2014, p. 25). Rather than seeing this as a frivolous undertaking by irresponsible young people, we can delineate adolescent rebellion from experiences of youth homelessness, which

...[has] more to do with individual/relational factors, structural factors and systems failures, than with the decision to leave home because one does not like the rules. Those who run away for more frivolous reasons typically return home quickly; having to wear the same socks for a week, going hungry and a heightened likelihood of being a victim of crime, can make doing the dishes seem not so bad (Gaetz, 2014, p. 12)

When youth experiencing homelessness are not being dismissed as frivolous, they are regularly considered dangerous. In reality (and despite ticketing and other interventions, which criminalize them), street-involved youth are more likely to be victims of violence and criminal activity than

perpetrators (Gaetz, O’Grady, Buccieri, 2010). When homeless youth are labelled as frivolous or dangerous, the agency of young people is reduced to “bad choices” or not understanding their responsibilities as future adults (Cruz, 2014). Reductive stereotypes about youth experiencing homelessness are materially detrimental to youth, shaping the creation and enforcement of policy and law (Gaetz, 2014), and obscuring vulnerabilities, which warrant critical and timely interventions from educators, social workers, and other people who interact with young people experiencing homelessness. Indeed, within a Québécois context, the term runaway (“en fugue”) is still regularly used within policy and practice contexts. The continued use of stereotypical tropes in provincial policy suggests that broader societal stereotypes about runaway youth, which minimize the seriousness of this issue, and perpetuate barriers for young people, remain relevant.

Landscapes of Youth (and youth homelessness) in Canada

Of approximately 200,000 Canadians currently experiencing homelessness annually, estimates are that around 18% (Evenson & Barr, 2009) to 20% (Segaert, 2012) of the homeless population using shelters are unattached youth between the ages of 16-25. There are “at least 35,000 young people who are homeless during the year, and perhaps 6000 on any given night;” however, “this [count] does not include young people who do not enter the shelter system.” (Gaetz, 2014, p. 7). A 2018 survey of young people experiencing homelessness in Ottawa found that that the majority of participants “reported couch-surfing and rough-sleeping more often than shelter stays” (Sauvé et al., 2018, p. 5), suggesting the numbers of precariously housed and homeless youth are significantly higher than statistics suggest. Many youth do not understand or define their experiences of precariousness as homelessness (O’Grady, Kidd & Gaetz, 2020) and thus may also be missing from official statistics due to a lack of self-identification as homeless (but, nonetheless, may need access services targeted to homeless and street-involved people). Of

those experiencing broadly defined homelessness, including sleeping rough, hidden homelessness, or otherwise lacking a “stable, safe or consistent residence” (The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016) structural factors can lead particular groups of young people to experience homelessness at higher rates.

Young people who have experiences with child protection (and, as it is called in Québec, youth protection (“protection de la jeunesse”) are more likely to experience homelessness (Bender et al., 2015, Nichols et al., 2017, Nichols, 2013). In Canada, over half (58%) of homeless youth report some involvement with child protection services (Gaetz et al., 2018, see also Goyette et al, 2007a). Additionally, youth from low-income and working-class families are more likely to experience homelessness, (Haber and Toro, 2004), with poor youth more likely to become homeless than youth from more economically advantaged families (Embleton et al., 2016, Canada Without Poverty et al., 2016). Experiences of abuse and childhood trauma are also common among youth experiencing homelessness (Tyler & Bersani, 2008), with one Toronto study suggesting “more than 70 per cent of youth on the streets leave home because of physical or sexual abuse” (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2001, p.2). Additionally, national studies demonstrate that LGBTQ2S youth (29.5% (Gaetz et al., 2016), Indigenous youth (30.6% Gaetz et al., 2016), youth of colour (28.2% Gaetz et al., 2016), newcomer youth (25% Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014), and those with a mental health/physical disability (47% Schwan et al. 2018) are “over-represented but under-served demographics” among homeless populations (Sauvé et al. 2018, p. 1). It is also the case that these patterns of over-representation may be much higher depending on how demographic categories are defined, where and how research is carried out.

Patterns of over-representations may be interpreted as though particular identities put some youth at a greater risk of homelessness; in contrast this thesis holds the view that societal systems informed by racism, cissexism, homophobia, classism, xenophobia and colonialism make up the “structural conditions” (Nichols, 2016, p.202) that lead to this overrepresentation. For example, given the racialized organization of urban spaces (Baldwin, 2020; Gillen, 2014), a lack of street-youth services in young people’s own neighbourhoods and communities may significantly disadvantage young people from particular racial and ethnic groups who have to travel outside of their local communities to access services – many of which will not be tailored to their particular cultural and/or racialized experiences (Edwards, 2020; Springer, Roswell & Lum, 2007). For example, both Indigenous and LGBTQ2S youth report avoiding shelters due to a fear of discrimination (Sauvé et al., 2018), while in some urban centres youth, in general, may avoid shelters, at times “feeling unsafe around adults with behavioural or mental health problems” (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2001, p. 1. Other research indicates young people feel unease using shelters designed for adults, more broadly (Sauvé et al., 2018), which the research discussed in this dissertation affirms.

Different approaches are useful in thinking through the unique trajectories of young people, and how services must be adapted to serve them. For example, the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) program addresses the different pathways that may lead youth to experience homelessness, rather than assuming trajectories are the same as they are for adults (Gaetz, 2014). HF4Y builds from the Housing First approach, adapting it developmentally for youth. A key part of the HF4Y approach is recognizing the importance of support of “youth choice, youth voice and self-determination” (Gaetz, 2017, p. 2). HF4Y programs must also address youth-specific needs to housing stabilization, including unique mental health challenges, increased vulnerability

to exploitation, and supports to remain engaged in high school and the job market, and must give “young people access to such supports for as long as they need them in order to recover, to grow and mature, to engage in school or employment, and to become socially included (Gaetz, 2017, p. 3).

Specifying the unique needs of young people is important in adapting adult services, and can ensure youth agency and youth choice inform how young people access and receive services. Experiences of homelessness are shaped by the services people are able (or unable) to access⁶; and what skills (social, financial, etc.) they have at their disposal (Courtney et al., 2014; Gaetz 2014). As a result, much of the literature about youth homelessness speaks to the range of ways youth must be supported to conceptualize their own experiences, rather than imposing solutions from other contexts, or imposing judgement based on what youth “should” and should not do (Gaetz and Redman 2016; Moore 2013; Schwan et al. 2018). As demonstrated in this dissertation, this requires intentional approaches to developing and cultivating youth leadership of, and meaningful contribution to, initiatives that are being mobilized to address youth homelessness, including access to education.

Youth Homelessness and Education

Education and its relationship with other opportunities and structural conditions (employment, housing, etc.) is complex. A focus on access to (and success in) education as a tool which allows youth to enter the job market/find more stable employment is dominant in the literature, including in research that foregrounds young people’s own determinations of what

⁶ For example, in Ontario, applicants under 18 must demonstrate that a variety of “special circumstances” apply in order to receive any social assistance (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2012). In Québec, applicants under 18 must undertake a long and inaccessible emancipation process to receive social assistance, and cannot apply for welfare if they are full-time students of any age (Government du Québec, 1991).

they need (Schwan et al., 2018, Sauvé et al., 2018). Understanding what enables young people to participate in school (and what does not) is key to designing supports and programs that target and address their needs, strengths, and aspirations:

Understanding the factors that contribute to academic resilience is important. If we are aware of the specific factors that promote participation in school for some homeless youth, we may be able to design programs and policies that provide these supports for all homeless youth. Finding ways to increase the school attendance of homeless youth is critical, given that educational achievement is so closely tied to future employability and quality of life (Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 277)

Efforts to understand the underlying factors that present barriers to education for youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability, can support the work of finding broader systems of support which might be applied in educational institutions.

The dropout rate, in Canada, for homeless youth is estimated to be anywhere from 62% (Evenson & Barr, 2009) to 90% in some cities (Liljedahl et al., 2013), and can be safely estimated at, at least, eight times the national average (Gaetz et al., 2010):

Most homeless youth do not have a high school diploma. In Ottawa and Toronto between 63% and 90% of homeless youth have not graduated from high school despite being of age to have done so. Lack of a high school education, alongside a history of homelessness, places youth at risk of long-term social exclusion (Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 270)

The barriers homeless youth encounter in maintaining enrolment in school are directly and indirectly related to difficulties gaining employment, perpetuating poverty and precarity as young people grow into adulthood: “high school drop-outs face a considerable disadvantage in the labour market and may face exposure to a life of poverty” (Gaetz, 2014, p.9).

Solomon (2013) describes the lack of education homeless youth are receiving as a “health inequity” issue (p.3). High-school drop-outs have shorter life expectancies than graduates and those with post-secondary schooling (Montez et al., 2012), and are at greater risk of chronic illnesses (Zimmerman & Woolf, 2014), with poor health, in turn, contributing further to lack of

school completion (Sznitman et al., 2017). In one Canadian study, housing—particularly stable housing—has direct links to success in school, being the “most significant predictor of high school completion,” (Soloman, 2013, p. 84), with the number of relocations in a young person’s life most likely to predict drop-out rates. Similarly, Liljedahl et al. (2013) found a “longer duration of rehousing” (p.279) or increased housing stability was directly linked to greater success in school. The longer a youth is living in poverty, and particularly without stable housing, the more exacerbated these effects become, with the “probability of dropping out and “school failure” increas[ing] the longer children are “exposed to relational adversity” (Jensen 2013, 29). Indeed, programs like Housing First for Youth draw on research that demonstrates youth who have stable housing are more likely to attend school (Gaetz, 2017; Liljedahl et al. 2013). In one study, 45% of chronically homeless adults who formerly experienced youth homelessness, saw insufficient education as contributing directly to their current homelessness (Baker-Collins, 2013), suggesting this is an issue that is likely to follow individuals into adulthood and compound as they age.

Education and the Labour Market

The way I wish to discuss “education” here is directly related to youth-adapted approaches that center young people’s experience. I want to avoid framing education within a narrow understanding, or purely in relation to credentialing and labour market participation. There is certainly a normative student that is presented in the literature and around which systems of public education have been constructed and currently operate (Au, 2015; Benekey, 2020; Nichols, 2017a). This is not surprising, as education has long been understood as a citizen-making process that works to preserve the status quo and rationalize the exclusion of particular groups (Giroux, 1997, Feinberg 2016, Freire, 1970, Haworth 2017). But in this dissertation, I

want to focus on young people's freedom and agency, as well as their capacities to critique institutional and social expectations for growing into a particular ideal of adulthood, as necessary in conceptualizing educational "success" for all youth. As such, I understand education to include a spectrum of formal/informal/nonformal opportunities for learning (Brennan, 1997; Choudry, 2015), with a particular focus on formal educational institutions, as well as a political process (around and outside of schools).

Education clearly has health, social and economic implications which are intimately tied to labour market access and participation. In 2014, "only 23.8% of youth with less than a Grade 9 education were employed compared to 63.7% of high school graduates and 71.8% of youth with a bachelor's degree" (Statistics Canada, 2015a). In one study, researchers found 73% of homeless youth were unemployed (Noble, 2012). Employers may be hesitant to hire youth who are homeless or precariously housed, perhaps due to a fear of instability or "stereotypes associated with homeless and at-risk youth" (Noble, 2012 p.14), regardless of their level of education. For example, it is difficult to apply for jobs with no fixed address, phone number, or if you list your address as a known shelter (Zhang & Zuberi 2017, Schwan et al. 2018). However, despite barriers to accessing educational programming, when homeless youth do access higher levels of credentials and education, their chances of gaining access to the labour market increase (Randall & Brown 1999).

In terms of employment, the age of young people can prevent them from accessing services targeted at adults, including financial support and employment resources. One conflict experienced by young people navigating employment is related to bureaucratic literacies and an uncertainty about social welfare processes—for example, young people's belief (and reality, often) that, upon gaining employment, "they would lose all benefit entitlement and be worse off

in work” (Randall & Brown 1999, p. 2). This has been a barrier we have encountered in our employment of youth within the context of this research project, as young people receiving social assistance were limited in terms of how many hours they could work without undermining their eligibility for social assistance – including essential access to dental and eyecare, prescription drugs, and subsidized or supportive housing. As such, young people may strategically refuse part-time work opportunities that might enrich their lives or provide important income and experience in order to keep their benefits. Young people must have supports, and education, in order ensure they are able to navigate these bureaucratic systems in informed ways, but also, upon securing some form of employment, financial supports must not be revoked until young people have achieved financial stability (Canada Without Poverty, 2016; Gaetz, 2014; Randall & Brown, 1999). Furthermore, even with full-time employment, many are not able to afford rapidly increasing costs of housing. For example, in 2020, rental costs of unoccupied units in Montréal increased by 30% from 2019-2020 (Observatoire Grand Montréal, 2021), while the vacancy rate dipped under 2% (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2021). In addition to housing, as youth transition to independent living they incur increased living costs such as groceries (Gunderson, 2003; Pauly et al., 2012), eye and dental health care, and prescription drugs (Baggett et al., 2009; Jaffe et al., 2021), which are partially covered while on welfare, further discouraging transitions from social assistance. This suggests, in line with Housing First for Youth and other youth-specific programming, youth will need continued supports (especially health and social care benefits) even as employment is stabilizing.

Homeless youth are often entering the workforce earlier to sustain themselves (while sacrificing school attendance and completion of secondary), and subsequently are at a disadvantage in finding future employment unless they are able to return to school or gain

additional training (Liljedahl et al., 2013). As this dissertation affirms, youth encounter barriers to re-engaging in school after dropping out during experiences of homelessness, including negotiating previous negative experiences (racism, lack of institutional supports or action, punishment) in schools (Schwan et al., 2019). Additionally, for young people who are attempting to sustain housing, pay bills, and feed themselves, being in school for 6 or more hours a day may be less immediately useful than working, and they must choose between the two. Of the 38 youth interviewed in this study, 28 framed access to education, at least in part, around accessing a job or credentials, and as a necessary tool to gain employment and stability--but also as a tool that was difficult to use to their advantage within their day-to-day financial realities.

Homelessness and the Neoliberal State

Policy texts are important sources of data throughout this dissertation (explored in detail in Chapter 5) and are key to understanding the current state of homelessness in Québec and Canada. In addition to sparking ‘mass homelessness,’ the national defunding of social welfare programs has affected the social, economic, and political climate for all Canadians (Banting & Myles, 2013). Young people experience the impacts of this defunding in unique ways, and this research is grounded in these experiences. At the time of writing this dissertation, we are in the midst of a global youth unemployment crisis, beginning well before 2020 (Means, 2017) and continuing into the COVID-19 epidemic (Biko Koenig & College, 2020; Puddu, 2020), which has impacts for youth independence, autonomy, and participation in educational programs (Godden & Oshabi, 2019). Today, “the deeply held belief that youth who are homeless can ‘bootstrap’ themselves out of poverty through employment is severely out of step with economic reality” (Schwan et al., 2018, p.40). Since the initial period of State defunding of programming under neoliberal policies globally (Blad 2011; Coté & Simard, 2012; Stedman Jones, 2012;

Wacquant, 2009), community organizations have led responses to government cutbacks and insufficient supports for the poor and homeless.

It is also important that responses to youth homelessness in Canada shift to address these changes in the social and economic climate. I experienced educational disengagement for the first time in 2006. At that point, unemployment rates nationally were 6.6% (Statistics Canada, 2006). More than ten years later, at the time of undertaking this project, (Statistics Canada, 2021) that rate is 8.2% nationally. For youth aged 15-24 years, the unemployment rate is significantly higher. In January 2021 the national youth employment rate was 19.7% (Statistics Canada, 2021). Education and credentialization are increasingly required to access jobs, the labour market is more precarious, and housing is more expensive. Youth in Canada today, housed or not, are facing increasing prices (of housing, goods, etc.), stagnating wages (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2017), diminishing job prospects (Means, 2017), and decreasing opportunities for autonomy:

The ability to obtain full employment with a living wage in a context of rising costs of accommodation impedes the ability of many young people to go out on their own in their late teens or early twenties. As part of the transition to adulthood, leaving home and achieving independence is a lot more challenging than it used to be (Gaetz, 2014, p.8).

In the last national census, 34.7% of young people aged 20-34 lived with at least one parent, with that number reaching as high as 47.4% in urban centres like Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2017), reflecting a 20.3% increase since 2001. For young adults aged 20-24, this is even higher, and “the proportion [of young adults] co-residing with their parents rose from 58.3% in 2001 to 62.6% in 2016” (Gulliver, 2015), and this trend has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fry, Passel & Cohn, 2020).

These demographic shifts support evidence that it is increasingly difficult for young people to achieve job security (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2017) and economic and housing

stability. Scholars suggest these trends are directly related to increasing pressure to credentialize, competitive job markets, and a shift to casual employment (Archibald 2009, Means 2017, Zhang & Zuberi 2017), as well as the financialization of the housing market (Farha & Schwan, 2021, Leijten & de Bel, 2020). Increased credentialism in the labour market (Baker, 2014, Gaetz, 2014; Ferrer & Riddell, 2003) also necessitates staying in school longer, something which requires success at early levels of schooling and ongoing access to financial resources.

This is the context within which youth experiencing homelessness or housing precarity live and pursue (or are unable to pursue) educational and labour market opportunities. This is not to say that housing precarity and educational disengagement were easier to navigate ten or fifteen years ago; rather, my point is that young people are facing even starker consequences associated with educational disengagement in 2021, shaped by fewer jobs, stagnating wages and shifts to part-time positions, higher costs of housing and an increasing focus on credentials. While my own research is not guided by a narrow focus on education as solely providing access to credentialization and the labour market, these interconnections are integral to consider--within critiques of the broader ways that the labour market and capitalism organize the lives of youth, it is also important to ensure that youth are able to access housing and education within the current housing, economic, and social context.

COVID-19 has demonstrated some new ways governments could provide supports for all people (San Juan, 2020). For example, in Canada we saw universal economic relief provided through the distribution of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit CERB and provincially/territorially imposed moratoria on evictions and the cessation of rental increases (Canada Mortgage and Housing Crisis, 2020). Unfortunately, the pandemic has also demonstrated the ways that imagining radical change or widespread social welfare responses by

the State are quickly quashed by limited political imagination and framing a “return to normal” as desirable (Nolan, 2020). Particularly during and following the realities of COVID-19, which have illuminated and exacerbated existing inequities and precarity (Budd & Bersani, 2020; Luscombe & McClelland, 2020; Puddu, 2020; Schwan, Dej & Versteegh, 2020) we need to continue prodding and pushing at these points of possible shifts in paradigm, because the most marginalized young people are not served by State responses, including educational ones (Hagopian, Au & Rooks, 2020).

Homelessness and the Settler Colonial State

Just as this dissertation situates experiences of youth homelessness within the context of global policy shifts toward neoliberalism, it is also important to understand youth’s experiences within the context of Canada as a settler-colonial State. Discussions of Canadian homelessness must speak to the ways that Canada as a nation has, and continues to be, built on displacing Indigenous communities and “as the outcome of historically constructed and ongoing settler colonization and racism that have displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories” (Thistle 2017, p. 6).

The emergence of the settler colonial State has depended on the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their territorial lands and the imposition of policies that function to ensure Indigenous peoples were and continue to be disconnected from land, and destabilized (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015; Palmater, 2015). Settler State efforts have impacted every facet of Indigenous lives, including unjust and unfulfilled treaty negotiations, segregated healthcare and housing, eugenics and blood quantum (Bang et al., 2014; Palmater, 2015; Coulthard, 2014, Manuel & Derrickson, 2015, Toulouse, 2018, Thistle, 2017, Battiste, 2014 Tuck and Yang,

2012) and includes policing and control of movement, disproportionate criminalization, violence (Razack, 2016; Freistadt, 2016), destruction and exploitation of traditional territories by the Canadian government and “land trauma” (WEA, 2015 p. 13), as well as cultural and linguistic genocide (Palmater, 2015, Thistle, 2017, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). While these forces of colonization are often framed as historical (Commission d’enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019), scholars are clear that settler colonialism is an ongoing relation (Alfred, 2010; Million, 2013; Palmater, 2019, 2015; Razack, 2016) and the present settler colonial State continues to benefit from the theft of Indigenous (home)lands:

Modern colonisation, like historical colonisation, includes the ongoing state and corporate theft and destruction of Indigenous lands, waters and resources, as well as the violent intervention of state police and military, on behalf of powerful corporate interests, to quell both Indigenous resistance and ultimately Indigenous survival (Palmater, 2019, p. 134)

Schools initially played a significant role in not only physical displacement of Indigenous children from their communities but also severing cultural, linguistic and social connections, in what scholars and official government inquiries have referred to as “cultural genocide⁷” (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2018, p. 570; for early conceptualizations of this argument, see Woolford, 2009). Additionally, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), an inquiry into

⁷ While debate on whether “cultural destruction or elimination” of Indigenous peoples counted as “genocide” has been ongoing since before the termination of Residential schools in Canada (Macdonald Hudson, 2012) UNDRIP definitions of genocide and the rights of Indigenous peoples under colonial rule (2007) has largely led discussions of Canadian education of Indigenous children on a policy, practice, and advocacy level in Canada to adopt both “legalist and pluralist conceptions of...both genocide and cultural genocide” (Macdonald, 2019). Further, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) reiterated arguments from the TRC that government practices are relevant not just any, but all of the criteria for the crime of genocide under the UN’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II (1948).

As genocide is the term used by both official Inquiries into the initial roles of schools in treatment of Indigenous peoples; diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities; non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2013; Churchill, 2004; Hill, 2002; Macdonald, 2019; Palmater, 2015; Razack, 2016; Starblanket, 2018; Thistle, 2017), I follow Indigenous leadership and utilize this term in the context of this dissertation as well.

the impacts of Residential schooling, Indian day schools, and compulsory education for Indigenous children which spanned from 2008-2015, asserts that:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as "cultural genocide."

Physical genocide is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and biological genocide is the destruction of the group's reproductive capacity. Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, 2015c)

Genocide is the term used by the TRC Commission to frame reconciliation as an ongoing and urgent effort in modern-day schools in Canada. Policies and institutional barriers continue to perpetuate ongoing disconnection from culture, land, and language (Battiste, 2013; McIvor, 2013), including the reality that Indigenous youth in Canada continue to have to leave their traditional territories and communities to attend school in urban centres (Cooke & O'Sullivan, 2014; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). As a result, independent researchers as well as the authors of official Canadian government-sponsored, Indigenous-led inquiries argue the delivery of schooling to Indigenous youth continues to mirror earlier plans by government to "get rid of the Indian problem," despite the last residential school closure in 1996 (Scott, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 1924) (Sabzalian, 2019; St. Denis, 2014). Partnerships between schools and the child welfare system that continue to remove Indigenous children from their families, cultures,

and communities are further evidence of the ongoing of influence of cultural genocide (Blackstock et al., 2020).

The framing of historical and ongoing tactics of cultural genocide through colonization is also important for understanding how Indigenous experiences of home and homelessness are organized. Due to the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples in Canada are disproportionately represented among urban and rural homelessness populations (Christensen & Andrew, 2016; Kidd et al., 2019; Thistle & Smylie, 2020; Thistle 2017). While the number of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness can vary widely depending on the location (for example up to 96% of the homeless population in some northern communities (Belanger et al. 2012)), it is clear that the effects of colonization persist, shaping experiences of absolute homelessness, as well as abhorrent and vastly inadequate housing conditions on reserves (Thompson, Bonnycastle & Hill, 2020), and ongoing attempts at cultural genocide through provision of services which exclude or deny Indigenous experience (Thurston et al. 2011).

Settler notions of “home” also shape Indigenous experiences of homelessness:

Settler discourses, and Canadian settlement itself, have transformed the Indigenous experience of being placed or rooted in territorial spaces and within All My Relations, reframing Indigenous existences into being without an adequate place to “be” within the foreign colonial polis... To put it plainly, hundreds of years of colonialism have eroded, undermined and supplanted Indigenous cultural practices and their inclusive concept of home, replacing these with the Western ideals of patriarchy and a personally owned independent home. Thus, Indigenous homelessness has been incorrectly understood by settlers as being without a structure of habitation or being roofless...when Indigenous homelessness is also about being without All My Relations. (Thistle, 2017, p. 16)

Research from First Nations, Métis and Inuit researchers outlining Indigenous experiences of homelessness increasingly outlines the ways interventions for (and by) Indigenous communities must be approached with a focus on concrete acts of reconciliation, connections to land and self-determination (Thistle 2017; Thurston et al. 2013; Leach 2010; Stewart, 2018).

Work led by Indigenous individuals and communities, and particularly Indigenous youth, to consider these concrete practices such as Thistle’s Indigenous definition of homelessness (2017) are important in continuing to contextualize this issue within the framing of the settler State--not only because they link experiences of homelessness directly to systems of governance, policy, and social norms, but also because they call for concrete measures that are not being delivered by the government of Canada, despite promises to do so⁸. As St. Denis (2011) notes, and data from this project supports, systems assume the imagined citizen (typically a white settler (Battiste, 2014)) and see inclusion of Indigenous identities and experiences as being an “add-on,” or as requiring specialized services. Within an educational context, the focus has been on the inclusion of Indigenous programming with little attempt to address the underlying settler colonial structures. Unfortunately, “the “add and stir” model...has not achieved the needed change, but rather continues to sustain the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and processes” (Battiste, 2014, p. 28). Any response to homelessness on unceded and stolen land must attend to the underlying causes of Indigenous homelessness and develop actions that address the material and cultural consequences of settler colonialism.

Youth Homelessness as (A)political

These neoliberal and colonial framings speak to the political nature of homelessness in Canada. The ways we understand this political dimension to homelessness also informs the effectiveness of our (community, federal, provincial, and ministerial) responses. In tracing the historical trajectory of services and advocacy around homelessness in Canada, Schwan (2016)

⁸ For example, through reports produced through Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, and the Commission d’enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics of Québec’s Viens Commission, (Commission d’enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019)

links “first wave” advocates as working closely with (and most often, within) community organizations to push back against government cutbacks and criminalization of the poor and homeless. While there are still advocates and activists doing “first wave” work, the creation of some national funding to support housing in community organizations (such as the National Homelessness Initiative in 1999 and the National Housing Strategy in 2018) may have contributed to an environment which deterred organizing efforts among activists working in these organizations, because advocacy put organizations at risk of jeopardizing funding for emergency services (Schwan, 2016). Despite recent shifts legally to remove strict limits on how non-profits and charities may engage in non-partisan political advocacy⁹, organizations may continue to avoid explicit political activism or advocacy due to aftereffects of this, or a “fear of admitting to problems that may put their funding or reputation in jeopardy” (Schwan, 2016, p. 219)¹⁰.

Schwan distinguishes “first wave” grassroots, frontline activist efforts from “second wave” advocates (2016, p. 102), who emphasize the necessity of working in direct partnership with governments to change the landscape on issues of homelessness, and what Reynolds frames as harms which come from professionalism (2021) which devalues the work already being done by those experiencing (or who have experienced) homelessness. This second-wave of homelessness advocacy may be linked to the State-led incorporation of the Housing First Model throughout the country (Courtney et al., 2014, Gaetz, Scott & Gulliver, 2013), as mentioned above, and coupled with moves in different communities in Canada to “end homelessness” (Gaetz et al., 2016, p.13, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021, Mouvement pour

⁹ Including the Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruling that the previous regulation set by the Canadian Revenue Agency limiting “political activities” to 10% of activities was in violation of freedom of expression

¹⁰ For a deeper analysis of the realities and tensions of programming, funding and measuring outcomes in a Toronto-based educational program for homeless youth, see Bridgman 2001

mettre fin à l'itinérance à Montréal, 2015), as well as many municipal and provincial plans to end homelessness (A Way Home Canada, 2016).

Alternatively, framings of activism, and political action, are important to how many of the youth in this study understand their work (Fieldnotes, November 2018)--work they are doing to organize around housing precarity, but also the political survival work of their everyday lives (Hern, 2013, Sabzalian, 2019). What we've seen in this research, echoing other lived experience advocacy (Jarrett, 2016; Nelson, 2020,) is that working to "end homelessness" is inherently political for people experiencing it. Before we even began interviews, each youth researcher articulated reflections on their own experiences of homelessness within a context (and critique) of the current social order, including experiences of racism, trans-exclusive policies, mental health stigma, addictions, capitalism, colonialism and neoliberalism (Fieldnotes, 2019; Watchorn & Malenfant, 2019). Particularly grounded in the exclusion of young people in many spaces where decision-making happens (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008) youth activism has important links to notions of empowerment and, more importantly, youth agency to refuse collaborating with those holding positions of power in the very systems within which youth experience marginalization, violence and experiences of homelessness—as the sole form of "political" action (Cruz, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Plaster, 2012).

Farrugia and Gerrard (2016) position homelessness research as steeped in the politics of power and privilege" (p. 268):

The visible presence of homelessness has prompted substantial policy and research interest internationally, and research narratives have played a central role in the constitution of homelessness as a significant and politically visible matter of concern. This research attention represents a genuine desire to bring attention to, and contribute to the alleviation of, homelessness. At the same time, the political investments driving homelessness research create entanglements between research narratives and the discursive definitions and pragmatic requirements of welfare service interventions" (206,

p. 268.) building the “theoretical and epistemological basis of hegemonic homelessness research” (2016, p. 271)

Learning from the experiences of youth, it is clear that (political) hegemonic understandings of homelessness impact their everyday lives. Thus, how we conceptualize and enact responses and supports is always a political undertaking. Imagining this work as apolitical diminishes our capacity to address and understand the “ruling apparatuses...which organize, regulate lead and direct contemporary capitalist societies” (Smith, 1990, p. 2). While it is promising that youth homelessness literature is beginning to address systemic issues in more robust ways (Nichols, 2014, Gaetz & Dej, 2017, Buchnea et al., 2021), future responses to homelessness must attend to the political nature of these relations, framings, policies, and practices (and who is able to shape these (Nelson, 2020)).

Much of the literature grappling with these approaches to homelessness understand it as a complex, “intractable” or wicked problem (Farrugia & Gerrard, 2016; Schwan, 2019). This framing may position those “on the ground”—working in communities, those with lived experience—as too close to the issue to address the bigger picture of “macro” work necessary to solve complex issues (Farrugia & Gerrard, 2016; Reynolds, 2019). Some activists critique the ways homelessness and poverty are framed as intractable as part of invisibilizing the work happening in community, and prioritize professional knowledge over lived experience, in order to maintain a dichotomy of who can “know” and “act” on these issues and:

mystifies the causes of poverty, making it seem like some kind of mysterious math problem that only people with advanced degrees can figure out. But any poor person knows that poverty is caused by the greed of their bosses, landlords, and health insurance companies, by systems of white supremacy and colonialism, and by wars and forced migrations (Spade, 2020, p. 26)

There are emerging scholars who argue for intentionally complicating the dichotomy between those who are experiencing homelessness/doing frontline work and those who can act with a

more holistic, broad or “expert” view of the issues (Jarrett, 2016; Nelson, 2020; Paradis & Mosher, 2012; Reynolds, 2019; Yarbrough 2020). I argue that power, access, and imagination shape how we understand roles of professional and those with lived knowledges as differently positioned to address homelessness (i.e. those who are “in the weeds” (fieldnotes, 2018) of everyday homelessness and those who aren’t (Malenfant, Nichols & Schwan, 2019, Voronka, 2016)). Work across different roles, experiences, and strategies is necessary to both understand the everyday realities of housing precarity and harness the labour to push in every possible direction to “end homelessness” (Smith, 2020). In the following chapter I will explore how the ways we have attempted to work and analyze research in this project lend themselves to building these links with intention.

Conclusion

This review of the literature suggests youth homelessness is a much more complex phenomenon than young people “running away” or simply not wanting to follow rules at home; rather, it points to deep and complex inequities that are built into society as it exists today and which undergird young people’s experiences of homelessness. It also suggests that centering youth agency is necessary to respond differently to youth homelessness, and we must support diverse to lead the work. I am someone who knows about youth homelessness from my own experiences (Smith, 1987) I see my own work as political, and believe we must grapple with real questions about how homelessness can be tangibly prevented within a nation State that builds itself on the displacement, marginalization, and invisibility of certain communities and individuals. I ground my work in the literature outlined in this chapter because the policy and social contexts within which individuals experience homelessness are important to understand. This broader context is particularly important when peoples’ experiences of homelessness (my

own, youth we worked with, and more broadly) are framed as individual problems and failures. By framing youth homelessness within the broader policy and practice contexts that organize how homelessness is experienced today, we can see how preventing and ending youth homelessness should be a key responsibility of the State but must be shaped by and with communities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDINGS AND RESEARCH METHODS

Within this project, approaches to methodology and methods were intended to be collaborative and participatory whenever possible and, in keeping with that spirit, I intentionally use we, our, and us to describe the work we have done when applicable. As a team of six researchers (myself, Naomi, and youth researchers Laurence, Maxime, Mickey and Shayana) each of us brought unique experiences and skills to this project and played important roles in how we undertook our research. I also intentionally use I when I am espousing my own groundings and hopes for this work, heeding Tuck and Yang's (2013) warning that "when we theorize the change we want and how to get there, the "we" becomes very important to unpack, as the desires of different groups for change radically depart"¹¹ (p. 246). For this reason, I use we and I in different parts of this chapter, to honour the work we undertake as a team while trying not to speak on behalf of the desires of other team members. I position myself/ourselves in line with the anarchist principles guiding the work and to make consistent efforts to combat structures that perpetuate (symbolically, emotionally, physically) violent hierarchies and oppression (Springer, 2010), as well as to bring power dynamics into view from my "standpoint of experience" (Smith, 1990, p. 2). Here, I will provide an overview of some of these influences that have shaped my research as well the subsequent methods we have used in this project.

Methodological Groundings

¹¹ Tuck and Yang expand on these departures as firmly grounded in relations to power and the State: "whether it is the desires of the privileged and powerful to stay in power (or not); the desires of the neoliberal machinery to expand the market; the desires of the dominated to be less violated within nation-state arrangements; or the desires of those whose lives were interrupted by empire for a return/renewal of life after, beyond, and despite the modern arrangement of nation-states" (2013, p. 246)

Our approach to this project was underpinned by a desire to do research differently—combatting historical research approaches in the lives of homeless people and others that perpetuate “pathologization, paternalism, an extractive exoticification,” (Yarbrough, 2020, p. 59) and “treat young people as objects rather than as subjects” (Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016, p.4). We aimed to interrogate our complex positions and relations within these histories, wherein “we enter ourselves into the relations we are concerned to explicate as methods or practices” (Smith, 1990, p. 9). We also hoped to undertake research that was aimed at action (and, often, direct action (Graeber, 2009a)). As part of these commitments, it was important that we were not studying the objectified lives of youth who had or were experiencing homelessness, but rather that we were speaking with young people to better understand the processes and practices that they were engaging with at different points of their lives—before, during and after periods of housing precarity and homelessness.

In our efforts to work toward both systemic change as well as tangible and direct changes in the lives of youth, we aimed to be participatory in multiple ways. This included honouring the knowledge and expertise they brought into the project (i.e. through setting up dialogues with legal students where co-researchers could collaborate to better understand the ways professionals were actually enacting laws and policies), as well as supporting young people in their day-to-day navigation of social structures (i.e. through working together to understand how Québec schools, social assistance, mental health systems could be better accessed, ensuring whenever possible they had tangible financial and relational support). We also attempted, throughout the project, to provide knowledge and opportunities for young people to “analyze their social context, to collectively engage in critical research, and resist repressive state and ideological institutions” (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008, p. 2). In these efforts I have drawn particularly on

critical youth participatory action research (YPAR) (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Gillen, 2014; Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016), anarchist theory and practice (Kaltefleiter & Nocella, 2012, Ferrell, 2009; Graeber, 2004; Shantz, 2017; Shannon, 2009; Rouhani; 2012) and institutional ethnography (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Smith, 1987, 1990, 2004; Smith, 1990; Nichols and Ruglis, 2021; Nichols, Griffith & McLarnon, 2018; Nichols, 2014).

In this chapter I lay out how these methodological groundings have informed my work and our development and planning of different phases of the research project. Following a discussion of my methodological influences, I explain these different phases of research, training and collaboration between our team members, and the ways we organized our work. I outline the ways that each mode of inquiry complements the others, in order to maximize the strengths and address the limitations of each approach—I have in particular attempted to merge Institutional Ethnography with anarchist modes of thinking and practice in order to consider the most impactful ways we can mobilize both approaches. I will also speak to the compatibilities of these methodological groundings, particularly within the aim for social justice and the rejection of social theory being applied in a top-down manner to the lives of people.

Youth Participatory Action Research

The first of these methodological groundings is Youth Participatory Action Research, or YPAR, which can be understood as “the practice of mentoring young people to become social scientists by engaging them in all aspects of the research cycle, from developing research questions and examining relevant literature to collecting and analyzing data and offering findings about social issues that they find meaningful and relevant” (Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016, p.2). YPAR, similar to both anarchist and Institutional Ethnographic approaches to research, is

understood as more than a methodology or method, but rather a “radical epistemological challenge to the traditions of social science, most critically on the topic of where knowledge resides” (Fine, 2008, p. 215).

YPAR distinct from “training young people to mimic the behaviours of adult researchers” (Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016, p. 2) and equipping youth to do research *as youth* already increases the political potential of YPAR as an approach. While not always unproblematically applied, our project emphasized the role of youth researchers to not only act “as youth”—and not follow preset guidelines of how we might act as adult researchers—but was designed to benefit from their perspectives as youth (as youth who had different racial, gender-based, linguistic, etc. experiences across systems), to emphasize reciprocity, (for example through recruiting, through being able to connect with participants, and make them feel safe (Cammarota & Fine 2008)), and to offer alternatives that weren’t necessarily bound by rigid institutional imaginaries of what “ending homelessness” must look like—to “challenge traditional paradigms, texts and theories [and] foreground the experiential knowledge of young people” (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008, p. 12).

YPAR is linked to PAR as a broader approach to research that values participation/co-created research oriented at tangible actions (Garnett et al., 2019; Jordan & Kapoor, 2016). Similar to the youth-specific housing interventions discussed in the previous chapter, YPAR attempts to understand the unique ways research can include, speak to and serve young people (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008). Action, the A in both acronyms, speak to the need for projects to have some impacts outside of creating research for its own sake “action” is not uniformly defined in the literature but mostly references activities like civic engagement and presenting to public/public figures, and/or artistic outputs (podcasts, photography, etc.) (Nichols

and Ruglis, 2021, Smith et al., 2020, Ferrer, Lorenzetti & Shaw (2019)). However, YPAR also recognizes the ways that actions must be understood with a broad definition and be grounded within youth's conceptions of what an action looks like, based in recognition of the potential of all students to be "experts in their own lives" and "the humility of adult researchers [and] their duty to honor those who entrust them with their stories and to strive to share in the struggle toward social justice" (Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2016, p. 4).

Literature outlining the use of participatory approaches to research, broadly, often focuses on the "emancipatory" or activist nature of this work (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008, Garnett et al., 2019; Dolan et al, 2015). Many other scholars suggest projects fail to achieve their intended aims, due to imposed performance metrics of the neoliberal university (Chatterton, Hodkinson & Pickerill, 2010; Jeppessen & Adamiak, 2017; Hill, 2012), lack of resources or supports (Haworth, 2017; Gillen 2014), or the overwhelmingness of the social problems they are attempting to take on (Kumashiro, 2002). These have all been considerations for this research as well. In particular, methodological reflections on participatory work often point to the need to rework academic obligations, which hinder the success of participatory projects. As the Autonomous Geographies Collective argues, "challenging the imposition of the 'law of value' within higher education and its colonisation of our labour time is necessary if we are to defend and reclaim our academic freedom to carry out long-term "collective political work" (2010 p. 250).

It is important to reflect on whether participation actually leads to benefits for young people, particularly when projects may demand significant labour and risk from youth (Flicker, 2008) and "discourses around empowerment...need to be continuously questioned" (Flicker, 2008, p. 83). One approach to combat these limitations may be grounded in the youth-centered

ideals for this approach, even if there are many institutional barriers standing in the way, and a broad concept of what “actions” may look like, including actions which do not require participation in State institutional or bureaucratic appeals for “change” (Choudry & Kuyek, 2012). I am particularly hopeful about links between research and direct action¹² (including mutual aid and relationship building), which is a common approach in youth led movements outside of the academy (Juris & Pleyers, 2009) and holds radical possibilities for realizing the “emancipatory” or “empowering” nature of this participatory research.

Our approach to research has always attempted to situate our team within historical research practices and to pay attention to the power dynamics between researchers and participants, especially youth. This ranged from discussions exploring of the historical role of ethnography as “handmaiden to colonialism” (Graeber, 2014, p. 80), to meeting youth researchers where, when, and how made the most sense to them. This also included taking pauses when members of the team needed, and prioritizing attending to the different mental, physical, and emotional needs of each team member. We also attempted to balance the demands on youth researchers’ labour with ensuring they were (and continue to be) supported to participate in different phases of the project. While much of the research on participatory work highlights training for recruitment and data collection (and the “access” benefits that this strategy provides) (Flicker, 2008), it is also important to consider how processes of research, writing, and dissemination take shape. By controlling how the words of young people are presented, curated and disseminated, academics may “suck the life out of those they describe” (Ferrell 2009, p. 79) and take the words from the mouths of the marginalized in order to translate them, jargonize

¹² Direct Action can be understood as “any form of political resistance that is overt, militant, and confrontational, but that falls short of outright military insurrection” (Graeber, 2009a, p. 204) and “is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free” (Graeber 2009a, p. 2013)

them, and make them relatable or knowable to other academics (or, palatable to the ‘public’).

Akom, Ginwright and Cammarota (2008) suggest one approach to combatting this is the creation of peer-led “youthtopias,” which are:

Traditional and non-traditional spaces where young people depend on one another’s skills, perspectives, and experiential knowledge, to generate original, multi-textual, youth-driven cultural products that embody a critique of oppression, a desire for social justice, and ultimately lay the foundation for community empowerment and social change (p. 3).

For the authors, these include understanding how race (and other intersecting forms of oppression) can be combatted by young people *through* understanding how race is experienced within and outside of institutions, and how young people experience these structures of inequity in their day-to-day lives (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008). This also includes elements of direct action to impact the lives of youth participants immediately (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008).

For our team, embodying this ideal relied heavily on recognizing and mobilizing the different knowledge that different team members brought—for example Naomi knew how to advocate within systems in ways none of us understood or had experience with, and youth co-researchers knew the actual conditions of access for services, safe spaces for shelter or street workers, and had racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of institutions in ways Naomi and I wouldn’t know otherwise. The generosity of knowledge we shared, and where, at different points, we each “depend[ed] on one another’s skills, perspectives, and experiential knowledge” (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008, p. 3) became a basis of the relational ties that made our team strong. The time we were able to take to build and maintain these relationships from the outset of the project, within and outside of a research context, were direct benefits to each of us, within and outside of the realm of research activities.

Is Participation Enough?

YPAR and participatory approaches have informed this research since the start of the project, however, I have asked if participation is enough (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016)—particularly within academic research structures that often relegate that participation to pockets of projects such as recruitment, data collection and some knowledge mobilization (and, as we attempted to do, sometimes research design, interview guide development, and the development of research aims). Existing models for participation suggest that youth are being invited to join structures that are already developed or controlled by others (Cataldo et al., 2021; Cruz, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014). I believe that participatory methodologies are a minimum standard to ensuring research is grounded in the lives of people, but must be used in tandem with other tools and approaches that work to actively resist and change research contexts and move past participation toward resistance and youth leadership (Deleon, 2008; Fernandez, 2009; Gillen, 2014; Jun, 2012).

Performative modes of participation only further the marginalization that is experienced by many communities, as it creates the illusion that change is happening while failing to address the underlying structures that require this to be youth participation in a project rather than youth leadership—or more importantly, youth resistance (Caraballo et al., 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Fine, 2014; Guishard, 2014). Youth resistance is always already happening, and must resist performative participation in favour of “bone-deep participation, acts that...change the lives of participants and the lives of those around them” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 14):

Resistance is resisting even when we think it is not doing anything, even when we’re not looking. Resistance creates highly visible moments...but there [are] many unseen moments. In this respect, deep participation doesn’t necessarily deliver a new policy, a new regime, a political victory. It might re/new an epistemology. Sometimes it can deliver a movement. Other times, it forms nodes and networks and pathways to be activated episodically for more explicit political participation. (Tuck & Yang 2014, p. 14).

Ultimately, neither participation nor resistance are enough if they are not working toward “transformation...otherwise it’s just reorganizing the order of the chairs on the *Titanic*” and will result in “integration into the existing frame, not the change we [seek]” (Fordham, 2014, p. 102). While there will always be resistance to oppression, and it is important to highlight and value this, resistance is neither transformation nor justice (Reynolds, 2021). For this reason, I believe that mobilizing both the activist orientation of Institutional Ethnography and anarchist methodologies in this project to create “nodes and networks and pathways” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 14) has not only worked at ensuring YPAR approaches are grounded in resistance but consider the necessity for direct action, including building networks of transformation from institutional contexts that require us to conceptualize youth participation in the first place.

Institutional Ethnography

Following Nichols’s previous work (including 2018, 2017a, 2015, 2014) this project began with Smith’s Institutional Ethnographic (I.E.) approach, that aims to approach the “object of our inquiry, as practices, methods, procedures—as activity, rather than an entity” (1990, p. 90). This is important as we continue to reflect on the history of research *on* homelessness—or homeless people—as an objectifying and obfuscating practice, and opt instead to understand through experiences, texts, practices and procedures, the social activity and relations that young peoples are experiencing as “homelessness.” I.E.’s Marxist-Feminist grounding, particularly in Smith’s focus on Marx’s call for “a positive science of society” (2004, p. 446) that actively links research to the material conditions of peoples’ lives, has informed the planning, ethics, data collection, analysis, and continues to inform how we understand the things we have learned through this project. Smith’s unique interpretation of Marx forms the basis of her “sociology for

people” (2005), which fuses well with the (Y)PAR strategies (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016) to reject the application of theory onto the experiences of people to explain their everyday lives (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008, Mirra Garcia & Morrell, 2016). In her reading, Smith argues that Marx and Engels view ideology as perpetuating the decontextualization of concepts; instead she emphasizes the need to maintain the materiality and historicity of people’s lives, particularly in their idea of “consciousness:”

Consciousness is always and only the consciousness of individuals; it is embedded in the actual activities of people, in their social relationships, and in economic and technological level of development through which individuals subsist. Consciousness as social, that is, as it exists among people through the materiality of language, embodies ideas, principles, law, moral and religious beliefs, which are created in the context of actual social existence as it is lived.” (Smith, 2004, p.449)

In this, consciousness becomes a term through which the “actual activities of people” can be understood, not as independent of the social but perpetually within it and of it. This connection is key in why we have begun with, and continue to return to, the material realities of people’s experiences, and how seemingly distant policies and texts can have significant and embodied effects in young people’s lives. It also reminds us that policies and texts, which appear to exist independently of authors, emerge from the actual embodied activities of people. The action, or activism, or changes that I.E. attempts to support, then, begins in (and drives) this work—as Smith emphasizes, “we want to know more so that she can also” (1987, p. 127).

Smith’s feminist-Marxist perspective also provides a starting point to outline the ways in which capitalism obfuscates and creates an environment in which social relations become alienated from the structures and relations that organize them (1990). Smith also links the tracing of this obfuscation to action, rather than philosophy for philosophy’s sake (2004), to understand the “real” social through “mak(ing) observable the social relations concealed in the commodity” (2004, p. 458). For this project in particular, where the obfuscation as well as erasure and

devaluation of young people’s understandings or knowledges is a regular occurrence as they attempt to navigate systems, this grounding is important.

Additionally, through our methods and data collection with participants (and in conversations with our team), we were able to access and trace out different institutional relations and processes that would otherwise remain obfuscated if we were working in a less diverse group. For example, our work with legal scholars demonstrated how multiple standpoints could offer important details on how legislation is actually applied by people (police officers) and experienced by people (homeless youth) in ways that added to the knowledge of all team members—and would not be knowable from looking either at only laws nor lived experiences of young people alone. I.E. shaped our research questions, our interview scripts, and how we engaged with texts and legal policies and laws throughout the project (more on this below)—as well as how we’ve created a code-book, conducted analysis, and are understanding our “findings”—through attempting to refuse, even now, to fit the stories of youth into neat theoretical boxes. This grounding, when smooshed with YPAR, further shaped our participatory team dynamic.

Following George Smith’s activist argument for I.E., as particularly useful to any researcher who “stands outside political-administrative regimes intent on managing society” (1990, p. 631), we tried to mobilize the “ground-up” potential of I.E. for activism, particularly within these “regimes” that can be difficult to access (for example, police protocols (Smith 1990)). While we traced out the policies, laws, and experiences that made up youth trajectories of homelessness, we were regularly reminded that there are limitations to simply understanding how things unfold and are experienced. For many youth participants and researchers, while perhaps not knowing the particular policies or practices that were in play, they already knew how

these institutions worked (in that they didn't work for them) and learning about the policies that denied them service didn't necessarily help them navigate these institutional contexts any more effectively. This drove me to continuously reflect on and find ways to ensure the activist potential of I.E. was realized through doing something with knowledge of the institutional processes and structures we were trying to understand.

Anarchist Methodologies

We must remember that our work is in the middle, the present, the space of “what’s happening now,” and to this extent we can never afford to become distanced from the realities of the world. This doesn’t mean that we should all be activists as well as academics; it means that we should see our work itself as activism. (Jun, 2012, p. 300)

An anarchist approach aims to always keep the action—and the need to be acting to imagine *and* build socially-just futures—at the heart of each and every aspect of our work. An anarchist approach, then, asks, how do we collectively organize so that not only does she know also (Smith, 1987), but that we are making shifts and changes that ensure power is wrested from the positions and processes that ensured she didn't know in the first place. For anarchist researchers, this work must take place in the “here and now” (Deleon, 2012 p. 124), and act to continuously transform structures and institutions that cause harm.

The commensurability of IE and anarchist methodologies has been integral to my understanding of this research, particularly in the grounding of research in our experiences, in the calls for tangible action, and the rejection of theorizing for theory's sake (Shantz, 2017, Rouhani, 2012, Pusey, 2017, Kaltefleiter et al., 2012, Graeber, 2011, 2009a, 2009b, Jun, 2012, Ferrell, 2009, Armaline, 2009, Williams, 2017). In my approach, anarchist methodologies have allowed us to build on I.E.'s potential as a tool for social change, particularly through thinking on and

seeking out everyday revolutionary actions. Anarchist approaches to research and learning “doesn’t mean [we] have to be against theory” (Graeber, 2004, p. 7), echoing instead the institutional ethnographic approach that theory not be groundlessly applied to people’s experiences (Smith, 1990). Within an anarchist methodology, “one’s means must be consonant with one’s ends” (Graeber 2004, p.7), and carrying out work in inherently hierarchical, commodified and exclusionary institutions (which could be one way to describe a university setting) is not justifiable as a sustainable solution for our future, regardless of the “good” which may come out of this work. Further, as YPAR and IE also necessitate reflection and accountability to the very communities or experiences where research is undertaken, anarchist methodologies push for work that does not necessarily need to follow a set structure, sequence or goal (Jeppesen & Adamiak, 2017). This has meant that this research is always (re)thinking of a radically different future for myself, co-researchers and young people experiencing homelessness.

Anarchist methodologies also take up the issue—discussed within both YPAR research and IE—of the ways that academic disciplines can extinguish possibility for social change (Graeber, 2004, Ferrell, 2009). In this sense, socially-just is always at-risk of losing its radical potential within academic and State institutions. Jun writes, “even honest, clear-eyed, and well-intentioned academics—the kind of academics we *want* to be—constantly run the risk of valorizing the abstract and theoretical at the expense of the concrete and the practical” (Jun, 2012, p.284). This must also be met with resistance (Tuck & Yang, 2014), finding a balance between working to break down the institutions that facilitate these ongoing power imbalances and hierarchies, through refusing to uncritically use their means whenever possible. An anarchist approach to research pushes us to imagine, within ground-up understandings, the construction of

“institutions of a new society” within the old to “expose, subvert, and undermine structures of domination” and “demonstrate that those structures are unnecessary” (Graeber 2004, p.7). These require us to “grow new solidarities” (Spade, 2020, p. 2).

These processes sometimes seem at odds with one another. For example, is it reasonable to appropriate academic resources--which may be seen as unjustifiable means for social change (as part of funding structures which maintain gross inequities)--in order to support and employ homeless youth? For many anarchists, academic processes (Jun, 2012) or policy issues (Graeber 2004, 2009a) are not worth engaging in, as “by participating in policy debates the very best one can achieve is to limit the damage” (Graeber, 2004, p. 8). However, limiting the damage, in a system that is both full of harm and a daily part of most young people’s lives (Hogarth, 2018) seems important, particularly in ways where we are still able to imagine and work toward building new systems. This must involve bringing “half-thoughts” to our work and collaborating with those who may hold the other halves (Jeppesen & Adamiak, 2013), particularly those who are most impacted by these oppressive systems (Suissa, 2006; Haworth, 2012; Milstein, 2010). In this work, this has meant imagining how research can undermine or utilize these existing structures *for* change (for example, seeing IE as opening up space in sociological discussions for multiple knowledges (Smith, 2004) or YPAR as creating research programming for youth in schools to dictate what they want to learn, speak to racism in classrooms, or to run their own classes (Gillen, 2014, Krueger-Henny, 2016)).

Finally, important to bring from anarchist methodology is the notion of radical imagination. Radical imagination--while a part of (intersecting) feminist (Dowsett, 2010; Fraser, 2006; Lewis, 2007) queer/trans (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014; Melz, 2021) Black (Johnson, 2019; Kelley, 2002; Rickford, 2016) and Indigenous (Alfred, 2010) resistance--is also key tenet

of anarchism, a cornerstone of anarchist methodology, and is regularly critiqued for contributing to the unfeasibility and utopianism of anarchist organizing. Spade describes anarchist modes of organizing, and mutual aid, as not only radically imagining but “as “inherently antiauthoritarian [and] demonstrating how we can do things together in ways we were *told not to imagine*” (Spade, 2020, p. 16, my emphasis).” Anarchists frame radical imaginings as critical to building new structures of knowing and being—that imagination does not mean the structures we are engaging with are “imaginary”:

[Radical imagination] is a crucial aspect of the fundamentally political and always collective (though rarely autonomous) labour of reweaving the social world. Despite its problematic history as the fetish of the European “Enlightenment,” we cannot let go of a radicalizing idea of the imagination because it speaks to our ability to create *something else*, and to create it together (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010, p. iii, emphasis in original text)

I have recognized that, within our team, our imaginings (grounded in embodied material realities (Graeber, 2007)) are often far more radical than in other contexts exploring prevention of youth homelessness. I maintain that when you are homeless, radical imagination is a necessity. The realities of homelessness—death, poverty, precarity, hunger, suffering—also dictate that acting on this radical imagination is a necessity. The experiences that were shared with us over the course of this project demand that we incorporate not only action, activism or “a million small experiments” (Kaba, 2021, p. 12) toward revolution into our work, but that we *must* imagine things differently, concretely, and urgently, for young people who spoke with us and others who experience the realities of youth homelessness every day.

Situating Schools as Sites of Power and Hierarchy: Groundings of Understanding

Everyday Life as Illuminating Relations of Ruling and Violence

Following an I.E. approach (Smith, 1987, 2005), the data presented in this dissertation, as well as the learnings from work with YARR, broadly, are ways to understand the structures and systems that organize our lives—to better understand the “ruling relations” (Smith, 1990, p. 6), or “the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate the multiple sites of ruling” (Smith, 1990, p.6). As such, throughout the dissertation I situate individual experiences in schools within broader structures of power and ruling. At times I describe how these broader power structures organize the lives of young people as “violent,” particularly as a way to mobilize I.E. and other activist methodologies to understand the connections between the conditions which shape individual experiences in schools. Following Naomi’s previous work, this project is also grounded in the assertion that:

The underlying conditions that shape school violence are social and political economic relations that operate globally but manifest locally as unequal educational, social, health, and criminological outcomes at the level of individual children, youth, and families (Nichols, 2019, p. 179).

YPAR approaches also aim to both illuminate and resist “historical and present-day relationships between knowledge-production...and epistemic violence” (Nichols & Ruglis, 2021) and while I.E. argues for the need to illuminate power, for the purpose of shared emancipation, YPAR grounds this in clear ethical and methodological assertions that young people, in particular, are knowers of their realities and can claim power through doing research—in addition to providing clearer understandings of often obfuscated social structures (Mirra, 2016).

While both I.E. and YPAR argue for the need to illuminate social structures both for the purpose of reform and radical change (Nichols, Griffith & McLarnon, 2018 Nichols & Ruglis, 2021; Smith, D. 2005; Smith, G., 1990) within anarchist theories and methodologies both educational institutions and structures will always, necessarily, be violent (Graeber, 2007a). Throughout this dissertation I engage with theory and research which qualifies the use of the

term “violence” in different ways, including viewing State systems and institutions as specifically enacting “political violence,” “epistemic violence,” “symbolic violence,” “institutional violence, “systemic violence.”

It is important to maintain distinctions between physical and other forms of violence. Drawing from Woodson (1933) and Fanon (1963), Picower (2021) notes that discussions “connecting curriculum to physical violence” (p.58) have been longstanding within lineages of Black scholarship on education, arguing that the two are intimately connected, in that they “both serve the explicit purpose of maintaining power and control” (Picower, 2021, p. 58). Echoing Indigenous scholars’ claims of violence within classrooms across Turtle Island (Sabzalian, 2019), Picower argues that curricular violence which invisibilizes BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) realities and reinforces normative histories serves as a form of “slow violence” (2021, p. 58). In defining the term, Nixon argues that “slow violence occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (2011, p. 2) and is “typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon, 2011, p. 2).

Anarchist theory, alternatively, is explicit in framing these multiple understandings of violence *as violence* (Gelderloos, 2010)—arguing that the violence inherent in State structures includes intersections of all forms of violence (Graeber, 2008). Complicating Arendt’s arguments that all social subjects can access violence (and, in fact, violence may be necessary for individual liberation (Arendt, 1970, p. 547)) anarchist theorist Springer suggests violence reflects State power and State systems, arguing that all individual instances of violence are positioned differently (along unequal relationships to State power) within broader social structures of violence and power hierarchies (Springer, 2010). While Foucauldian and Arendtian analyses may see violence (both political and “biological”) as a contributing force of power (Oksala,

2010), anarchist theorists see violence as an essential product of all unjust power hierarchies (Springer, 2010; Williams, 2017).

This broad understanding of violence is not to diminish the instances of physical violence and their impacts—but rather make visible and real the violations and harms that institutions perpetuate *and* dismiss/deny (Nelson, 2020; Richards, 2020). While experiences of physical violence are disproportionately common for youth experiencing homelessness (Dank et al., 2015; Gaetz, O’Grady & Buccieri, 2010; Nichols, 2018) in this dissertation, I focus on relationships between everyday experiences, violence, institutions and broader social organization.

I also pay attention to how the concept of violence is operationalized by the young people on our research team and those we interviewed. The majority of participants (n=16) who used the term violence did so when referring to physical violence. Four young people spoke of “psychological violence” (Nathan), “police and State violence” (Leah), “violence” as inherent to the structure of drug and alcohol treatment programs (Benny) and “emotional violence” (Diana). Within our research team, the concept of violence was used to refer to physical violence (for example, within families, by police officers and healthcare workers, fieldnotes, 2019) as well as more symbolic or institutional forms of violence--the violence of large-scale opposition of residents to the development of a transitional housing unit serving people using drugs (fieldnotes 2019) or the violence of not being believed when reporting abuse in schools (fieldnotes, 2018).¹³

Violence is also a framing taken up in different ways by key Canadian scholars with lived experience of homelessness to discuss experiences (their own and within their research) in schools and other State systems (Bohnert, 2016; Nelson, 2020, Smith, 2020, Watchorn, 2020) as

¹³Within the codebook we developed as a team, which was used to code and analyze the findings presented in this dissertation, sub-codes for violence were also defined, and defined to broadly apply to these various experiences of violence (i.e. “violence” under the policing code was defined as “symbolic and physical violence; forms of brutality; where the police take you to the edge of the city and beat you”, while “violence” under the Relationships code was defined as “(sexual, verbal, symbolic, physical forms of violence)” See Appendix B for more examples of definitions of violence co-developed with youth researchers.

well as prominent theorists and scholars from communities that are most impacted by State violence: Indigenous (Avalos, 2019; Laboucan-Massimo, 2017; Palmater, 2019; Rodríguez, 2019; Sabzalian, 2019; Thistle, 2017; Tuhiwai Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2008; Women's Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2015), and Black Liberation theorists (Bey, 2020; Rodriguez & Kokka, 2021; Mustafa, 2017), women and gender diverse authors (Arendt, 1970; Nelson, 2020; Jarrett, 2016), LGBTQ2SAI+ authors (Kumashiro, 2002; Lemaster, 2017; Panter, 2020; Plaster, 2012). Throughout this dissertation I ground my own analyses of violence within schools and State structures within these theorists' larger bodies of work.

How Research Went Down

In this section, I will outline how this project has taken shape in practice. I will begin with the questions that originally guided the development of the research project, explain the broader context within which this research occurred, and then look at the different phases of this work from 2017-present.

The research questions guiding this work were:

1. What barriers to education are young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability currently encountering?
2. What provincial and federal policies and institutional practices shape these experiences?
3. What types of educational interventions will address homeless youth's unique needs and experiences in the context of Canada's shifting political-economic conditions?

These questions were explored within the context of the greater project, led by Naomi and myself and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which also asked the same of the child protection system, the healthcare and mental health system, the criminal justice and legal system, and social services and housing systems,

with an understanding of the interconnectedness of youth's experiences within many of these institutions. My doctoral work fit inside of this larger project, with further funding by a Vanier doctoral scholarship and a scholarship from the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

The first question informed the approach taken to data collection with young people who had or were experiencing housing precarity. Analysis of policies and institutional practices occurred before, during, and after data collection, including discussions with professionals and analysis of policies and other texts that the interviews with youth suggested might be important to review. This approach ensured we were understanding these experiences and processes from many different standpoints (Smith, 1987), including standpoints within the institutions themselves. Addressing the second question began with our initial work with the youth team and legal students, and has continued in a review of educational policies, interventions, and programming, stemming from the interviews themselves. For example, if a young person is discussing a particular policy that led to their expulsion, I collected these texts in order to understand the ways they are created and “devise an official means for proceeding” (Nichols, Griffith & McLarnon, 2018, p. 120) and become actionable by those working in institutions. The third research question was addressed both by asking young people what could have prevented their homelessness in schools, what interventions worked or might have worked, or what strategies they were employing outside of schools to ensure they were surviving, or even learning in important, alternative ways. This also included looking at interventions that exist elsewhere, promising new practices, and educational plans and reports. Each of these questions were addressed throughout different parts of the project and didn't necessarily follow a linear timeline.

Our partnership with Dans la rue officially began in 2017 after a meeting to outline points of mutual interest in the topic of youth homelessness prevention, with a specific focus on schools. Dans la rue is a service based in Tio'tia:ke/Montréal that serves young people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity. It was founded by a Priest, Father Emmett Johns, known within the community as “Pops” (leading to the name for their drop-in day centre, Chez Pop’s), and has expanded from a van that served hot dogs and provided a space to warm up for young people sleeping rough to a large-scale organization with multiple sites. Dans la rue currently employs over 75 intervention and outreach workers, administrators, family service workers and housing liaisons, as well as teachers, psychologists, and a nurse (Dans la rue, 2020). The majority of services are offered at Chez Pop’s, the day centre, though outreach occurs with the “van” and transitional and emergency housing has been offered at “The Bunker” since 2003 (Dans la rue, 2020). Each service targets different and intersecting populations of young people: the van continues to provide hot dogs to people experiencing homelessness of any age, the Bunker provides housing for youth aged 12-21 (ages may be extended for trans* youth), and the day centre serves all young people aged 12-25 (Dans la rue, 2020).

Dans la rue approached me in Winnipeg earlier that year, following a presentation about my proposed doctoral research, expressing an interest in exploring homelessness prevention and education. This began with conversations, following Naomi’s approach to community research (Nichols, 2019, Nichols & Ruglis, 2021; Griffith, Nichols & McLarnon, 2018) wherein we outlined the ways in which we could support one another, particularly in asking what kinds of research would benefit Dans la Rue in their service delivery and advocacy. I spent time at the Chez Pop’s day centre, a two-story building in the Centre-Sud neighbourhood of Montréal, which houses the majority of Dans la rue’s services, including a school, clothing room, garden,

lunch service, art room and a variety of supports for youth, including psychologists, job seeking services, and veterinary services. Outreach began as a series of conversations between myself and Dave (the housing coordinator and our primary staff contact at Dans la rue), the employment coordinator, and other workers at the Day Centre to understand how this research could be conducted so as to contribute to, rather than disrupt, existing operations.

We worked with Dave to draft a call for youth researchers in French and English. While Statistics Canada defines “youth” as those 16-28 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2021), we recruited “youth” aged 16-29, both in our ethics proposal and in our recruitment of participants and co-researchers. This was, in part, to address the ways that transitions to what is typically understood as “adulthood” may occur later for those who experience homelessness (Gaetz, 2014), as well increased frequency that all young Canadians are having to depend on parental and other supports for housing until a later age, up to age 29 (Gaetz, 2014; Gulliver, 2015), as mentioned in the previous chapter. We interviewed 9 youth—originally wanting to hire one youth researcher, then two, and finally deciding to hire four: Laurence, Shayana, Maxime and Mickey. We aimed to hire youth who held diverse experiences and different standpoints on the topic of youth homelessness, with a shared lived experience of homelessness (broadly defined) themselves. We negotiated with Dave and the accounting/finance team at Dans la rue to ensure that youth were being reimbursed by transferring funds from our SSHRC grant directly to the organization. Two youth in the project were on social assistance, so we tailored pay to ensure there were minimal clawbacks.¹⁴ This is not ideal—but a common consideration to working with peer researchers (Guta, Flicker & Roche, 2013). In an ideal context, we would be able to hire

¹⁴ in Québec, basic benefits for single individuals on social assistance is \$648 per month (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018), and they can only earn \$200 a month (in cash, gifts, or any “income”) without reduction of their benefit (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018). Individuals are also ineligible for welfare if they have more than \$580 in their savings account (Gouvernement du Québec, 2018).

them to work full time, though this would come with its own challenges and barriers (for them as well as us).

Initially, we also had a research assistant Emanuel Guay, hired by Naomi, who helped with essential translation, note-taking, summarizing of our discussion, theory training (including leading an important “class” for youth researchers on Marxist and feminist definitions of work), and general support for our initial meetings. As mentioned, we were also joined by two legal students who were undertaking their internships at Dans la rue. Both legal students spent some of their hours available to youth throughout the organization and some with our team, wherein we asked them to undertake research on legislation and policy that was pertinent, and they joined our team for discussions. These presented important opportunities for multi-directional learning and, I would argue, grounded our work and particularly the youth’s interest in understanding how laws and policy are actually structured, as well as highlight the immense disconnect between how laws and policies are imagined and how they are experienced by youth.

Partnership with an organization such as Dans la rue was essential both to recruitment of youth researchers as well as providing supports to both members of the research team and participants in the project. Dans la rue not only has a shelter with 17 beds for youth aged 12-21, it also has 17 transitional housing units and a day centre with food (essential to feeding our whole team during meetings), psychologists, a school, family supports, an art studio, music studio, clothing and resource centre, and employment support. In our partnership with Dans la rue, we hoped to do research that served the organization and the young people the organization serves. I would argue that this partnership faced challenges, in particular due to language barriers (the Dans la rue leadership and staff were primarily Francophone and all organizational activity

took place in French, whereas our team was largely Anglophone), though the early involvement of Emanuel helped bridge some of these disconnections in important ways.

Phase 1: Research Training, Relationship Building and Policy/Legal Analysis

Our first meeting was October 16, 2018, and for the following weeks we built relationships, protocols, interview questions and prompts, and began work with two of Dans la rue's legal stagiaries (Sophie and Emmanuel) to build out some of our understandings of the legal policies and laws that were already shaping the experiences of our youth team. Naomi and I began drafting our ethics proposal for the project in November of 2018, at the same time we drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ourselves and Dans la rue. and our interviews began in March 2019. We signed the MOU with Dans la rue in order to ensure ethical work not only satisfied the McGill institutional review board, but also spoke to how, as researchers, we were dedicated to ensuring contributed to the goals and research aims of the organization. This included outlining what was within the parameters of the project, what was not, and how we would be using funding to carry out data collection.

As stipulated in the ethics review, all interview data was de-identified prior to analysis with youth researchers. Our application was built in conversation with the whole research team, and included considerations for when the co-researchers and Co-Principal Investigators (Naomi and myself) felt that anonymity could not be ensured absolutely (for example, the recruitment of participants through youth co-researchers' social networks). These considerations were approved by the McGill Ethics Review Board in February of 2019. Additionally, following the research ethics proposal we submitted, all names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms, and all locations or identifying information (school names, neighbourhoods, towns outside of Montréal) have been changed.

During this time, our training around research methods included implementing the Without a Home survey (a Canadian survey about youth experiencing homelessness), which provided a point for the youth team to understand how they wanted to structure our report differently (for example, the youth shared that the format of a survey and the many questions could be triggering for them and others, so we had many conversations about safety protocols to anticipate if this happened with our research as well). With support from Emanuel, we drafted bilingual protocol documents outlining work responsibilities and expectations, protocols for disclosures of suicidal ideation or similar, communication, and interview scripts.

Work with the legal stagiaires was important for many reasons—on a practical level it gave us greater understanding of the legal context in Québec, including the rights and responsibilities implicated in interactions between young people and the police (a common occurrence for many of our youth team and their peers). It also was a clear demonstration of the benefits of having multiple standpoints or perspectives at the table—the legal team learned from the experiences of young people, particularly that legislation is often not experienced in the way it is imagined. Discussions of “knowing your rights” in regard to particular events (such as a police search) were contextualized within lived experiences, for example that police officers don’t always follow the law. This became a basis for my understanding of policy and textual analysis moving forward, with an emphasis on the need to ground readings of these texts in everyday experiences. These early dialogues modelled important forms of unanticipated, non-formal, and multi-directional learning across diverse standpoints and experiences that I attempted to foster in different ways following these discussions.

In terms of our safety protocols, these were developed partially around our experiences with our own group research meetings, wherein we would share stories of navigating the

institutions that we hoped to study, and as five of the seven team members present for those meetings had experienced homelessness at some point (or many points) in their lives, we wanted to ensure we were supporting one another when interviews may bring up difficult memories or trigger past traumas. Initially we had planned on doing 20 minute debriefs following each interview, as well as providing participants with resources, or even connecting them with an intervention worker at Dans la rue if needed. This didn't end up being actualized in any systematic way, and over the course of the project youth researchers themselves shared encountering barriers to getting connected to mental health services—demonstrating that we could have had more explicit strategies around support (i.e. more peer support built into the team, more dialogue with intervention staff at Dans la rue). Due in large part to the language barrier, I believe, our interactions with staff were also tense at times, including a meeting with one youth's regular intervention worker who assumed the research project was becoming a barrier to stability for a youth researcher. After some dialogue and explaining our project in more detail, we reached a tentative agreement that they we could contact one another to ensure research wasn't impeding any other efforts for stability. These dialogues didn't end up happening with any regularity, but the conversation allowed the youth researcher to challenge the perception (among his social workers) that his involvement in the project was at odds with other efforts to stabilize his life.

Logistically, we created a shared calendar to include research meetings and interviews and encouraged all team members to communicate if there were circumstances in their lives that would prevent them from coming to work. We implemented shared understandings for when a team member needed to step away from an interview, and this was used on more than one occasion. We developed a suicide protocol—based in the protocol from the organization Dans la

rue, and developed in conversation with some intervention staff at Dans la rue, which included reaching out to mental health and intervention staff at the day centre, as well practicing “warm transfers” (i.e. ensuring youth are directly connected to services) rather than simply giving young people a list of services to pursue on their own.

Research training primarily focused on how to conduct qualitative interviews. These took the form of day-long hang outs at the day centre, including lunch, with time for us to check-in, share general stories about topics, and follow an unstructured agenda. Initial training also touched on how to take research/fieldnotes, with the intention of creating shared and collaborative documents for the team to create a fieldnote bank, though these were largely abandoned by the team after the first few interviews. We largely didn’t create fieldnotes, at least not collaboratively, as we had intended, though I have utilized fieldnotes and reflections in this dissertation and the youth have since written reflections on their experiences. These reflections from youth team members include links between interviews and their own experiences and observations about institutional processes and systems. This brings up an important point that is present throughout the different phases of our research together. From our first interview, our own experiences—of homelessness, but also of navigating different institutions and systems—has been an integral part of how we work together. We have prioritized making space for the difficulty that sharing these experiences can present and have grounded so much of our work in what we know from each of our standpoints to understand “the actual work of coordination, the ongoing co-ordering that brings into being...the social” (Smith, 1987, p. 9).

As such, team members (primarily Emanuel) took notes from our first meetings—that include the experiences of team members, including my own experiences of navigating systems and survival while homelessness—but also discussions of possible solutions, descriptions of

community-oriented networks, programming that “works,” commiserating around shared barriers, and youth mapping out the landscape of services and institutions in Montréal. For example, in one of our first meetings, youth explained their own trajectories being barred from services, receiving medications that did not work for them, and frustrations with stigma and judgement:

We have a discussion about information-sharing between various services, and a fear that is brought up by Jayne and Max is that this information-sharing becomes a way of policing and controlling people in a more efficient way, rather than allow better services. We could ask ourselves what our rights in hospitals are when it comes to dignity. Laurence mentions that nurses’ role is to make sure that people are doing okay, and when people are abusing drugs or alcohol, they somehow work against the nurses and that pisses them off. Rehab services are not very well adapted to people experiencing homelessness. Max felt excluded and stigmatized while being there. Laurence says that the transition out of rehab centers needs to be more comprehensive. You feel like you want to die when someone tells you: “we can’t help you; this is not a place you belong in”. Shayana mentions that presenting a more humane approach to services as cheaper in the long-run might be an interesting way of defending our point. (Group fieldnotes, Emanuel Guay, December 13, 2018)

These documents constituted shared understandings that shaped our project, and the things we shared are included in the data that I analyze and discuss in this dissertation. These early conversations created an important base for us to work from for the rest of the project, as we took time to honour the past and current experiences team members were sharing and grounded our research in those.

Our interview prompts were designed as a team, attempting to be broad enough that people felt comfortable sharing what they wanted to share without feeling pressured to repeat traumatizing accounts of “their stories.” We also asked participants to begin in their first experiences with a given institution (schooling, child welfare, healthcare, policing, or housing), and share any relevant reflections within a trajectory from childhood to the day we were interviewing. As such, youth shared a variety of experiences ranging from early childhood to what had happened the day of the interview, and these varied for each participant. At Naomi’s

suggestion, after trying out our scripts amongst the team, we decided to provide the option of up to three interviews with each young person due to the high volume of institutional experiences we knew was likely for homeless youth to have experienced. This also served to create closer relationships between interviewers and participants, where we could build connections over three interviews spaced across time and different happenings in their lives. In line with our approach to research as an active tool for building communities of resistance, this approach created ties with participants, particularly for youth researchers. These were all intentional parts of our research design to minimize the feelings of objectification, exploitation, and (re)traumatization that youth associated with research and being asked to tell their “stories” repeatedly to access services.

Phase 2: Recruitment/Talking with Youth

Our recruitment initially aimed to branch out to other organizations we had connections or experience with as a group, including at the Maison Benoit Labre, Réseau Habitation, Refuge des jeunes, YMCA, Héberjeune de Parc Ex, Auberge du Coeur, En Marge, Ketch Café, Passage, CACTUS, Sac-a-dos, ASTTEQ, and Spectre de la rue. In reality, data collection primarily took place at Dans la rue’s day centre, where we initially set up in a conference room for one or two afternoons a week. Naomi or myself would often come in the morning and stay for lunch, where recruitment could happen with young people using the services. Three interviews took place in the communal garden space behind Dans la rue’s day centre, where I had been doing some work with youth the previous year. Naomi also did interviews at a detox centre, and I conducted interviews on two occasions at a supported housing unit. These also demonstrated the need for a broad definition of homelessness, particularly in the supported housing where youth were less likely to identify with the term homeless. Youth were also able to contact me or Naomi directly to book interviews at a time and location of their convenience, and many interviews happened

either at McGill campus (in our offices) or at quiet cafés or parks throughout Montréal. When we met in cafés, I offered to buy participants snacks, coffee, and on one occasion, for a recurring participant who was having a particularly hard time, myself, Maxime (and two pet rats) had brunch with her during an interview in a restaurant near Chez Pop's. In each instance, in both offices, parks, and cafés, interviews were audio recorded by me or Naomi, and additional notes were taken by myself, Naomi, and at times combined with notes from youth co-researchers within our shared drive after the notes were de-identified. Recorded interviews were transcribed, primarily by myself and a professional transcriptionist we hired for the project, and audio files were stored on McGill's secure One-Drive until they were deleted after being transcribed.

Doing most of our data collection at Chez Pop's afforded benefits as well as limitations to our recruitment and participants. While members of our team represented different groups of youth using Dans la rue's services, they also had varying levels of comfort doing recruitment with their peers (for example, Mickey and Maxime were very comfortable recruiting people for interviews while Shayana and Laurence were not), and data collection ended (due to scope of the project and COVID-19) before we were able to undertake street interviews that were planned with myself and Maxime downtown in areas where youth were sleeping rough.

Maxime emphasized that there were youth who wouldn't use Chez Pop's for many reasons, so we know that our connections to Dans la rue shaped who we talked to. Chez Pop's also primarily offers services in French (for example, the school program is only offered in French) and does not offer any specific cultural programming (for newcomers or Indigenous youth, for example), likely further shaping who our participants were. While we did send recruitment material to the Bunker, their short-term emergency housing program, we didn't do interviews or recruitment at the Bunker because we decided this would be intrusive, as this

building primarily served as housing and overnight services for youth in crisis or transition. We know from interviews and our youth researchers that this may have also shifted which youth we spoke with—many youth used the Bunker for emergency accommodations but did not use the day centre.

After eight months of data collection, Mickey, who self-identifies as having Indigenous ancestry, also emphasized the need to include more Indigenous youth, which was echoed by the whole team, and plans were in place to reach out to the Native Friendship Centre and Native Montréal's youth programs before we had to stop meeting in person. Of 38 youth we interviewed, only 2 explicitly identified as Indigenous, which is even lower than recent data on the number of Indigenous youth using Dans la rue's services (Gaetz, Kidd & Schwan, 2019). Members of the team also wanted to do more explicit outreach to youth with physical disabilities, as Maxime shared that this was a barrier he regularly witnessed to accessing services, though no young people shared these experiences in interviews.

While all of our research took place in Montréal, we spoke with many people—including Québécois(e)s—about experiences with services and institutions elsewhere, primarily in other provinces across so-called Canada, but also experiences in the United States and Aotearoa/New Zealand. In each case, youth contrasted their experiences using services elsewhere with their experiences accessing services in Montréal, allowing us to gain a better understanding of how different policies, practices and programs are experienced across contexts.

During only one interview did I have a youth researcher have to excuse themselves entirely because the content of the conversation was upsetting, and it was because the interviewee was expressing the view that police were warranted in using excessive force on people sleeping outside. The youth researcher had recently had a friend assaulted by the

Montréal police force (SPVM) and had personally experienced physical violence from the SPVM during a mental health crisis on public transportation. Based in our training and conversations, the youth researcher stopped the participant and said that they had to leave the conversation, they apologized for any disruption it would cause, and attributed it to their own experiences with this. After the participant began to react with anger, I was able to explain that our approach to research meant that we didn't attempt to approach issues from an imagined, objective standpoint, but that we grounded ourselves as people who had experienced homelessness, whether in similar or different ways to participants. I debriefed both with the participant after our interview, and with my co-researcher after that, as our protocol would suggest.

This co-researcher has regularly revisited and clarified their boundaries throughout the project, including opting not to work at McGill or with particular codes or data that they find too difficult to read. We have encouraged all team members to communicate these boundaries with one another. In other circumstances we have had more extensive debriefs for more “difficult” interviews when necessary, and youth shared that they debriefed with one another after interviews and knowledge mobilization activities, suggesting more informal structures of support replaced our team protocols. The co-researchers did not know each other before our project but have become very close, including becoming supports for each other in navigating these same systems we are studying.

We tried to make the interviews open – for example, by inviting participants to self-determine how they identify. By the end of the project, we were more direct about what identifications we were looking for (race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, etc.) and youth often gave examples of how they identified themselves to guide participants. However, this

openness has led to some gaps in demographic information, even as it did seem to succeed in making people more comfortable with the interviews (i.e. many white-presenting Québécois(e)s seemed uncomfortable describing themselves in terms of their race or ethnicity). This was followed by an open and simple prompt, where we asked, “Knowing this project is about how government systems could work differently to prevent youth homelessness, can you tell us why you wanted to participate? Or do you have a particular experience you want to start with?” The assumption behind this prompt was that every youth who reached out to us did so because they have a story they want to share about how their experiences in school, the child protection system, healthcare, or the criminal justice system contributed to (or did little to resolve) their housing precarity, in whatever way was important to them. In total, we interviewed 38 youth with 63 total interviews.¹⁵

Limitations of Data Collection Methods:

While the methods we employed as a team allowed for flexibility in how both co-researchers and participants engaged with the project, in line with trauma-informed practices, (Reynolds, 2016) these methods have led to limitations in how we can generalize findings across diverse experiences. For example, through asking participants to identify in whatever way they wanted, we had variety in demographic information provided (i.e. some people shared their how they identify in terms of age, race, first language, gender, sexuality, geographic location, Indigeneity, and religion, others chose to share only their age, and that they “like sports”). As a result, analysis is limited to understanding individual experiences rather than broad generalizations across demographics within the sample of 38 youth.

¹⁵ See Appendix A for youth self-identified demographics, [including age, sexuality, race, gender and dominant language, when provided.](#)

As mentioned, doing most of our data collection at or in relation to Dans la rue, which served primarily Francophone young people, was also a limitation of this study. As Maxime and Mickey mentioned in reflecting on our project, this also led to underrepresentation of groups of young people who may be overrepresented in the overall population of youth experiencing homelessness: namely Indigenous youth (as Dans la rue is a settler organization and does not provide significant supports for Indigenous youth), youth who are barred or choose not to comply with rules to use Dans la rue, and youth navigating physical disabilities (as the day centre where we conducted most of our interviews is up a flight of stairs). As a result, the sample of youth in this study are not representative of the demographics of young people experiencing homelessness in Montréal, as outlined in the Without a Home Study, 2019 (Gaetz et al, forthcoming).

Phase 3: Data Analysis, Making a Codebook, Navigating COVID

Data analysis began in the winter of 2019. Once these data were coded by our research team, we began to engage in collective analysis. Due to COVID-19, this work has taken place virtually, where we identified institutional “points of failure and points of possibility” (Sauvé et al, 2018), or “what worked” and “what didn’t work” among the interviews (e.g. we began this work by reviewing all of the data that had been coded with education-related codes). The pandemic meant that we were paying closer attention to what everyone needed to keep doing research--making sure that we weren’t pushing the research ahead without checking in with one another, as youth were experiencing increased housing precarity, increased policing and decreased access to regular services during lockdowns (Luscombe & McClelland, 2020). This, as well as the need for data to be securely stored/NVivo licenses limited to Naomi, mine, and the McGill office computers, meant that more analysis of the coded data than intended was carried

out without the youth researchers. However, the initial development of the codebook as well as coding of most interviews took place with team members at McGill and Dans la rue.¹⁶

While we did take time to work through possible codes together and train the youth co-researchers to use NVivo qualitative software, the training period for data analysis was a fraction of the time spent on training in data collection. Ideally, we would have been able to take a similar amount of time to dedicate to data organizing and analysis, including allotting time in meetings to continue discussing personal topics, current and sharing reflections on the content of interviews (all very important tasks). This would have afforded a more expansive development of skills (understanding of a research project from start to finish) to youth researchers, to carry through in future projects. By this point in the project Laurence has also returned to school, and Shayana was enrolled in university. The shifting dynamic of our team, and the option for youth to return/work in whatever capacity made sense to them at that time was also an intentional part of the project (Mirra, Garcia & Morrell, 2006).

Due to the number of interviews, and the flexibility participants had to share what they found important—as well as personal life events and a global pandemic—analysis took longer than anticipated. Once we had identified the most promising institutional points of possibility/failure in each system—through looking at codes for each institution—Naomi and I returned to individual interviews and organized interviews into chronological institutional trajectories for each young person. As we had asked participants to share their experiences from their first memories of the institution in question to the present day, these trajectories attempted to illuminate what diverse barriers were present throughout the lives of young people (within a

¹⁶ See appendix B for a final version of the team codebook in English.

preventative lens applied to each trajectory) and also informed what policies and practices were most pertinent to examine as possible levers of change.

We also returned to the legislative and policy analysis we had done at the start of the project to look closer at the particular contexts that were background to the stories young people shared with us, digging deeper into policies in different institutional contexts (primarily in Québec) based in the trajectories young people shared with us. COVID-19 has demonstrated how difficult it can be to undertake this work independently and remotely, with increased barriers to working as a team (including difficulties using Zoom and overall breakdowns in communication when we aren't physically together). Following anarchist approaches to reorganizing the ways we work together and in relation to one another, this “project” will continue through the relationships we have formed and the work we collectively aim to do with what we've come to know about how youth homelessness is organized in different ways.

Reflections on the Importance of Lived Expertise in Peer Research

Throughout the course of this project the fact that I had also experienced homelessness and housing precarity as a young person mattered, particularly in cultivating relations of trust within our team. I can note moments where connections were made that have carried us through the past few years of working together. I remember sharing my experiences while navigating safety while doing sex work and trying to maintain stable housing, and turning a corner of trust with one of the youth researchers as a result—because they saw their own experiences resonate with my knowledge. I shared stories about infamous punk houses and squats with another youth researcher who tried to map out where I fit within the broader network of street punks, including commiserating about how many good friends had lost their lives to symptoms and consequences of homelessness. I heard from researchers and participants about how my status as a PhD

candidate, as someone who was lecturing to future teachers, going to conferences, and being featured in the media, were hopeful things for them to see, even if they didn't want to follow that path. In hospital rooms and metro station and rehabilitation centres and gardens and cop shops and, sometimes, in fancy conference centres and universities, our whole team took moments to stop, feel, cry, talk, and press pause when we needed to—not only valuing lived experience but valuing and recognizing the emotional labour that this work entails (Nelson, 2020).

In the absence of work grounded in lived experience, I would argue that many scholars and researchers are so far removed from these realities that hanging out in a community organization for a few hours a week, or attending a monthly meeting with an advisory, amounts to grounding their research in the lives of participants. This is problematic in that it allows the performance of community-based research, with the option of practicing professional distance when things get too difficult, to return to the university to squirrel away research data in a neat box. It also becomes a barrier for those with lived experience to develop knowledge together in meaningful ways. I will speak to this in more detail in Chapter 6, where I explore the political and justice potential that peer-led spaces may hold for addressing youth homelessness and education. Moving forward methodologically, I hope to continue to understand how moments where we centered the everyday realities of members of our team, can be shared and useful to others in developing broader research based in mutual aid and aimed at radically shifting research practices.

Conclusion

Informed by these approaches to research broadly, in my own methods I have attempted to maintain an ongoing reflexivity, never taking for granted that the mode of inquiry nor the

methods we have used are critical or activist, inherently. However, this must also move past simply practicing insular academic reflexivity (Lagalis, 2019). As Kumashiro points out,

No practice, in and of itself, is anti-oppressive. A practice can be anti-oppressive in one situation and quite oppressive in another. Or it can be simultaneously oppressive [and] anti-oppressive... (2002, p. 15).”

Participatory methods, institutional ethnographic inquiry, or anarchist methodologies alone are not intrinsically subversive of the power dynamics and hierarchies that characterize academic research. Research that consistently centers the realities of people (Smith, 1990; Graeber, 2009; Akom et al., 2008; Krueger-Henney, 2016) and resists the ways that our emotional labours, experiences, and knowledges become objectified and subsumed into knowledge production (Fordham, 2014; Nelson, 2020; Smith, 1987) is necessary to realize the radical possibilities that social justice research aims to achieve.

CHAPTER 4: YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOLS

N: Yeah. So...what was getting in the way of school at that time?

P: Trying not to die.

Matti, a genderqueer/Two-Spirit youth of white and Haudenosaunee descent

Of the 38 young people we spoke with, 37 shared experiences with schools. Unsurprisingly, schools were a key site for almost each young person we spoke with when thinking of their institutional trajectories—this is part of what makes schools a powerful point of possible intervention and prevention of youth homelessness (Gaetz, 2014, Gaetz et al., 2018). Grounded within the literature on the educational barriers for homeless and precariously housed youth

above, in this section I will focus on the ways that young people shared stories of their educational experiences, returning to the lens used throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of this research around the “points of failure and points of possibility” (Sauvé et al., 2018). This chapter is a reminder that schooling also begins, but “does not stop” (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 2) in the everyday lives of people.

This chapter aims to contextualize and explore the institutional conditions that organized the “points of failure” that youth shared, and while these reflect the more common barriers to education found in the literature (for example, malnutrition, untreated infections, stress, and incorrect or absent medications (Courtney et al 2014), I also want to explore them within the broader trajectories within which these incidents occurred. Themes across the experiences of young people demonstrate points of failure that underpin patterns of institutional exclusion young people experience in schools. Namely, schools create and practice interventions designed for a particular ideal student which reflects normative notions of race (white), class (middle), sexuality (heterosexual) and gendered (cisgender) norms and applied universally to all students.

This chapter explicated the first point of action within the broader approach this dissertation proposes: that we must ground this work in learning from the experiences of youth. This point of action conceptualizes the realisation of education (and schools) as a possible site of youth homelessness prevention *through* understanding the experiences of youth. Following the modes of inquiry I’ve laid out in the previous chapter, it is essential to ground analysis of schools in young people’s embodied and experiential knowledge and understanding. This chapter demonstrates that we cannot rely on educational policy, procedures, or official professional practices competencies because, because youth experience these policies and practices differently than schools (seem to) intend. There are clear gaps and spaces of institutional harm

that current responses—to homelessness, but much more often, to treating the symptoms of homelessness—must consider. It is also clear that responses don't necessarily take into account the actual youth who are attending schools (Nichols, 2019, Kumashiro, 2002; Sabzalian, 2019, Hagopian & Jones, 2020, Jones, 2012, Wilson & Laing, 2008).

The most significant theme throughout the interviews discussed in this chapter—other than each young person facing some barriers to staying engaged in schools during housing precarity—is that there is a serious and significant disconnect between youth's experiences and official institutional narratives, or even public perceptions (Mao et al, 2011), about how schools are responding to the needs of young people before and during experiences of homelessness. I believe this disconnect is inherently linked to two points: first, the devaluation of young people's expertise about their own experiences and needs, grounded in the paternalistic roles schools have and continue to play (Battiste 2013, Tuhiwai Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2008, Gillen, 2014, Milne, 2016) and second, the role of schools in fostering an ideal "citizen" or student, and punishing difference (Haworth, 2017, Nichols, 2018; 2019). This means that youth are not being supported before they become homeless, and that they are also often being punished for symptoms and survival mechanisms related to that precarity (e.g. going to work instead of school because of a need to make money). These punishments, and the messages youth receive about their deservedness, deviancy, and responsibility to "help themselves" have lasting impacts. Schools not only have to recognize how they could prevent youth homelessness, they must also take responsibility for the harm they cause. This chapter will explore themes which emerged in the stories young people shared with us, including a focus on the things that are happening for youth well before experiences of homelessness.

All but three young people (n=35) described their homelessness within the context of a longer and broader trajectory in their lives that included educational disengagement, at times from an early age. Multiple youth did describe a (homelessness) event—which was regularly accompanied by an institutional response (or, more often, lack of response) in their school lives—such as the moment of entering foster care or a centre jeunesse, a death in the family, parents’ divorce, abuse, losing housing as a family, or the development of mental health problems. However, these events existed within trajectories, which were regularly, but not always, related to issues such as poverty, substance use and abuse within the family, intergenerational trauma, and/or mental health struggles of parents, with these events “accelerat[ing] the process” as Lucas, a white, straight, “pagan-ish” youth who grew up middle-class, put it. To understand how interventions must occur with a prevention lens addressing “multiple, cumulative factors”, and not as responses to a particular linear trajectory or event (Gaetz et al., 2018), we must understand the complex trajectories young people experience.

There are many reasons for ensuring that young people are engaged in education—access to the labour market (including increasing demand for certificates and post-secondary (Gaetz, 2014), increased life expectancy and better health outcomes (Montez et al., 2012), passion and a desire to learn, peer support and building community (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017), or because it allows for “full engagement in social, cultural and economic life” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017, p. 26). Only one young person (Nathan, a white, cis-gender male from a northern community) we talked to said he didn’t want to have his GED/high school diploma, and the majority of young people we spoke with expressed frustrations at the barriers they and their peers had (and kept) encountering in achieving that milestone, echoing research claiming that while barriers are significant, young people do want to graduate from high school (Schwan et al.,

2019, Malenfant et al., 2020) . These narratives also speak to human rights discourses and the right to education—as Lucas shared when asked what supports may have looked like for him, “people should at least finish high school.” The majority of youth we spoke with saw schools holding the responsibility for ensuring youth were able to graduate from secondary.

Whether students want to participate in learning, connect to a community of peers in school, or simply follow the increased need for accreditation and educational credentials to enter the labour market, youth who experience homelessness in our study and others (Schwan et al., 2018, Sauvé et al., 2018, Gupton, 2017, Baker-Collins 2013) want to be able to access schools in safe and supported ways. Barriers that young people shared focused on complex and intersecting themes, including rigid one-size-fits-all approaches, inadequate supports, accommodations and diagnoses for learning disabilities and mental health struggles, feelings of personal failure, responsibility, and not being believed by teachers and staff, bullying, and damaging institutional inaction/action. Young people feeling supported to participate, access, and succeed in schools is therefore the minimum that we should be ensuring, and developing a better understanding of how young people can maintain access to these spaces and opportunities while they are navigating diverse housing needs is necessary to do this. Realizing schools as a site of homelessness prevention—a key inquiry of this project—requires that they first understand the ways that they are failing to support many students.

Housing

If you don't have a place to stay, how can you go to school?

Diana, a Black, heterosexual, Francophone woman of Haitian descent

As outlined in Chapter 2, how we conceptualize youth homelessness should recognize young people's own expertise and must be broad enough to encompass diverse experiences. The

proposed definition through the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness provides a starting point:

“Youth homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence. (2016, p. 1)

In this project we spoke with young people aged 18-30 (though we recruited youth ages 16-29, as discussed in the previous chapter), though we focused on many experiences of precarity, institutional intervention (or lack of) and homelessness throughout their childhood and teen years. The project itself grounded our inquiry within a human rights framing (beginning interviews by stating “We believe housing is a human right”), and youth shared similar framing that themselves and their peers deserved a safe place to live. Youth also shared frustrations that they (or their peers) were unable to access the supports to ensure that right was met, including interventions in schools (n=30). Our data echoes research that suggests youth want to attend, or remain engaged and enrolled in school while navigating periods of housing precarity and homelessness (Morton et al., 2020, Sohn & Gaetz, 2020), though they face barriers to doing so. Within a preventative lens we can see how young people we spoke with are not receiving interventions at the right time to maintain their housing (or find them suitable and safe housing when they need an alternative), but also that when they do receive housing, they often lose access to other necessary supports (e.g. those available through shelters and regular outreach/“street workers”) (Shiwcharran, 2020).

Multiple youth (n=21) described having already skipped school before or during initial phases of housing precarity--because they hated it, were bullied, they didn't feel they fit in, they were feeling attacked by teachers, they were staying out all night, they needed to make money and work, or a combination of these and other factors (e.g. they are not getting the educational

supports and accommodations they need). While these decisions may be understood as youth choice (to not try, to party, to blow off school), youth choice and agency are often absent in the institutional responses that follow (Gillen, 2014). The trajectories youth shared with us outlined many barriers in schools throughout their lives, and for nearly each young person who spoke to us about schools (n=32). By the time young people's housing situation became more precarious, unsafe, or they were sleeping rough, they were already starting to disengage.

Just working and going to school and not having a place to stay. Me it's—what frustrates me the most is the fucking vicious cycle that comes with all of it. Like, it's really hard to have support when you have no support.

-Fariha, a queer, francophone immigrant woman of colour, whose family were practicing religious minorities

Fariha shared that trying to make money to eat—through the formal and informal economy—while maintaining attendance in secondary school fed into a vicious cycle that began before her experiences of homelessness. When Benny, a bisexual, Anglophone, “white boy” from a suburb of Montréal first experienced homelessness, he had already dropped out of one school; Casey, an anglophone white man from a rural community explained that he “already wasn't really going anyways” when he first experienced sleeping rough, so decided not to go back to school. Experiences of homelessness amplified educational disengagement but also, often, led to punishment in schools that further marginalized young people who attempted to maintain attendance, and further exacerbated their precarity (navigating suspensions, expulsions, etc.). This is why it is important to implement a holistic understanding of homelessness prevention in schools—one that understands the nuanced interrelation between “structural factors, systems failures and individual and relational factors” (Gaetz et al., 2018), and takes into account how young people's housing trajectories intersect with and shape their educational trajectories.

In some cases, access to housing or financial supports are dependent on school enrolment, creating a vicious cycle whereby youth aren't able to access housing stability through housing programs and supports unless they are enrolled in school, but are unable to sustain enrolment without housing supports. This is compounded by a lack of affordable housing available to young people (Gaetz et al., 2016; Rosenberg & Kim, 2017). Furthermore, links between school participation and housing eligibility ignore that for many youth, school has been a violent space and sets up a dynamic wherein their "choices" are to either lose access to housing or experience institutional and epistemological violence in schools, including the policing of the bodies of youth of colour (Bohnert, 2016, see also Jones, 2012; Rodríguez, 2019). This presents a significant barrier given our understanding of how difficult educational engagement can be when you already don't have housing, but more importantly underestimates the history and present-day realities of harm schools cause many communities—harm that may overshadow the harm of not having a home.

Points of Failure

One Size Does Not Fit all

The first point of failure, discussed at length within team meetings throughout the project, was a One-Size-Fits-all schooling, and it is intrinsically linked to the disconnect between the experiences of youth and the ideal student that schools were imagining in their student body (outside of which they were often enforcing/punishing/expelling). Particularly youth who were racialized, LGBTQ2SIA, poor, or did not speak the language of instruction felt they did not fit the mould and rather faced punishment, bullying from students and teachers, and stigma. When experiencing homelessness and housing precarity, youth described teachers punishing the ways

they were coping, or facing refusal when they asked for concessions, accommodations, or supports. The damage that “one-size-fits-all” education can do is well documented (Wun, 2017, Annamma et al., 2019, Advisory Board on English Education, 2013) , and youth on our team and those we interviewed shared that schools regularly did not understand (and often refused to try to understand) their unique situations, a strategy that is significant to supporting homeless students—teachers who build relationships and understand the individual needs of students are more effective in ensuring stability and preventing homelessness (Moore, 2013). Griffin et al. (2019) argue that “teacher support may be even more influential for homeless youth because homelessness is often characterized by inconsistent caregiver support and fragmented family relationships” (p. 113).

For example, while Fariha was navigating a newly diagnosed learning disability, family abuse and conflict, experiences of homophobia, mental health challenges and periodic episodes of sleeping outside, she recalled a teacher refusing to make concessions or provide extra resources. This was the first of multiple occasions where Fariha described teachers explaining that they could not make exceptions for her circumstances, communicated by teachers as “If I make an exception for you, I have to make an exception for everybody.” As Fariha pointed out, other students were living with their parents and fitting into idealized notions of what was expected of students—namely that they were housed in safe and supportive family homes, something she was not experiencing throughout secondary and post-secondary schooling. This idea that teachers couldn’t (or wouldn’t) make exceptions or accommodate each student’s unique circumstances resonated throughout interviews. Fariha went on to attempt to access mental health services through her school, an intervention that would have allowed her to remain educationally engaged and access accommodations, but her parents refused to sign the forms she

needed to submit to initiate the process. While teachers and school staff recognized that Fariha needed access to services, they weren't able or willing to shift the bureaucratic process for accessing the school psychologist—one that assumed parents' active participation. This led directly to Fariha running away from home many times, involvement with police and social workers, and spending periods sleeping rough or in shelters. Drawing on Nichols' earlier research (2016), it is clear that school processes assume a particular set of life conditions – e.g. that young people are housed and receiving care and guardianship from parents – and does not work when this assumption is challenged. Furthermore, the lack of fit between the assumed student and the actualities of Fariha's life produced the conditions through which she became homeless. The school not only failed to prevent Fariha from becoming homeless, their actions actually contributed to her housing precarity.

Additionally, even when youth were going through the “right” steps, their unique experiences fell outside of what was deemed acceptable for educational supports. As Lucas explained, while experiencing a period of sleeping rough, he was unable to finish his final assignments. Because the university could not see how losing his housing was related to the change in his academic performance, they denied his grade appeal:

I had a good GPA, so I didn't want to lose it. Then I went through bureaucracy and all the crap, filed the forms, and they refused me. I did an appeal and had to write a huge letter, refused me again. Then I kind of got bummed out. Those are super... like, they're not even that huge problems. They're not huge, but they're just disappointing and annoying because that's just one example in so many of the times that the systems in place failed to help you in your time of need, or they kind of push you down because they're like, “Oh, you don't meet the standards,” or, “Right now, you're not meeting the standards.” You try to be like, “Yeah, but I'm fucked up right now,” you know?

It was evident in experiences youth had that schools were not imagining homelessness as an issue they had to respond to, and as such did not see homelessness as representing reasonable grounds for academic accommodation. Because many of the youth we spoke with had lives and

experiences that were unlike those who educational policies were imagined for (because they were BIPOC, experiencing mental health issues, they were poor, they were queer, they were an immigrant, they weren't Francophone, etc.), they felt they were unsupported by conventional approaches and actively targeted for not fitting in the mould. Lucas's claims that school disengagement isn't even, as he stated, a "huge" problem also fits into narratives youth shared that in the face of experiences on the street, for example, it seemed petty or inconsequential to complain or pursue justice around harm faced in schools.

Rowan, a white Francophone, bisexual cis-woman from the suburbs, shared a feeling that not fitting this ideal not only led to a lack of access to supports she needed, but also led to disproportionate punishment.

Well, like, my director, and I just knew, the way they were treating me, the way they were talking to me, like, they would just kick me out of school for nothing, like, everything they could find on me, like, I had a uniform, and they—every day they were looking at me just to find the thing that could kick me home... Yeah, so one day I had like, white socks, with a sock with a tiny line of red, and another one with a tiny line of pink, and they suspended me for that. So, I know they were just kicking me out of school, all the time, for nothing. And I had people beside me with like, not even wearing the uniform, and they were staying there all the time. For them, they would prefer that I'm not there, not like, influencing the people, or like, whatever, whatever. I don't know why. Just, yeah, they had the perfect mould of their perfect school and I just didn't fit in with them. That's why I could not go to school, and they didn't care, not like, calling because I wasn't there.

At times, young people articulated why peers or other students were being harmed by this one-size-fits-all approach to education, despite their benefit from the structures that allowed them to succeed or access supports, positioning themselves within a broader context of educational access and equity. For example, Lucas, outlined the ways that despite encountering barriers at different points in his trajectory, when attending an alternative education program, he was given a pass despite skipping class and refusing to participate in punishment like detention, while Black students were given maximum punishment for similar transgressions.

[If] you were a black kid...then they'd stigmatize those kids so much. One of my friends got suspended twice for 21 days because he was like, the first time he was getting beat, you know, and then he got mad and punched another kid, and like, he got 21 days, which is crazy, because I would've done the same thing, I would've got like 4-5 days max. You know? [21 days] is the longest you get suspended before you get, you know, expelled, you know? And he got that twice, and then his teachers told him that they would send his homework, and they never did. And he was like, he was telling me this like, super intensively, he was like, you know, "Man, I wanted to do my homework, I didn't want to fail, like, I wanted—I know I wasn't doing the right things, but.."

One-Size-Fits-All approaches to both discipline (Skiba, Mediratta & Rausch, 2016), and curriculum (Au, 2018; St. Denis, 2011; Sabzalian, 2019) from teachers, can not only be a barrier to learning, but is a significant equity concern (Murray et al., 2004). This can be linked to increasing pressure on schools to perform to standardized measurements and achieve standard (and normed) outcomes (Au, Bigelow, Karp, 2003; Ohanian, 2001).

For those who do not fit into this idealized norm that school standardization upholds, our research suggests that interventions, supports and participation in schools are difficult to access, but their divergence also means they may experience disproportionate punishment, stigmatization, and racist/homophobic/transphobic punishments, exclusions, or even expulsions (Wun, 2017; Hallett & Skrla, 2017). As Fariha explained, supports may be withheld because they constitute "special treatment" for homeless youth and because youth are facing discrimination (like homophobia), while Lucas's reflections outline how punishments are experienced as disproportionately doled out without justification. Over half (n=24) of young people saw these experiences as individualized issues, stemming from interpersonal relationships with their teachers or school staff rather than systemic discrimination.

Subsequently, without understanding the broader structural pieces organizing their own school experiences, youth we interviewed typically viewed their barriers in schools as localized

and individualized problems. Nichols argues that when understanding school violence (and particularly violence based on racial, ableist and socio-economic discrimination) in schools, attempting to address these individualized and inter-personal experiences leads to further isolation and fails to address underlying causes, as well as invisibilize the inequitable labour conditions within which professionals operate:

Educators, social workers, and health practitioners toiling exhaustively at the local level, without attending to the wider political-economic and social conditions within which this local work is occurring, find themselves trapped in crisis response mode, moving young people through interventions that clearly aren't working for them (Nichols, 2019, p. 179).

The majority of youth shared examples of individual/interpersonal issues, of a teacher who does not know how to “use judgement” or does not care about children enough to provide more individualized supports, or teachers who were exhausted and overworked--or worse, “evil” teachers (fieldnotes, 2018) who “hate” them, as Matti shared. However, this dissertation hopes to demonstrate how assumptions relating to a normative student which shape policy and practice (Nichols, 2019) does not require individual teachers (who youth feel are uncaring or, alternatively, use “good judgement”) to shape young people’s experiences of exclusion or inclusion. Instead, these normative ideals of who a student is/is not creates an institutionalized space where harm, exclusion, and barriers to education for some students are normalized and taken for granted (Gillen, 2014; Krueger-Kenney, 2016).

Youth sharing the limitations of school professionals who did use “good judgement”, as Sandra did, is also daunting, in that the institution of schooling seems to take people who want to help students and put them in positions where they unintentionally contribute to harms by failing to provide sufficient resources (Courtney et al., 2014), and applying universalized, classed norms and standards (Griffith & Smith, 2005) that fail to account for and serve to destabilize people’s

varied lives and experiences. In this, students' homelessness, or symptoms of that homelessness, don't become a problem for the school to help students solve—rather, the problem becomes the student themselves.

Learning Disabilities and Mental Health Diagnoses

Multiple youth (n=9) shared that they faced significant barriers in schools because they were either diagnosed, misdiagnosed, or weren't able to receive diagnosis of a learning disability. Perhaps telling of the age of many of the interview participants, many discuss a lack of clarity, institutional (or parental) resistance or experimentation in early diagnoses.

“N: Yeah, did you ever—did anyone, I don't know if this has already been covered, but any time between 0 and grade 6, did you have any testing or diagnoses for learning difficulties, or anything like that? No?”

P: No, my parents didn't bring me to those kind of things. So I was like, “Ehn.”
-Palle, a bilingual white Francophone youth

As mentioned above, many parents did not have the ability, time, resources, knowledge, or access to have their children diagnosed or access supports. Jaide, a Métis, genderfluid youth, explicitly linked their lack of accommodations in school to a lack of funds, stating that their parents wanted to connect them with a diagnosis and supports—and even began the process but ran out of funds, leading to them disengaging from secondary school. They ended up receiving multiple other and ill-fitting diagnoses, including autism, before they were diagnosed with dyslexia, which is the disability Jaide found helpful for both understanding themselves and their educational needs. Another school eventually placed them in the singular special classroom they had for broad learning and behavioural issues, which led to bullying:

It's my mom who had to pay, a lot, outside of school to really know what I had, because the school didn't really care. They were like, “Oh no, it's just a learning disability, we'll put her in a class » I faced a lot of bullying because we were the only class at school for learning disabilities.

C'est ma mère qui a dû payer à l'extérieur vraiment cher pour savoir vraiment qu'est-ce que j'avais parce que l'école s'en foutait un peu. Ils étaient comme « Ah non, elle a juste des problèmes d'apprentissage donc on va la mettre dans une classe. » J'ai eu beaucoup d'intimidation à cause qu'on était la seule classe à l'école de difficulté d'apprentissage.

Matti echoed other young people's experiences, describing that their diagnosis for ADHD "came out of nowhere." All of the 9 youth who talked specifically about receiving or trying to receive learning disability diagnoses explained they were confused about the processes for accessing accommodations and treatments and struggled to develop strategies and receive support (other than medication) to ensure they could actively participate in and benefit from education.

Access to testing and diagnoses also rely on professionals that serve young people, and "begin with someone's subjective construction of a child's behaviour and ability as non-normative" (Nichols, 2019, p. 117). While some youth were unable to access a diagnosis, which may have led to more specialized support, others found the diagnoses they received were pathologizing and harmful. Matti recalled dismissing their diagnoses because they felt they had not received an adequate diagnostic assessment, stating that the evaluator didn't take more than five minutes to get to know what was "really" going on with them, and as a result, didn't feel their diagnosis resonated with their day-to-day realities. Youth like Matti, Sophie, Sandra, Benny and Jolene described being heavily or mis-medicated (for both learning disabilities and mental health diagnoses, which often overlapped), resulting in instability of mood and physical state that disrupted education. Finding the "right" diagnosis or medication—one which fit with their understanding of their experiences and needs and helped them actualize their goals (educational or otherwise)--required multiple attempts/incorrect diagnoses before finding a good fit, sometimes heavily aggravating mental health issues. Schools were not always aware of these

shifts, and young people shared facing punishment and disruptions while they took the time to stabilize their medications and treatments.

A lack of official learning disability diagnoses (and sometimes a fast and loose diagnosis from a teacher), could also lead to a lack of appropriate supports for a young person. However, even with a diagnosis (learning disability or mental health), medication could be administered and prescribed in ways that were chaotic to young people's lives, particularly if they were navigating hormonal changes and puberty at the time. As Sandra, a trans/non-binary artist, shared:

Everything started to change when I was in high school, because my hormones were disbalanced, because I was growing up, so I had to change medication every two months... The side effects were—I was having bad sleep. I was either sleeping too much or not enough, and therefore I felt tired all the time, like, it was really hard to just concentrate in class, because I was tired, but the medication was supposed to concentrate me, but because I was tired it didn't work. And, I felt angry because of that, because—I mean, what's the point of taking medication if it doesn't really help me out.

Dramatic shifts in hormones, medications, and combinations of the two can lead to significant issues for young people in schools (Corliss et al., 2008; Martin & Steinbeck, 2017). Systems that were administering medications or diagnoses tended not to work in tandem with schools to ensure that stability was offered while medications were tinkered with. Without youth-led accommodations by schools (and between school and other sectors), these shifts in medication led to young people dropping out (and/or suicide/self-harm). For multiple young people, schools dealt with transitions and major shifts due to new/changes in medication by placing them in special classes (as in Jaide, Robert, and Palle's experiences, and as outlined in Québécois educational policies ((Gouvernement du Québec, 2014)), so they were doubly impacted by trying to figure out what medication they needed. When teachers and staff were ignoring the

significance of these experiences for youth or failing to invest time in understanding what was going on for individual students, young people began to lose trust in and disengage from schools.

For both learning disability diagnoses and mental health diagnoses, multiple youth described that medication that wasn't working was maintained, with doctors and professionals telling youth to just "give it time" as Rowan, a white, Francophone, cis-woman from a Montréal suburb was told, and continue taking medication even in the face of severe mental health struggles and suicidal ideation, or significant educational disengagement. This denial of suffering (and young people's knowledge of their own bodies and experiences) is one of many ways that youth described not being believed or taken seriously by professionals. Young people are not trusted to know their own realities (Cruz, 2014), and many shared that when they attempted to access different medications or treatment, they were advised to maintain their prescribed medication. As Gigi, a 20 year old Québécoise woman shared, not only was the pharmacological regime maintained when she explained the medication wasn't working, but she did not receive additional educational supports to make up for missed class time when she was adapting to the new medication.

Some youth also described the kinds of coping mechanisms they had developed to deal with trauma or big life changes, or mental health struggles—which led to them struggling to concentrate or engage in class--being misdiagnosed as ADHD or other learning disabilities (and consequently being treated with medication rather than addressing underlying issues like trauma and abuse at home and/or bullying at school). These coping mechanisms, which for young people we spoke with, may involve distraction, disassociation, disengagement and angry outbursts, develop in the face of months or years on waiting lists to access appropriate mental health or psychiatric diagnoses and supports.

Youth who experience homelessness aren't the only students who struggle with mental health and learning disabilities in schools—20% of youth 25 and under in Canada have a diagnosed mental illness (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013), and more than half of all children (59.8%) with disabilities in Canada have a learning disability (Statistics Canada, 2007). It is telling that so many young people we spoke with (n=32) shared experiences of diagnoses (or difficulty accessing diagnoses) of mental health and/or learning disabilities. It is also indicative of a key point of possibility—diagnoses or signs that young people are struggling become points where they may be connected with professionals and supports. Unfortunately, for all but one young person we spoke with who navigated medication and diagnoses in school (Matthieu, a white, Québécois, neurodiverse man) their experiences were organized by a lack of capacity in schools, misdiagnoses and medication, and a lack of agency to access supports they needed/wanted—these experiences also shaped their institutional distrust and doubts about whether institutionalized interventions could ever serve them.

Equity and Accommodations: Imagined Paths for Advocacy

Multiple young people (n=18) discussed their parents' advocacy (or lack of advocacy) around their learning disabilities and accommodations. Equitable approaches to accessing diagnoses and other educational supports must consider that some parents may be unlikely to voluntarily and proactively engage school-based identification processes – for example, due to their own histories of trauma in schools, linguistic and cultural barriers, or working multiple jobs (Elliott, Powell & Brenton, 2013; Marquéz, 2019; Milne, 2006; Pavlakis, 2018; Sabzalian, 2019). There must also be ways for young people to initiate these processes without requiring their parents' involvement. Fariha's experience demonstrates the barriers when parents are not

only unable/facing barriers to advocate but are unwilling. She understood that others in her secondary school were able to access concessions and support that she needed:

...if I needed an extension for an exam, or if I needed something, they wouldn't give—they wouldn't let me. Like, you had to have a certain condition, or you had to be diagnosed, but I wasn't allowed to see a psychologist because my parents were against that, so—but then there were these other kids who like, if... “Can I do—can I go to the bathroom whenever I want?”, “Can you give me an answer to this?” And the teacher would be more prone to help.

Fariha was one of the significant number of youth (n=24) who described these barriers as based in interpersonal relationships with teachers and school staff, tying her understanding of a lack of access and accommodations to perceptions of favouritism or discrimination. Fariha interpreted staff's unwillingness to support her efforts to access an official psychological or psychiatric diagnosis as caused by homophobic discrimination, suggesting one way that discrimination and access to services intersect and shape young people's experiences in schools.

As most official processes for seeking educational accommodations and supports depend on parental or guardian engagement, some youth will be excluded from the processes or supports they need to be successful in school – particularly because classed, racial and gendered norms make much of this work invisible and undervalued (Elliott, Powell & Brenton, 2013; Griffith & Smith, 2005). Within public schooling, the invisibilized and required labour of “parents” (implied to be women) of middle-class families “has produced an engine of inequality giving a credentialed, pre-dominantly white, middle-class privileged access to positions in the ruling institutions” (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 17). This is done while maintaining the guise of presenting “a path to equality” (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 9)— a belief deeply engrained in Québécois educational policy and programs (Gouvernement du Québec, 2003, Gouvernement du Québec, 2020). Arguably, maintaining schools as structures to perpetuate these classed and privileged pathways also rests on a devaluation of youth's experiences and self-advocacy.

Students are rarely afforded educational opportunities or supports that recognize their autonomy or rights (Kumashiro, 2002) (following the need for multiple modes of entry and points of prevention (Gaetz et al., 2018)). Rather, schools (principals and school service centres in particular) necessarily understand unaccompanied minors or youth whose parents are not able to advocate as possible cases to report to youth protection. As I will explore in more detail, in Québec, schools have a responsibility to work with students and parents to “regularize [a] child’s situation” (1977, I-13.3, s. 17.1). In practice, the same rules that create barriers for students seem to apply to parents—if they’re not engaging in the “right” way, they and/or their children may pay the price, and they may ultimately face navigating youth protection involvement, which can fail to serve and/or harm families – particularly Indigenous, newcomer, and poor families (Blackstock et al., 2020, Brown et al., 2020, Jacobs et al., 2021; Maiter, Stalker & Alaggia, 2009).

The ways that young people we spoke with described their experiences with diagnoses echoes broader reflections on educational institutions we heard throughout the majority of interviews we conducted—youth saw school-based interventions as “cold”, inapplicable to their unique situations, and felt staff weren’t equipped or resourced to support them. Furthermore, while they may not have felt that interventions that were offered addressed what they needed at the time, multiple youth made explicit that they were deeply committed to the belief that youth *did* deserve interventions while simultaneously expressing critiques about the structure of the whole system. Lucas shared that learning disabilities and mental health diagnoses should be supported, instead of medicated purely to ensure young people can “shut up, listen and learn”:

*(ADHD and other diagnoses)...*I think it’s just a different way of being, and being human, which is like, so many ways to be human, and the institution of schools can’t—they’re unable to cope with that, they want kids lined up, they want them sitting down, they want—it’s kind of like, it’s not the military, but it’s military-fashioned in a sense

where, “You shut up, you listen, you learn.” You know? But it’s like, most kids I know that are on the streets, whether it’s for family trauma, or for like school—having a really hard time fitting into this kind of orderly system that just doesn’t fit for that person. They don’t fit in the mould, you know?

The framing that Lucas is describing—where students with learning disabilities or others that don’t fit the mould are positioned as having deficits--has long been critiqued by disability scholars (Kafer, 2009, 2013; Rice et al., 2020; Nocella, 2008, Ben-Moshe et al., 2005). These critiques also speak to how “able-minded” students are positioned in “norming” ways to those with disabilities (Kafer, 2013, p. 6).

Schools that fail to adapt to the actual needs of “diverse students” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017) and focus instead on “fixing” behaviours—whether they are the result of official mental health and learning diagnoses or symptoms/signs that a young person might be experiencing homelessness—fail to meet youth where they are at and support them to participate in the ways they need to. At times, as in Sandra’s experience, medication and an early ADHD diagnoses led to teachers telling her mother that she was “better—calmer, has more patience, she doesn’t go around playing with other kids when it’s not time to play.” However, despite teachers believing she was “better” because she was conforming (or, as Lucas suggested, she “shut up, listened and learned”), Sandra continued to struggle with mental health issues and the impacts of trauma, and eventually dropped out.

Institutional Action as Superficial, Limited, or Damaging: Inadequate responses

Youth like Lucas, Fariha, Casey, and Nathan, described attempts from schools to connect them with help as coming across as superficial, what Jolene described as staff “not really trying”, ironically echoing narratives that youth heard from teachers about their own behaviours—that they didn’t care, weren’t trying, were lazy or were wasting time. Youth we spoke with described a range of interventions that they didn’t understand, including some experiences of mandatory

programs like anger-management or appointments with a psychologist or counsellor. While these interventions were sometimes reflected on as helpful, these benefits were often not noticed until some time had passed when youth realized they had developed skills that were useful later in their trajectories. Thomas, a white, straight, cis-man, shared that he was barred from attending classes pending mandatory anger management courses through the youth protection system:

P: Anger management? Yes. Because, you know, like I said, what the fuck with school man, I was always acting up, always trying to punch someone in the face, so they actually forced me into anger management at one point.

N: Was that DPJ¹⁷? Or was that the youth justice system?

P: DPJ, yeah. And like, the school and everything else. Like, “Your kid needs to go to anger management, he can’t come back to school unless he fucking takes a class.”

N: Right, how did that go?

P: Well I ended up with a bunch of books, and I’m less of an angry person now...I no longer punch people in the face as a first resort.

The reason behind these interventions were often not explained in a meaningful way to youth (i.e. many youth said they assumed they were for “problem” students, or students who were facing family breakdown, but this was never confirmed), and were regularly brief blips before students were expected to just go back to class and keep up as normal without follow-ups.

Many youth who were able to access mental health or scholastic supports did say they were helpful, but were a limited number of meetings—for psych/mental health support, there are no follow-ups and there may be a limited amount of meetings (as few as 3-5 in some cases), something that is directly at odds with trauma-informed approaches to mental health supports—part of a broader shift to limited appointment mental health supports, meant to find a timely mental health “solutions” within a broader context of neoliberal austerity measures (Cohen,

¹⁷ Département de la protection jeunesse

2016; Evans & Goguen, 2019, Nichols & Lewington, 2020). Jolene, Sandra, Rown, Matti, and others (n=9) who attempted to access school-based mental health supports described not having referrals to ongoing or other services when these sessions run out, or if they missed one (or too many) sessions they lost the right to continue accessing support.

Some young people also shared that counsellors or staff were ill-equipped to deal with both the unique situations homeless youth may experience, where they often exist between child and adult services, and may be unable to access parts of the labour market. Youth shared a variety of different responses from professionals, including transgressing professional boundaries for good (for example, within our team Laurence strongly advocated for increased “judgement” as a point of possibility (Adamovicz & Malenfant, 2019)). They shared that professionals “use their power and judgement to evaluate each situation, rather than automatically apply laws and rules” (Group fieldnotes, Nov 2018)) and bad (for example, Benny shared experiences of school-based mental health counsellors making romantic advances and funding drug use). In both cases, it is clear that staff are not sufficiently trained, resourced or equipped to support youth experiencing complex issues like homelessness (Thielking, 2006).

Similarly, mental health support may be available, but young people might not feel ready to take on steps, (one youth described themselves as “too disorganized” to make it to appointments), may not be interested in the approach (Benny opted for “DIY or die” mental healthcare until he could access a program at the Foster addiction centre¹⁸), or may face stigma, (for example, Fariha and Rowan both shared that they did not want to face the stigma of being singled out in class to visit the school psychologist, and Gigi’s teacher shared her diagnosis with her whole class). This demonstrates a need for destigmatising mental health supports in schools,

¹⁸ At the time of our interview, Benny was still waiting but hopeful that he could receive treatment at Foster, which is the only English-language drug rehabilitation service in Montréal that is not part of the private system, which Benny could not afford.

as well as also clear and multiple steps for youth to access them on their own terms (Sulkowski, 2016, Sulkowski & Michael, 2014). For those who were able to access them, young people saw the mental health supports they were receiving in schools as underfunded and underdeveloped, and ill-equipped to deal with the realities youth were facing throughout their lives and during experiences of homelessness. For example, Sandra shared that supports at her suburban secondary school were little more than “encouragement”, including for supports when she began using drugs:

They’ll keep trying to make goals so that you use less often, but if you’re using more or less often...it doesn’t change anything. They’re just there to tell you, « You can do it! » *Pis on va essayer de faire un objectif pour que tu consommes moins » Mais si tu continues à consommer plus ou moins, mais...ça change rien. Ils étaient juste là pour te dire « T’es capable ».*

While these approaches were often also seen as well-intentioned, youth (n=28) described not trusting that educators and school mental health or social workers understood the root of their problems. Students may then quit seeing mental health workers because they don’t think professionals understand their realities or aren’t adapting their approaches for a young person who is homeless or at-risk of homelessness—additionally, many youth don’t want to divulge additional details of their lives for fear of punishment, stigma, or involvement of police or youth protection (Fisher, 2020; Nichols, 2019).

When describing a family car accident that would eventually lead to his homelessness and increased educational disengagement, Lucas explained:

To me I feel like institutions, for the most part, like, in the policies and in the stuff like that, and on paper, they like saying that they’re there for people, but I would say 75% of the time, unless you ask for help, and you go through the process, which can be friggin hard to do, they don’t care that much. Or not that they don’t care, but they don’t—they’re not going to put the time into it, you know? Which I think it like, the thing, you know, we didn’t get—the school was aware that we had an accident, but I don’t think they knew to what point it had affected our life. The hospitals knew, but they didn’t see that we needed

help, I think the insurance paid for a psychologist for us for like, a couple of years, which was a thing, which I guess helped with certain things.

Lucas references that going through the process, and asking for help, are things that can be “friggin hard to do,” especially when they are unclear, may not come to anything, or may end up requiring the youth to divulge or share things that they aren’t comfortable doing to “demonstrate” their worthiness for support.

Unclear Processes, Punishment, and Internalized Failure

While there are some provincial developments around the role of schools in addressing homelessness in a Québécois context, there are no official school policies that address student homelessness in the province. The interventions that youth described over the course of their academic trajectory are thus not “homelessness” interventions but rather responses to a variety of issues that youth faced before, during and after periods of homelessness. What is clear across youth experiences is that there are institutional narratives, grounded in obfuscated and unclear institutional processes and power dynamics (Graeber, 2015), which often place the blame on young people for their educational barriers and disengagement (blame that is internalized by youth in long-lasting ways and attributed to their own “stupidity,” laziness, lack of understanding or lack of caring.). It is also clear that young people do not believe that school staff understand what they need in terms of access and supports, which echoes previous research (Schwan et al., 2018, Vetrone, 2015, Pescod, 2020).

Youth also described disproportionate punishment in schools, with punishments following the same lines of reinforcing ideal student behaviour (Annamma et al., 2019). Just as one must “fit in the mould”, as both Lucas and Rowan put it, in order to receive or benefit from interventions, alternatively being labelled a “bad” seed (as Matti shared) or otherwise a threat,

like Pauline or Palle, to the order of the school, results in disproportionate punishment. Those who face this punishment are doubly disadvantaged in that they are prevented from receiving supports and actively pushed out of schools (Nichols, 2019; Wun, 2017) through violating school codes of conducts (described in more detail in the following chapter).

Multiple youth (n=29) described being punished for small or inconsequential incidents, such as Palle sharing regular conflicts with teachers because they wouldn't "speak to [him] like a human." While Palle's understanding of his expulsion from multiple schools stemmed from teachers unfairly punishing him for things like asking to go to the bathroom or handing in assignments late--which eventually contributed to his expulsion from secondary school--it is safe to assume that this was not the official institutional narrative of this situation. However, this was Palle's understanding of what led to his expulsion from the school—at the time of our interview he was in the process of appealing the school's decision, and the principal had been refusing to answer his emails, calls or follow "official" protocols.

P:I got kicked out the last day of class during that session, I was like, "Wow." Just because I wanted to go to the bathroom. And I was like, "So, you're going to kick out somebody who wants to go to the bathroom and just like, you know, asks you to go?" And he was like, "Yeah I will." And I'm like, "Okay, fine."

N: Kicked out of school, not just kicked out of class?

P: No, kicked out of class, that time...that school was like, it's stupid, because apparently the director, me and him, we had a contract and like, when I got kicked out of school, he told me in that contract there was like—it said that like, if you don't bring work on time, like, nowhere it was written that you're going to get kicked out because of that, and like, that was his reason. And in our agenda, it says that like, the SAP, that's where it's—the psycho-educators are, and they handle all these things, before it is handled by the director, they never came to see me, in the agenda it says that you are supposed to see you first. And the director like, it only happened two times that I didn't bring my homework on time, and I got kicked out because of that. And I tried to like, contact my director, you know, talk about it to him, and say, "Look, you did something wrong. Look at what the agenda says, show me your contract, show me where it's written." He never wants to contact me back. I've called him, it's been already over a month or two that I'm trying to call him back. And nothing.

Palle wasn't the "advocate" they imagined, and if his parents had been contacting the principal for an explanation, this process may have unfolded differently – although research suggests, this depends on his parents' access as well, (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Kingston, 2021; Solvason, Cliff & Bailey, 2019). Further, if engaging in institutional processes is difficult even for parents who have relative class and racial privilege (Griffith & Smith, 2005), expecting Palle to navigate these processes when he's not "speaking the same language" (Grant, 2020) institutionally is unlikely to allow him to advocate for himself. Regardless of the school's institutional understanding of what happened in their expulsion, Palle bore the burden of appealing (to no avail) and of having to reconnect with a new school—the school did not have to defend their decision to him.

Within schools, the freedom to choose how to best serve each community may allow for important equity work to be done to serve particular populations of students (for example, through supporting Indigenous self-determination (Battiste, 2013)) However, without recognizing and shifting the mechanisms that maintain the broader raced, classed and heteronormative system, (Au, 2015; Elliott, Powell & Brenton, 2013; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Griffith & Smith, 2005,) the lack of any school or school service centre/board policy dictating accountability or regulations makes it difficult to ensure effective interventions aren't the responsibility of the good "judgement" of individual teachers, staff or professionals (Edwards, 2020). In Québec, as outlined in the following chapter, each principal is responsible for developing their own code of conduct, and can expel, or "transfer" students as applicable. While school codes of conducts should aim to support the overall goal of the Ministry of Education to meet every student's right to education (1977, I-13.3) Palle was showing up to school high,

hangover, disruptive and otherwise being “bad”, so he was positioned as a threat to the school, rather than a student who needed help.

Expulsions (or, within less formalized processes across particular school service centres, “transfers”) within a Québec context stem from student behaviour that violates an individual schools’ policy—which may be officially stated in the code of conduct or simply “communicated” to students through assemblies (Cheff, 2018; Ministry of Education, 1988). These “transfers” or expulsions also relate to a common barrier for homeless youth—transitions to new schools, along with frequent transitions, are experienced in high numbers by homeless youth (Courtney et al., 2007; Low et al., 2016; Jones, Bowen & Ball, 2018). Youth experiencing homelessness have high transition rates in schools for many reasons, including family moves, “social expulsion” and exclusion from services (Kaufman, 2020); however, many youth we interviewed shared experiences that these transitions were officially (and unofficially) stemming from punishment for “bad” behaviour. Transfers as punishment (Cheff, 2018; Skiba et al., 2016, Skiba et al., 2002; Maag, 2001) continue to occur despite extensive literature outlining the significant benefits of teachers building strong, long-term relationships and learning the needs of individual students, and particularly for students experiencing housing precarity (Moore, 2013). Youth we spoke with said that having a relationship built on trust would be a defining factor in whether they think an intervention would work, suggesting an important point of possibility for action and prevention.

Like many of the educational barriers that youth described, the challenges arising from transitions to new schools were (complexly) constructed as personal failures (Gaetz, 2014; Nichols, 2019). Years before being expelled in secondary school, Palle transferred to a new school following a bullying incident in sixth grade. He framed his struggles to adapt to a new

context as a personal failure—he attributed to him being a “lazy guy.” However, further explanation demonstrated that he was struggling with the new material and difficulty level:

I changed schools I was changing for sixth grade, and I was just being lazy, like, I didn't want to do anything, because like, the level of that school was, from where I was before, the level of how strong it is was lower than the other one. Because like, they were more advanced in the school that I changed over, so, that I didn't understand anything...[At the new school,] I was not motivated for anything, as soon as I saw that the difficulty level was higher, you know? I was just like—it's like if you're in a video game and the boss is like level, let's say, 65, and your level's like 30, you're just like, “Oh fuck.”...They tried to offer me help, but like, I wouldn't understand, they didn't want to either. I didn't find it necessary at the time because, eh, life.

Moving to a new school, or in other periods of transition such as navigating new medications, changes or instability at home, or gender transitions, students also sometimes described “giving up” or skipping, because engaging becomes more challenging, framing these, too, as personal failures rather than a lack of transition plan or suitable and effective supports.

Adding to the difficulties encountered when transferring to a new school, students who may have received supports around learning disability diagnoses or behavioural issues may lose access to these when transferring--or when transferring from a specialized school to a “normal” school. Robert, a white, straight, Francophone Québécois man, who was placed in a specialized school serving “pupils...with various mental health issues” at a young age, shared that upon transferring: “*il n'y avait rien pour m'arreter d'avoir un crise*” (there was nothing to stop me from having a crisis). While he found the specialized school to be more targeted at those with developmental disabilities, he did see the counselling and specialized supports he received around his own issues (which he described as behavioural) as effective. When Robert enrolled in a mainstream secondary school and had a mental health breakdown, the police were called, and he was expelled (as well as brought to a youth centre – that is, a residential institution for youth involved in the youth protection and/or the youth criminal justice systems). Behaviour that would

have been a point of intervention at his specialized school was seen to require criminalization at his new school. While many youth held a critique of the shortcomings of the education system, particularly in preventing or intervening in experiences of youth homelessness, they often simultaneously maintained narratives that they were, themselves, to blame for their educational disengagement.

Some youth did not receive “transfers,” but rather were, as Matti shared about their own experience, “invited to leave.” While Matti experienced this while attending an Ontario secondary school, these unclear processes were also experienced by youth in Québec and across Canada. When Matti arrived for school in the second semester of their grade 12 year, they realized they had not received a timetable. When meeting with the guidance counsellor, they were asked to drop out:

M: That meeting, basically, consisted of them informing me that due to my poor attendance that first semester, and semesters previously, and also with my projected passing rate, that in their mind it didn't make sense to let me come back for semester 2, I wasn't being admitted. But, they didn't want to kick me out, so what they said was, “We're not going to admit you, but we can't really just throw you out, so we're going to ask you to sign these papers saying that you're dropping out.” So I said, “Okay. I don't have any other option? I can't fight this?” And they said, “No you can't, we can't throw you out because your attendance hasn't been horrible enough. And like, you've been kind of doing school stuff, we just don't think there's any point in you being here, we don't think you want to be here.” They kind of pushed it, pushed it, pushed it, it was this really awkward half-hour conversation, and eventually I signed the papers, dropped out of high school.

N: ...what did you do?

M: I immediately went outside and had a cigarette, even like—I was supposed to be going to my class and I said, “Well, no, it doesn't matter now.”

For young people who had to move from rural areas to access supports as they experienced housing precarity or homelessness, school attendance and enrollment was disrupted (echoing broader research within Québécois and Canadian rural/urban contexts (Buck-McFadyen, 2021;

Christensen, 2012; MacDonald & Gaulin, 2019; Sansfaçon et al., 2018, Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2016). Roy, a 20-year-old heterosexual cis-man who likes sports, said that when he became homeless after the death of his mother, he had to leave the small city he had grown up in, including the school where he had strong social and academic ties, in order to access a shelter and housing supports. He did not engage in schooling at this time since housing became a priority and he was unfamiliar with schools in the city.

Bullying

Experiences of bullying were described by the majority of youth we spoke with in relation to their educational trajectories. Young people experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to report being bullied (Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, 2019) which may be a significant factor contributing to increased risk for instability and mental health struggles such as suicidality (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018, McCallops, Aviles, Earnshaw, Palkovitz, 2020). Often, a lack of intervention around bullying cemented the notions for a young person that the system didn't care about them, or that teachers or authority figures were not looking out for them/would just punish them for attempting to get help. Palle and Matti shared that institutional inaction regarding their own bullying pushed them to retaliate, which then did lead to (their) punishment as well as tense and poor relationships with school staff who further saw them as a "problem".

Palle explained that punishments he received stemmed from not being believed when he tried to talk to teachers about being bullied himself:

Since the day I arrived in grade 2, and the school where I was there was just two guys that would always be like, bullying, and I was just like, "You know, I don't give a shit, you're not going to be bullying me."... I went to a teacher, I went to the director, you know, and at the time, some teachers were like, "Oh, why are you lying?" They didn't see—they wouldn't see the going on, and like, the bullies they would lie about it, they would lie about everything, and I was like, "You know what? I'm just going to like, stop

it.” At some point in grade five, when I just got annoyed with those bullies, and I just grabbed a stick and hit their knees and was like, “You gotta fuck off. Because the next time I’m hitting your face with the stick.”

Palle was eventually transferred to another school because of this bullying incident. Matti shared that they weren’t believed when they shared experiences of bullying with their teachers in elementary school and were instead punished for being the bully themselves, echoing existing literature outlining the links between bullying and housing precarity (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Bullying was described as a key factor in educational barriers for 38% of youth we spoke with, long before dropping out or being expelled, or experiences of homelessness, though some youth did reference that they believed schools were acting more about bullying today. This is reflected in Quebec’s 2012 Bill 65: *An Act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools*, outlining that Québec schools have a responsibility to prevent and intervene on bullying. Discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Bill 65 provides some interesting insight into how prevention and the role of schools in supporting diverse students might be actualized, as well as how “equity” policies can further serve to norm students if not critically mobilized (Darnell Pritchard, 2013; Edwards, 2020).

“Bad Seeds” and Undeserving Students

I wouldn’t talk about it...so the principal sort of was assuming that I was a drug addict, or something like that, because I was always sad, I was always skipping class, I was sleeping...so then, after that I ran away from my house because I had no other option, and...it took a while [to get help] because nobody believed my story.
Fariha

When discussing their own barriers in secondary school, Matti explained, “most of the kids that went to this high school were from welfare families, low-income families, a lot of them were like, involved in crime and other stuff...if you were one of these kids that seemed like they might

be a “bad seed,” you all got lumped in together, you were all going to get the same treatment.” In this case, that treatment was a lack of intervention, and being forced to drop out. In the same interview, Matti traces being labelled a “bad kid” back to being 7 years old and being punished through isolation from other students, being brought in front of the class as an example of “what not to do,” and being told they would go to jail when he grew up. Matti said the punishments were unwarranted and designed to “mak[e] sure everyone else knew that I was the “bad kid:”

And like, this was a continuous thing, and this teacher started to target me and tell me like, “You’re going to go to jail some day, for the way that you treat women.” But it’s like, I’m not doing anything. Literally, I’m sitting in a corner, don’t want to talk to anybody, reading a book. Being informed I’m this horrible monster of a human being. Imagine telling a 6-year-old, “You’re a monster, you treat women horribly.” Like, I haven’t even formed a, “There’s a difference in gender” in my head yet. And I’m not doing anything. So, I grew to hate this teacher, because like, anything I did, anything I did was an excuse to put me in front of the whole class. I actually remember a couple of times being singled out, but not directly, but hearing her say to other kids, “Don’t do that or you’re going to end up like Matti”...Because I was you know, like, short, shaved hair, dirty clothes, my dad didn’t do laundry, in jeans, and Harley Davidson t-shirts. I looked ragged and sketchy. And see that, that wasn’t me though.

As other research suggests (Gaetz, 2014; Nichols, 2018; Schwan, 2018; Trumpener, 1997) the majority of youth participants in this study who talked about their experiences in schools (n=37) described being punished the symptoms of a difficult home life—not finishing homework, not showing up, not having food, not concentrating, falling asleep or acting out—noting that school discipline processes mirrored the punishments they received at home. Teachers often expressed disappointment and outrage while personalizing young people’s failures. If they attempted to reach out to teachers for supports, youth explained these efforts were met with inaction (or ineffective action) from school staff. Indeed, in the worst case scenarios, they received punishment or brought attention to themselves in ways that led to discipline or involvement of youth protection or police. These responses taught youth not to reach out in the future.

Not Being Believed

An important aspect of the stigma associated with being a “bad seed” or a student who didn’t fit “the mould” is not being believed. Youth (n=26) shared experiences of not being believed, either when they asked for help or when they talked about being harmed by others (bullying, abuse at home, abuse elsewhere), resulting in a lack of intervention following disclosures. Not being believed from an early age diminishes the chances that young people are going to reach out to teachers or school staff when they do need support and are less likely to build relationships of trust and respect with professionals (Moore, 2013, Sauvé et al., 2018, Hope et al., 2019, Milne 2016).

Not believing students connects to the broader devaluation and casting aside of youth’s statements and experiences as not true, not valuable, and not based in how things “really are”—particularly because they are seen as too young to understand how the world works or be agentic in decisions about their own homelessness prevention (Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal, 2017). This stance is linked to the long-standing paternalistic role of schools (Battiste, 2013 Au, 2010, Krueger-Henney, 2016)—and narratives that young people don’t really understand how systems work (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008; Gillen, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014). However, there is a significant difference between not knowing how things “really are” and facing institutional barriers/facing bureaucratic and systemic processes that are intentionally inaccessible to youth (i.e. because they aren’t old enough, aren’t well/unwell enough, aren’t white, don’t have access to finances, or don’t have an advocate). Further, while information about rights and how institutional processes work may lead to more equitable access, this is not a guarantee. As demonstrated in our project, knowing that a police officer is breaking the law through an illegal stop and search process, or how a school is violating the Education Act by unfairly pushing you out, does not guarantee you can prevent it from happening. This

devaluation of youth agency contributes to the mechanisms that allow professionals to both ignore the signs that a young person needs support (by dismissing their realities and claiming that their hands are tied by set bureaucratic processes) and punish them for those same signs (through dismissing what they say as untrue and framing them as threats to the order of the institutional space).

Dismissing young people's accounts is reinforced by notions of the ideal and classed student (Griffith & Smith, 2005, Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009, Elliott, Powell & Brenton, 2013), and a belief within particularly middle-class and affluent schools that "homelessness doesn't happen here." As Jolene shared,

Well, I feel like when you have money, and you look a certain way, like, the DPJ [department de la protection jeunesse] don't even fucking—they don't even search or anything. Because like, the school, they were aware, like my grades were really bad, because like, I didn't get any help from anything, my situation was just degrading, because I didn't understand anything that was going on in class, because whenever I had homework or whatever, I fucking couldn't do it. Because my mom was never there to help me, and they knew that, like, all along. High school, like, showing up with bruises and everything, all the time, since I'm showing up to school crying, because my mom was really awful to me all the time. And they never—because, I don't know, when you come from a middle-class suburb family, it's okay, you can do anything you want.

Alternatively, poor schools or "skid" schools (as Matti described them) were described as holding such low expectations for the majority of their students that signs of trauma and/or homelessness were ignored. Discrimination and stigma based on race, sexuality, gender, language, "social condition" (as outlined in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, 1975, c-12, 10) as well as the presence of "bad" behaviours (drug use, for example) can also feed into the narrative of the ideal student, through assuming what a young person can do (go home, or not go home) and what they need.

Vee, a South Asian man who moved to Canada in elementary school, shared his experiences in Québécois “Welcome classes¹⁹” during third grade. He described encountering racism and discrimination, with the teacher saying he would never be able to learn French. He shared,

I got a lot of insults. In the beginning, I got a lot of insults. Even some teachers they said like, “You can’t learn French, you can’t learn Frenglish [8:00], you were never able to learn French, you’ll never learn French.”

J: Wasn’t it their job to make sure that you could learn French and English?

P: Yeah, but, they don’t want to actually, they’re more like, they’re more, you know, I don’t know if you call this racism, or you call this discrimination, I heard—I had teachers like, even if I didn’t understand French and English, my parents used to call me, to say this teacher is discrediting you, because of your colour...

Vee shared that he eventually loved school, and that the discrimination he faced in Welcome Class led to an increased “resilience” and ability to self-teach in later school experiences. While I do want to honour the ways that young people shared the benefits that experiences of hardship, discrimination and harm in schools cultivated in their own educational independence—there are ways to think about ensuring students are able to self-direct their learning (Akom, 2009, Johnstone & Terzakis, 2012; Marquéz, 2019; Williams, 2017) without putting them in classrooms where they experience overt racism, belittling, unfair punishments, and institutional gaslighting.

This extends to schools’ assumptions about what a student’s homelife might look like. While assuming that students have a safe home to go to can be detrimental, making assumptions about a young person’s safety (i.e. that their home is not safe) can undermine the very real

¹⁹ Bill 101, or Québec’s Charter of French language, dictates all official schooling in the province must be in French (with select exemptions). Welcome Class aims to provide French immersion to newcomers over at least 10 months, as well as integrate “Québec values such as “having the right to express themselves” (Summers, 2014)

strategies youth have for keeping themselves safe, as well as reasonable fears that families have about police and youth protection involvement. Multiple young people described keeping any signs of difficulty, physical or emotional violence at home from teachers and school staff because they feared entering the “system”. As Thomas explained,

T:[Youth protection] are always there like a fucking—they’re like hawks. You—you can kind of constantly feel their presence, but unless you’re like, down, nothing. Actually they’re more like vultures. A lot of them are more like vultures, actually. They prey on bad situations, and if it seems even a tiny bit bad, they’ll try to like, like I said, force a false confession out of you, just to, you know, put you in the system and shit like that. It’s like, “No, I’m trying to stay the fuck out of the system, fuck you.”

N: Right. But you, by your own account, said it was like, your dad was an alcoholic, like things were not the best at home, but you felt like, whatever was at home was better than what they could offer?

T: Oh yeah. Yeah. Like, I saw my cousins going into it, I was like, I do not want this.

Thomas explained that seeing his Indigenous cousins separated in, and unprotected by, the youth protection system, meant he avoided youth protection and police “like cancer.” “Safety” also needs to be understood in a way where one size does not fit all, taking into consideration what is and has been safe for different communities (Hackford-Peer, 2020; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Trocmé, N., Knock, D. & Blackstock, 2004). Connections to youth protection, for many, was seen as a punishment rather than an intervention or help.

Working the System/Making the System Work

While youth shared that being positioned as “gaming” the system or “liars” from an early age was damaging, it is also worth noting that lying is a strategy that some youth employ in order to access services and ensure safety—sometimes as the only way that young people could access institutional supports (Cruz, 2014). Throughout our initial meetings, we talked about how sometimes lying is the only thing we can do to either access services or protect ourselves—due

both to the fact that homeless youth are supposed to share their “stories” and intimate details about their personal lives in order to access services. Our team also perceived that that access to supports was granted based on demonstrated merit/deservedness/performing need, incentivizing youth to lie about how long they’ve stayed at a shelter, whether they’re taking drugs or drinking, and even how old they are. These are seen as survival strategies. In the following chapter, I will dig into how policy is often set up to necessitate the ways youth have to “work” the system.

Multiple young people described the strategies that they learned to gain access, reduce harm, or get through educational experiences. Young people also described knowing when not to disclose things, because the police or social workers would get involved. Learning how to lie to protect themselves or their family was also described as an important skill to develop. This sometimes included “demonstrating” they were worthy of supports, including demonstrating they were poor enough, mentally unwell enough, or homeless enough to deserve interventions (a task that, if they failed, they received the kinds of responses like Fariha, whose teacher told her she “didn’t deserve the help she was getting” and that she was “too smart” to be struggling in school).

As Fariha shared, knowing how to navigate the system--in her case, knowing how to access a psychologist to get accommodations in secondary schools--included addressing the supposed involvement of parents.

P: Um, the thing is, in order to be able to see one [a psychologist], you had to like, let your parents know. You had to have their permission.

JM: Okay, they sign a form?

P: Yeah. But at one point it got so out of hand, that I needed help, that I did it like, regardless, and I faked my dad’s signature.

JM: Okay, and that opened it up?

P: Yeah.

Similar to Thomas’s strategies for avoiding the youth protection system, multiple youth (n=17) described attempting to maintain appearances (showing up, getting “good enough” grades) in order to avoid *any* attention from teachers or administrators, particularly because they didn’t trust/didn’t know what schools would be able to or would do to them. This included fears of having youth protection or police involvement. This provides a particular challenge in trying to think of early assessments and prevention (Mackenzie and Thielking, 2014), since young people are actively hiding the “warning signs”²⁰ that might suggest that something is off, but also bolsters the need for youth-chosen services that are built on trust, consent, agency, and respect. For example, when Naomi asked Lucas what would have enabled him to take a teacher up on an intervention, he shared,

N: Like, but if I was—I used to be a teacher, if I had asked you, “Yo, Lucas, like, what’s up? There’s a huge drop in grades, what’s happening?” What would you have said to me?

L: Well, depends on how you approach me.

N: Mhmm, but just like that. Like, I’m saying, like a teacher..

L: If you approach me nice, and you ask me enough questions, and you were nice the whole time, I’d probably just be honest, because I’ve always been relatively honest.

This is a clear point where prevention could be actualized. Research suggests in situations where there is trust and rapport between teachers and students/families, teachers saw early intervention more frequently, and more likely to be *initiated* by students or parents (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017, p. 108). Many young people described hiding lates and absences, or hiding behaviours from family and professionals around them for fear of being punished (n=19).

²⁰ An Australian study of teachers demonstrated this was one of the most significant barriers to early homelessness prevention in schools—teachers shared that when young people disclosed struggles, punishment and child protection were often the only options. As one teacher shared, “That’s the biggest barrier and my god it’s bad because they’re all under 15 or 16. And they’re all experiencing—they’re all high maintenance and stuff, and there’s not a lot of services out there to cater for them. It’s [child protection service] and only [child protection service].” (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017, p. 101).

Coupled with stigma and lack of trust, a fear of punishment is a tangible barrier to young people sharing what is actually going on in their lives.

Youth shared that, in schools from elementary to post-secondary, if you're not "cooperating," you may be framed as undeserving of interventions or supports, or are seen as complicit in your own educational disengagement. Demonstrating "cooperation" was also part of how youth learned to work (within) the system. As Fariha shared, this sometimes extended to teachers and staff blaming youth for taking advantage of supports they did not "need":

They started—[teachers and school staff] patronized me a lot, which I kind of hated, like, they treated me as if I—I, ugh, didn't know my situation. So like, I had to be very cooperative and receptive to what they were offering, even after, it took me a long time before they'd even take me seriously also... "Oh you're very smart, I don't understand why you're on the street." "I don't understand what you're doing with your life, you could have been done with this a long time ago." "You should take advantage of the fact that you could still live with your parents and suck it up." Um, "You shouldn't be smoking." I don't know, I don't know, like, "You have everything at your disposition [sic]", which was not the case, especially not in my reality at the time... "You don't deserve all the help you're getting."

Yeah, that was one teacher. "I want to see you out of here, I'm tired of seeing your face." Like that was one thing, one teacher told me.

This is particularly important in how we imagine interventions, prevention and supports, since many youth already felt that they didn't want to take up space or resources if they didn't "really" need them, weren't "homeless enough" or seemingly could return home, even if it wasn't safe for them.

"Working the system" might be understood instead as self-advocating within a system that did not expect them to, and actively encouraged them not to—in systems that discriminated against them. Students whose parents/families played the supportive role expected of them (as essential to children's educational success) did not have to self-advocate in the same way. The additional work that youth had to do to self-advocate also included attempting to access channels

that were intentionally only accessible to parents, when those parents were not playing the role of advocate, and often led to them feeling they were failing, lying or were bad students.

Fuck It

Alternatively, youth may choose to refuse (Tuck & Yang, 2015; Miller, 2016) to “work” the system or cooperate with what is expected of them. Many of the youth we spoke with, and members of the youth research team, used the words “Fuck it.” While initially this seemed to maintain the blame on the young people themselves (echoing Palle’s asserting that he was just a “lazy guy”) they were often contextualized within a long trajectory of trying and failing to access services. As Fariha shared,

It’s funny, because they like, referred me to food banks at school, and then I went to a few of those, and they said, “You have to be on welfare, in order to get food.”...like, I was at school, so you’re not allowed to be on welfare when you’re at school, so I had to quit school, but in order to be on welfare my parents had to declare that I didn’t live with them. So, anyway, and I didn’t know that you could use Pop’s as an address for welfare, so like, by the time I was 18, I was like, “I’m going to the Yukon, fuck this shit.”

Fariha is referring to both the requirement that social assistance recipients in Québec not be enrolled in school, and that applicants under 18 need to receive written statements from their parents to legally emancipate (Gouvernement du Québec, 1991). While Fariha’s “fuck this shit” moment came well into her educational trajectory—after years of attempting to access supports through secondary and post-secondary--this wasn’t the case for all youth. Casey shared that when he experienced homelessness in schools, he was not attending often and “decided to fully say “Fuck it.”” because there was nothing schools could do outside of calling youth protection services. For many, a lack of trust, and subsequent lack of “cooperation,” was consistent in their reaction to schooling from a young age.

This mode of resistance came up for the first time while planning our interview scripts as a team, while conducting a mock interview as a team. I acted as the guinea pig participant and Naomi acted as interviewer, both to see how interviews might unfold but also to model what an ethnographic interview looks like for the youth researchers. Naomi asked me, “If someone had reached out to you in school before you became homeless, what would that have looked like? Would you have accepted help?” My answer was, “I would have told them to fuck off.” This became a point that we continued to return to throughout the project, in a project where we asked youth how institutions might have prevented their homelessness, we also had to grapple with the answer that proposed interventions would meet refusal from the very youth who were proposing them. This speaks to a deep-seated mistrust of institutions and reemphasizes the fact that many young people begin school with intergenerational knowledge to avoid institutional engagement (Harvey, 2016). Each barrier that I have outlined thus far not only reinforces young people’s lack of trust in the education system to not only to act on best interests, but to do anything other than actively harm them.

Refusal has been taken up, particularly by BIPOC scholars and activists (Rodríguez, 2019; Simpson, 2020; 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2014; 2018) as an important act of resistance within violent structures and systems.

Through a refusal of the bankrupt rewards of “entry” where one is meant to be thankful for simply being included in a still oppressive structure experienced in academic spaces, we create an opening. Refusal allows us space to examine and gain clarity on that which is being refused. Refusal helps us unmask seemingly benevolent relations and the function of affect in creating institutional buy in. Our refusal creates space for resistance to incorporation while simultaneously opening space for us to turn toward another possibility. Our refusal lets us recognize that we are each other’s possibility. Through our refusal we challenge normalized coercive violence (e.g. the capitalist reproduction of death, prisons, the dispossession of Indigenous lands). Our refusal delegitimizes that which has gained legitimacy by force. (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 6).

While speaking specifically of refusal in academia, Rodríguez's argument of the potential for refusal to "turn toward another possibility" (2019, p. 6) is applicable to youth's descriptions of refusing to "cooperate" in schools and other State systems. Young people's descriptions of refusing to engage in the processes that were doing harm to them (in and out of schools), failed to see them as knowledgeable and competent, and did not value their agency not only brought attention to the failures of these systems. At the same time, these accounts highlighted youth's agency to refuse their participation as a choice, allowing for imagining how these seemingly inevitable trajectories in harm within schools may look different. These acts of refusal "delegitimize" (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 6) the inevitability of schools, as we know them and as centres of "coercive violence" (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 6) for many youth.

Drug and Alcohol Use

While drug and alcohol use were sometimes associated with these feelings of "fuck it," substance use also played other roles for individual youth. At times used as forms of escape or coping, including coping with the stress and harm they experienced in schools, youth used drugs and alcohol for multiple reasons. Some young people (n=11) described ambiguous feelings about drug use--being in situations where drugs were openly available (i.e. in a squat, at a younger age than other young people may be starting to experiment) were described not as a negative force, but rather a complex, if useful, tool to engage peer networks and cope with trauma. However, using street drugs simultaneously had direct impacts on how much youth were able to concentrate and participate in school (as in the cases of Mattie, Benny, and Jolene), thus having a future impact on their lives (not having high school diploma, etc.).

I want to intentionally avoid talking about drug use as inherently negative, or as simply "addiction," as the ways many participants were talking about drugs was much more complex

than that (although some did talk about drugs purely in these terms). Especially with young people, there is a tendency for any drug use to be seen as inherently problematic and impacting development (Zweifler & de Beers, 2003) including a resistance to employing harm reduction approaches with youth (in favour of abstinence-based approaches (Bonomo & Bowes, 2011)). Alternatively, young people are also assumed to have the flexibility and freedom to experiment in their youth, though this often isn't afforded to youth who are over-criminalized and underserved (Bagot & Kaminer, 2018, Pilkington, 2007)—or experiencing homelessness (Gaetz, 2014; Jean, 2019)

Lucas discussed the moral superiority he witnessed with respect to different kinds of drugs--for instance, he contrasted the highly stigmatized use of crack by people experiencing homelessness downtown to the recreational use of designer drugs at teen parties in the suburbs where he grew up. He shared that upper/middle class youth were experimenting with drugs in ways that were socially acceptable, contrasting this with his own experiences of punishment for smoking weed:

But like, I think like, the problem at that point in high school was that I was getting into trouble, because you know, I was smoking weed and doing drugs, or whatever, you know, starting to experiment with drugs and, like, and then I think teachers like, there's a stigma about it right? Like, it's taboo, so they punish you, you know? So I started to hate institutions around that same time, you know...[In the suburbs] it's like capitalism at its finest, you know? People buy all the same crappy houses, same crappy car, same crappy fridge and, the kids all do the same crap, and then they don't even fucking know but their kids are all snorting coke, doing oxy's, these days, zany's, benzos, and I tell them, because I like making them fucking think of—see how life is, they won't fucking listen, but whatever. You know?

Rowan also described facing disproportionate punishment for drug use, something she engaged in earlier than most students (as a tool for dealing with the harm she felt at school) prior to experiencing homelessness, leading to her ultimate disengagement from secondary school and further contributing to how she “hated to be there.” Multiple young people described their drug

use as ways to cope with difficult life events or mental health struggles, particularly in the absence of accessible treatment and mental health supports.

School policies have long been based on moral conceptions of drug use rather than evidence (Gorman, 1998), and this was echoed in experiences of young people. While schools punished drug use, often very harshly, they also, often, did not engage in education around the realities of drugs, to the detriment of students navigating using drugs and alcohol (Darcy, 2020; Turner, 2021). Jolene shared that while her school knew she was engaging in problematic drug use, they wouldn't address drug issues, nor offer any substantial interventions. She directly linked this lack of information to struggles with addiction to opiates later in life. In extreme cases, such as Palle describing literally doing lines of ketamine off a school desk with no intervention from his teacher, experiences may testify to broader capacity issues in schools, as well as the need for relevant training on drug use and supports for school staff (Blackman et al., 2018; Midford & Cahill, 2020; Tupper, 2008).

Increased training for teachers, principals, and school staff on the realities of drug use and the harm of zero-tolerance policies—as well as for students who may be using drugs, would act preventatively to better support youth when they need it most. Some youth, like Matti, also shared that even if they weren't using drugs, they were discriminated against and stigmatized, echoing research which found teachers mobilized “junkie” narratives to “dissuade young people from using illicit drugs” (Meehan, 2017, p. 94). Regardless of if they were using drugs or simply facing the stigma of assumed drug use, many schools made it clear that students who used drugs constituted a threat to the greater student body and warranted harsh punishment. These zero tolerance policies also led to young people feeling teachers and staff didn't understand their realities and made it less likely they would reach out for supports.

Youth Protection and Police

While a comprehensive exploration of youth experiences with the youth protection system is outside of the scope of this dissertation (though is taken up in detail elsewhere (Barker, et al., 2014; Blackstock, 2007; Doucet, 2020; Nichols et al., 2017; Nichols, 2013; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004), interactions (or lack of interactions) between the youth protection system and educational system were important to youth's trajectories. Even the unspoken threat of youth protection involvement was a significant factor in multiple young people's trajectories to homelessness. While police were mentioned slightly less frequently by young people we spoke with, both youth protection workers and law enforcement contributed to how young people framed their experiences (and fears of) of policing, control, and punishment within “the system.”

Casey shared that his experiences of running away from a “hellhole” of a group home made it less likely that he would show up for school, and saw his social worker during his teens as consistently harassing him and living in a strict group home, full of staff that “hated the youth,” as contributing to dropping out of secondary school:

Group homes are not good. They don't work...It just puts a bunch of troubled youth underneath the same roof. It amplifies the problem. Because like, you have your problems and reasons why you're here, he has their—has different reasons involved, and then you get them together and now both your problems are both your problems. And it would just like, stack up on top of each other.

Robert, who was in over 21 different group homes and youth centres from ages 7 to 18, felt he “grew up in youth centres/*grandi en centre jeunesse*,” and this meant that his life was always unstable. His extensive experiences in the youth protection system led him to rebel, especially against institutional processes that he didn't understand:

As a teen, I became very rebellious as well. I wanted to rebel against the system, against the youth centres. I was frustrated with my mother, my father. I didn't understand why all of this was happening to me. (*Adolescent, j'étais devenu très rebele aussi. Je voulais me rebeller contre le système, contre les centres jeunesse. J'étais frustré contre ma mère, contre mon père. Je ne comprenais pas pourquoi que ça m'arrivait tout ça*)

While in youth centres, Robert opted to work to support himself rather than attend school, after being expelled following an outburst at school during a mental health crisis. This instability continued after Robert had aged out, without a secondary school diploma, and he ultimately attended the school at Dans la rue. At the time of our interview, he was still hoping to finish his secondary credits to go on to CEGEP.

Pauline echoed Robert's experiences, and shared that going to school in youth centres only provided limited educational trajectories:

And in the youth centres, when you're in the closed group, they send you through—it's an internal school and it's ridiculous. It's like a particular track but even if you go higher than that, you're doing a particular track. It's ridiculous. You can't really start from there as and be ready to go to CEGEP *Pis en centre de jeunesse, quand t'es en groupe fermé, ils te rentrent par – c'est une école intérieure pis c'est ridicule. C'est comme un cheminement particulier mais même si tu cadre plus haut que ça, tu fais du cheminement particulier. C'est ridicule, ça ne démontre pas. Tu ne peux pas partir delà comme vraiment pis être prêt pour aller au CEGEP.*

Pauline and Robert's experiences suggest that even as there is increased recognition of the barriers faced by youth in the youth protection system to engaging in post-secondary (Nichols, et al 2017; Rosenberg & Kim, 2017; Salazar, 2013; Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013) there are multiple barriers that begin much earlier in their educational trajectories.

Many young also people described a lack of meaningful interactions between the youth protection system and their schools, other than possibly reporting absences. Casey shared that there were no interactions between his group home and school, and “the most they got was a phone call saying, ‘Well, he missed classes 1 through 5 today.’” Fariha also shared that there was

limited engagement with social workers and police while she was frequently running away, whose primary aim was to keep her connected to her family, and her secondary school, which prevented her from accessing individual supports without permission from her parents. Most discussion of interactions between schools and youth protection/social workers revolved around punishment, and youth frequently shared that they were not implicated in these exchanges, nor decisions made about their welfare.

Similar to how young people described strategically avoiding youth protection, many youth described avoiding police as young children (often for fear that they would be removed from their family/implicated in the youth protection system) and as teenagers, in order to avoid tickets, criminalization, physical violence and incarceration. Benny shared that he specifically lied to police throughout his life, beginning in a desire to protect his family and continuing in a desire to protect his peers and community:

I thought all cops were people. Well, bastards are people. Yeah, yeah, I didn't think they were bad guys, but they were definitely notable figures of authority, and I gotta protect my tribe, so, here's a system I don't understand and no one's dying, even though it's crazy and stupid under my roof, no reason to go to jail.

Youth also described employing strategies to avoid police as they experienced homelessness because many of the activities they needed to survive every day were criminalized (i.e. hopping transit turnstiles, squatting, stealing food from dumpsters/stores). Multiple young people (n=12) also referenced the increased risk of violence they anticipated in interactions with police due to discrimination (based on appearing homeless, language, race, mental health diagnoses or because they were “known” to police). Casey shared that he had ribs broken on multiple occasion by the Montréal police, and believed it was because he was anglophone—and while he had been arrested in other provinces, “outside of Montréal and Québec, [he] didn't get [his] ass kicked,

just went to jail.” While youth shared experiences of avoiding police during their schooling, only Robert shared experiences with police at school--when Robert transitioned to mainstream secondary school, rather than intervention workers responding to a mental health crisis, police were called. Robert was subsequently expelled from school and moved to a youth centre.

Not Waiting until Youth are “Homeless Enough”: Building Preventative Capacities in Schools

JM: Is there something that could have prevented your homelessness?

Fariha: Bien, if they started acting on it right away, instead of having an entire process, having to see different people, having to sign and declare different things, and have like, a solution, a temporary solution until something is found, maybe I would have not ended up on the streets.

MW: What do you think should have been that first marker?

Fariha: Even if I didn't have a fucked-up family situation, a dysfunctional family, just being bullied at school is a lot to affect somebody, like it leaves permanent scars for like, some people. So if they see that there's something like that happening, they should act. Like, I don't know. Or if you're having difficulty just in school in general, whether it's intellectually, or socially, or emotionally or whatever, they should give you like, the choice to be able to do something about it, not just take a while, or like, it's like you have to—you have to get hit before knowing you're getting hurt, you know?”

While some protocols or policies seemed to be in place to dictate intervention, these often depended on a young person demonstrating that they were “at-risk” or “homeless” enough, and in schools, “teachers may not know when young people are at risk of experiencing homelessness because they do not show obvious, external signs until problems reach a crisis point” (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p. 9). The educational supports that young people found helpful were often only available after they faced housing precarity.

As Fariha shared, you have to “get hit before knowing you're getting hurt.” Many youth shared that schools waited until the signs were “bad enough” in order to offer an intervention that

(sometimes) wasn't punishment, though there weren't always clear markers of what was "bad enough" or "homeless enough" to access/deserve supports. While it is evident throughout this chapter that schools are not acting soon enough—and often are acting in ways that fail to help (and actively harm) youth. Regarding homelessness explicitly, schools are not linking these early warning signs with the eventual experiences of homelessness and housing precarity they lead to. As mentioned above, youth often needed to strategically divulge information in particular ways to demonstrate that they were mentally unwell enough, sick enough, abused enough, homeless enough, etc. However, without clear policy speaking to homelessness in schools, there is not even a set marker or consistent demonstration of what is "homeless enough" to access interventions.

There are also currently limitations to the protocols, policies, and capacities for supporting youth in schools. Many youth described going to teachers as some of the first people they reached out to for supports around their homelessness, or the family situations, mental health struggles, or financial contexts that would later lead to their homelessness. However, while some did describe teachers being open and trying to work with them, they also described frustration that staff couldn't do anything, or, as Sophie shared, were "stuck [within] certain limits to help...because they couldn't do much with what they had." This often prevented youth from feeling comfortable, confident or willing to reach out to people for help moving forward—because they wouldn't be able to do anything either—as well as prevent youth from reaching out if they thought limited resources should be reserved for students "who needed it more."

Youth elaborated on the need to more properly resource and fund schools and teachers in particular, with teachers' lack of capacity as directly related to young people's lack of supports in schools (Schwan et al., 2019; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017)—wherein

“youth felt that poor funding of the education system, as well as low salaries for teachers, led to a poorer quality education and inadequate supports and resources for teachers and students alike” (Malenfant et al., 2020). References to schools giving a “list of resources and saying good luck!”, as Casey and Fariha experienced, can be understood as a point of failure, but also relate to the capacity of teachers and schools to do anything more than direct students to non-profit organizations or youth protection. Realizing this point of contact as a point of possibility, instead, could be essential to prevention (Mackenzie & Thielking, 2014, Gaetz, 2014, Gaetz et al, 2018, Sohn & Gaetz, 2018), and could function to benefit both resources supporting young people to adapt to prevention-based models as well as increase capacity in schools.

Youth also often need to access one system in order to access another—or be eligible to access another—and similar to many institutional policies and processes, these mechanisms are not clear to the young people who are trying to navigate them. As Robert shared above, much of his resistance and rebellion came from a lack of understanding of why things were happening to him, and a lack of caring supports in his life, ultimately leading to his educational disengagement. In Fariha’s case, school staff and her principal became the gatekeepers for her to access a mental health diagnosis, mental health supports, and subsequently financial supports and ways of finding safety and independence outside of her parents’ home. She was unable to access these supports despite seeking them out, in part because her principal was homophobic and stigmatised mental health struggles. Not knowing how to access, or being barred from accessing, different systems that she needed to survive led directly to her “running away” and experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Post-Secondary

Research suggests that homeless youth not only “report fewer plans for post-secondary education than do youth who have never been homeless” (Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 272) but that homeless youth in post-secondary institutions are invisibilised and lacking in integral supports (Gupton, 2017, Kovacs Burns et al., 2016, Weissman, Waegemakers-Shiff & Schiff, 2019, Havlik & Duckhorn, 2020). In our research, many youth discussed hopes and plans for post-secondary, and some had experiences navigating colleges or universities. In Québec, the CEGEP system (commonly understood as “free” post-secondary as they cannot charge tuition fees for Québec residents (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021)) may be part of the reason why Québécois(e) young people frequently discussed planning or attending post-secondary education. However, even in Quebec, the majority of youth we spoke with who attended CEGEP (n=13 out of a total of n=19 youth who attended CEGEP) experienced significant barriers financially and academically, again relating to schools’ imagined post-secondary students (Weissman, Waegemakers-Shiff & Schiff 2019). While tuition may not be a barrier in the same way as in other post-secondary institutions, balancing housing, food, and textbooks proved too costly for these youth. Lucas, Pauline and Fariha also highlighted the need for post-secondary staff to understand the situations of young people with current or past experiences of homelessness, and accommodate their unique needs (Gupton, 2017; Havlik, Sanders & Wilson, 2018).

Many young people who did attempt to go to post-secondary, or hoped to go to post-secondary, (n=16) described it as directly related to their desire to carry out certain jobs in the labour market—particularly either stable/financially secure jobs or jobs which “give back”, like becoming a lawyer or a social worker. However, in addition to not being stable enough to attend classes regularly, not having food, young people who attempted to go down this trajectory described frustration with classes not being focused enough or relevant (experiences that were

also echoes with elementary and secondary curricula)—because many of them understood their participation in post-secondary as directly related to securing a job (particularly for those who wanted to “give back” as social workers (Fariha), lawyers (Pauline), etc.). This may be partly related to the fact that youth’s low secondary school grades meant they had to upgrade (Cutuli et al., 2013), enrol in a bridging program or begin with a general program, which they did not see as directly contributing to their overall career goals. For example, Sandra hoped to become a social worker but without the credentials/grades to be admitted to specialized post-secondary for it, described her CEGEP program as “deceptive” because she didn’t actually know what they were signing up for—and it was irrelevant to both her day to day realities as well as the dreams she had for the degree serving to qualify her to “give back” to other young people through a social work career. Rowan, Pauline and Fariha all shared similar disappointments with programs being too broad or not what they expected. Youth may also be missing the required “academic” or university-level courses to apply for some programs (Liljedahl et al., 2013, Gupton, 2017, Havlik & Duckhorn, 2020) attesting that for homeless youth, post-secondary (especially college and university) is often not seen as an option and they are therefore not prepared by schools to pursue it.

Lucas said that his experiences at university made him feel alienated, where campus activism and abstract theorization of poverty was removed from his reality experiencing and witnessing institutional discrimination first-hand—this also reinforced expectations for him that all post-secondary students come from a middle-class/affluent background and were out of touch with the experiences of people living precariously. This was echoed by other youth (n=6), who shared that while they may not have many peers in primary and secondary schools, in post-secondary there were unique feelings of isolation, not belonging, being financially at a

disadvantage, and, again, not “fitting the mould.” This fits with people generally describing leaving school—in post-secondary primarily, but also in high school—not only because they didn’t feel supported, but because they saw themselves as unable to connect with the concerns of their peers who were not dealing with precarious housing, violent or unstable home life, or working to survive (as Palle shared, he was “too old for this shit.”)

Learning from Experiences across Diverse School Contexts

In our interviews with young people, we began discussions about their experiences in schools by asking, “What was your first memory of school?” As a result, the responses we received ranged from different points in the lives of young people, from primary to post-secondary school. Experiences ranged from early childhood memories to experiences in schools the day of our interview. Additionally, they also encompassed a variety of different types of institutions of learning. Over the 64 interviews (with 38 youth) we carried out, we heard about experiences of public schools and private schools, primary schools and secondary schools, post-secondary schools (CEGEPs, trades colleges, and universities), specialized schools that serve youth with behavioural, cognitive and learning disabilities, “welcome” schooling or education for newcomers to Québec, and alternative programming such as “street schools” (Dans la rue, 2020). While all of the young people we spoke with were living in Québec at the time of our interviews, multiple youth (n=7) spoke about schooling experiences in other Canadian provinces, and one youth spoke about international schooling experiences.

While the points of failure presented in this chapter (and points of possibility outlined in following chapters) emerged across different interviews with young people, the specific contexts discussed may not always be indicative of the experiences of all young people, nor applicable to all schooling environments. In Canada, all schools are provincially mandated. Québécois schooling differs in some ways from other Canadian provincial and territorial educational contexts. Despite this, I believe the points of failure outlined—which are connected to broader social, political and economic structures (Gaetz & Dej, 2019)—speak to how experiences of homelessness and schooling are organized more

generally by discourses, professional norms and expectations, and institutional procedures that are common across Canada. The application of “One-Size-Fits-All” approaches, a lack of equitable access to diagnoses, and inappropriate institutional responses to student issues, for example, hold (varying levels of) relevance across different types and locations of schooling. We can also see the ways that points of failure and possibility fold into broader trends in education, such as an increase in standardized evaluation, and neoliberal reforms in schools (Au, 2014, Blad, 2011, Nichols, 2019) which exist both within and outside of specific Québécois schools. This dissertation brings into view how broader structures of power and resources are distributed in schools to create interconnected webs of support and harm for students (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2020), knowing that actions to support homeless youth will look different in each school, situation, and environment.

Conclusion

As outlined in this chapter, young people face many barriers to maintaining engagement in education before, during, and after experiences of homelessness, and points where their homelessness may have been prevented are rarely being realized in schools today. While young people framed these in different ways in relation to their roles in maintaining educational engagement (i.e. taking on self-blame, being “lazy” or giving up, or, alternatively, facing discriminatory, unclear and under-resourced school structures), the stories young people shared speak to a complex structure that currently fails to ensure young people receive the supports they need when they need them. The things young people experienced do not easily lend themselves to solutions within the current educational system: while it is evident that institutional inaction can be harmful, institutional actions often function to punish, cause harm, and—in the case of young people’s youth protection involvement (Courtney et al., 2014; Goyette & Frenchon, 2013; Lacroix, 2016; Nichols, 2018; Nichols et al., 2017a; Nichols, 2016) —contribute to the

homelessness of young people. Youth expressed wanting to leave schools, be supported in schools, be left alone in schools, be believed in schools—wanting to refuse and resist in schools and to learn in schools—suggesting that supporting young people in concrete ways requires creating more avenues to listen to them and shifting education to better support the complexities of young people’s experiences today.

Youth often shared a common “point of possibility” that supported avenues of believing and listening to youth (in schools, as well as across institutional contexts): finding a champion, advocate, support, one person who makes a difference, or a teacher or school staff who “gets it.” The idea of having a “champion” (to support individual youth or push forward prioritizing youth homelessness prevention (Grant, 2020; Hallett & Skrla, 2017; Smith, 2021)) was frequently mentioned by young people. The efficacy of the support these “good” teachers or staff offered were often extra-institutional, outside of their official roles, or even breaking procedures and laws to support young people. Key to how youth were describing these “good” individuals were that they were willing to use their “judgement” (Adamovicz & Malenfant, 2019) or break the rules, to meet young people where they are at and ensure they are receiving what they need to survive. I will explore this in more detail in following chapters, including the harm that can befall youth when professionals use their “judgement,” as well as when teachers and staff are engaged in refusing and resisting—including breaking the rules when those rules are harming young people, as so many youth talked about people breaking the rules and saving their lives as a result.

This chapter conveys young people’s experiences in a variety of different schooling environments, ranging from early childhood experiences in primary schooling, to experiences in public schools, private schools, alternative education programs, specialized classrooms, and

schooling taking place within youth detention centres. Following an institutional ethnographic approach, these unique contexts underlying broader State and societal understandings of schooling (and normative notions of student success (Au, Bigelow & Karp, 2003; Nichols, 2019)) allow us to better the historical, political and social contexts that make up the materialities organized by “ruling relations” (Smith, 1990)—materialities that are important for tracing out how power is structured, and how we might be able to speak back to it (Smith, 1987). Within the contexts of the points of failure or possibility outlined here, the next chapter will examine specific policies and professional practices to understand how they fit into how broader ruling structures and texts (government and institutional policies, for example) are currently enacted in the everyday lives (Smith, 1987) of teachers and students.

CHAPTER 5: BEYOND LEARNING, FOSTERING POINTS OF POSSIBILITY IN WHAT SCHOOLS ARE DOING TODAY

Your teachers clearly know that you’re going through something, but that they apply the same rules to everyone, like, there’s no exceptions. You know? “If I make an exception for you, I have to make an exception for everybody”. But like...I was homeless while everyone was still living with their parents, and they had an allowance, they had a way to eat. Me, I couldn’t. I had to steal.

Fariha

In the last chapter, I drew from what young people shared to understand the ways that they experience schools and school-based interventions (or lack of interventions) prior to and during

experiences of housing precarity. As the above quote from Fariha demonstrates, the “same rules” that schools often applied to the needs of diverse students, when understood through the lived realities of youth experiencing homelessness, demonstrate a significant disconnect between how schools imagine equity and supports and what young people really needed. D.E. Smith asserts that, “from different standpoints different aspects of the ruling apparatus...come into view” and that different standpoints are “the fundamental grounding of modes of knowing developed in the ruling apparatus” (1987, p. 107-108). Beginning in my own experiences, and the experiences of youth we spoke with, in this chapter I aim to bring different aspects of the ruling apparatus “into view,” and understand how texts, policies, and practices in schools intersect and shape the experiences youth shared with us.

Two things are clear from what youth were telling us—youth experiencing homelessness are not part of the imagined student body in most schools, and the institutional processes they are navigating are thus not designed for them. Furthermore, these processes are not transparent, which a review of educational policy makes depressingly clear. I have emphasized thus far how the experiences of young people in educational institutions were in tension—or direct opposition—with dominant institutional narratives, norms, and expectations. In this chapter, through examining policies, particularly in a Montréal/Québécois context, and I will explore how responses, practices, partnerships, and interventions are currently organized in schools. While it is important to note the policies that exist (or, more often, don’t exist) across Canada, this chapter will prioritize looking at Québec and Montréal, as the site of our data collection. I choose this focus on Québec/Montréal schools with a recognition of the high variability not only across provincial and territorial Ministries of Education, but also between regions, boards, and schools,

and though this chapter focuses on Québécois policy in particular, the experiences of youth followed similar trajectories within other provincial/territorial school systems.

I also wish to emphasize the tensions or gaps between how policy is written and intended to work, and how it is experienced by people everyday. There is a stark disconnect between what schools imagine to be their roles (within Québec, as part of the “educational childcare system” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014, p. 11)) and how homeless youth have experienced them (Malenfant et al., 2020; Schwan et al., 2019). This disconnect informs the lack of awareness and recognition that youth homelessness is an issue that is relevant for school staff at all; it also represents a point of possibility because it suggests an awareness campaign and public education might make a difference in the lives of homeless youth. Grounding our work in the hope that schools do, in some capacity, aim to foster “learning and well-being” that is “flexible and diverse” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014, p. 68), I hope this dissertation signals points of possibility that can be actualized today, while we continue to strive for long-term transformative educational work.

This chapter fleshes out how we might organize our work around the second point of action I propose: creating robust training for teachers, staff, and students in schools on the realities of youth homelessness, to both combat stigma and increase potential for early intervention and homelessness prevention I begin by exploring policy that follows the points of failure outlined in the previous chapter (including youth experiences with learning disabilities and mental health diagnoses, accommodations, institutional (in)actions around absences, drug and alcohol use, and not being believed), knowing that many of the policies outlined touch on multiple and intersecting points in young people’s lives. Additionally, much of the policy in this chapter explicitly speaks to the need to support “diverse” students in schools, and even takes up

the needs of young people living in poverty and with families who may not be comfortable or able to engage in school processes, demonstrating that while schools may understand the role they should be playing in supporting diverse students' wellness, there is a disconnect in how this happens in practice. I will end the chapter drawing on the experiences of teachers and advocates working in and with schools and school boards to address youth homelessness, thinking of how we may address the issue of youth homelessness in schools through teacher education, as well as the practices and programming that youth outlined as promising points of possibility.

Housing, Youth and Education: National Homelessness Policies in Canada and Québec

As in the previous chapter, I want to begin with an explicit focus on housing. While a deeper analysis of housing policy in Montréal/Québec will come out of other aspects of our team's research, here I want to specifically look at homelessness policy that speaks to the intersections of housing, education, and prevention. Within a national policy context relating to homelessness, the Canadian federal government does not have significant policies focusing on youth and therefore in this chapter I will also pay attention to policies that may not explicitly speak directly to, but impact the realities of youth homelessness (Smith, 2019). The National Housing Strategy does reference youth as a sub-group (and LGBTQ2 and Indigenous youth in particular) that may be vulnerable to housing precarity (2018). In describing its aims to reduce chronic homelessness, the Strategy does acknowledge that having a safe and stable home "makes it possible...to enroll in school" (2018, p. 18), suggesting the State is beginning to make connections between homelessness and education on a federal policy level. Most young people we spoke with referenced how hard it was to juggle housing instability and education, especially from a very young age. Rowan shared how difficult it was to prioritize and maintain school while increasingly living in squats; Fariha discussed having to steal food and consider engaging

in survival sex work to maintain enrollment; and in the case of Jolene, a lack of options or services to find safe housing at 14 led to her living with her 27-year-old boyfriend while in Secondary III.

In Québec, the current *National Policy on Homelessness: Working together to avoid and exit the streets*²¹ mentions dropping out of school as one of the main individual risk factors that can lead to homelessness (2014), illuminating the cycle youth often find themselves navigating, wherein educational disengagement leads to precarious housing, and precarity leads to further educational disengagement. The policy also highlights prevention and intervention examples in school programs (i.e. L'école de la rue CAPAB in Longueuil, Point de Rue in Trois Rivières and Le Tremplin in Sherbrooke), which are framed as directly impacting housing stability within the context of access to the labour market (2014, p.45) and socio-professional “insertion” (2014, p.46). There are also recommendations that specifically speak to the need to actualize intervention possibilities in schools to stabilize housing for youth and prevent homelessness, including, “rapidly identifying those who drop out of school or leave an institution after a period of time away from the labour market and ensure immediate and constant follow-up” (2014, p. 41).

While this recognition of the need for educational access as part of the provincial policy on combatting homelessness (particularly as a policy that is not explicitly focused on youth) is promising, dropout rates of 16.3% overall (Direction des statistiques et de l'information décisionnelle, 2019)²² suggests there is still room for a lot of work to ensure the policy is effectively put into practice. The experiences of young people also highlight that the role of

²¹ This policy outlines the significant relationship between involvement in youth centres in Québec and increased rates of homelessness (though claims that youth centres are aware and have already undertaken significant preventative approaches to address the issue)

²² These are much higher for First Nations and Inuit living in urban areas, with a dropout rate of 43% (Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019)

schools is not simply to provide access to the labour market and “socio-professional insertion” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014, p. 46), and that programs aiming to do so should allow for flexibility and choice—as Lucas shared, when accessing social programming for “socio-professional insertion” through social assistance in Québec,

Institutions...fail, in my opinion, pretty miserably, with providing kids and youth with another avenue of learning, and a different outlook on how to live life, I would say, would be how I would put it...They want you to get a mechanic’s job, a construction job, or a trades job. They usually focus you into CEGEPs and colleges and stuff, but that’s not the solution for so many people, especially youth.

In addition to proposing narrow trajectories that limit educational and work options for youth, there is currently no evaluation in place to measure or ensure schools or the Ministry of Education are responding to the recommendations of the Québec national policy on homelessness.

The city of Montréal, in 2017, commissioned a consultative report on youth homelessness prevention from the Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal (*Youth Homelessness: Uncovering a Hidden Reality*, 2017) on the needs of homeless youth, as well as promising Montréal practices that may specifically speak to youth homelessness prevention. This report outlines housing as a priority area for intervening with youth at-risk of homelessness in the city and emphasizes the need to prioritize “street work” and “socio-professional integration” (Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal, 2017, p. 2). This report is based on consultations across organizations serving youth in Montréal and recommendations stem from two key calls for action across their interviews:

1. Develop a deeper understanding of the new realities of youth homelessness in Montréal (p. 24)²³
2. Remedy cumbersome institutional processes (2017, p. 26)

²³ Including specifically engaging youth with lived experience in robust research practice and training developed in tandem with universities, community organizations and the city (2017, p. 24).

These themes certainly resonate with the data presented in this dissertation, and recommendations from the Conseil focus on intersections of housing, access to programming and education, and social integration based within “Concrete Prevention Practices” (2017, p. 28). Included are recommendations for “establishing connections of trust: valuing and supporting outreach (street) work” (p. 28); “the positive use of public space by young people through sports” (p. 29); “flexible socio-professional integration projects (including short-term work programmes like TAPAJ²⁴)” (p. 32), “accommodation adapted to the reality of young people based in the right to housing and shared space” (p. 34) and broader recommendations, including attending to hidden homelessness in future counts and action plans, using gender-based analysis and qualitative data collection to understand youth homelessness in the city, to foster data-driven preventative approaches that account to experiences of homelessness for women, Indigenous people, those with disabilities and LGBTQ youth (2017, p. 38). The final recommendation, and emphasized throughout the report, calls for “Montreal to model its leadership in the fight against youth homelessness by promoting an innovative concept of prevention in which young people are not seen as victims to be helped, but as autonomous actors who hold power over their own actions and their environment” (2017, p. 38). This position aligns with what young people shared with us—centering youth agency, power and choice in how we shift our responses to prevent youth homelessness, in and outside of schools, is a necessity.

Schools are not explicitly mentioned in the consultative report, though “socio-professional insertion” (2017, p. 32), a priority across provincial homelessness prevention policies and plans, does involve training programs. While this report holds promise, and echoes

²⁴ TAPAJ (Travail alternatif payé à la journée) programs, is offered through several youth-serving organizations in Montréal. TAPAJ was noted by many youth we spoke with, and some members of our youth team had/were engaging with the program. However, this work was highly variable and often youth participated as a condition of accessing other (housing and welfare) services.

many of the findings from the research informing this dissertation, there has been no clear plan set forward by the city to actualize these recommendations. Instead, recent attempts to address housing concerns, for example, a recent “diverse metropolis” bylaw (Ville de Montréal, Règlement 20-041, 2021) which aimed to prioritize construction of social housing, have been largely criticized by housing advocates for failing to address the actual lack of affordable housing and provide loopholes for developers in the most rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods of Montréal (FRAPRU, 2020).

While analysis of emergent work on the lack of educational policies around homelessness (Smith 2019) suggests a broader gap in Anglophone provinces and territories contributes to the inequitable and ineffective preventative responses to youth homelessness in schools, the incredible detail that some Québec policies provide in outlining the importance of educational homelessness interventions—which the Ministry of Education has contributed to drafting and signed—complicates this. Plans to end homelessness have become a common response from cities (Gaetz et al., 2016), but these must move to center youth voice and remain adaptable “to ensure relevance and progress is maintained” (A Way Home Canada, 2016). But plans without action do not lead to change. The existence of policy does not ensure that policy is being enacted as written, and while roles for the Ministry of Education and schools are specified in Québec policies and plans, the experiences of young people suggest that the aspirations in the plans and policies are not being realized in Montreal schools. As outlined by the Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal (2017) ensuring this policy makes material changes must also involve concrete measures to include and support youth with lived experience to participate, value the work that is already happening for young people and invest tangibly in (actually) affordable housing.

Policy and Points of Failure

While it is important to focus on housing, the links in the National Policy on homelessness between access to education and stable housing (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014) demonstrate the need to focus on broader educational policies. Reaching out to school staff before her first experiences of homelessness, did not lead Fariha to receive educational accommodations; instead, she faced discrimination from school staff based on her sexuality and mental health struggles. Other youth experiences unsupportive and harmful connections to the youth protection system coordinated by schools, demonstrating that the education system still fails to understand and support youth experiences of housing precarity within an early intervention framework. Students like Rowan, who were punished and excluded for minor breaches of a school code of conduct (e.g. uniform violations), illuminate how schools remain organized by, and perpetuate, narrow conceptualizations of ideal students (e.g. those who conform to the status quo, are socialized at to follow rules and perform academically and, importantly, who are housed, fed, and dressed in ways schools expect). Vee's experiences of racism within "Welcome Class," as well as Robert's difficult trajectory through schooling and youth centres, demonstrate how specialized educational interventions can further perpetuate normed notions of who Québécois schools aim to serve and who can be legitimately pushed to the margins. Together with the experiences of other young people we spoke to, points of failure within educational responses to young people's homelessness represent missed opportunities to change the lives of youth but can also inform how we might imagine schools acting differently to centre prevention. The next section examines policy to ask what schools are supposed to be doing at these points in young people's trajectories, and how we may shape and/or enact policy and practice to better support youth before and during periods of homelessness.

Learning Disabilities, Diagnoses and Accommodations: Policies on Individual Education Plans and Student Supports

Multiple young people we spoke with had either received mis-diagnoses (e.g. of neuro-developmental or mental health disorders, learning disabilities), struggled to receive professional diagnoses that are required to access educational and social supports, and generally struggled to navigate specialized educational and/or social services for students in Québec. As mentioned in the previous chapter, receiving diagnoses is often a complex and difficult process for young people—a process which is often invisible in the way policy is written—and a process which can lead to youth being less likely to engage in institutional mechanisms of support in the future. Following Québec policies aimed at supporting youth who have “maladjustments” or disabilities, those with “problèmes académiques” who cannot be supported to integrate (Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec, 1999) in classrooms are grouped into specialized classrooms that aim to support anyone whose needs are deemed too complex for mainstream classrooms—people with learning disabilities, behavioural issues, mental health issues, or any combination of these. Québec’s special programs and schools have vague and broad mandates, such as, “offering an education adapted to the needs and characteristics of pupils between 5 and 21 years of age with *“various mental health issues”*”, the mandate of École Eric-Lapointe, a specialized school in a working class but gentrifying neighbourhood of Montréal which Robert attended. It is worth noting that these schools do not only address mental health issues—but also broadly serve youth with behavioural problems and learning disabilities (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020). In addition to concerns that the programs’ broad mandates often meant that the specific issues youth were facing went unaddressed or unsupported, youth shared that being placed in these classrooms made them feel singled out or led to being bullied by other students in “mainstream” classrooms.

Youth who had experienced these special classes or schools in a Québécois context described the need for future programming to, at least, understand a distinction between those with behavioural issues and those with learning disabilities, though we know these often overlap. In Québécois policy there is currently no official distinction between physical, learning, or intellectual disabilities, nor the specialized supports that students struggling with their mental health may need. For example, Robert shared that many of the supports in the specialized school he attended were for those with developmental or intellectual disabilities and were not useful for his behavioural difficulties. Others shared that connections to specialized individual support workers didn't do much to either understand their needs nor support their learning. For example, Sandra met a support worker at school once a week as part of their Individual Education Plan, but clearly experienced these meetings as bureaucratic necessities rather than useful educational interventions:

She would just look at my locker and see if it was a mess, which it was a mess. Because that was the priority, like my agenda had to be looked at to see if everything was in order. And if my locker was in good condition, and that's pretty much it. She was really busy and had many kids to look out. I felt that she was trying to help me, but she was stuck at a certain limit to help me out, because she couldn't do much...with what she had.

Many other young people also spoke to this lack of resources and capacities on the parts of teachers in these “special” classrooms and those special staff (i.e. educational assistants) assigned to students within mainstream schools. While young people with behavioural/learning disabilities did talk about the effectiveness of some educational interventions, generally these were seen as requiring greater understanding of their unique situation in order to be effective.

The Québec Education Act (I-13.3) outlines that “in the case of a handicapped student or a student with a social maladjustment or a learning disability, the principal, with the assistance of the student's parents, of the staff providing services to the student, and of the student himself,

unless the student is unable to do so, shall establish an individualized education plan adapted to the needs of the student” (1997, I-13.3, 96.14). Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are intended to be strengths-based (Ministère de l’Éducation, 2004), and must fit with each school service centre’s policies and evaluation of individual students and allow both parents and students to lodge complaints with the service centre if they are not satisfied—with principals holding responsibility for the implementation of the plan along with regular evaluations to communicate to a student’s parents (1997, I-13.3, 96.14). Each school service centre is also supposed to establish advisory committees on “services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities” comprised of “parents of the students concerned” as well as teachers, school staff, and specialized service-providers (1988, I-13.3, 185). This policy, similar to the specialized schools and classrooms mentioned by Robert and Jaide, does not distinguish between different types of “maladjustments” or disabilities, but theoretically has a broad enough definition of what may require individual student supports that youth needing accommodations should be able to access them. In practice, experiences such as Fariha’s demonstrate that it is much more complex than this, often requiring proactive and costly interventions on the parts of parents to ensure their children have access to suitable IEPs (Nichols, 2019).

For example, Gigi’s experiences transitioning to new schools with a mental health diagnoses meant disruptions to her schooling, including being told she couldn’t attend class until other students were “sensitized” about her new diagnosis. This is contrary to directions outlined in Quebec’s Plan on special education (1999) each school service centre must consult on and adopt a

Policy concerning the organization of educational services for such students to ensure the harmonious integration of each such student into a regular class or group and into

school activities if it has been established on the basis of the evaluation of the student's abilities and needs that such integration would facilitate the student's learning and social integration and would not impose an excessive constraint or significantly undermine the rights of the other students" (I-13.3, 235).

In addition to advisory boards, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms, under the Education Act of Québec, schools have a responsibility to ensure students with physical, intellectual, and learning disabilities have the supports for "harmonious integration" into regular classes if this is deemed to facilitate learning. In practice, students (and those who came from poor families in particular) faced difficulties accessing the diagnoses necessary to receive supports and often faced stigma, navigated disruptive medication regimes, and suffered severe impacts to their mental health rather than "harmonious integration."

Wellness and Equity: Social Condition and Educational Success

The Policy on Educational Success (*politique de la réussite éducative*) (2017) released by the Québec Government Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEES), states that the school system is "expect[ed] to promote equal opportunity and social equity, counter exclusion and various forms of violence, help fight poverty" (p. 15). While this does not explicitly mention housing, it outlines a vital role for Québec schools, not only at the forefront of ensuring all young people are receiving an appropriate and supportive education, but that society is continuing to "evolve" in just and equitable ways. This policy also positions itself within a history of Québec "educational success," from the creation of the Education Act and MEES in 1964. Of these 24 policies and provincial action plans, none mention housing or homelessness.

More recent policies do begin to speak to the importance of preventative power in schools, with prevention of "vulnerability factors related to [students'] development" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017, 34) being the third objective of the policy the *politique de la réussite éducative* (2017), calling for a 5.6% increase of supports for youth with "vulnerability factors in areas

of...physical health and well-being, social skills, emotional maturity, cognitive and emotional development, communication skills and general knowledge” (2017, 34). Another Québec policy, “Healthy Schools” (2003) outlines the requirement for “the adoption of a comprehensive and systemic vision of young people’s needs and the most appropriate strategies for meeting them” (p. 18) as well as that “prevention actions be integrated into the school’s success plan” (p. 18). These policies begin to expand on how the wellbeing of students—considered within “diverse” student experience—is integral for their academic success. While they are not speaking to homelessness prevention, homelessness certainly impacts wellness and mental health. Additionally, the focus on prevention demonstrates that schools *can* conceptualize their role as preventing broader issues impacting students’ capacities to learn.

While this recognition, as well as the increasing emphasis on schools as potential sites for prevention, is promising in terms of how youth homelessness might be addressed in a Québécois context, further grounding this shift in the lived experiences of diverse students is necessary to ensure schools are basing responses in the actual needs of students. For example, recent policies link educational success to “being fully aware of different social realities” as schools “play a societal role...to promote equal opportunity and social equity, counter exclusion and various forms of violence, help fight poverty and integrate newly arrived immigrants into the community” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017, p. 15). At the same time, laws such as Bill 21 (Loi sur la laïcité de l’État/Act respecting the laicity of the State), which bans teachers from wearing religious symbols at work (and particularly discriminates against Muslim women) and sustained incidents of anti-Black racism and bullying from peers and teachers in Québec schools (Harrold, 2021; Nichols, 2019; Ross & Sherwin, 2020; Scott, 2021; The Canadian Press, 2020) point to a broader reluctance (or refusal) by Québec government and lawmakers to acknowledge

systemic racism (Banerjee, 2020; Mahrouse, 2018; Murengerantwali & Chaachouch, 2020) that shapes the trajectories of young people in schools.

Governance and Institutional Processes: Policies, Punishments, and Approaches to Drug and Alcohol Use

In practice, whether educators see themselves contributing to the prevention of youth homelessness and/or distress is highly dependent on individual schools and school service centres, as well as decisions made by each schools' principal (I-13.3, Education Act, s.76). Québécois educational governance aims to support flexibility and the individual autonomy of schools, through individual codes of conduct and policies (developed with individual governing boards in schools). Additionally, every school within each of the 71 provincial schoolboards has its own governing board²⁵, made up of the principal, parents, teachers and staff and community members (theoretically). Individual principals draft the “rules of conduct and safety measures” (which are variable, but can range from guidelines on politeness and hygiene to rules around drug use and attendance), which must be approved by the governing board. Principals then have the responsibility to communicate this information to students and parents at the beginning of each school year (Education Act, I-i.13, 76), with no clear measures that outline or evaluate effective communication in this context. Furthermore, the flow of information (from principals to students and families) undermines dialogue and student input into school rules.

²⁵ The governing board shall analyze the situation prevailing at the school, principally the needs of the students, the challenges tied to educational success and the characteristics and expectations of the community served by the school. Based on the analysis and taking into account the commitment-to-success plan of the school service centre, the governing board shall adopt the school's educational project, oversee the project's implementation and evaluate the project at the intervals specified in it. Each of these stages shall be carried out through concerted action between the various participants having an interest in the school and in educational success. To that end, the governing board shall encourage the collaboration of students, parents, teachers, other school staff members, and community and school service centre representatives. (Education Act, I-i13, 74).

For example, exclusionary school-based policies regarding drug and alcohol use emerged as a point of failure in our team's analysis of the data. Young people (n=18) talked about unfair punishments, abstinence-based approaches, and stigma, which were often highly dependent on individual schools and principals. In Québec, principals and governing boards develop individual approaches to expectations and punishments laid out in annual codes of ethics and professional conduct (Gouvernement du Québec, I-13.3). In theory, the flexibility offered to particular schools and school service centres in Québec could mean that principals with strong ties to community adapt their schools to account for the multiple identities, experiences, and need of their unique student body; in practice—from research on this topic (Cheff, 2018) as well as young people's experiences (for example, Palle, Thomas, or Rowan's experiences with inadequate supports and arbitrary, exclusionary and punitive school discipline), each schools' flexibility is often used to punish and push out "problem" students.

The codes of conduct in most public secondary schools across Montréal contain some mention of drug and alcohol use, ranging from prohibition of attending school dances under the influence and resources for support and recovery programmes (Royal West Academy, 2020) to explicit statements that any student suspected of using drugs or alcohol are subject to body and locker searches and "may be suspended or expelled immediately" (James Lyng High School, 2020). Recent literature (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; González, 2012; Skiba et al., 2014; Wun, 2016) supports the experiences youth shared with us about punitive and exclusionary responses to drug and alcohol use—they function to criminalize and "push out" students who are not, as Rowan observed, "fitting the perfect mould of their perfect school." The freedom of each principal to draft and communicate the codes of conducts for each school likely ties into the institutional murkiness, or "cumbersome institutional processes" (Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal,

2017, p. 26) which compounded experiences precarity for young people attempting to navigate housing precarity and schooling. Young people we interviewed also suggest that the lack of clarity of institutional processes, policies, and rules is not incidental—educational policy in Québec seems to intentionally create ambiguous institutional and bureaucratic funky zones (Graeber, 2015) and centers the power in the hands of individual principals.

Attendance and “Regularizing” Students’ Situations

Codes of ethics and professional conduct are likely to include policies on attendance, consequences, and protocols for students who may miss class. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are many reasons why young people may be unwilling or unable to attend classes, including efforts to mitigate the harm coming from attending school itself. Within the *Education Act of Québec*, in relation to mandatory attendance for all children ages 6-16 (with some exceptions), it not only states that “Parents must take the necessary measures to ensure that their child attends school as required” (I-13.3, s. 17) but that “The school service centre must, at the Minister’s request and using the information the Minister provides concerning a child who may not be attending school as required or concerning his parents, take any action with the child and his parents that is specified by the Minister to ascertain and, if applicable, regularize the child’s situation.” (I-13.3, s. 17.1) The Act does not suggest how educators or the Minister should “regularize” a child’s situation, though does stipulate that “If the action does not allow the child’s situation to be ascertained or regularized, the school service centre, after notifying the student’s parents in writing, shall report this to the director of youth protection” (I-13.3, s. 17.1) I was unable to find any ways that schools collect or conceptualize accountability mechanisms to ensuring the “regularization” of children of family situations, but we can see in instances like Palle, Rowan, or Fariha’s experiences that there are a diversity of ways that they

fail to do so. The Healthy Schools policy recommends “appealing and regular communications” with parents (2003, p. 5) as part of a holistic and individualized approach to supporting students, and even recommend adapting and translating communications to meet the needs of parents. However, this doesn’t consider parents’ past experiences with schools, or strategies for engaging in institutional processes (which may centre avoidance or refusal (Milne, 2017)). If regularization does not happen, the school service centres have a responsibility to notify the parents in writing and to report to the director of youth protection.

But this begs the question: what happens in cases like Fariha, when parental involvement undermines a young person’s safety and stability? And to what extent are young people seen as able to self-determine the best course of action for themselves – or at least contribute to their own plans of care? Parents and families are referenced and imagined within policy, from 1967-present, as active members of the school environment (Griffith & Smith, 2005) whom school services centres and schools have responsibility to support in participating in their child’s educational lives, wellbeing, and educational trajectories. This involvement is also intended to include opportunities for parents—even those not sitting on the governing board—to impact decisions about their children’s education. For example, in the Québec Education Act (i.13-3, 8) it is outlined that both students and parents of students can request that school service centres reconsider any decisions impacting them, receive supports to do so, and receive responses within a 45-day period. However, as Palle outlined (when he observed his parents did not know about or how to access these processes), accessing educational accommodations and supports or challenging school-based determinations are complex processes, and many parents may not feel entitled, safe, or knowledgeable enough to try to hold schools accountable through these

institutional avenues (Compton-Lilly, 2019; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020; Yull et al., 2018, Pavlakis, 2018).

Dropouts, Pushouts and Expulsions: Policy on Expulsions and “Transfers”

Youth experiencing homelessness, including those we spoke with, are at higher risk of expulsions (Gaetz, 2014, Jensen, 2013; Liljedahl, 2013) dropping-out, or being “pushed-out” (DeRidder, 1990, p. 154)²⁶ through disproportionate punishment (Brownstein, 2010). Within Québec, expulsions, or “transfers” (Cheff, 2018), can result in multiple experiences across multiple schools, each with a different code of conduct. As Palle noted when he was “transferred” to a different school, these moves may also require youth to adapt to new teaching practices, supports available, and students may not be able to access (or may be unaware of) transition supports. As noted in the last chapter, these transfers—and the transitional periods that accompany them—are often unsupported and lead to high levels of educational disengagement with youth (Liljedahl et al., 2013). In Québec, in addition to high variability in approaches to punishment and expulsions, there are also no records kept or available to know the frequency with which these transfers happen (Cheff, 2018). “A student expelled from school” (i-13.3, 15) under the Québec Education Act, is one of the categories of those under 16 who are exempt from compulsory school attendance, and expulsions or transfers can be used at the principal’s discretion as a disciplinary measure (i-13.3, 96.27), with “just and sufficient cause” (i-13.3, 242). In the case of expulsions, principals must make a request to the school service centre, and following approval the principal, inform the director of youth protection (i-13.3, 242). However,

²⁶ “The term “pushout” is used to describe at-risk students who continuously receive signals from their schools that they are neither able nor worthy to continue to graduation and who are frequently encouraged to leave” (DeRidder, 1990, p. 154)

this process does not need to be followed for transfers and so this appears to be the process that is used most often (Cheff, 2018).

This process may seem unclear and allow for loopholes in how each principal may choose to enforce punishments, and youth described their experiences of “dropping out,” being kicked out of schools, or asked to leave, as organized in multiple, confusing ways. It wasn’t always evident to youth whether these were official school processes or not. In my own experiences of secondary school, I technically made the decision to stop going to school, they didn’t transfer or expel me, and there was certainly no connection to youth protection. Like many young people (in our study and elsewhere, O’Grady, Kidd & Gaetz, 2020; Robinson, 2011), I didn’t identify as homeless, and so any official processes or accommodations in place²⁷ for homeless youth may not have necessarily been available to me while I was attending. As mentioned, many youth explained that they intentionally avoiding describing their experiences in ways that would warrant intervention, for fear of taking up too many resources or facing attention from youth protection and police. The lack of clarity when young people are suspended, transferred, or expelled through murky and exclusionary processes, often means the responsibility for maintaining “compulsory school attendance” (Gouvernement du Québec, I-13.3, 14)—a right assured them through the provincial Education Act--falls on individual young people, who ultimately come to see their educational disengagement as their own fault.

This emphasis on student retention is not only a priority of schools, but, as outlined above, homelessness policy in Québec directly relates the prevention of housing precarity to rapidly and “constantly” following up and supporting young people who have dropped out of

²⁷ For example, student peers who were sleeping rough (in ATM vestibules or parks) received free monthly bus passes. While I may have been eligible for a pass, I didn’t consider myself as homeless enough, nor did teachers or staff present this resource.

school. These policies explicitly tie school retention to labour market participation and access to credentialization. In the experiences of young people, expulsions, transfers and dropping out can be devastating to their educational continuity but also their relationships of trust within institutions (Moore, 2013; Thielking, 2014). Young people often described their “choice” to drop-out as shaped by a need to prioritize day-to-day survival, finances or mental health struggles—supporting Wun’s claim (2017) that these are not so much choices youth make; rather, they are “pushouts”.

Youth protection/Police and Interministerial collaborations

Youth who are minors (that is, under 18 years of age in Québec) are framed in law as being under the legal responsibility of their parents or legal guardians--which “may be the youth protection system” and constructed as “children, unable to make decisions about what is good or bad for themselves” (Chau & Gawliuk, 2009, p. 3). Many of the experiences youth shared demonstrated barriers present when young people attempt to access services as minors, and reflect the ways that those under the age of 18 are not imagined as agentic or rights-holders. It is important to understand the needs and access of youth change as they age, particularly in understanding what policy may be relevant to their experiences, but also how policies that exist to protect legal minors are enacted and experienced by young people in ways that diverge from their imagined institutional aims. As institutions “caring” for youth and children, schools in Québec have interministerial responsibilities to work with the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Youth Protection. For minors in Québec, youth protection involvement may lead to schooling in youth centres (such as those attended by Robert after his secondary school called the police on him during a mental health crisis where he became violent). Youth who are placed

in youth centres face difficulty maintaining educational engagement as well as significant barriers to stability during and after involvement (Goyette et al., 2007a).

While involvement in the youth protection system can impact the type of schooling youth may be able to access (or not), schools are also places where youth are flagged for youth protection intervention. In Québec, poor school attendance can lead to youth protection involvement²⁸ and a lack of attendance without parental engagement necessitates schools contact the DPJ (Gouvernement du Québec, 1988, i-13.3, 18). Because of this, youth like J.C., Robert, Martin, and George were moved in and out of specialized schooling and schooling in youth centres, destabilizing possible connections to schools and teachers, as well as connections to family and place. J.C. shared that he moved around, particularly as foster families “didn’t want him around”:

For a long time I was at *L’Enterprise*. Well, in first and second year of secondary, about two and a half. After that I was at *Rapides*, yeah, for a little bit, for two or three months. After that, I was at *ÉSP* for a week or two. I went back to *Rapides* because I was kicked out of *ÉSP*. After that, I had to go to the youth centre because my foster family didn’t want me anymore. After that I went to Mascouche²⁹. I ended up—I was in Saint-Jerome. After that I was in Joliette. After that, I went to Mascouche I think. I think it went like that. I was in Mascouche, I went to Joliette. I think that’s it. And that’s how it went. And after that, I was put in a youth centre. After that I was in a youth centre. I was kicked out because I always forgot my notebooks and I was too slow.

J’ai été longtemps à L’Entreprise. Bien en secondaire 1 et secondaire 2, environ deux et demi. Après ça, j’ai été au Rapides, oui pendant un petit bout, de deux à trois mois. Après ça, j’ai été ça ÉSP une semaine ou deux. Je suis retournée au Rapides parce que je me suis fait mettre dehors de ÉSP. Après ça, j’ai dû aller en centre jeunesse parce que ma famille d’accueil ne voulait plus de moi. Donc j’ai été à Mascouche. J’étais rendu – j’étais à Saint-Jerome. Après ça, j’ai été à Joliette. Après ça, j’ai été à Mascouche je pense. Je pense que c’est comme ça. J’ai été à Mascouche, je suis allé à Joliette. Je pense que c’est ça. Puis c’est ça. Puis après ça, bien je me suis ramassé en centre jeunesse.

²⁸ The Youth Protection Act (YPA) stipulates that children and youths between the ages of 0 and 18, **are** in need of protection in any of the following 6 situations: abandonment; neglect; psychological ill-treatment; sexual abuse; physical abuse; serious behavioural disturbance. The YPA also considers that children or youths **may be** in need of protection if they: run away; are not attending school; have been abandoned by their parents after being placed in foster care by virtue of the Act Respecting Health Services and Social Services.

²⁹ All references to specific neighbourhoods, towns, and cities have been changed to maintain anonymity

Après ça j'ai été en centre jeunesse. Je me suis fait mettre dehors parce que j'oubliais tout le temps mes cahiers vu que j'étais trop lent.

This led J.C. to observe that he “wasn’t too interested in schools.” It also signals a much longer and complex institutional trajectory full of transfers and barriers that he attributed as his own failings, because he was “too slow” or the content was too difficult. For young people in youth protection completing their secondary school education, under the Youth Protection Act (P-34.1) should be “followed over the age of 18 in order to enable them to remain in care while completing their high school education under the *Youth Protection Act*” (1984).

The *Youth Protection Act* (1984) states that young people from 0-18 are in need of protection if they are experiencing “abandonment, neglect, psychological ill-treatment, sexual abuse, physical abuse, serious behavioural disturbance” (34.1, 38). It states that young people may be in need of protection if they “run away; *are not attending school*; have been abandoned by their parents after being placed in foster care” (34.1, 38.2.1 emphasis added). The *Educational Act of Québec* ³⁰ outlines that schools have a responsibility to report to the *department de la protection jeunesse* (DPJ), both if they are unable to “regularize” a student’s situation and if a student is not attending school regularly and “intervention does not allow the situation to be remedied” (i.13-3, 18). The *Education Act* also places responsibility on school service centres to ensure the development of an agreement with Youth Protection that addresses “continuity and complementary of the services provided and the actions to be taken jointly” (i-13.3, 214.3). In theory, this would necessitate the kinds of partnerships outlined by provincial frameworks such as the *Two networks, one objective: the development of youth* (Deux réseaux,

un objectif: le développement des jeunes) (2014)³¹ and the interministerial action plan on homelessness prevention. In practice, these “continuities” are seldom experienced by young people in meaningful nor protective ways (Nichols, 2016a).

While some youth ended up accessing education through youth centres and through the youth protection system, many other young people (in and outside of Québec) developed strategies for avoiding any sort of connection with youth protection, as outlined in the previous chapter. As Thomas shared, he knew from watching his Indigenous cousins be separated from each other and his family that he did not want to engage with the “system”—and while he had some youth protection involvement growing up in B.C., when his family moved to Québec he mobilized robust strategies to avoid engagements with social workers. Benny, Martin, Matti and Jolene all echoed this fear, and hid any signs that intervention may be needed, knowing the kinds of responsibilities that schools had to report abuse³². These strategies decidedly prevented young people from reaching out to schools, teachers and guidance counsellors about issues they may have been able to support with. Teachers may also face sanctions, punishments, or lose their jobs (Fisher, 2020) if they honour young people’s wishes not to report, regardless of whether young people have faced hardships through the child protection system—and face “horrendous” (Fisher, 2020, p. 151) processes that harm students if they do report. While much of the literature

³¹ School service centres must also establish agreements with an MSSS centre in its area for cases of “educational neglect”: i.13-3, 214.3: A school service centre must enter into an agreement with an institution operating a child and youth protection centre in its territory concerning the services to be provided to a child and his parents by the health and social services network and the education network if the child is the subject of a report for a situation of educational neglect in connection with the schooling the child receives or with the child’s compliance with compulsory school attendance under subparagraph iii of subparagraph 1 of subparagraph *b* of the second paragraph of section 38 of the Youth Protection Act (chapter P-34.1).

³² Under section 39 of the Youth Protection Act, every professional who, by the nature of his or her profession, provides care or any other form of assistance to children in the practice of his or her profession (with the exception of a lawyer in the practice of his or her profession), including any institutional employee or any teacher or police officer who has reasonable grounds to believe that the security or development of a child is or may be considered to be in danger, must bring the situation to the attention of the DYP without delay. All citizens have an analogous obligation to report physical ill-treatment and sexual abuse. Incidents of sexual abuse or acts of violence against children are often reported to the police. When the police department receives a complaint in this regard, it must immediately inform the DYP, who must then determine whether the complaint is admissible and whether emergency measures are required.

focuses on the harm that a lack of reporting can cause (Ayling, Wash & Williams, 2017; Choo et al., 2013; Crowell & Levi, 2012), increasing studies attend to the dilemmas for teachers when reporting also causes extensive harm, particularly for students of colour (Fisher, 2020; Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Raz, 2020a; Raz, 2020b).

Additionally, there were young people who experienced a complete absence of reporting to youth protection, which also failed to support their wellbeing or educational engagement. Jolene, a white woman, shared one example linking her experiences at a high school in a middle-class suburb to assumptions around abuse and class. When asked if she had any DPJ involvement in her school experiences, she explained:

No. No, and it's weird, because my mom was never really there for me, and she was like, abusive, she was an alcoholic, she wasn't really taking care of me or my sister, and I don't know. Well, I feel like when you have money, and you look a certain way, like, the DPJ don't even fucking—they don't even search or anything. Because like, the school, they were aware, like my grades were really bad, because like, I didn't get any help from anything, my situation was just degrading, because I didn't understand anything that was going on in class, because whenever I had homework or whatever, I fucking couldn't do it. Because my mom was never there to help me, and they knew that, like, all along. High school, like, showing up with bruises and everything, all the time, since I'm showing up to school crying, because my mom was really awful to me all the time. And they never—because, I don't know, when you come from a middle class suburb family, it's okay, you can do anything you want.

Jolene provides a key example of when schools insistence that abuse, homelessness, and precarity “don't happen here” directly harms young people. Jolene went on to share that even when she left her mother's home, and was 14, living with her 27 year old boyfriend, school staff knew and didn't intervene, that “the social worker at the school, she knew him, because she went to school with the guy, she was the same age, so she knew him, and she knew he wasn't a good person, and they never did anything.”³³ In a review of schools within an English Québecois

³³ While many young people described inaction by their schools as relating to “not understanding” what was happening in the lives of young people, a 2003 Québec educational policy (Healthy Schools) suggests the Ministry of Education understands that some of the complex and serious issues youth are facing in their daily lives: “Young people are exposed to risks to their health

school centre, Harris (2019) found that most schools did not have individual policy on youth protection or maltreatment past the duty to report (Gouvernement du Québec, 1984, P-34.1) and those the few that did often copy and pasted from official government text. Schools often explained this by claiming there was no need for more specific policies—because no youth or children faced maltreatment in their schools (Harris, 2019).

In a situation where impacts of youth protection system involvement may cause immense harm, and (or) be a necessary intervention, it seems reasonable that a flexible policy that allows professionals to practice their judgement would support youth receiving supports that meet their unique needs. However, the experiences of young people demonstrate that this is decidedly not the case—in fact, flexibility in practice, which allows for the simultaneous over-reporting of poor and Indigenous families (Blackstock, Bamblett & Black, 2020; Caldwell & Sinha, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020, Schumaker, 2012) and under-reporting of middle class and affluent families (Howze & McKeig, 2019; Raz, 2020), seems to open multiple ways that young people can be harmed by the system. The policies outlining duties to report and partnerships between schools exist within a reality where both institutions do harm, but wherein the youth protection system in particular has played an historical and present-day role in framing some families as risky while invisibilising the risks built into institutional responses (Raz, 2020, p. 121). This is particularly relevant given the high overlap between youth protection system involvement and experiences of homelessness (Nichols et al., 2017) as well as the barriers to early intervention and prevention a fear of the youth protection system can present.

and wellbeing as well as to difficulties and problems that may affect their personal and social development. The main social adaptation and health problems [include] learning disabilities; dropping out of school; behavioural problems and delinquency; physical and psychological abuse, sexual assault, neglect ; violence; (bullying, taxing, violence in love relationships) – psychological distress, suicide; injuries resulting from trauma; sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections such as HIV and AIDS; teenage pregnancies; alcohol, drug, tobacco and other dependency-related problems (e.g. gambling and games of chance); physical health problems including oral-dental health problems, asthma, allergies, acne, respiratory problems linked to poor air quality; sedentariness; obesity, overweight, excessive preoccupation with body image” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2005, p. 16)

While both the youth protection system and education system are fraught with issues that make their involvement problematic for many young people in Québec (Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019, Goyette et al., 2004; Goyette & Frenchon, 2013, Lacroix, 2016), our research suggests that when youth *are* implicated, systems must be acting to ensure youth aren't "falling through the cracks" (Clark & Cooper, 2000; Viramontes, 2019; Nichols, 2014). Policy in Québec (2008, 2014, 2017 2019) frequently recommends actions to "bridge the gap" between ministries, connecting to young people's frustrations with facing disjointed institutional processes which frequently weren't in conversation with each other in ways that centered the needs of young people. The Interministerial Action Plan on Homelessness Prevention is one of many Québécois policies outlining these partnerships, continuums, and "continuities" (Gouvernement du Québec 2003, 2014, 2017) in detail. The collaborative protocol between the Québec Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEES) and Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) as part of the 2003 Agreement for the Complementarity of Services Between the Health and Social Services Network and the Education Network (2014) dictates "Developing and Strengthening a Continuum of Integrated Services for Young People at the Local and Regional Levels" (2014). The protocol itself references the barriers in achieving a "continuum of integrated services" between schools, youth protection and social services, due to a "lack of clear guidelines for access to services and the challenge of establishing a service continuum among the institutions in each network and between the two networks" (2014, p.2).³⁴

³⁴ In 2003 the Government of Québec also outlined the benefits that interministerial collaboration and continuum of services affords teachers (understanding the needs of youth holistically can help "avoid compartmentalization and avoid teacher burnout" (p. 85) and "makes it possible to prevent compartmentalization and ensure that promotion and prevention actions are integrated into a harmonious, coordinated and coherent plan with shared objectives in which everyone collaborates...[this] ensures that individuals are not overburdened with too much work" (p. 18), speaking to the capacity issues outlined by young people in the previous chapter

There are less comprehensive policy documents outlining the partnerships of schools and police, though the *Education Act* outlines similar responsibilities³⁵ of school service centres to develop agreements with police forces (as with MSSS). The Provincial Table on Violence, Youth and Schools (2005) policy on police presence in educational institutions outlines that police are “first and foremost...one of the partners who contribute to the education of rights and responsibilities, which is offered to students, youths and adults, which includes interventions of a preventive and corrective nature” (2005, p. 6), but that this must exist within “a capacity for dialogue [and] seeking the collaboration of students and their parents” (2005, p. 6).³⁶ This also suggests that when educational institutions request involvement of police, police should limit their presence to administrative areas, and recognizes the detrimental shifts that police presence can bring to relationships between teachers and students (Table provinciale de concertation sur la violence les jeunes et le milieu scolaire, 2005). Unsurprisingly (Brent & Wilson, 2018; Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; González, 2012; Merkwae, 2016; Howard, 2016; Maynard 2017, 2020; Madan, 2018) students shared avoiding police involvement in the lives of themselves and their families in similar ways to how they avoided social workers, and students had negative experiences with police interventions in other institutional contexts before and during experiences of homelessness.

³⁵ i-13.-3, 214.1A school service centre and each competent authority in respect of a police force in its territory shall enter into an agreement to determine how the officers of that police force will intervene in an emergency and when an act of bullying or violence is reported to them, and to establish a mode of collaboration for prevention and investigation purposes. The Government may, by regulation, determine the essential elements and the special stipulations that the agreement must include. In the absence of an agreement between the school service centre and the competent authority in respect of a police force in the territory of the school service centre, the Minister and the Minister of Public Security shall jointly determine how the members of the police force will intervene in an emergency and when an act of bullying or violence is reported, and establish a mode of collaboration for prevention and investigation purposes, to stand in lieu of such an agreement. The director general of the school service centre shall send a copy of the agreement to the school principals and the Student Ombudsman.

³⁶ During COVID-19, the Québec Ministry of Public Security and government have increased the presence of police officers in and around schools to enforce public health restrictions (CBC News, 2020)

Across the trajectories that young people shared, it was evident there is a need for clarity, transparency around policy and process, and accountability in schools ensuring processes lead not only to clear outcomes for youth—but are clear to youth. Because the responsibility for the development of school codes of conduct falls to individual principals, schools and governing boards, it is difficult to develop a general understanding of the multiple processes of intervention and punishment youth described to us—and often seemed unclear to young people as well. This isn't surprising, particularly since it is possible that each schools' "rules of conduct" are only shared to youth verbally, once throughout the year as required by the Ministry of Education (Gouvernement du Québec, I-i.13, 76)—and that this possibly occurs in a way/language that did not ensure they nor their parents understood it (for example, as a result of following Québec's Charter of the French Language (Gouvernement du Québec, 1977)).

Indigenous Education and Interministerial Agreements/Responsibilities

In Québec, Indigenous students may face different contexts when navigating schools, both because of their unique experiences within schools (particularly stemming from intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools and Indian day schools (Battiste, 2013; Blacksmith & Awashish, 2016; Robinson, 2020) and because of the different governance amongst Indigenous schoolboards: within Québec, Indigenous education falls primarily under the Cree and Kativik school boards, which largely serve rural and northern communities but also operate within urban centres like Montréal and Québec City, particularly due to the lack of resources and capacity afforded to First Nations health and social services to conduct youth protection investigations in community and the large number of Indigenous youth being relocated through youth protection services to cities (FNQLHSSC (2008)). Across Québec, Indigenous parents feel schools are difficult to engage with, fail to ground learning in Indigenous languages, knowledges, and community, and face racist attitudes and tokenistic inclusion in non-

Indigenous schooling (Advisory Board on English Education, 2017). In a 2018 study, Indigenous youth saw racism in schools, and colonisation broadly, as a key factor contributing to their homelessness (Schwan et al., 2018), but also saw access to cultural supports (Stewart, 2008), Indigenous visibility and lessons centering Indigenous experience as points of possibility within educational institutions (Kidd et al., 2019; Malenfant et al., 2020; Schwan et al., 2018;).

Within Québec (Advisory Board on English Education, 2017), as in other contexts (Battiste, 2013; St. Denis, 2011, St. Denis & Schick, 2003) curriculum largely positions Indigenous issues as historical--if they are present at all (Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019)--and a common view is that a focus on Indigenous topics or cultural knowledge is too "narrow" (St. Denis, 2011c) and/or that students and parents don't "feel they need to learn 'that stuff'" (Schick, 2014, p. 91). Despite this, Indigenous students and parents see the inclusion of Indigenous content across subjects and grades to be key in combatting "racist attitudes in the mainstream population" (Advisory Board on English Education, 2017, p. 13). Québec classrooms, and those across Canada, are currently struggling (Kabatay & Johnson, 2019; Madden, 2019) to include Indigenous knowledges, as per the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (in particular calls 62-63)³⁷ (2015c), to address the historical and ongoing role of schools in genocide since 1782.

³⁷ 62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

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

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

While moves to Indigenous governance of education and social service systems³⁸ may serve to support self-determination in education in integral ways, particularly through a lens of reconciliation for residential schools (Toulouse, 2018), this shift may also contribute to non-Indigenous schools imagining there are no Indigenous students studying in their communities, and further erase the needs and knowledges that may support the educational and life trajectories of Indigenous youth (Battiste, 2013; Schwan et al., 2018; Toulouse 2018). The Viens Report (Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019) calls specifically for schools to address lack of educational retention and supports for First Nations and Inuit students through understanding the “needs identified by Indigenous peoples themselves and complying with their ancestral traditions” (p. 236) as well as address the need for affordable housing (p. 235). Despite calls for government to better measure, report and assess the effectiveness (or harm) of interventions in the lives of Indigenous youth in State institutions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015c), Québec has frequently been criticized for failing to report numbers on Indigenous children in care (Fast et al., 2019; Trocmé, Knock & Blackstock, 2004).

Within Québec schools, attempts to add cultural supports for Indigenous youth currently include being connected with a “spiritual animator” (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2002) who occupies a role that draws from original policy that outlined that schools “shall...facilitate the spiritual development in students so as to promote self-fulfillment” (Bill 118, amendment to the Education Act, 2000). However, under the supposed secularization of schools in the 2010's, the role has expanded to serve to “implement programs or activities of a community,

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

³⁸ Which have been strongly opposed by the Québécois government in many cases, including challenging the constitutionality of bill C-92 (Shingler & Deer, 2019)

humanitarian, spiritual and religious nature for larger groups of schools” (EMSB, 2021). These spiritual animators may not be equipped to support young people with knowledge of Indigenous spiritualities nor social, material or housing supports (Robinson, 2020). While these animators may currently fail to support the specific needs of Indigenous students (as this is not officially their role (Advisory Board on Education, 2017; Robinson, 2020)), it demonstrates that there is the capacity to provide unique resources to students to support their learning (even if this was historically imagined within a white, Catholic and Francophone framing).

Ultimately, the racism and exclusion that Indigenous youth face in schools, today and through generations subjected to residential schooling, can be tied to experiences of homelessness in tangible ways (Schwan et al., 2018, Stewart, 2018, Thistle, 2017, Grande, 2015). Both the Truth and Reconciliation (2015c) and Viens Report (2019) demonstrate how this is not solely the responsibility of Indigenous schools, school boards, and social services to address, but requires broader social shifts and education—particularly on issues that are currently invisibilized in much of the Canadian curriculum (Toulouse, 2018). The reports also emphasize institutional shifts required to understand the needs of Indigenous young people in schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015c) where interventions for Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness require thorough, interconnected, and Indigenous/youth-led actions (Commission d’enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics, 2019).

Points of Possibility

Unlike provinces and territories outside of Québec, which have very little policy speaking to homelessness developed by/with Ministries of Education (Smith, 2019), Québec’s recent policy and prevention outlines some key roles for the *Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur*, drafted and led in collaboration with the Ministry itself. Following

the experiences of young people, here I outline some policy points of possibility that emphasize the need for collaboration and continuums of care across institutions, propose methods of centering youth voice and engagement, and focus on preventative approaches.

Bill 56: An Act to Prevent and Stop Bullying and Violence in Schools

Youth described experiences of bullying from other students as well as teachers and authority figures, which often led to disproportionate institutional punishments if they retaliated (for example, Palle was told he was lying when he tried to report bullying but had to transfer schools after retaliating) and aggravated instability and mental health struggles. Research stresses the importance of understanding connections between bullying and youth homelessness (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018; Gaetz et al., 2016; McCallops et al., 2020; Kidd & Shahar, 2008), and some young people, like Fariha, described how stigma and bullying may prevent them from accessing supports in schools that may help them (including mental health supports). Bullying often intersects with structural factors, “in the form of homophobia, transphobia, [and] racism” in contributing to young people’s homelessness (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p. 18). Within Québec educational policy, acknowledgement of the harms of bullying makes up a point of possibility, in that it reflects a recognition of schools’ responsibility to act (and act preventatively) on issues of bullying and violence in schools. *Bill 56: An Act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools*. In Québec, requires all schools to have a plan to address bullying, following a structure that encourages them to adopt early intervention and prevention, including the recognition of early warning signs. While Bill 56 does not include mention of homelessness (despite connections between bullying and housing precarity (McCallops et al., 2020)), its potential lies in how it holds schools accountable for prevention—if schools can understand their responsibility for preventing bullying, and enacting meaningful ways of implementing training

and monitoring efforts to do so, it is possible that they may play a similar preventative role regarding homelessness.

Assessment and evaluation of prevention efforts is an important point in *Bill 56*. While what constitutes prevention isn't clearly defined in *Bill 56*, it does outline ministerial accountability measures, including that each school "shall send the Minister, at the time and in the form determined by the Minister, a yearly report which states the number of acts of bullying or violence reported to the institution and the nature of those acts. The report must also describe the results achieved by the institution with "respect to preventing and dealing with bullying and violence." (Assemblée nationale du Québec, 2012, p. 11). If effectively undertaken, a yearly report for evaluating individual school initiatives on important issues (such as bullying (2012, I-13.i, 83.1) or homelessness) would lead to much needed accountability in the current landscape where (in the absence of data) principals can continue to claim that homelessness does not exist or is not a problem for their student body. We might also think of how young people might be involved in these processes of accountability in supported and sustained ways³⁹, as youth shared that they didn't feel they could say anything if interventions weren't working, didn't exist, or were harmful--they simply would not reach out to school staff again in the future.

Within the Education Act, each governing board is responsible for adopting a plan⁴⁰, proposed by the principal, that aims to prevent and stop all bullying and violence in schools. The

³⁹ In line with the Education Act I-13.i, 9 (1988) that states that either "a student or parents of students affected" can engage the school board/school service centers' decision-making processes

⁴⁰ These plans must include: **an analysis of the situation prevailing at the school** with respect to bullying and violence; **prevention measures to put an end to all forms of bullying and violence**, in particular those motivated by racism or homophobia or targeting sexual orientation, sexual identity, a handicap or a physical characteristic; **measures to encourage parents to collaborate in preventing and stopping bullying and violence and in creating a healthy and secure learning environment**; procedures for reporting, or registering a complaint concerning, an act of bullying or violence and, more particularly, procedures for reporting the use of social media or communication technologies for cyberbullying purposes; the actions to be taken when a student, teacher or other school staff member or any other person observes an act of bullying or violence; measures to protect the confidentiality of any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence; supervisory or support measures for any student who is a victim of bullying or violence, for witnesses and for the perpetrator; specific disciplinary sanctions for acts of bullying or violence, according to their severity or repetitive nature; and the **required follow-up**

points of possibility stemming from Bill 65 are not in its specific naming of homelessness, but rather the structure it provides for thinking of the responsibility of schools to address the barriers young people face to education broadly. The preventative responsibility around bullying that Bill 65 lays points to possibilities through its comparison to existing or pilot projects attempting to address homelessness prevention in similar ways. For example, The Geelong Project in Australia, developed pilot projects to demonstrate the impacts that early intervention and prevention can have—within five years of beginning the programme the number of youth entering the homelessness support system had declined by 40% and youth leaving school early had been reduced by 20% (Mackenzie, 2018).

Particularly through developing a “community of schools and youth services (COSS) model for early intervention” (Mackenzie & Thielking, 2014, p. 25) similar to Québec’s intended “continuity of care” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2003), schools could renegotiate their roles to better acknowledge and address student needs by tapping into community and interministerial resources⁴¹. Similar pilots in Canada have outlined the possibility and challenges of preventative approaches to youth homelessness (Sohn & McKitterick, 2019; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020) in ways to how Bill 56 imagines a preventative approach to bullying (a significant experience for many young people who experience homelessness (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Bill 56, in theory, demonstrates the willingness of schools to develop prevention strategies to support the wellbeing of *all* students. In practice, considerations must consider existing barriers outlined here,

on any report or complaint concerning an act of bullying or violence. A document explaining the anti-bullying and anti-violence plan must be distributed to the parents. The governing board shall see to it that the wording of the document is clear and accessible. The anti-bullying and anti-violence **plan must be reviewed each year, and updated if necessary** (Bill 56, 2012)

⁴¹ As imagined in the Québec interministerial action plan on homelessness prevention, 2014

including a suspicion of reporting and social workers (a key point of intervention in many proposed early interventions).

Interministerial Responsibilities and the Interministerial Homelessness Action Plan of Québec

Preventing homelessness and addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness in any sense, requires working across institutions and systems and a recognition of their responsibilities to young people (Nichols, 2016a). Québec's recent Interministerial Homelessness Action Plan (2015-2020⁴²) provides clear actions for preventing homelessness for Québécois people of all ages, and lays out particular ministerial roles in prevention of child, youth and young adult homelessness: the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sport are solely responsible for a number of efforts to “support measures and methods of education, training, re-engagement and integration to employment for precarious young people” (2014, p. 13). The plan lays out particular means through which ministries can do this, as well as who they should collaborate with. The plan specifies the development of training and guides for professionals in other institutions (healthcare, social work, employment) on how to actively support young people's “school-to-life” transitions (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014, p. 13). Other responsibilities include two targeted adult education opportunities for Indigenous communities (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014, p. 26) and collaborating with the Ministry of Health and Social Services on biannual knowledge exchanges on preventing and ending homelessness (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014, p. 30).

⁴² The release of a subsequent Interministerial Homeless Action Plan for 2020-2025 has been delayed due to COVID-19 but will likely be released at some point in 2021, and may address youth homelessness in more detail.

| ACTIONS | MOYENS | RESPONSABLES | COLLABORATEURS |
|--|--|--------------|--|
| 4. Soutenir des mesures et des méthodes alternatives de formation, de rattachement et d'insertion à l'emploi pour les jeunes en difficulté. | 4.1. Soutien offert au milieu scolaire afin d'aider les élèves des milieux défavorisés à cheminer vers la réussite scolaire. | MELS | Commissions scolaires, écoles primaires et secondaires |
| | 4.2. Soutien offert aux commissions scolaires pour l'organisation de services de soutien pédagogique et psychosocial favorisant la réintégration des élèves suspendus ou expulsés. | MELS | Commissions scolaires et écoles |
| | 4.3. Élaboration d'un guide de soutien destiné à l'ensemble des intervenants et intervenantes des réseaux concernés (ex. : milieu de la santé et des services sociaux, milieu de l'emploi) pour favoriser la mise en place de la démarche de transition école-vie active. | MELS | MSSS, MESS, MTQ, MF, OPHQ et autres partenaires |
| | 4.4. Accroissement de l'accessibilité à des programmes de formation professionnelle pour les titulaires d'un certificat de formation à un métier semi-spécialisé. | MELS | |
| | 4.5. Poursuite de l'appropriation des nouveaux programmes d'études de la formation générale des adultes (intégration sociale et intégration socioprofessionnelle) auprès du réseau scolaire et promotion de ces programmes. | MELS | Milieu scolaire, syndicats, entreprises, OC, entreprises d'économie sociale, MSSS, MESS, MSP et milieu correctionnel |
| | 4.6. Production d'un guide encadrant la conclusion d'ententes entre les acteurs et actrices des réseaux publics et communautaires en matière d'alphabétisation, de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire, d'intégration sociale et d'intégration socioprofessionnelle. | MELS | Commissions scolaires, OC et leurs regroupements |
| | 4.7. Soutien de projets entre les commissions scolaires et des organismes communautaires pour prévenir l'itinérance, notamment chez les 16-24 ans. | MELS | OC |
| | 4.8. Soutien offert à des organismes d'action communautaire autonomes dont la mission est le rattachement (écoles de la rue). | MELS | OC |
| | 4.9. Poursuite des interventions auprès des jeunes âgés de moins de 25 ans qui sont éloignés du marché du travail, qui ont un parcours de vie difficile et qui présentent des problèmes particuliers pour les aider à acquérir une autonomie. | MESS | |

Img. 1., key sections outlining MELS responsibility in Québec's homelessness prevention action plan

Within his plan, the Ministry of Education and school service centres/schools are supposed to play a key role in providing youth homelessness supports and public/professional education about youth transitions and needs, as well as engaging in collaboration with other ministries to prevent youth homelessness. The plan is also incredibly detailed in how it imagines the specific roles, actions and collaborations that will address homelessness prevention, including school-based prevention efforts with youth. The report also outlines that the Interministerial Table on Homelessness, led by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, is responsible for implementation and evaluation of the uptake of recommended actions, including annual

monitoring that will inform future homelessness prevention priorities. At the time of writing this, no assessment or updates on the uptake of these actions by the Ministry of Education has been made public and young people’s accounts offer no evidence that the promoted actions are currently being pursued in Québec schools.

Advocating and “Convincing” Schools Youth Homelessness Matters

While it is important to know the policy landscape that young people were navigating in their trajectories, it is also important to how these experiences and policies intersect with the professional practices and programs for youth. As argued by the Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal (2017), any policy-based approaches to issues of youth homelessness must assess and evaluate existing practice and capacity. The practices outlined in this section begin, again, in the experiences of youth we spoke with, but also look at how teachers and advocates are experiencing youth homelessness interventions in schools. I will also examine some existing practices or interventions in Québec and Canada which “brush up against” youth homelessness interventions, and that address the needs of youth, before and during experiences of homelessness.

Teachers, Practice and Advocacy in Schools

A major point which frames examinations of practice and school policy, from the experiences of professionals and youth alike, is that schools (in Québec and elsewhere) are incredibly risk-averse. Schools may be resistant to having conversations about homelessness in their student bodies, quick to act around the symptoms of homelessness as “problems,” and often require heavy and complex bureaucratic processes—over long periods of time—in order to make minute changes in how they intervene in student lives. Despite Québec policy that positions

schools as necessarily “contribut[ing] to social progress and help[ing] pave the way for the future” (2014, p. 11), conservative positions, organizational politics, lack of capacity and a fear of risk remain barriers to beginning broader discussions about youth homelessness and prevention in schools (Malenfant et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). While schools and school service centres/boards may be largely risk-averse and unlikely to immediately adopt policies on homeless prevention, some teachers are already working, thinking, and acting on issues surrounding housing precarity for their students.

There is evidence in the literature (Thielking, 2015; Thielking, La Sala & Flatau 2017; Moore, 2013), as well as in the stories young people shared that some teachers and staff are aware of the realities of youth experiencing homelessness and shift their practice with aims to support them—even if they are “not equipped with the knowledge or capacity” (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p.7). A 2016 study of teachers’ perceptions and needs in supporting homeless youth speak to the same experiences of mistrust of services, institutions, and adults--teachers shared that in addition to mistrust of authority figures and stigma associated with poverty and homelessness, “embarrassment and general anxiety around help seeking behaviour was said to further contribute to an overall hesitancy in asking for support” (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017, p. 100):

There’s probably just that element of: ‘I don’t know what this is’, you know? ‘What am I walking into here? Who are these people? What do they want with my life?’ and so I think there’s still that element” I think that kids go, ‘well I’ve had issues with adults, so are these adults gonna try and just tell me to go back to mum and dads? I think it’s more of that. (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017, p. 101)

Thielking et al. also speak to teachers and school staff sharing that “intergenerational and peer-led fear of child protection or other authorities contributed to students’ reluctance to seek support” (2017, p. 101). This echoes the ways young people spoke about police and youth

protection involvement in previous chapters of this dissertation and emphasizes important learnings on teachers' perceptions of interventions: namely, that trust is key to any intervention with young people, and teachers may not feel they have the knowledge or capacity to engage in early intervention. Acknowledging that young people may feel safer “sleeping rough in neighbourhoods they knew” than being removed from their families and communities (2017, p. 101) is an important reality when developing institutional responses and prevention efforts. Teachers also identified poverty as a major barrier, and shared that any service that required a fee, or parents taking time off work, would exclude many families from engaging in early intervention supports (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017, p. 103).

In our research, over half of the youth we spoke with (n=23) referred to a champion teacher (or other professional) who made a difference in their trajectories—sometimes by breaking the rules, taking on additional labour outside of their official role, or simply “getting it”, at times because they had, as Casey and Pauline pointed out, experienced periods of precarity as well. Advocates and teachers echo the necessity to have a school champion to emphasize the importance of youth homelessness to parents, school service centres/boards and principals (Malenfant et al., 2020, Morton et al., 2020) —and that this can be the determining factor in getting schools and communities “on board” (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p. 16). However, similar to the limitations that depending on “good” teachers presents in schools, advocates also identified this as a barrier to systems change, because if “champions” retire or leave, often they had to begin the process of convincing schools that youth homelessness was an important issue to attend to (Malenfant et al., 2020). This also puts the onus for change on professionals who may not have the capacity or resources to sustain the work (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017).

Thielking, La Sala, and Flatau in addition to arguing for the efficacy of including schools because young people are already there, argue that from the perspectives of teachers,

Teachers and student support staff believed that students and their families internalised a preference for dealing with school staff rather than someone unfamiliar from an external agency, and many participants stated that teachers and student support staff felt a high degree of responsibility towards helping students and their families with such issues. (2017, p. 103).

This is not necessarily true for all students or families (who may have intersecting reasons for not trusting school staff (St. Denis, 2011)). The literature also suggests that many teachers and staff do feel strong responsibilities to help students, though may not have the tools or capacities to do so. While teachers can be strong advocates for acting on issues of youth homelessness, they may often feel they don't have the capacity or power to shift school culture—and much of this work is led by advocates external to schools themselves, having to “bring schools along” (Morton et al., 2020). Experiences by professionals trying to *advocate* for youth homelessness prevention in schools (Thielking, 2015, Morton et al., 2020; Malenfant et al., 2020) speak to both this risk-aversion from schools as well as barriers to engaging school service centres/boards in youth prevention or intervention.

Within this project and reflected in the experiences of practitioners and advocates (Morton et al., 2020; Partouche, 2020), time— and particularly to “take the time to build the relationship that is necessary to the development of a real understanding regarding what [the youth] needs” (Kidd et al., 2007, p. 18)—has emerged as an important theme for thinking of shifting our responses to supporting young people. “Time” is one of the codes we employed in our collective coding and data analysis, and was an important point brought up by young people around what “works” for them, particularly within experiences where they are expected to immediately trust authorities within schools and organizations (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014; Thielking, Skues &

Le, 2018) despite repeatedly being harmed by others in positions of authority. Lavalee (2020) echoes this in building out educational programming for Indigenous youth, stating that there is significant time spent convincing schools any Indigenous programming is necessary (as evidenced by multiple barriers and disengagement faced by Indigenous students) and additional time to ensure programs are built upon solid and reciprocal relationships. This can be seen in the policy and educational context in Québec, as well, and suggests there is significant work to “convince” educational institutions of their roles in both supporting homeless youth and Indigenous youth (as well as how the needs of these youth intersect and overlap).

A panel during the summer of 2020 focusing on this work within a Canadian context echoed the policies and processes that frame these barriers, and shared lessons from decades of practice and advocacy attempting to address youth homelessness in schools (Malenfant et al., 2020). Primary themes included finding ways to get schools to understand that youth homelessness was something they should be thinking about. Smith, a researcher with lived experience of homelessness, identified advocacy as needing to begin with basic education about the issues, claiming “schools don’t talk about homelessness” (2020). Grant, who has over ten years of experience at a community organization providing homelessness services for youth, emphasized the need to invite those in leadership on school service centres/boards to learn about youth homelessness and engage in targeted public and professional education on what youth need, trying to find a “common language” (2020). This is echoed in studies speaking with teachers, school staff and principals about supporting homeless youth, where one principal shared that effective interventions stemmed from a broader and shared understanding, or a “shift in what [school district leadership] thought of as homelessness...when that shift happens of how they

define homelessness, that's when we started realizing "Oh my gosh, we have a lot of kids in this situation"" (Hallett & Skrla, 2017, p. 82).

Lavallee, Executive Director of an Indigenous youth education and community program shared similar experiences attempting to open dialogue with schools about the need for culturally relevant services for urban Indigenous youth (Lavallee, 2020), a point that is echoed by those working in tandem with school service centres/boards and Indigenous services in Montréal (Robinson, 2020; Advisory Board on Education, 2017). Like young people in this project, advocates shared that youth and community members knew there were significant barriers to school engagement well before schools did, but were not able to access mechanisms to impact decision-making within schools or school service centres/boards (Kelley, 2020, Fieldnotes, 2019).

Lavallee (2020) also emphasized that time was needed to understand the obscure and cloaked decision-making processes within schools—suggesting that advocates, and even teachers and school staff, were navigating the same murky processes that young people described. When working with a school board to organize a “stay in school” program for Indigenous youth across multiple schools, Lavallee shared:

One of the most important learnings was trying to unpack the hierarchy and politics within a school environment. In my naivety, I would engage with folks in the system without realizing the communication protocols in place and I would unintentionally follow the wrong path (Lavallee 2020)

I would argue that the long timelines, risk-aversion, and “convincing” that is part of advocacy work to address youth homelessness in schools is shaped by, and perpetuates, the same normed understanding of who schools are serving present in the experiences of youth themselves—

schools aren't pressed⁴³ to shift their practices because they still need to be convinced that harm is happening to their students (or to the students they care about (Darnell Pritchard, 2013)).

While students and advocates, and perhaps teachers and school staff, may be very aware of the urgent need to address youth homelessness in schools, those in positions of power (particularly principals (Corbitt, 1997; Miller, 2009; Tomley, 2020)) may frequently be a barrier to changing school policies and practices around youth homelessness, difficult to "convince" (Kelley, 2020) or may already believe they are adequately supporting students in need (Mackenzie & Chamberlain, 2008).

Mobilizing Lived Experience and Stories in Schools: Teacher Education and Trauma Parades

Advocates also highlight convincing schools, principals, and school service centres/boards to care about youth homelessness often includes mobilizing stories from those with lived experiences to demonstrate that youth homelessness and education is an issue worth acting on (Sohn, 2020), echoing approaches which mobilize experiential and narrative demonstrations to push for action (Nelson, 2020; Paradis & Mosher, 2020, Sandhu, 2017). Critics of the tokenisation of this strategy refer to these testimonies or narratives as "trauma parades" or "poverty porn" (Atkins, 2020), wherein people's experiences are mobilized without their input to serve an advocacy or research goal (Nelson, 2020). Following my approach to this project, and working with our research team, I argue that involving narratives and personal experience should be prioritized in education and advocacy, and can be a powerful influencing factor in institutional and policy shifts (as outlined by Lavalley and Grant (Malenfant et al., 2020), as well as others (Jarrett, 2016). However, this must be done thoughtfully.

⁴³ Within the context of funding structures within the McKinney-Vento act in the U.S., schools may be motivated when they are seeking funding themselves, and align their goals with funding to address youth homelessness (Hallett, Skrla & low, 2015).

During the course of this research, I was working with a day-centre serving people experiencing homelessness in Montréal, and the coordinator was managing an increase in secondary school classes requesting “visits” to the centre to educate students about the realities of homelessness. This was following the provincial Interministerial plan on homelessness prevention (2014), rising costs of rent and increased visible homelessness in the city (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2018; Baillergeau, 2014), and an emphasis on “citizenship and community life” as an area of learning in the Québec Education Plan (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004; EMSB, 2016). The coordinator shared that while she was hesitant to refuse schools’ requests to tour the centre, because she saw education as an important tool to address homelessness, the visits were harmful for everyone involved—participants in their program felt they were on display, uncomfortable, and sometimes objectified by teachers, staff were overburdened and had to juggle navigating students on top of their busy daily schedules, and students themselves were often unprepared to engage respectfully, were traumatized by visits, and were unable to effectively learn what the coordinator hoped to impart from these experiences (Fieldnotes 2018).

This demonstrates a situation where schools intended on benefiting from the pedagogical impacts of engaging lived experiences of homelessness, but without the structures in place to support all those involved. The organization eventually decided to stop these visits until they were able to develop or share educational tools ahead of time to create conditions for respectful opportunities for co-learning (Fieldnotes, 2018). These experiences began ongoing discussions of what curricular tools might be developed within a Montréal and Québécois context that would both provide students with understandings of the complexities of homelessness as well as provide teachers with knowledge to both educate students who have not experienced

homelessness, and identify students who may be navigating housing precarity—echoing research that demonstrates when teachers have more knowledge about homelessness, they are more likely to meet the needs of homeless students (Moore, 2013; Tomley, 2020).

These benefits can also be demonstrated through integration of other (intersecting) topics--the increasing implementation, for example, of mandatory courses on Indigenous topics for pre-service teachers demonstrates that these forms of education may have significant, if complex (del Carmen Rodríguez de France et al., 2018; Tupper, 2012), impacts in the classroom, including introducing topics of Indigenous histories, cultures, knowledges and realities to pre-service teachers who often do not have lived experiences or knowledges of them (Tompkins, 2002; Kitchen, 2005). While people's experiential knowledge of homelessness is an important resource to include in curricular tools or lessons, failing to do so in engaged and ethical ways perpetuate harm must also reflect on and evaluate lived experience engagement (Sandhu, 2017; Zuchowski et al., 2019). In a Canadian, and especially Québécois context, there currently exist very few curricular resources on homelessness for K-12 teachers⁴⁴.

Existing Programming and Supports, Promising Practices

I wish to end this chapter by highlighting programs and supports that were noted by young people as particularly impactful to their education and stability throughout their trajectories, often outside of official school programming or contexts: food supports, art-based programmes, and mental health programming. These were themes which emerged in how young people were talking about successfully learning, and accessing supports for stability, but also

⁴⁴Those that exist are often regionally-specific, but robust, including the Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group's *Teacher Toolkit: A resource package designed to assist educators in teaching students about homelessness in Waterloo Region* (2009), *Learning about Homelessness in British Columbia: A Guide for High-School Teachers* (2010), Greater Vancouver's Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness's *Homelessness: A Teacher's Guide* (2010), the *Toronto Relief Committee's Teaching Guide on Homelessness* (2008). There are few curricular resources that have been developed in the last decade.

what led to exploring their passions through education. While the majority of young people accessed these supports *after* their initial experience of housing precarity or homelessness, and often outside of schools (within homelessness non-profit/community organizations), their efficacy for youth suggest important points of possibility—particularly if they were realized within a prevention lens. In order to effectively be supporting young people, we need to shift educational practices to fall in line with what works (centering youth agency and choice, or low-barrier supports, for example) to ensure all young people are accessing “learning and well-being” (Gouvernement du Québec 2014, p. 68).

Breakfast Clubs and Low-Barrier Access to Food

Breakfast clubs or lunch programmes⁴⁵ were the most common programming in schools that youth observed having a positive impact in their educational trajectories while they were navigating difficulties and homelessness. While it isn’t evident if these were official Breakfast Club of Canada programs (which fundraise/mobilize support to provide funding and tools to schools to implement breakfast programming (Breakfast Club of Canada, 2020), or similar, programs that provided food, they were seen by youth as a baseline to help them navigate school before or during experiences of homelessness. These programs are low-barrier, and youth do not have to demonstrate need or deservedness to access a meal. Casey shared that this was the singular support he accessed through his school, and Matti explained there were times in their life where they depended on these meals as their sole source of food each day. Breakfast clubs and accessible meal programs demonstrate an awareness that schools can be a place to connect young people with the services, supports and goods they need to participate in school. Given that

⁴⁵ Breakfast programming and food-based community education initiatives have been particularly successful examples of Mutual Aid against the State throughout history, including the Black Panthers’ Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program (Heynen, 2009)

research suggests factors such as food insecurity (and housing precarity) “account for up to 80 percent of any given test score” (Au, 2018, p. 66), food programmes may be seen as an important first step to creating conditions for school engagement.

Another food program that many depended on was the provision of free meals at Dans la rue’s day centre, Chez Pop’s, where we were conducting many of our interviews. Chez Pop’s offers meals (with vegetarian and meat options) on every weekday. Palle explained that meals at Pop’s allowed him to continue to be engaged in the education program there, and he had heard from friends who used the day centre about how to engage with the educational counsellor. Fariha shared that instead of stealing food, she opted to run to Chez Pop’s while taking university courses, though this often led to being late for classes. Many youth shared that they only accessed meals through Chez Pop’s and other youth-service organizations, like Ketch Café, when they had already experienced homelessness, and had already disengaged from school—for youth like like Robert, these services were only accessed *after* periods of sleeping rough. While it is important to have services for homeless youth, there is also stigma associated with using these services, and many young people may not identify as homeless, particularly during periods of couch-surfing or hidden homelessness (O’Grady, Kidd & Gaetz, 2020; Thielking, 2014).

Access to Mental Health Services

While experiences weren’t always positive, schools were sites where young people shared that they were likely to seek out mental health supports, and sometimes were able to connect with counsellors. Over the course of this project, I have had many professionals in and out of schools reach out to me to attempt to access preventative services through community organizations in Montréal, after students they were working with disclosed that they were in dire need and weren’t receiving the supports they needed in school. While there are some supports in

youth organizations, such as Head & Hands’s low barrier counselling program for youth 12-25, and Dans la rue’s collaboration with Clinique des jeunes de la rue as well as two in-house psychologists, are often over capacity. Youth explained that even though these services exist, they may be on waitlists for weeks, months, or even years to see a mental health professional. These were also often being accessed *after* experiences of precarity.

While I will talk about peer support in more detail in the following chapter, youth found that peer groups, both formal and informal—particularly for youth of colour/linguistic groups/queer and trans groups/young people navigating mental health barriers--were a way to connect with supports while negotiating long waitlists to access official mental health services. This included ACCESS Open minds, which was a research and support group project taking place at Dans la rue’s day centre at the beginning of our research, which is a pan-Canadian project has undertaken data collection and research on how to shift to youth- and community-centered mental health supports (ACCESS Open Minds, 2019). However, the majority of these groups also existed within crisis or homelessness services, and were not accessed through schools. While some young people did find mental health supports through schools helpful, these were often limited to a set amount of appointments, and often young people were unable to continue accessing them if they missed appointments or weren’t prepared to accept the counsellor’s approach (for example, Benny facing barriers to accessing a Foster’s program en lieu of 12-step for his problematic substance use, or Rowan who, in part due to the stigma of being called in front of her class to see the psychologist, stopped going after four appointments⁴⁶).

⁴⁶ Youth are often also blamed for not wanting help if they don’t show up, though this may be because of the barriers access currently provide. As Martin shared, “In total I made about 5 applications to the drug emergency drug detox program and was

Access to Art Programs

Diana shared that drop-in art programs allowed her to reimagine the role of education in her life and “explore [her] passion.” She believed that all services for youth should have similar arts-based programming and had accessed the art room at Chez Pop’s as well as three other art programs, including classes. Shayana, a member of our youth team used the art room at Dans la rue, and hosted workshops for other young people and partners. Lucas shared that switching to an alternative secondary school that allowed for an art focus “helped a lot,” and allowed him to channel his passion and dedication to doing graffiti around the city at night to institutional education. When I was 15, I was mandated to see a mental health professional after a suicide attempt and was connected with SCYAP (an organization providing drop-in art classes, employment and cultural programming) in downtown Saskatoon. SCYAP is not explicitly a homeless organization, but provides important supports to Saskatoon youth experiencing homelessness, in a city with very few supports for homeless youth. When I could no longer access my mental health professional free of charge (after I missed too many appointments), making art also became a way to cope and, eventually it allowed me to return to school.

I particularly want to note how often art programs and learning came up because art is often something that isn’t conceptualized as a basic need. When individuals experience homelessness, arts are often framed as outside of basic needs despite arts being increasingly successful in organizations working with homeless youth (Kidd, 2009; Schwan, Fallon & Milne, 2016; Schwan, 2017). Martin, a pagan(ish) trans man who identified as a “street kid,” also shared that doodling helped manage his anxiety, but was seen as a luxury by practitioners:

accepted twice. The first time I was accepted I panicked because I was given a very tight deadline to turn myself in and I felt that this was unrealistic so I cancelled my application out of panic.” This demonstrates that options must be provided when youth are ready to access them.

[At the emergency detox unit], I felt like I was being punished. I tried to get a book or colouring in to pass the time and do something other than think about my withdrawals, but I couldn't and when I said I thought it was strange that we didn't have access to colouring to take our mind off things, I was told that our stay there was not meant to be fun. I only spent 35 hours there, but soon I started to feel really claustrophobic.

The nurse's framing positions art, creativity or even reading as "fun" rather as an impactful tool young people use to cope and heal. Access to arts programming has been found to have significant impacts in the lives of homelessness youth (Novak, 2018) in terms of mental health and stress management, as well as coping with and healing from trauma—often within contexts where young people may be lacking institutional mental health supports (Schwan, Fallon & Milne, 2016). Additionally, art programming may provide benefits that institutional mental health supports do not, including "*unique* functions in managing the economic and social exclusion associated with youth homelessness, such as stigma management, relationship building in the face of discredited or devalued social identities, and the navigation of institutional structures within social service context" (Schwan, Fallon & Milne, 2016, p. 362, emphasis in original text). The ways that young people were speaking about art and what it offered them in terms of stability, confidence, strategies for wellness, and opportunities for educational engagement, should be considered alongside meeting the "basic needs" of young people, such as food programming.

Conclusion

The experiences of teachers and advocates intersect in interesting ways with how young people describe navigating schools while experiencing homelessness and point to an important issue that preventative efforts must attend to—despite policy outlining the responsibilities of schools to consider the wellness, engagement and success of students, educational institutions do

not see homelessness as an issue that they must address, and often do not see it as an issue that happens within their walls. The danger of schools (or, more accurately, teachers, staff, etc.) not seeing homelessness—even if its manifestations are right in front of them—is suggestive of the normative standards for educational participation and the types of experiences that are recognized in schools. As youth shared, when they did disclose that they were at risk of, or were experiencing homelessness, they were frequently told (sometimes at very early point in the trajectories) that they were “liars.” This points to a more insidious issue we must deal with: that regardless of whether policies and structures were in place to (theoretically) support youth, if youth are not believed when they are attempting to access them, the policies and structures will fail to make a difference.

Policies in Québec *do* position schools as playing a role in youth homelessness prevention, but the issues that youth face in schools are often the result of structural and systemic discriminations and barriers, and require action in order to realize the role of schools (and education broadly) in this issue. Schools are also (an integral) part of a broader society that reinforces these barriers, stigmas, and the devaluation of particular voices (Haworth, 2017, Elmore 2017), and policy without material and systemic shifts will continue to be ineffective in making the impacts it proposes. Smith outlines how institutionalization and professionalization obfuscate, depoliticize, and subsume activist work, and “[use] knowledge to restructure collective non-capitalist forms of organizing into hierarchical strata, detaching them from the movements they originate in and connecting them to the relations of ruling” (1987, p. 217). To resist this detachment, work to address youth homelessness in schools (through policy, training, programming) must be developed with young people who have lived experiences of poverty and housing precarity, and continue to be grounded in the complexities of meaningfully serving,

educating, and supporting diverse youth. As recent Québec policy states, “school and society are not static entities, and they can only evolve in concert. The school system must contribute to social progress and help pave the way for the future” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017, p. 11). To achieve this, we need a robust curriculum, tools, and destigmatising education for teachers, school staff, guidance counsellors, and parents, as well as students, to support a real shift in societal understandings of youth homelessness (Smith, 2020).

CHAPTER 6: OUT OF THE RUINS, RADICALLY RE-IMAGINING EDUCATION AND PEER LEARNING

When you see people call themselves revolutionary always talking about destroying, destroying, destroying but never talking about building or creating, they're not revolutionary. They do not understand the first thing about revolution. It's creating.
-Kwame Ture (1971)

In the last two chapters, I highlighted points of failure and possibility in terms of the formal organization of schooling and social service delivery (e.g. youth protection). In chapter 6, I engage in radically reimagining how people might teach and learn together, with a specific lens on the educational strategies and needs already developed and employed by youth experiencing homelessness. Schooling is sustained on classed, unpaid, and invisible labour (Griffith & Smith, 2005), including the labour that young people experiencing homelessness put in to educate and care for one another in the absence of parents or institutions playing this role.

Many would argue (Annamma, 2016; Elmore, 2017; Kaba, 2021; Hill, 2012; Wun, 2017; Gabbard, 2012; DeLeon, 2012) that, as part of a carceral, hierarchical State-run institutional system, schools must be abolished in order for justice to occur—that they will always function to uphold the idealized student (Nichols 2019, Griffith & Smith 2005, Haworth, 2017) and punish, exclude and invisibilize others (Wun, 2017, Sabzalian, 2019, Au, 2010). As Wun argues within a U.S. context, rather than as a starting point in the “school to prison pipeline” in need of reform (Skiba et al., 2014) schools themselves are an integral part of a carceral system:

schools operate as multilayered sites that do more than funnel students into prison or prime them for incarceration. Schools are part and parcel of a US logic of punitive carcerality, positioning Black and Brown bodies under constant observation and scrutiny through the school’s architecture, policies, and practices (Wun, 2017, p.1)

Within a Canadian context, we see how school architecture, policies and practices make up part of the same punitive, carceral State system for poor students, Black, Indigenous and students of colour (Battiste, 2013, hampton, 2010, Nichols, 2019, Toulouse, 2018). While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work (2015) signifies an increased Canadian knowledge about the legacy of residential schools, most Canadians struggle to conceptualize current schools as belonging to this legacy of social control and Indigenous genocide (Battiste 2013; St. Denis

2011). For young people we spoke with, and students who are experiencing housing precarity or homelessness broadly (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014; Sauvé et al., 2018, Schwan et al., 2018,), schools are indisputably experienced as “structures of harm” (Ruglis, 2011, see also McKenzie-Mohr, Coates & McLeod, 2012) – even as young people appear to hold out hope that schools (or education) will serve them at some point in their lives.

In the previous chapter I outlined some of small gains described by advocates, which took place over long periods of time, with significant pressure, and often dependant on individual school staff. The overall failure of schools to respond in meaningful ways to long-standing calls to address these harms and inequities⁴⁷ exist within conceptualizations of what harm is acceptable (harm in schools or on the street) and to whom harm is acceptable (to white students or Indigenous students; deserving students or undeserving students; good kids or “bad seeds”) (Hogarth, 2018). I wish to avoid reifying dichotomies of experience, and instead position the types of harm that are often associated with youth homelessness (i.e. entrenchment in street culture, exploitation, sleeping outside, (Douglas, 2011; Karabanow, 2004; O’Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2013)) and the experiences that young people shared in schools (institutional discrimination based on class, sexuality/gender, language or race, for example) as existing across a spectrum of harm. Both forms of harm are unacceptable, and both are intimately related to and shaped by systemic inequities and injustices (Bey, 2020).

Forms of harm that are inter-relational or attributed to individuals (such as exploitation or assault) are often framed as both more urgent, and more realistic to tackle—typically through increased legislation or policy. These moves prioritize energy toward reforming the behaviour of teachers or social workers (for example), and “divert from other harms, [including] harms

⁴⁷ In part due to the performative nature of many responses, including Equity and Diversity Initiatives as explored in great depth in the work of Smith (2017, 2014, 2013), Ahmed (2012), hampton (2020), Gonzales et al. (2021)

induced by the State” (Ben-Moshe, 2020, p. 19), while ultimately failing to address the underlying structures that cause and compound the normalization of exploitation in and beyond schools. Institutional structures function to invisibilize and legitimize these harms, while undermining the knowledges of those experiencing it firsthand (Spade, 2020). To address harms across educational experiences of young people, we must continue to shift how schools respond to youth homelessness every day while also doing concrete work to think of how teaching and learning must look radically different.

In line with anarchist organizing, theory and methods, in this chapter I ground my considerations of a different future within the work young people are doing in and in relation to institutions (the shell of capitalist society) each and every day (Graeber, 2009a, Jeppesen & Adamiak 2017). As DeLeon argues, this creative, revolutionary work cannot be limited to the classroom, but must include non-formal education initiatives *and* direct action:

[This work] happens in the classroom, but educators must also do actions outside of the school if they are serious about social change. This means examining successful strategies and employing them against oppressive institutions and structures. Anarchist modes of direct action are useful here in moving society towards social change, rather than just critique, because direct action demands and means working towards active participation in alleviating social problems. Educators can utilize anarchist praxis in the classroom, but also larger projects need to occur outside the school walls. (2008, p.133)

Shifts to structure education around care, solidarity, and action must also be grounded in the work and experiences of homeless youth, and communities which have been fighting for justice in schools, and imagining alternative futures, for a long time (Bey, 2020, Taylor, 2012; Rachal, 1998; Howard, 2016, Pusey, 2017, Shantz, 2012). Grounded in these knowledges and a feminist approach to radical imagination, I pay attention to the “slower, painstaking struggle of creating alternative solutions” (Graeber, 2015 p. 64) that are already in play. By paying attention to the radical work that young people are already doing and hope to do, I consider how we could create

the “invisible structures”, communities, and “alternative institutions” (Graeber, 2015, p.64) that can sustain a radically different way of teaching, learning, supporting, and housing youth.

I will once again begin in what young people were saying—about their own strategies for developing mutual aid networks, direct action, or responses to their own experiences within State institutions, as well as alternative education programming and other “alternative” points of possibility. Following this, I trace out what an anarchist response to education for homeless youth might look like, and then analyze this from the perspective of anarchist educational efforts that have occurred over the course of this project to illuminate challenges in organizing this type of work. I pay particular attention to the ways that peer-based learning has played a role in young people’s education broadly, and within the context of this research project in particular. Finally, I explore what it would look like to have youth, or those with lived experiences, lead educational changes in pursuit of a youth action (educational) revolution.

Building the New in the Shell of the Old, Radically Imagining Education and Youth Homelessness

The third and final point of action that I propose in a radical response to youth homelessness in/around schools centers on revolutionary imagining *and* action, to shape how we learn and organize together to address the root causes of homelessness. We must think differently about how to pursue educational interventions within contemporary (racist, colonial, heteronormative, ableist) State institutions, and mobilize educational efforts and (youth-led) mutual aid in order to radically imagine a different future. I begin this section with a discussion of anarchist pedagogy, to ground an anarchist posture for rethinking the role of education and schools. While anarchist education does not have a singular prescribed structure or aim, it can generally be understood as built around mutual aid and co-learning to break down traditional and

unjust power hierarchies (Haworth, 2015; Rouhani, 2012; Shantz, 2017). Suissa defines an anarchist educational philosophy as hopeful and based within an ethic that imagines educational means as being intimately in line with their ends. Its revolutionary potential lies

in its ability to transcend the means/ends model and to perceive every educational encounter as both a moment of striving, through creative experimenting, to create something better, and of celebrating and reinforcing what is valuable in such an encounter (Suissa, 2006, p.150).

Anarchist understandings of education position schools as, at best, unimaginative factories (Haworth, 2017 Graeber 2009b, Graeber, 2008, Goldman, 1917, Jeppesen & Adamiak, 2017) and, at worst, explicit tools of white supremacy, patriarchy, power hierarchies, colonialism, and capitalism (Armaline, 2009, Bey 2020, Fernandez, 2009, Jeppesen & Nazar, 2018)

An anarchist education will adapt and respond to the needs of those who use it and participate in it (Armaline, 2009, p.136), and will aim to provide learners with greater political power and agency through its lessons (including through illuminating societal and institutional processes of oppression (Hill, 2012)). Much of the literature on anarchist education holds a tension between purely “nonformal” education and the work that needs to be done in schools, with a recognition that while schools can be powerful sites for resistance and subversion, this is limited by schools’ implications in “intensifying state control and capitalist practices” (Jeppesen and Adamiak, 2017, p 225). Rather than dismissing the work that needs to be done in formal institutions, schools can be conceptualized as one space within a broader context in which educators must practice activism and direct action—part of a spectrum of environments where we can practice anarchy. This is certainly not the stance of all anarchists (Haworth, 2017; Graeber 2009; Dyke, Meyerhoff & Evol, 2018; Jun, 2012), but I believe ensuring that everyone

has the *choice* to disengage from schools should be where we begin, within a context where significant amounts diverse young people are actively pushed out of them (Wun, 2017).

Instead, we need spaces that begin in thinking on what will “allow us to survive in schools” (Gillen, 2014, p. 15). Rowan’s experiences emphasized this need—she shared that she hated school so much that she strategically missed half her classes to cope (what Naomi described back to her as a “harm reduction approach to school”). This wasn’t only because she was being disproportionately punished for using drugs, but that she didn’t feel she could learn or fit in:

It was like a bunch of people not like me, really like, straight people, really by-the-book people who wanted a career, and I was just like, not feeling for that kind of life, and being like—sitting on the desk for me was impossible, like, I’m really like, “Oof!” Trying to move all the time, you know? It was just not for me, so I just didn’t want to go. Especially at the end, like, my last two years, it was like, too much. Like, if I go all the time, I’m going to quit for sure, so for me, that was the way of finishing my high school, just going sometimes.

For other young people we spoke with, these feelings arose from ways that teachers and schools were “not really getting it,” and either ignoring or ignorant of the realities they were facing, before and during experiences of homelessness. As Gillen (2014) observes:

We need a way of describing and thinking about public schools of poverty that addresses what actually happens as opposed to what the dominant ideology says should happen...a better frame will give us words, images, and ways of thinking that are sturdy and agile enough to do battle with the propaganda of the dominant ideology manifest in schools. It will let us survive in schools of poverty without being forced out or forced to compromise or made ill (Gillen, 2014, p.15)

By asking young people to share “what actually happens” (Gillen, 2014, p. 15) in schools, I argue that we can nourish the ways young people experiencing homelessness *do* feel they are supported in learning—based in strong relationships peer-learning, learning that is relevant to

their lives, and learning that allows them to explore their passions—and harness these to create systems of learning that better support all young people.

Youth Perspectives on Building a New World, Peer Supports and Learning

A theme that was common among youth on our team and those we interviewed was the importance of learning in relationships outside of formal educational structures, as well as informal relationships with authority figures in institutions. As Casey explained, he often learned how to survive away from official institutional processes (while skipping school and running away from group homes) by checking in with different groups of friends to gather advice, information, and learnings from their experiences. As mentioned above, much of the harm associated with youth homelessness stems from involvement in street life, and many preventative approaches emphasize the importance of avoiding “street entrenchment” and fears that identifying as “homeless” will prevent people from leaving the street (Osborne, 2002). The concerns for the harms that come from street-involved homelessness are valid ones, including exploitation, violence, significant detriments to physical and mental health, and increased exploitation and harassment by adults (Douglas, 2011; Karabanow, 2004; O’Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2013) whether institutionally sanctioned (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2019; Luscombe & McClelland, 2020; Roy et al., 2020) and/or inter-relational (Gaetz, 2004; Petering et al., 2017). That said, young people’s experiences also complicate traditional academic and practice-based narratives about the dangers of street-life. In one of our first group meetings, Mickey and Max discussed the benefits and harms that came from including experiences of homelessness as part of one’s sense of self or identity:

Mickey and Max agree that idealizing the street helps to create a sense of belonging, and we must not detach ourselves from this identity, but rather find ways to make our lives easier. We should definitely not present street life as a purely deviant mindset/lifestyle,

but also recognize that it's a rough and difficult environment. Both prevent, accommodate and facilitate transition out of homelessness. Once you've been on the streets, you find people so fake and so attached to [needless] conventions. (Group fieldnotes, Dec 2018).

Discussions of “street families” (Smith, 2008) capture some of these complexities (of both the harm and supports that peer relationships can offer) but may only frame the benefits as short-lived and related to “specific street/survival needs” (Smith, 2008, p. 769).

Jolene, whose secondary school did nothing while she was using drugs and showing signs of abuse at 14, emphasized that it was drug addiction, and not relationships in a street culture that lead to “entrenchment”:

I feel like people that just are on the street are good people, you know, like Lucas and everything, travelling, and if I would've stayed in that mindstate, I would have ended up like, getting my shit together at some point, and just like. It's just because now I'm a heroin addict, so, that just ruined my life, like, I can't do anything. So. That's why I'm saying that, because being on the street, it's not the hardest part, you know?

Over 60% of the young people we spoke with referenced that they navigated day to day “survival” and attempts at institutional navigation (e.g. getting access to support or de-escalating conversations with the police) with help from friends and community. Members of our research team also emphasized the need for peer support (including from other team members) while navigating problematic drug use and institutional barriers to accessing services (Fieldnotes, 2019). Rather than dismissing the strengths of these networks, I question whether resourced and *supportive* peer networks created by and for young people might contribute to greater and more positive institutional access, as well as improve safety and wellness as part of young people's everyday survival. With this in mind, I'm curious how we might foster the revolutionary aspects of young people's current efforts to support one another, as we rethink what youth-led education might look like.

Benny described in detail what mutual aid and direct action meant for him, and how they were pillars of his drive to both find stability as well as maintain connections to others experiencing precarity and homelessness. At the time of our interviews, he had started a dumpster diving network, which involved sharing strategies, tips, and information on the best dumpsters across Tio'tia:ke/Montréal, including organizing to distribute any good finds amongst those in the highest need. Julia, a transgender Jewish woman, said that she became involved in anarchist organizing with, and other “leftist shit” with peers when she first experienced homelessness, including contributing to a grassroots homelessness newspaper. Rowan described staying outside of State systems and surviving because she “had the help of [her] friends.” Multiple young people (n=12) shared that friends provided a primary source of housing and resources to in times of housing crisis, and these supports were integral to surviving day-to-day.

Smith has emphasized the reciprocity present in peer-based supports around homelessness (Smith, 2020), often because housing does not provide immediate solutions to many institutional barriers and problems. For many, feeling responsible for supporting their peers was also a driving force in their own stability – even keeping them alive during difficult times. Again, in sharing his experiences with mental health struggles—something he didn't find adequate supports for in institutional settings—Benny shared that his role in his community had kept him alive during secondary school and afterward:

I've already tried to commit suicide twice, and that I didn't tell anybody about it, and didn't really try, like, I played with it. There was one time I brought my toaster into the bathroom. And I made a bath, and I just sat there, and stared at that toaster, until the water was fucking pretty cold. And then there was another time... I cut myself a bit, and I'm standing in the room with this knife, and I'm just like, you know, “If you don't go across the tracks, if we go down the tracks, then I'm free. I'm free!” But there's so many kids in my town that had trouble, and I played little social worker all the time... I was actively trying to help my community. So, I can't kill myself, I got things to do.

Benny shared throughout his interviews that he understood a huge responsibility to his community—not only to educate peers about their rights (including during an arrest of himself and three friends), but also to ensure they had the mental health supports, food, and safe spaces to use drugs or sleep.

Benny also described writing manifestos, learning about social theory and anarchism/Marxism from older peers experiencing homelessness—theories that he found useful in making sense of his own homelessness and barriers to education--and passing this on to others, creating communities of learning for revolution. Understanding how systems function to marginalize you or cause you harm is important for activism (Smith, 1990) but also must be paired with a knowledge of how people can build and are participating in resistance in their everyday lives (Spade, 2020).

Benny’s approach to education addresses an issue that many youth suggested was a major point of failure in schools—in order to learn, grow and participate in community, people need to be well enough to do so. Benny framed his activist education efforts as intimately tied to his food distribution efforts. Julia echoed this sentiment, while explaining the difficulty she faced organizing protests by and for homeless people – figuring out how to center people’s needs and mitigate increased police violence. Leah, who organized in encampments in British Columbia, saw her day-to-day survival and the wellbeing of her neighbours as both opportunities to learn (about institutional processes) as well as embodying and radically imagining different responses to homelessness and drug use. As outlined in the last chapter, even school policies and boards recognize that students’ wellbeing and “social integration” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017, Advisory Board on English Education, 2013) must be fostered in order for young people to learn, but it is clear from our research that schools in Quebec presently struggle to ensure that their

students are well. Perhaps part of the problem is curriculum, which is always “an extension and expression of material and social relations” (Au, 2018, p. 186) and “supports the status quo, hegemonic social relations and worldviews, and runs counter to the worldviews, experiences, and curriculum knowledge advanced by oppressed groups” (Au, 2018, p. 188). Benny saw learning (about society, about revolution, about the best dumpster spots) as integral to his peers’ wellness—and in understanding the structures that organize their own precarity--and saw that wellness as key to his peers being able to participate in networks of support and learning, in turn. Standardized curricula make it difficult to tap into young people’s passions or carve out opportunities to learn things they deem important and useful in their lives.

Many youth described taking on similar roles as Benny, who described “play[ing] little social worker all the time.” Some research suggests homeless youth may be more likely to “shoulder responsibility [and] take on adult-like responsibilities” (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2017, p. 343), and our research certainly bore this out. While there is limited literature on these structures of informal peer-based learning and support, it is well known to young people who are or have experienced homelessness that they are already supporting and teaching each another in life-saving ways (Cruz, 2014). Having to play the role of social worker, teacher, therapist, even doctor (I remember on more than one occasion treating peers’ ulcers, concussions or abscessed teeth), are not only tangible ways we can see youth stepping in to play these official roles for their peers, but also that those who are playing these roles are entrenched in make-shift and patchwork peer support networks out of necessity, because institutions are inaccessible or violent to them.

One example of this is access to mental health supports. Struggling with mental health issues and not being able to access services was a huge barrier to educational engagement for

youth before and during experiences of homelessness (and is proven to be a barrier for all youth, housed or not, (Statistics Canada, 2017, 2014, 2004). When asked about mental health supports, many youth said they simply relied on their friends. Youth explained that waitlists to access psychologists and psychiatrists were often months or years long (similar to barriers laid out by Deschênes, Bellot & Abdel-Baki, 2020), that they often didn't meet the requirements to access mental health support programming (e.g. sobriety), or they had harmful or futile experiences when they were able to access mental health supports (in schools, often, but also in community organizations). Martin, for example, who had been on a waiting list to access specialized supports for over a year, and was barred from many services because he self-harmed, shared that he was told he needed to practice better emotional regulation before being able to access a mental health expert on emotional regulation. Benny experienced instances of inappropriate advances by his school counsellor, that stopped him from reaching out to services for several years afterward—instead choosing a “D.I.Y.” approach. Casey said that his friends constituted a good support network, so he never had to rely on counselling or psychiatric services:

It's easier that way...There's no doctor force-feeding me medications...And if this group of friends can't help me, I've got different groups in different areas that support in different ways...I just look at my friends and say, “Hey man, this is really bugging me, help me.” And then if they're like, “I can't help you with this. Ask him. He's going through the same thing.”

This is not to say that we should not be working to ensure that Casey has access to institutional or professional mental health supports—rather, here I acknowledge the things that do “work” for Casey and suggest there may be something to learn from his experiences. Young people are already relying on networks of peers, sharing strategies for coping, sharing tips for navigating systems and for self-medicating safely; working with (rather than against) these informal peer networks might be one way we can ensure that mental health supports are not only open to youth

but that they will use them, and use them in ways that are beneficial to them. Daley (2020) has outlined how small shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as allowing youth to use text messages to book appointments or communicate with mental health professionals, have radically improved accessibility and allowing youth to engage in the ways they do with their peers.

Unfortunately, for youth like Jolene, finding enough stability to become a peer worker, in turn, may mean youth lose the organizational and community supports⁴⁸ that led to finding stability (housing or otherwise) in the first place—suggesting that many supports focus on periods of crisis rather than recognition that peer learning and supports play an integral role through young people’s trajectories (Griffin et al., 2019). Relying on, contributing to and creating these peer networks was also described as a source of pride—rather than the self-sufficiency that is imagined within individualized narratives of “success” trajectories (although this wasn’t absent from the aspirations of some youth we spoke with), more often youth described what can be understood as community- or network-sufficiency, what I’ve referred to elsewhere as a DIT (Do-It-Together) (Malenfant, 2018) approach to navigating violent social institutions. This DIT ethos is intimately tied to DIY (Do-It-Yourself) values, but places great emphasis on the ways that communities support one another to “do it” rather than individualized notions of social change, intimately connected to a desire to build “institutions of a new society” (Graeber, 2004, p. 7).

Peer Learning for Safety in and Outside Institutions

⁴⁸ Lucas saw the lack of supports his peers found when they started organizing as more insidious and stemmed from the power they had—that, similar to Indigenous land defenders, the government was afraid of them and intentionally denied supports and services. He shared that the power that came out of organizing with “anarchists and punks and stuff...we don’t fit in, so a lot of us live super traumatic lives, and then we get thrown into drugs and stuff, and we don’t get good help because they know we don’t like them and that if we’re healthy, we’ll...They don’t want to help us because we can end this kind of era, you know?”

With some students I don't begin from a place of "this is everything you don't know," but rather from a place of "you live it so you already know and together we can do something with what you already know." (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 8)

In schools, peer-learning is not a new pedagogical approach, and is employed in different contexts across K-12 and post-secondary institutions of learning (Ashwin, 2003, Behrent, 2012; Carvalho & Santos, 2021, Colvin, 2007, Dekhinet et al., 2008, Kirabo & Bruegmann, 2009, Vygotsky, 1978 Wentzel, 2009). The benefits of peer learning within schools include flexibility and "open" learning (Davidson & Major, 2014), the development of social skills and a sense of community (Dekhinet et al., 2008) and increased student achievement (Topping et al., 2017). Within schools however, this peer learning is "defined by the teacher" (Topping et al., p. 6) and is most effective when clearly structured. In fact, Topping et al. argue that the role of teachers in dictating the terms, roles and objectives of peer learning is key to its efficacy:

As does a coach in the sports field, the teacher organises the group life, so that it becomes a team, where, as we will see later, the participation of all and each one of its members is required for the success of the team...It is not sufficient to put students together and ask them to work together for it to actually happen and students learn. (2017, p. 6)

Within peer groups experiencing homelessness, learning from peers was described as important in (n=16) interviews with young people, and scholars and advocates with lived experience argue that these ways of learning are integral for how youth survive while experiencing homelessness (Frederick, Daley & Zahn, 2018) particularly in that they provide learning that is built within relationships and mutual knowledges and skills, a strength of peer-learning broadly (Topping, 2005a).

It is important to pay attention to the compatibilities and differences between peer learning within schools, peer learning informally within groups of youth experiencing homelessness, and peer learning (and "support") within youth serving shelters and organizations.

Peer learning within schools is linked to student success (Carvalho & Santos, 2021, Colvin, 2007, Dekhinet et al., 2008, Kirabo & Bruegmann, 2009), while on the street peer learning is often framed as leading to harmful “entrenchment” (O’Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2013). These distinctions are important to ground in youth’s complex realities, as Casey emphasized in his learning from friends how to navigate social systems while in high school, or Benny’s descriptions of creating networks of peer learning and food supports. A point of possibility would stem from understanding how the benefits of peer learning within schools may be applicable in how we support peer learning for youth before, during and after experiences of housing precarity.

Smith (2020) emphasizes the reciprocal and shifting nature of peer support and peer learning that homeless youth employ (Smith, 2020), arguing that it can be an essential support for understanding as well as survival (Smith, 2021) . Peer supports, within the context of peer learning or in general within school settings, can also be an important factor in building competencies and sustained engagement for young people (Griffin et al., 2019, Juvonen, 2006, Wentzel, Russel, & Baker, 2016). Homeless youth who experience educational disengagement lose access to social and personal connections which can help to “minimize feelings of isolation and to maintain connections with community.” (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017, p. 97). There is emerging literature outlining the efficacy of peer support programs in the context of homelessness and outreach for populations who face barriers to institutional supports (Abdel-Baki et al., 2019, ACCESS Open Minds, 2019, Greer et al., 2016, Owczarak et al., 2020, Faulkner-Gurstein, 2017, O’Hagan et al., 2010). Casey echoed this, and other youth shared they felt more comfortable with peer-led supports and initiatives. Casey said if he used services, he chose ones where workers “know what it’s like:”

C: They can relate. Like, they can—they've been in, I can't say they've been in my shoes but like, in general, they've been in your shoes before.

JM: How do you know that?

C: Just talking to them...when you're sitting there talking to them, and you're just looking at them, it's like, "Yeah, you've been on the streets doing drugs before. You know what it's like."

Literature that digs into how peer learning occurs in these programs is still rare and often frames peer learning within hierarchies of knowledge (i.e. where training and certificates create hierarchies of knowledge external to "peer" or experiential knowledge). Research emphasizes the many benefits associated with peer support in terms of service delivery (including supporting youth to collectively "identifying structural issues" and "mutual responsibility [and] a flattened hierarchy" (Frederick, Daley & Zahn, 2018, p. 253), and demonstrates that peer supports can be beneficial to all involved (though not without its risks), and emphasizes the benefits of peer educators (Frederick, Daley & Zahn, 2018).

There is no literature providing substantial insight into how processes of peer learning occurs informally within networks of youth experiencing homelessness and housing precarity (street-involved or otherwise). Despite this gap, literature on the informal development of peer learning and support structures suggests informal peer learning can be beneficial to young people's academic engagement and wellbeing (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008). Literature that "brushes against" peer learning with precariously housed youth primarily focuses on how (academic) researchers can teach peer researchers to collect data in "marginalized" communities, with learning research skills, training and participation contributing to their own emancipation (Garnett et al., 2019, Edwards & Alexander, 2011). However, young people in this project and in others (Nelson, 2020, Smith 2020, Shiwcharran, 2020) reference the important role that learning

from peers plays in day-to-day survival, creating affinity networks, and institutional navigation. Others outline how these processes of learning are meaningful to homeless youth particularly because they allow release and distance from the harm “accrued from constant negotiations with teachers, police, and medical personnel” and constitute a “resistant sociality” (Cruz, 2014, p. 207.)

While we know that community-driven and peer-led education can be helpful (Rice, 2010), particularly within communities that historically don’t trust institutional and government-led education campaigns (Abdel-Baki et al., 2019), when not supported, resourced, or valued these forms of learning can also be harmful⁴⁹. The things that young people come to know can reinforce the exclusion they already face in systems like schools, social assistance, healthcare and the criminal justice system. Within our youth team and in interviews, we saw how this occurs, in ways that improved young people’s safety (i.e. by explaining not to go to a particular hospital because they’ll abuse you/discharge you when you’re not conscious or capable of taking care of yourself) and at other times prevented youth from applying for things like social assistance (i.e. by inadvertently mis-representing eligibility requirements for disability benefits or to access shelters).

At the outset of this project, we grappled with the things that youth were telling us that were at odds with how we knew official policies were structured. As outlined in the previous chapters, sometimes these represented real disconnects between how policy was written and the unjust ways youth were experiencing it in practice. However, there are “learnings” that peers share on the streets that persist despite no longer being accurate representations of institutional policies, and that further distance young people from understanding and accessing institutional

⁴⁹ For example, the devastating impacts which can come from the perpetuation of myths and misinformation about fentanyl and fentanyl use on social media (Stea, 2021).

supports. For example, it has been common knowledge among street kids since I was a teenager, that if you got a face tattoo in Québec, you are automatically eligible for welfare (as you would be unemployable or face barriers to employment). Members of our youth team had also learned this. A face-tattoo eligibility criterion does not exist officially in any social assistance policies I reviewed. Having said this, the process for accessing social assistance in Québec is obscure and inaccessible⁵⁰, and it very well could be that historically a face tattoo was seen as circumstance that makes one eligible for welfare. In either case, misinformation sometimes circulates in peer networks in ways that have the potential to further marginalize youth who act on it.

These kinds of street “legends” exist particularly within the context of bureaucratic, institutional mechanisms of obfuscated and limited access, including in schools, but also in the State systems that work in tandem with them. They are learnings that are passed through networks or peers because they don’t have access to the “official” knowledges that are (maybe) accessible to middle-class or housed youth, but likely are kept secret within bureaucratic mazes of how things are done (Gillen, 2014). This information may originate in the absence of adult advocates within the system, or from faulty information from authority figures like teachers, police or social workers, who Jolene shared might “say anything, they don’t know what they’re saying”, and spread through peer networks. This is intimately tied to the ways that youth “work” the system, or make the system work for them—such as knowing what to say to get to the top of housing need lists, access services (don’t say this or you won’t get a meal)--or Fariha’s description of how other students receiving additional supports in class as favouritism but later

⁵⁰ For example, if you are under 18 you need to provide written proof from your parents that they aren’t financially supporting you in order to access social assistance. This process is different than legal emancipation, though it is understood as emancipation by many youth (including youth we spoke with). If youth do provide this, they may still only receive a fraction of the amount they are eligible to receive. Dans la rue, through their day centre, offers legal supports that youth can access to advocate for the full amount, though it isn’t clear to youth (or myself) why additional legal steps are necessary to assure that any youth who aren’t connected to a service like Dans la rue may not know they are eligible for more.

realizing that these students had gone through the “right” channels to access diagnoses. If these systems aren’t clear, then these peer learnings become the ways that young people navigate access. In the absence of reciprocal flows of knowledge across diverse standpoints that value experiential, professional and institutional knowledges for solidarity (Spade, 2020), these spaces can also become limited and harmful to youth.

These learning gaps can also have direct and interpersonal risks, which relate to concepts of entrenchment in street culture. For example, when Jolene shared that the lack of drug education at her school directly contributed to her heroin addiction and “entrenchment” later in life, gaps in knowledge can also make youth vulnerable to exploitation while experiencing homelessness—the drug education she received instead was through older adult men. Smith has echoed calls for the need for comprehensive harm reduction education for young women (British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health, 2010), stating that not understanding how to safely prepare and inject drugs, for example, can lead to them being targeted by older men (Fieldnotes, 2020, Smith, 2020). These risks—for example, in the perpetuation of street “legends”—and complexities are not to say that peer-learning should not be mobilized as an effective way to support and engage homeless youth, but rather that it must be resourced and supported in order to be effective. By understanding the work young people are already doing to learn and survive, we can think through how to build the structures and institutions necessary for radically different ways of supporting young people’s education. Paying attention to the important informal and “incidental learning” (Choudry, 2015, p. 102) that happens is key to organizing political struggle. The ways we learn from our peers, if grounded in justice seeking and the lived realities of people, can also support defensive techniques for community

sufficiency and DIT that actively prevents exploitation and centers community wellness (maree brown, 2021).

Learning about Learning from Peer Learning amongst Homeless Youth

Similar to how we may be able to mobilize the points of possibility that already exist in schools, we might also actualize possibilities coming from networks of peer learning on the street—which are also imperfect and full of tensions. Cruz argues peer networks create important “breathing spaces, however tight, for...street youth” (Cruz, 2014, p. 210) that contribute to “resistant sociality” (Lugones, 2010). These spaces of learning are where:

Street youth share with each other gossip and information about jobs, teachers, social workers, the police, and security guard agents. These spaces *away* from the scrutiny and examination of those in power, when [queer] street youth compare their experiences and analyze power become locations for creativity and possibility. A resistant sociality also makes space for the youth to rest without harassment....to release the “muscular tension (Fanon, 1963, p. 17) accrued from constant negotiations with teachers, police and medical personnel (Cruz, 2014, p. 209).

These spaces where peers are leading and learning together not only lead to knowledge of how to survive, but also may be seen as direct action in that they create moments to escape and rest from the harm perpetuated in State institutions—with those who have diverse lived experiences of this harm (Spade, 2020).

These “directly meet people’s survival needs and are based in a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust” (Spade, 2020, p. 7) as well as build “shared understanding about why people do not have what they need” (Spade, 2020, p. 9). Casey, Benny and Matti all shared that peers were able to show up and share experiences in different ways than professionals because they understood the failings of institutional learning,

and understood peer learning as breaking down damaging hierarchies—instead encouraging youth to see “experience as valid, as a dignified way of making amends for ways in which the system is failing youth and other populations who are marginalized” (Partouche, 2020). This also allows for the valuation of diversities of knowledge and experiences that contribute to important reciprocal relationships of learning (Smith, 2020).

While youth and peers did not see having lived experience as being necessary to do this work in a caring way, they did share that it seemed more likely that they found champions or “select few individuals” (Shiwcharran, 2020, p. 4) who showed care or mutual aid because they “knew what it was like” (Taylor, 2020, p. 8). This echoes literature suggesting that mutual aid groups are likely to “develop a multi-issue and solidarity-based approach because their members’ lives are cross-cut by many different experiences of vulnerability” (Spade, 2020, p. 15). As Mickey shared while discussing their approach to research as intimately linked to “going to bat,” direct action and advocating for friends who had lost their housing, “nothing but absolute resistance to the mounting pressures we see in our society—nothing less will save us.” (Watchorn, 2020, p. 12). In this, the mutual aid that youth like Benny, Matti, Leah and our co-researchers spoke about works to “push at the systems and structures that are organizing all of our experiences”, as argued by lived experience youth researcher Atkins, 2020 (p. 21) Youth have also shared that while their peer-support and peer education are based in necessity (in the face of failing State systems), they are also professionally relegated to “peer” positions and working unofficially because they do not have the official certificates, degrees or schooling to occupy professional care positions (Shiwcharran, 2020). An alternative approach to schooling—an “alternative structure” that supports and serves youth who are not currently being supported in schools—must harness the power of these kinds of relational, peer and community-based

education efforts while countering the devaluation of knowledges outside of narrow academic understandings (Ferrell, 2009).

To better understand what this might look like, I want to explore three examples: peer learning within our research team (somewhat recognized within school structures), organization of workshops at a free school, or as they have been referred to within anarchist iterations of free schooling, a “free skool” (Dines, 2015, Noterman & Pusey, Shantz, 2012; 2011, Thompsett, 2017), (not recognized within school structures), and alternative education programs (recognized within school structures) from the perspectives of youth we spoke with and by drawing on my own fieldnotes (2018 to 2021). I do this to provide tangible examples for how education could support young people experiencing homelessness, but also push back against the systemic and structural forces that contribute to their homelessness in the first place. None are pure nor perfect examples of how education might look differently, but I believe all provide valuable lessons on the tangible ways we can build “alternative institutions” (Graeber 2014).

Participatory Action Research and Peer Learning in YARR, Learning as Direct Action

Many of the learnings that took place, across our team of researchers and broader networks, throughout the course of this project may be contextualized within our understandings that the “actions” (Mirra et al., 2016) our project would achieve would include direct actions, which Graeber defines as “the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free” (2008, p. 58). This meant they did not have to rely on institutionalized understanding of “actions” but also that they tangibly modelled the kinds of changes we hoped to see—particularly relational and community-oriented changes that addressed the need to build peer-based and youth-led research and action. Some of these actions were also highly linked to how we imagined learning,

teaching, and training while working together. I would argue that the understandings of how we hoped to work together, at the core of this project, were anarchist.

While some were explicitly named as such (fieldnotes, 2019, Watchorn & Malenfant, 2019), I will also do the thing that anarchists do and claim the less explicitly anarchist pieces (Bey, 2020; McClelland & Dodd, 2016) as contributing to these direct actions as well. As a team, we shared a dedication to doing what we needed to support one another, in the spirit of anarchist organizing and pedagogy, “not in some postrevolutionary future in the distance, but right here, right now” (Shantz, 2012, p. 124). We did so throughout the phases of this research project, grounded in each team members needs and skills (Spade, 2020) whether we were explicitly conceptualizing it as “mutual aid” or not. We understood our roles as intrinsically based in multidirectional support, and saw each moment in our work being an opportunity to model how we might be together otherwise, even if we didn’t always know how to do so perfectly (Kaba, 2021). This was not only unidirectional experience, as evidenced by how young people walked Naomi and I through how youth centers were organized, what the limitations to social assistance and access to addiction services were for young people in Québec, and when the team eventually taught Naomi what ACAB meant (which was not, as we originally suggested, All Cats are Beautiful). As Spade argues, even when attempting to subvert hierarchies of knowledge and build solidarities, “we bring our learned practices of hierarchy with us” (2020, p. 16) and must work to unlearn them in ongoing ways (Haworth, 2017).

Within this, actions can be understood as the development of mutual aid structures, of creating relationships, of sharing moments of joy, and supporting one another through moments of loss, instability and grief. Direct actions, in particular, allow us to see each moment as an opportunity to model the relational structures we wish to see (Graeber, 2011), wherein “all

aspects of our lives, where and how we live and work, eat, entertain ourselves, get around, and get by are sites of injustice and potential resistance” (Spade, 2020, p. 27). I argue that the conceptualization of “actions” as having particular “impacts” (in terms of civic engagement, or policy advocacy, or public awareness, for example,) are limited to liberal ideas of social change (Guta, Flicker & Roche, 2013; Spade, 2020). Cruz argues that actions “in the form of traditional politics, such as mobilizing for public action and civic engagement⁵¹ in formal organizations, do not often work for street youth” (2014, p. 216), but rather youth are also always already engaging in “small yet deliberate acts...toward their social service workers, police and medical personnel” (Cruz, 2014, p. 216). If actions must always engage with policy, civic political processes, or appealing to those in “decision-making” positions, research insidiously contributes to maintenance of the ruling relations and institutional “model of normality” (Cruz, 2014, p. 211) and threatens to be “sucked into the social relations of neoliberal accumulation” (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016). Maintenance of this normality usually leads to subtly reforming systems that serve a few and disadvantage many others, dangerously furthering the belief that we only have enough capacity to organize for small changes instead of revolution (Ben-Moshe, 2020).

In talking about building care into abolitionist and revolutionary organizing, Kaba shares the “importance of us building a million different little experiments” (2021, p. 166) to imagine a different future. Kaba contrasts the ways that failure or risk are normalized within corporate, tech and “innovation” contexts to how risk (and potential failure) is referenced as a reason not to imagine radical social change. Rather, we must break out of a one-size fits all approach and associated risks—or “the projects of homogenization and hierarchy” (McClelland & Dodd, 2016, p.6)—altogether, stating that the revolution will be made up of many different things (Kaba,

⁵¹ Why might it be conceived as a successful action if youth share their experiences to city councillors (who will likely say they don’t have the power to change things), but not develop radically supportive community with their other peer researchers?

2021). Smith also outlines the ways that we must intentionally resist and “subvert [the] process of institutionalization” (1990, p. 222). However, as we learned together in our project (throughout), resisting institutionalization is not always easy to center as a driving force of research. Smith speaks to this reality when conceptualizing the role of feminist ethnography and responsibility to community, realizing that “we are still not doing this work for them; we still have funding obligations to meet, reports to write that are part of them, academic papers to produce that are also part of our funding obligations” (1990, p. 218). I believe through research and pedagogical efforts that mobilize means and methods (particularly the forms of peer-supported learning that youth already engaged) that are in line with our ends (justice), we can continue to centre this resistance and radical imaginary which “does not disrupt the resistant sociality of youth” (Cruz, 2014, p.215).

Possibilities, Limitations, and Lessons from the McGill Free Skool

Another example outlining the complexities in actually doing this work differently is organizing anarchist education (Shantz, 2017, 2012). Under the broader umbrella of free schools, which may range from examples of formally recognized learning institutions, such as alternative school Summerhill (Neill, 1996) to informal, anti-institutional and volunteer-run community learning spaces in people’s homes (Noterman & Pusey, 2012), free skools are specifically anarchist in their organization—aiming to reject State schooling and function to provide non-hierarchical and justice-oriented education by and for community. Free skools (sometimes called autonomous free schools or simply anarchist free schools) have existed in their current form since the 1990’s, across North American cities (Shantz, 2017). The McGill free skool initiative was inspired by notable examples of free schooling, such as the Anarchist

Free Space and Free Skool (AFS) founded in Toronto in 1999, and Free Skool Santa Cruz in California, which has offered classes for over 15 years.

All free skools look different, but in explaining the work of AFS in Toronto's Kensington market, Shantz describes them as

bridging classrooms and communities, particularly marginalized communities, to highlight opportunities for critically engaged teaching and learning. Through participatory approaches bringing students and street involved people together in contexts in which people are simultaneously teachers and learners these efforts contribut[e] to a teaching/learning praxis informed by critical pedagogy and antiauthoritarian social perspectives contributing to empowerment for learners and communities. Along the way participants try to effect positive changes in themselves, the skool, and the community (2012, p. 126)

In line with the aims of free skools broadly, the McGill free skool aimed to be a space of experimentation on how education might be organized differently, and where we could organize education which spoke directly to issues of access, particularly, as Shantz notes, by developing “participatory approaches” to bring students at McGill and people experiencing marginalization and housing precarity together to take part in multi-directional and critical learning.

In 2018 this work started in the McGill Education Community Garden (where I held a paid position as a community liaison worker), with an aim of creating links between the gardens that we supported, including the Dans la rue garden and a garden at a homelessness day centre for adults. Planning these learning opportunities was intimately connected to both the educational barriers and harm I knew existed for people who were or had experienced homelessness (with youth and adults experiencing homelessness facing significant exclusion from post-secondary institutions), as well as a dedicated to direct action and trying to find these spaces for “different little experiments” (Kaba, 2021) for learning differently. As we shared in advertisements and recruitment on our website:

Free Skool initiative is an attempt to disrupt hierarchies, encourage snacking, provide anyone with an opportunity to experience and experiment with course facilitation, and to position people as "experts" in their fields. These spaces aim to be intentionally anti-hierarchical, anti-oppressive and question the role of educational institutions in teaching and learning. We hope to open McGill space outside of the campus community and encourage anyone to participate. Learners of all ages welcome!

As a form of direct action, the free skool directly organized the workshops that people requested or volunteered to lead, without the need to approve them, seek funding, or engage in official bureaucratic processes. This was grounded intimately in reciprocal and peer-based knowledge. It did depend on volunteers as well as the contributions of paid garden employees. In theory, the free skool wanted to provide opportunities for critical and non-hierarchical learning, where facilitators could engage with learners in ways that didn't reify their "expertise," but opened dialogues about knowledge and access. Proposed workshops ranged from bicycle maintenance, waste-free baby care, language learning, painting workshops, development of zines and infographics, and cross-stitching tutorials mixed with an anarchist theory reading group (my own).

Free skool was the first time many participants had engaged with unstructured, non-hierarchical learning. Youth team members of YARR did attend some workshops, and while they didn't always appreciate content (particularly embroidery), the informal structure was largely embraced and familiar to us. In my imagining of these spaces, I saw them as ways for us to work together differently, modelling some of the structures we used and developed under our research project. I also planned them with the understanding that I was playing the role of "peer," though can reflect on the ways that this term can take on different meanings depending on the context (as most workshops were full of "graduate student" and not "lived experience" peers). The more "peers"—those who shared that they had lived experience of homelessness, for

example—the more comfortable members of the youth team seemed to feel engaging in workshops.

Over the course of this research project, prior to Covid-19, the free skool hosted over a hundred recurring and unique lessons and classes in the community garden on McGill campus, as well as in spaces within day centres, community centres, and parks around Tio'tia:ke/Montréal. As is the case with other anarchist educational initiatives (Nicholas, 2012), we did not track the number or demographics of participants, nor was there an evaluation of the programming outside of open-ended reflection with regular attendees and facilitators at the end of each year (fieldnotes, 2019). Even still, the different programming organized through the McGill free skool managed to provide educational opportunities for at least 200 diverse learners and educators, including children, teens, adults, and elders, as well as organize over a dozen workshops where space was specifically structured to create opportunities for participants with current and past experiences of homelessness to learn and educate in collaboration with those who had no lived knowledge of housing precarity.

Youth with lived experience of homelessness who participated in the workshops primarily learned about them through participating in YARR's work at Dans la rue or being peers of youth co-researchers on the project. Some youth (n=5) returned for several weeks of the 2019 cycle of programming for recurring workshops and became part of the core group of participants in the free skool. The free skool aimed to build on the importance of the relational bonds that are harnessed in peer learning (Carvalho & Santos, 2021) and that youth (n=25) explicitly described as missing in institutionalized relationships with professionals, and explicitly create these bonds to build capacity for solidarity (Spade, 2020). Additionally, as all participants in the free skool contributed to shaping the content and structure of both individual and regular

workshops or “classes” in active and ongoing ways, the free skool and others like it provide opportunities for us to experiment with education that is explicitly political, and ask how education both within community-based projects and institutional schooling might be built by-and-for those directly experiencing educational barriers, through practices such as consensus decision-making and offering multiple and flexible options for participation (Gabbard, 2017, 2012, Haworth, 2017, Nicholas, 2012).

Limitations of the free skool

The barriers that we encountered in creating these “anarchist” learning spaces—something that we began in response, as a direct action, to the educational inaccessibility of McGill’s formal learning spaces—included both similarities to those we face in formal education settings (organizing workshops around a normed, imagined learner, for example) as well as differences to institutionalized teaching and learning. Workshops primarily attracted post-secondary students (at McGill especially), and more targeted recruitment and supports would benefit a broader variety of topics, skills, and inclusion. As both educators and learners who were accustomed to formal and institutionalized structures of schooling (Romero, 2018; Zamotkin, 2019) myself and other facilitators struggled to resist modelling the same structures we participated in within our universities (fieldnotes, 2019). We often failed to take into account the “deschooling” (Sukarieh & Tammock, 2020) that people may need to participate in open and collectively governed learning formats (Shantz, 2012; Zaldívar, 2015), an endeavour we did not have the capacity nor resources to undertake in any significant way. In addition to pedagogical and epistemological roadblocks, there were also physical and symbolic barriers to participation in free skool workshops for some groups. As mentioned in Chapter 3, McGill campus was not welcoming to learners for many reasons, even if we met in an outdoor space outside of the

physical walls of the university (for example, because of McGill's historic connections to elitism and slavery; the physical inaccessibility of being located up a hill; the confusing layout of campus spaces). While workshops were originally planned to take place in a similar outdoor space at Dans la rue, a series of misunderstandings with residents of a low-income building nearby, and capacity issues with day centre staff, meant these never occurred.

In thinking of creating sustainable and broadly applicable actions to address educational inequity, as well as in recognizing the need for educational institutions to play a role in speaking directly to supporting youth homelessness prevention (Schwan et al., 2018), initiatives like the free skool demonstrate the distance between (often, utopian) anarchist imaginings for the future of education and society, and the current material realities of youth and other participants. While free skool workshops directly addressed the feelings youth had that they were not being heard in school as well as a need for education that builds community (fieldnotes, 2018, fieldnotes 2019) (through collaborative planning and implementation of learning opportunities, open formats for workshops and co-facilitation), educational initiatives that stem from a political rejection of institutionalized schooling and credentialism do not account for the reality that many young people need secondary and post-secondary diplomas to participate in the labour market (Ferrer & Riddell, 2003; Gaetz, 2014). As a result, free skools currently may be less effective in enacting broad societal change than offering spaces of incubating ideas, experimenting and “radically imagining” (Kaba, 2021) educational alternatives.

In order to enact broad-scale changes that address the current structural and systemic barriers within institutionalized schooling and State systems, both reform and radical change must be part of the conversation, across diverse spaces of learning—within community-grounded, direct-action oriented spaces like free skools, and in formalized State classrooms

throughout K-12 and post-secondary institutions. The ethos of the McGill free skool project echoes educational research across formalized and informal learning, in radical or reformist approaches, that emphasizes that this work must be relevant to, and shaped by, those who are most impacted by it (Choudry, 2019, Dewey, 1991, Eilers, 2019, hooks, 1994, Krueger-Henney, 2016, Udoh, 2018). Examples of this can be seen in the implementation of child-centered and problem-posing pedagogies in schools, to the development of educational responses to decolonizing curriculum across institutions (Battiste, 2014, Kimmerer, 2013, St. Denis, 2011), as well as the development of anarchist pedagogies within institutional classrooms (Jeppesen & Adamiak, 2017). Within the free skool, this work took the form of collective decision making around all teaching and learning activities, including regular opportunities to stop, check-in, and change our approaches in line with the needs of participants in a given cycle or workshop.

The McGill free skool, as well as all schooling discussed in this dissertation, exist within broader political, social and material contexts that organize how they are experienced by participants. While we aimed to address issues of accessibility, we currently lack the resources to address the significant supports that many individuals needed to fully participate in both learning and governance of the initiative—the free skool is unable to ensure youth are housed, for example. As Benny pointed out, learners cannot participate if their basic needs are not met, if they aren't supported in accessing the space (physically, emotionally, symbolically, etc.) nor if learning isn't relevant to them. Additionally, “it's very difficult to organize when you are also struggling to survive” (Spade, 2020, p. 13), and while the free skool asks questions about how we could organize education to build pedagogical and activist capacity, free skool initiatives (ours and others across North America/Turtle Island) do not currently have the resources or ability to address broader structural and systemic questions of basic needs and access.

Alternative Education: “Street” Schools in Montréal

Echoing claims that alternative schooling is a particularly promising practice as outlined in the Québec National Policy on Preventing Homelessness (2014) young people (n=16) described alternative education programs as useful to helping them re-engage with schools (for example, Palle, Martin, Fariha, Jaide, Robert and other young people we spoke with attended Dans la rue’s École Emmett Johns before or during our interviews). While definitions of what constitutes alternative education are not always consistent (Baroutis et al., 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2014) and may vary across geographic contexts (McGregor & Mills, 2012) I subscribe to broad definition proposed by Hayes (2005) of alternative schools as a multitude of sites which reject hegemonic notions of surveillance and evaluation, and shift from mainstream schools’ focus on “disciplinary practices over pedagogical ones” (Hayes, 2005, p.609). The experiences youth shared about alternative schooling aligns with research which suggests alternative schools provide important sites of prevention of a variety of access issues for youth who face barriers to accessing education (Bertrand, 2021; Daggett & McNulty, 2020; Franklin, Harris & Allen-Meares, 2008; Hopson & Steiker, 2008; Van Acker, 2007).

These alternative education programs are structurally different from the specialized education programs described in Chapter 4 (for all students with “various mental health issues”), though do include some of the same characteristics—they served a broad range of students who faced difficulties, they were connected to supports (mental health, scholastic, etc.), and they were flexible and provided different options for engagement. Different than the specialized education classrooms, however, was the timing of when young people were engaging with them. As specialized classrooms, including “Welcome class” were often accessed in elementary or early secondary school, the majority of youth (n=13 of n=16) described only accessing alternative education programs when they had already experienced homelessness (for example, through

École Emmett Johns at Dans la rue) or were already disengaged from school (like Lucas, who went to an alternative art school in Ontario).

Additionally, the alternative schools described by the 16 young people who discussed them as points of possibility were specifically supportive alternative educational programmes and not “disciplinary alternative education” which may reinforce racial and economic discrimination and barriers for young people (Selman, 2019). Rather, alternative education programs mentioned allowed for additional support from teachers and other social service staff (psychologists and employment supports, for example), flexibility in attendance, and options in courses taken across academic and vocational trajectories. In particular, the youth we spoke with in this study shared experiences in what are known colloquially as street schools, which are schools organized by community organizations that serve youth experiencing homelessness or other complex social issues outside of official schooling institutions, as one service making up a spectrum of supports—often including access to food, mental and physical health supports, and opportunities to engage in arts-based learning (Dans la rue, 2021, Gouvernement du Québec, 2014).

Further, research demonstrating the possibility for youth participatory work in schools and institutions to become important tools of emancipation, resistance and social change (Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2008, Balridge et al., 2017, Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013, Coles, 2021, Fine & Ruglis, 2009, Griffiths, Nichols & McLarnon, 2018, Mirra et al., 2016, Nichols & Ruglis, 2021) echoes learnings from both youth co-researchers and participants in this study, where multiple youth (n=12) spoke specifically about creating spaces for youth voice or the need to listen to youth in schools. Throughout our project, youth co-researchers proposed the approaches we had employed in line with youth participatory methodologies (Cammarota & Fine

2008, Mirra et al., 2016) to build broader structures of youth-led change in schools (fieldnotes 2019, 2018; see also Adamovicz & Malenfant, 2019; Watchorn, 2020; Watchorn & Malenfant, 2019). Alternative schools may be important sites where participatory processes are undertaken more frequently (Akom et al., 2008).

In 2021, building from research developed across youth consultations and drawing from the research presented in this dissertation, the first official youth homelessness prevention coalition in Québec called for youth participation as essential for acting in multiple social institutions, including schools, referencing the benefits that alternative programming already held for carrying out this work (Coalition Jeunes+, 2021). Alternative education programs may serve to develop youth voice and representation for social justice, in collaboration with the entire school community (Baroutsis et al., 2015). However, within mainstream schooling (Baroutsis et al., 2015; Coles, 2021; Fine & Ruglis, 2009) and especially within disciplinary and carceral programming (such as schools within the youth centres in Montréal (Goyette et al., 2012)), youth experiencing precarity and homelessness are less likely to be supported to participate in shaping their own educational experiences (Cruz, 2014; Nichols, 2019, 2014).

Additionally, flexible programs, interventions and education that supports young people to access training and the labour market are the types of educational “prevention” that is mentioned in Québec National Policy on Homelessness: Working together to avoid and exit the streets.⁵² This policy frames dropping out of school as one of the main individual risk factors that can lead to homelessness, emphasizes the detrimental effects this can have on future labour market participation, and highlights alternative school programming as successfully working to

⁵² A policy which also outlines the significant relationship between involvement in youth centres in Québec and increased rates of homelessness (though claims that youth centres are aware and have already undertaken significant preventative approaches to address the issue)

address these risks (2014). Québec’s work preparation programs and semi-skilled trades programs’ ((as well as specific alternative programmes at L’*école de la rue* CAPAB in Longueuil, Point de Rue in Trois Rivières and Le Tremplin in Sherbrooke) are highlighted as significantly cutting the provincial dropout rate for those under 20 and providing “key routes to preventing homelessness for many young people” (2014, p. 44).

Many of the things that alternative education classrooms modelled are similar to what free schools aim to do, but these provisions of tangible certificates and credentials provide opportunities that youth described needing in order to enter the labour market. Focusing education on both the things young people realistically need (like a GED/TTG) and the things they want to learn (such as art programming, music production, etc.) harness the things youth said did work for them in schools (when they were able to access them). Attendance is flexible, supports are offered if young people need additional tutoring, time, and connections can be made to other professionals (such as mental health, food or family supports). The “point of failure”—from a prevention lens--that came out of young people’s descriptions of alternative education programs, like Emmett John’s school at *Dans la rue*, was that youth were almost exclusively accessing them when they had already experienced homelessness.

Ultimately, the points of possibility evident in alternative education approaches lie in the willingness to trust young people to shape their own educational paths. As mentioned in the previous section, an increasing emphasis on the importance of “child-led” alternative approaches such as Montessori (which has been primarily accessed by middle-class and wealthy families (Lillard et al., 2017; Orem, 1968)) demonstrates shifts to put into practice the types of learning young people (n=16) described as effective in alternative programming that supported them to participate and succeed in schooling. What an anarchist lens gives to this work is to imagine

harnessing youth-led modes of learning to push back on ruling structures and build new forms of learning to maintain the power of our “collective non-capitalist forms of organizing” (Smith, 1987, p. 217) to actually change structures of inequity (Haworth, 2017; Elmore, 2017).

Youth Participation, Consultation, Leadership, and Radical Imagination

Imagine for a minute what our responses...could look like if we did not have to constantly battle against massive state, institutional, and private sector apparatuses to get access to the means for our survival (McClelland & Dodd, 2017)

In writing about the approach to fieldwork we have employed in this project, I claimed that working with our youth researchers has allowed Naomi and I to engage in more radical imagining of how society might (and must) look differently, with more tangible solutions being offered outside of what might be considered “realistic” in today’s world (Malenfant, 2020). I also began to grapple with what our responsibilities were to ensure that the young people we worked with continued to engage in our ongoing “little experiments” with revolutionizing education and responses to youth homelessness, and what our roles and responsibilities as academics on this project were moving forward.

Youth leadership and development of education to address issues of youth homelessness must be part of this work, not only because they know what’s happening “on the ground”, providing “insider knowledge” (Mirra et al., 2016, p. 11), but also how to push narrow thinking of how change must happen. As I’ve outlined in this chapter, working within institutions, or “in the system” necessarily makes revolutionary change seem unreasonable. Being wary of narratives of youth empowerment (Flicker, 2008), work must be done to shift the systems so that youth not only have the means and access to wellbeing to participate, but that we rethink the ways knowledge hierarchies create barriers for them to shape education in the first place. Based in the everyday concerns and knowledge of people, direct actions and mutual aid that young

people are already engaging in “actually produce new ways of living where people get to create systems of care and generosity that address harm and foster well-being” (Spade, 2020, p. 2).

The solution to violent and harmful State-run educational institutions, within an anarchist framework, is education itself (Haworth, 2017; Suissa, 2006). Part of revolutionary imagining, from both an anarchist and abolitionist perspective, necessitate unlearning the classist, racist, heteropatriarchal, colonized ways of knowing and being, and learning new (or existing) ways of being together in society. Anarchist education presumes that if people are taught about consent, about mutual aid, about networks of care, about how to work together well, about multiplicity and multiple perspectives, this won't make a perfect society--but it will give children/youth/adults the tools to be better equipped to continue building it. I believe that through keeping in view the responsibilities we have to young people in institutions today, the ways we must be ensuring that professionals around them are understanding their realities, and for the revolutionary efforts that we can imagine as part of a new society, radical, youth-led and revolutionary education is key.

CONCLUSION

In this research, I set out to explore the trajectories of young people and their education within and outside of schools. I have asked how youth could be better supported by educational institutions, while honouring and valuing the educational work that young people do with one another and in their broader communities. In collaboration with YARR, I listened to young people's experiences, analyzed policies and reports, and spoke with advocates and researchers in my efforts to understand the types of responses that would address youth needs in schools. Throughout my research I have hoped to highlight the responsibility of schools and other State institutions to support, care for, and better serve young people they engage with, and have framed this within the context of education inside and outside of the system. I continue to emphasize the necessity for schools to be held accountable for mitigating the harm young people face in school classrooms and hallways, even as I argue that schools alone cannot adequately prevent youth homelessness—they must work as part of broader systemic and societal shifts to better support young people. Further, schools in their present state uphold and protect structures and values that harm youth, contributing to the maintenance of a status quo that does not effectively address or prevent youth homelessness.

As this project has progressed, I have negotiated and struggled with how to do research that does not objectify my own experiences and the lives of people I know and love. To achieve this aim, I looked to anarchist approaches that shift and break down the structures we take for granted, as well as to feminist, Black, Indigenous, queer, and disability justice literature (Ahmed, 2021; Bey, 2020; Kumashiro, 2002; Nelson, 2020; Palmater, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Smith, 2014; Smith, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008) that has long addressed questions of how to ground research in lived experience, and highlight what has and continues to take place in communities to combat injustice. My modes of engaging with youth are grounded in these reflections and

approaches, as well as the knowledge I have gained from over a decade of doing this type of organizing with my peers. I hope that this dissertation has demonstrated points of action for building supports and resources to help youth take on leadership and solidarity-building efforts to address housing precarity. I will continue supporting and learning from youth, across shared and diverse experiences, to build networks of solidarity within institutions and, often, in spite of, or in refusal of the State.

YARR has structured our data collection and analysis in the lived and *living* experiences of each team member, and we always aimed to prioritize the wellness of our team and participants. This aim has sometimes impacted how our work was able to progress in both institutionally expected trajectories as well as our own expectations for what our research would accomplish. Through doing this, however, I encouraged young people we worked with to do research “as youth” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), meaning I did not expect or require them to participate in the same way that myself or Naomi came into the work. Ultimately this approach was grounded in seeing our work together as both a process of learning and action, rather than a means to achieving particular findings. We prioritized figuring out how the process of learning together alongside, and not secondary to, the work of collecting research data. As such, the learnings I wish to conclude with are things we did find out, together, but I emphasize that they are points of ongoing exploration, navigation and organizing for action. This project is part of learning I have been doing for years and will continue, in and outside of YARR.

In this conclusion I synthesize key points that emerged from the work presented in this dissertation, by returning to the questions that guided the research,

1. What barriers to education are young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability currently encountering?

2. What provincial and federal policies and institutional practices shape these experiences?
3. What types of educational interventions will address homeless youth's unique needs and experiences in the context of Canada's shifting political-economic conditions?

I will summarize six key findings from this dissertation. Following this, I will return to the points of action outlined in the introduction to explore how these might be mobilized by researchers, practitioners, and schools.

Youth Homelessness Stems from Educational Policies, Practices, and Institutions that Reinforce an Idealized Young Person

As outlined in Chapter 2, specific policies, and State responses, including those grounded in neoliberalism and settler colonialism, have shaped homelessness in Canada today. In learning from young people's experiences in schools, it is evident that educational and institutional policies work to reinforce normed ideas of who students are and "reproduce[e] inequality" (Au, 2018, p. 65). These policies seldom consider housing or homelessness explicitly but nevertheless impact how homelessness prevention and intervention efforts occur. Further, when policies do acknowledge inequities in schools, they often "address them only at the level of the individual, considering structural changes like the provision of housing, food and health care to be out of reach, unattainable, or unimaginable" (Au, 2018, p. 66). This limited imagination for what changes are possible, coupled with policies and practices that reinforce narrow standards for ideal identities and behaviours of students, institutionalize exclusionary and punitive relations in schools that disadvantage youth whose lives do not conform with institutional norms. The ways that interventions, punishments, and accommodations are accessed through schools reinforce gendered, classed, raced, ableist, and colonial notions of who students should be.

Schools are also sites of measuring and assessing the "usefulness of students (and teachers)" within the context of normative roles in society (Haworth, 2017), and can thus be seen

as an integral part of the ruling apparatus that organizes experiences of youth homelessness. Institutionally shifting forms of assessment (of students and teachers), developing accessible accommodations, and “policy audits” (Hallett & Skrla, 2017, p. 75) can begin to bridge the “disconnect with the reality of how homelessness exists in local community” (Hallett & Skrla, 2017, p. 81). However, we must also understand how “policies actively produce and exacerbate the harm, inadequately respond to crises, and ensure that certain populations bear the brunt of pollution, poverty, disease and violence” (Spade, 2020, p. 1). If we are to understand the ways that young people may be supported before experiencing homelessness, we must look to schools not only as sites of prevention and intervention, but as sites that currently shape experiences of homelessness and other intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion as one piece of a broader collection of structures, practices, and policies that make up the neoliberal and settler-colonial State. These experiences of exclusion and discrimination in schools are often the basis for young people refusing to engage with or trust institutional structures in ongoing ways throughout their trajectories of housing precarity.

A Significant Disconnect between Youth Experiences and Official, Institutional Narratives

To position schools as a site of homelessness prevention, we must first understand the ways schools currently fail to address or understand homelessness and exclusion. Young people we spoke with outlined significant disconnects between how educational policies imagined the role of schools as supporting “diverse learners” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017) and how they were experienced every day. Youth shared that in their experiences in schools, from primary to post-secondary, they weren’t being believed when they reached out, were made to feel underserving, and were stigmatized for being poor, being homosexual or queer, facing mental health struggles, or not “trying hard enough.” While many policies in Québec do not explicitly

speak to homelessness, their focus on wellness, prevention (of mental health struggles, health issues, and bullying), and emphasis that “fostering educational success for all...means being fully aware of different social realities” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2017, p. 13) suggest that they could be adapted to include specific references to homelessness as a situation that undermines academic success, school engagement, and wellbeing.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I outlined the different ways that young people attempted to reach out in schools but weren't believed, especially at key points where their homelessness may have been prevented. For example, Matti sought out teacher intervention during periods of bullying, but was punished instead of supported. Jolene was not connected to interventions, even as she was showing up with bruises or after she moved in with a much older man at 14. Fariha encountered barriers to mental health or housing supports without parental involvement, and when attempting to access accommodations at school, was told they weren't necessary in her case. In many instances youth were not heard, and were also told explicitly that they were lying. While schools, teachers, and staff continue to pretend (or believe) that homelessness isn't an issue their students are dealing with, the creation or implementation of any official policies regarding homelessness prevention will likely fail. Further, any policy to better organize supports for youth will fail if young people are not being believed by teachers and school staff, ultimately leading to destabilization of students' school trajectories.

While the Education Act in Québec does imagine robust ways for students and parents to engage in advocacy and appeal decisions relating to their own education, in practice, youth were unable, unwilling, or unaware of how to engage in these processes in any meaningful ways. Any policies that seek to better support youth experiencing homelessness in Québec schools, or even to prevent homelessness, must be grounded in an understanding of the different situations that

make up youth homelessness—allowing for youth like Fariha, Palle, Matti and Robert to access supports without necessitating parental involvement, eligibility requirements, or demonstration that they are “homeless enough.” The current disconnects between how policy is written, what policy is needed (Au, 2018), and an absence of equitable mechanisms for youth feedback, assessment, and accountability (Hallett & Skrla, 2017) ultimately lead to young people shouldering the responsibility both for their educational disengagement and resulting precarity.

More importantly, changing systems toward justice requires collective work to do more than recognize or acknowledge (Coulthard, 2014; Robinson et al., 2019; Robinson, 2020) that they harm youth, and harm certain youth disproportionately. Ensuring action, instead, requires us to engage in “anti-perfection projects” (Reynolds, 2021). This involves rejecting “clear and easy” solutions that mask the “catastrophes of white supremacy, colonization and genocide” and instead centre and learn from justice-doing work already happening in spite of these systems (Reynolds, 2021). If we continue to see the problem of youth homelessness as narrowly tied to housing, individual struggles, or linked to entrenchment in street identities, we will continue to propose solutions that fail to address the systemic ways homelessness is organized. If we see young people’s experiences of homelessness as embodied impacts of the diverse and intersecting forces of colonization, capitalism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy, we can think of how preventing youth homelessness must not only reform or resist, but also ultimately transform these systems.

All our Work Must Continue to (Re)Center Youth Knowledges and Experiences

Disconnects between youth’s experiences and official institutional narratives function to uphold normative notions of who students are, as well as prevent young people from accessing services before and during periods of homelessness. These disconnects also demonstrate the need

to continuously center, and when necessary, recenter, the knowledges and experiences of young people in schools. This centering must take place through clear accountability and advocacy mechanisms in schools, as well as opportunities for youth with lived and living experiences of homelessness to inform future policies and practices. This requires ongoing reflection on how young people are engaged throughout a change process rather than including individual events or consultations that allow for performative youth engagement, but do not sustain young people's ongoing input and involvement. Lived knowledges must be valued and actualized across different roles and positions.

Recentering youth knowledges and experiences is important to ensure policies, interventions and practices will actually meet the needs of young people, particularly as we acknowledge that “the position of the oppressed creates a stronger standpoint for better understanding the material reality of society” (Au, 2018, p. 184). Institutional and organizational shifts that center lived knowledges and youth leadership must take into account the current critiques coming from communities with lived experience of performative or tokenistic participation (Jarrett, 2016; Nelson, 2020)—as Reynolds has argued, in many communities most impacted by oppressive State policies (such as drug users or sex workers), the designation of “peer” has shifted from its radical roots to becoming synonymous with underpaid and undervalued positions in non-profits (Reynolds, 2021, 2018). Further, the designation of “peer,” while affording young people networking, professional, and educational opportunities they may not otherwise have access to (Smith, 2020) is often also used to limit youth from professional opportunities (i.e. mobilizing or engaging with knowledges that aren't “lived”) or to speak with authority (Shiwcharran, 2021). This echoes ways that young people are not believed in schools,

reinforcing the idea that youth must speak a certain way or occupy a particular position for their experiences to be heard or valued.

Peer work must address the structural barriers that youth with lived experience encounter, such as limited access to post-secondary education (Gupton, 2017; Weissman, Waegemakers-Schiff, Schiff, 2019), while resisting imposing tokenistic and limiting roles for peers. As outlined in Chapter 6 and emphasized by those working in harm-reduction, anarchist, abolitionist, and community-led spaces, people—in particular, people most impacted by oppressive State policies—are already doing the work of organizing and learning for survival (and joy) with one another (Avalos, 2019; Bey, 2020; Lagalisse, 2019; McClelland & Dodd, 2016; Partouche, 2020; Reynolds, 2021; Taylor, 2020). Responses inside and outside of schools must honour and value the work already being done by young people experiencing homelessness, and the knowledges they hold.

From Individual Champions to Do-It-Together Structures for Change

In Chapter 5, I discussed how for youth experiencing homelessness, including youth researchers on this project, finding an individual champion at a key “point of possibility” in their lives was incredibly impactful, and could be lifesaving. However, these were often temporary, rare, or unsustainable relationships, particularly with professionals who were doing work that was outside of their official mandates and, at times, breaking the law to support young people in the ways that youth needed. Further, while many youth shared that professionals using “common sense” against homogenized and rigid rules and exclusionary structures was an important point of possibility, in practice the “judgement” exercised by professionals may be more likely to lead to barriers and poor outcomes for students—with many youth facing discrimination, not being believed, or being barred from accessing accommodations or supports in schools that may have

prevented their homelessness. Addressing the root causes of youth homelessness requires shifting our societal expectations from individual responsibility, a key tenet of capitalism, colonialism, and neoliberalism (Graeber, 2009; Hogarth, 2018; Farrugia & Gerrard, 2016), to collective responsibility and building the networks of shared understanding necessary to do so (Reynolds, 2016).

Solidarity and mutual aid, two key tenets of anarchist action, suggest how we can begin the work of learning to organize responses differently, particularly when building from the experiences of young people. Solidarity efforts, rather than charity, or even equity efforts, may deepen how adults, other youth and students, and communities with different relationships to (and experiences of) oppression (Spade, 2020) learn about homelessness. These community-building endeavours can ensure that this work doesn't fall onto individual professionals willing to bend the rules and who have the "good" judgement youth seek, but rather that we create structures of solidarity across different and diverse standpoints to support all young people. Building solidarity requires a shift not only from "charity to equity" (Hallett & Skrla, 2017, p. 73) but from resistance (Reynolds, 2021) and refusal (Fordham, 2014) to transformation. Through building networks of solidarity, we can better understand our collective responsibility to "undoing" systems of harm (Avalos, 2019) and how direct action can lead our organizing, for example through Doing-it-Together (DIT) networks. Creating networks of solidarity harnesses the potential, urgency and radical imagination of the informal structures that youth are contributing to in their daily lives to address the root causes of homelessness: white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, cissexism, heteronormativity, ableism, and intersecting and multiple forms of oppression.

Peer Learning for Survival: Urgent and Transformative

As outlined in Chapter 6, peer learning can hold complex benefits and difficulties for young people experiencing homelessness. Youth experiencing homelessness often have no choice but to teach themselves and one another how to navigate systems. Peer learning and support were strategies that young people engaged with in many ways during, before and after experiences of housing precarity. As discussed in Chapter 6, peer learning is mobilized in many specialized educational opportunities for middle- and upper-class youth in transformative ways (including education such as Montessori programming, but also in informal ways such as sharing knowledge about post-secondary processes and funding opportunities). However, the value of peer-based learning for homeless youth warrants further attention and plays an important role in how young people experiencing homelessness learn. Within formal and informal supports for youth with lived experience, peer work (including peer education) reinforces ideals that centre anti-oppression, mutual responsibility, safety and flexibility, and the subversion of hierarchies of knowledge (Frederick, Daley & Zahn, 2018) in ways that are also transformative.

Transformational learning might be supported within educational institutions for teachers and school staff, and Hallett and Skrla argue that it is key in addressing youth homelessness in schools:

For a school...to truly provide the type of learning environment in which all children learn and thrive, including students experiencing homelessness, major change from typical ways of operating will often be required. Faculty and staff must not only understand and buy into the needed changes; they must also experience a type of personal growth that goes beyond simply acquisition of new information. The type of learning that we are talking about is known as transformative learning...Transformational learning is a cycle rather than an event. It is an ongoing process of knowledge acquisition, dialogue, action, and re-evaluation of understanding (2017, p. 88)

As outlined in Chapter 6, the same transformational potential can be harnessed in existing structures of peer learning amongst youth experiencing homelessness. Particularly the

“incidental learning and reflections of people’s everyday lives” (which contribute to important ways activists “learn to adapt and to resist” (Choudry, 2015, p. 101)) influence how youth organize together while navigating State systems and housing precarity. Valuing these nonformal and incidental ways of knowledge exchange is a point of possibility in fostering resistance and transformation of both informal learning contexts and institutionalized education (Choudry, 2015). Valuing the educational strategies and centering the knowledges of homeless youth is also urgent because these learnings play an important role in keeping young people alive and thriving within systems where many are treated as disposable (Mbembe, 2019).

Points of Action

Ultimately, I have aimed to illuminate the additional labour that youth experiencing homelessness must do to navigate educational institutions—in ways which are interconnected, relational, and transformational. When pushed out of schools, youth take on responsibility for their own learning and find ways to do this, often outside of formal educational structures. Youth are learning, addressing their own needs, and resisting in ways that are integral to their survival, often because they have no choice. As young people’s lives are regularly dependent on this learning, they are doing so in ways that could transform current responses to youth homelessness. Youth-led education in the context of homelessness includes creating networks of learning and solidarity that do not rely on State systems that harm them, as well as doing the work of radically imagining how we can organize learning that attends to the needs of all learners. Resourcing, supporting, and building on the existing knowledge and actions of youth can lead not only to new ways of organizing education as an integral part of “the fabric of an alternative approach to schooling for [homeless] groups” (Hallett & Skrla, 2017, p. 79) but shifting the fabric of society, and how we organize collectively toward justice.

Each finding presented in this conclusion supports and contextualizes the points of action I have laid out in the introduction. In order to justly shift how we support youth experiencing homelessness educationally, we must ground all of our advocacy, research, activism and organizing in learning from the experiences of youth, first and foremost. These experiences must inform how we develop training for teachers, staff, and students in schools, to reflect the actual and diverse lived realities of youth homelessness. This training can lead to the development of more effective and supportive relationships between school staff and youth (Hallett & Skrla, 2015; Moore, 2013; Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017), and can combat stigma and stereotypes about what homelessness looks like. Increased understanding about the lived realities of youth experiencing homelessness can also increase the potential for early intervention and prevention in schools (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). Finally, in order to actually address the underlying structures that organize homelessness today, we must think differently about how to pursue educational interventions within racist, colonial, heteronormative, and ableist State institutions, and mobilize the mutual aid and educational efforts that young people are already engaging in. To do so, we must create strong networks of solidarity to support radically imagining a different future for youth, schools, and society—as well as create space to experiment (Kaba, 2021) for this imagining.

Limitations and Future directions for study

An important point of radical imagination is paying attention to the lessons we learn while trying to organize our relationships and structures differently (Kaba, 2021). This ongoing, “imperfect” (Reynolds, 2021) project continues to teach me, and the broader YARR team, many lessons we can take from the past few years of research together. This includes how we may do things differently moving forward. There are ways that we may have approached phases of our

project differently, including considering whose experiences we engaged with, and how we structured our work together.

As mentioned, the young people we spoke with were limited by the organization where most of our recruitment and data collection took place—Dans la rue primarily serves white, Francophone youth. As outlined by Mickey (fieldnotes, 2019), Indigenous youth were not well-represented in our study, and to change this would likely have required substantial work with Indigenous organizations, especially as there is no homelessness-specific service for Indigenous youth in Montréal. Plans to connect with Native Montréal were not realized, as COVID-19 drastically shifted our approach for further data collection.

A failure to engage Indigenous communities is a common limitation of many Québécois efforts to address homelessness and will be a point of consideration as we continue this work. As Matti shared in an interview, when asked about services for Indigenous youth in Montréal, “a lot of Indigenous people have a general distrust of anything that colonialism has built, be it a homeless shelter or a police force.” Matti expressed that services could better support Indigenous youth that may enter their housing and programmes but “don’t stay long,” through supporting existing Indigenous organizations materially and financially, and learning how to connect Indigenous youth to programmes they may not be able to offer, as well as professionals who understand their language, culture and experiences. Moving forward, I hope to explore how this research may inform the responsibilities and roles of non-Indigenous organizations to better address and understand the needs of Indigenous youth.

We also primarily spoke to young people who were using services, particularly Dans la rue’s services. Maxime hoped to do outreach to youth who did not use services—for reasons of being barred, not meeting eligibility, or because they chose to sleep rough—but we were also

unable to because of public health regulations during COVID-19. The experiences of young people who don't or cannot access homelessness services is an important one, particularly in thinking of how existing policies and services can be exclusive (Brais & Malenfant, 2020). Maxime had also suggested a greater focus on youth with physical disabilities, which was not a barrier that any young people identified in the interviews we conducted. This may also be related to where we conducted the majority of our fieldwork, as neither Dans la rue nor our offices at McGill were physically accessible spaces.

Many individuals outlined experiences that will be important to explore in this work moving forward. For example, Tracey, a trans Québécoise woman from a northern community in Québec, sat with us for interviews throughout many periods of transitions in her life, including gender transitions, transitioning to living in an urban centre for the first time, and transitioning to staying in adult shelters. This demonstrated the importance of conducting more than one interview with each young person, as it provided greater insight into Tracey's shifting experiences and reinforced relational and caring ways of undertaking research. Her experiences illuminated unique challenges for youth moving from rural and northern communities, particularly for queer and trans youth for whom northern communities may not be supportive or safe. I will continue exploring these important issues in future research.

Most importantly however, this project intended to interview professionals who engaged with young people, to better understand the standpoint of teachers and other school staff. Due to COVID-19 this also was not possible, though plans are underway to begin focus groups with teachers and educators. Though I spoke with educators I knew professionally and engaged with literature discussing the experiences of teachers, their standpoint is not as clear or well-understood as I hoped it would be in this dissertation, and future work that aims to address the

need for teacher education must begin in a grounded understanding of the everyday realities of teachers in schools. This work will continue through highlighting the three points of action I have laid out here, working to centre, value and amplify the ways that youth experience homelessness, as well as resourcing, supporting, and collaborating on youth leadership, creating resources, and supports for teacher education and schools.

Finally, in this research I have begun to grapple with the role of schools as integral in organizing and perpetuating the social structures that contribute and shape the conditions of youth homelessness. This includes paying attention to the ways that schools are currently unable or unwilling to prevent young people from experiencing homelessness, intervening when students become homeless, or keeping youth connected to schools during periods of housing precarity, while also trying to better understand the role of schools in shaping homelessness. Schools, as forces which “guide [our] lives, form [our] world view, and define for [us] what is legitimate and what is not” (Illich, 1971) arguably introduce and reinforce values of white supremacy, heteronormativity, colonial knowledge hierarchies, and competitive individualism (Deleon, 2008) which create homelessness as it is experienced in today’s capitalist context. In 1917, one of the most influential anarchist theorists and pivotal voice in developing modern anarchist critiques of education, Emma Goldman, argued that schools “perpetuate privileged classes [and] assist them in the criminal procedure of robbing and exploiting the masses” (Goldman, 1917). Anarchist scholars have been carrying forward her critiques of formal education that position it as a tool of State oppression (Haworth, 2017; Williams, 2017), and maintain that schools future directions for this research will involve exploring how schools contribute to youth homelessness and broader, intersecting forms of systemic harm.

I will continue working to radically (re)imagine what new institutions of care, justice and creativity might look like to better support young people and prevent their homelessness, knowing that this work is always informed by past structures of organizing and looking to new, radical futures. The research presented here is itself a project of learning and imagination, which has aimed to demonstrate the need for collective shifts in how we imagine the role of schools in preventing youth homelessness, but more importantly the role of education in building a radically different future. This future must begin and build from the knowledge of those most impacted by homelessness, and can structure new ways of knowing, organizing, and transforming together.

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APPENDIX A

| Name | Self-Identified demographics |
|-------------|--|
| Thomas | N/A |
| Benny | Bisexual, 25 year old, white, boy, Anglo (Norwegian, Armenian, Maltese) from Québec (suburb of Montréal) |
| Leah | Queer, white, female |
| Casey | Male/"young"/intentionally homeless/Anglo/white |
| Fariha | Female/23/Lebanese-Canadian/Queer/Jehovah's witness |
| Michael | Male, Irish/English heritage, straight |
| Sandra | Trans/non-binary, 23, artist |
| Diana | Woman, Haitian Parent Immigrants, Speak Fr, Créole, En, Black, Heterosexual |
| Robert | White, Quebecois, Cis Man, Straight |
| Palle | Bilingual francophone; white |
| Martin | Trans man, pagan(ish), street youth |

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| Roy | Cis man, heterosexual, 20, likes sports |
| Gigi | Quebecoise woman, 20 years old |
| Tracey | Transwoman, quebecoise, from a northern town in Québec |
| Jaide | Gender-fluid (iel), autochtone (métis) |
| Mimi | Gender-fluid/gender"alien", quebecois |
| Jean-Claude | White Québécois man |
| George | Person, male, straight |
| Samuel | 24, heterosexual, quebecois (French mom/Irish dad), atheist |
| Mathieu | White, heterosexual man, quebecois, atheist |
| Olivier | 24, man, heterosexual, quebecois, white, atheist |
| Tommy | 23, heterosexual, quebecois |
| Jean-Claude | White, anti-fascist, 23, employed, human being, non practicing Jehovah's witness (mother), digs Buddhism |
| Jolene | white, woman |
| Lucas | White, straight, middle-class (formerly), pagan-ish |
| Matti | 23, genderqueer/2S, male-presenting, white-presenting Haudenosaunee |
| Rowan | 21, cis-woman, white, francophone, suburbs, bisexual |
| Vee | Sri Lankan/Tamil/Hindu/Immigrant, 25 |
| Pauline Marie | 21, cis-woman, white, francophone, suburbs, bisexual |
| Sara | White, heterosexual, woman, catholic, 22 |
| Raed | Moroccan/Arab Quebecois, straight, cis man |
| Julia | Trans woman, Jewish (identifies as Sephardic, ashkenazi and mizrahi jewish) |
| Nathan | White man, from northern city |
| Jeff | Persian Canadian, Male, Bilingual, Criminalized youth |
| Michel | White straight quebecois man |

APPENDIX B

| Code Book | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Categories | Sub-Category | Definitions |
| <u>Mental Health</u> | | |
| | arrests | (e.g. when someone is brought to the hospital against their will by the police) |
| | non-voluntary admission | (e.g. when someone is brought to the hospital |

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| | | against their will, but not by the police) | |
| | inpatient mental health care | (e.g. where you stay overnight) | |
| | outpatient mental health care | (e.g. therapy, other clinical programs where you don't stay overnight; same-day care) | |
| | prescription drugs | (e.g. prescription pharmaceutical medication) | |
| | breakdown/crises | (e.g. when a person describes mental health distress as overwhelming them/others) | |
| | suicide/suicidal ideation/attempts | (e.g. any reference to thinking about, trying or actualizing suicide in self/others) | |
| | self-medication | (e.g. non-prescription, but can be pharmaceutical or not) | |
| | self-harm | (e.g. references to harming/destructive behavior in self/others) | |
| | <u>Health</u> | | |
| | urgent care | (e.g. references to emergency services, including paramedics) | |
| | non-urgent care | (e.g. clinics, preventative medicine, general practitioners, CLSC) | |
| | dentistry and oral care | (e.g. any references to teeth, oral health, dentist, etc) | |
| | testing | (e.g. going for STI testing, diagnostic testing) | |
| | health card | (e.g. having, not-having, needing a health card) | |
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| <u>Housing</u> | forced removals | (e.g. any forced removed by police or other authority, which is not an eviction -- e.g. camp) |
| | eviction | (e.g. forced removal from a rental property by landlord, police, others) |
| | camps | (e.g. any structures, tents, etc, erected for sleeping outdoors and not taken down each night) |
| | shelters | (e.g. temporary accomodation -- usually 1 month or less -- in an emergency shelter for youth or adults) |
| | transitional housing | (e.g. second stage housing after using an emergency shelter; usually has a use-cap of about 1 year; will not have 24-7 onsite support, but will have support and/or outreach workers available) |
| | supportive housing | (e.g. permanent or temporary -- i.e. has a use-cap -- housing with various types of support workers on site) |
| | housing subsidy | (e.g. where part of your rent is covered by the government or an agency) |
| | squats | (e.g. where people live/stay in an abandoned apartment/building but don't pay rent) |
| | outside sleeping | (e.g. sleeping rough, but not in a camp) |

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| | social | (e.g. various forms of subsidized public housing) |
| | co-ops | (e.g. not-for-profit co-operative housing environments) |
| | market | (e.g. any form of housing that is not public or government subsidized) |
| | gentrification | (e.g. the processes through which neighbourhoods are changed to attract wealthier residents) |
| | couch-surfing | (e.g. temporarily or in the long-term staying with friends or families) |
| | traps/drug houses | (e.g. staying in places where drugs are bought, sold and used) |
| <u>Transportation</u> | | |
| | public | (e.g. STM, public buses, metro/subway) |
| | hitching/ride-sharing | (e.g. catching free rides with strangers either on the road or through ride-sharing programs) |
| | riding trains | (e.g. riding trains without a ticket) |
| | bus tickets | (e.g. local travel, between cities) |
| | personal | (e.g. rubber tramping, living out of your car, travelling in your van) |
| <u>Child Welfare</u> | | |
| | "abuse" | (e.g. where child welfare is investigating or intervening due to abuse; young people may not describe the situation as abuse) |

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| | "neglect" | (e.g. where child welfare is investigating or intervening due to neglect; young people may not describe the situation as neglect) |
| | force | (e.g. where child welfare workers use force or restraints during a removal, conflict, mental distress etc.) |
| | confinement | (e.g. where child welfare workers use isolation for punishment, control, mental health intervention or safety) |
| | removals | (e.g. where child welfare takes a child/youth from their current living situation, can be against the will of the child, but not always) |
| | interventions/lack of interventions | (e.g. where an intervention is or isn't organized by child welfare for a young person or child) |
| | punishments | (e.g. where a young person describes receiving a consequence or being disciplined by a child welfare workers/while in care) |
| | housing | (e.g. foster care, shelters, group homes, facilities) |
| | voluntary agreements | (e.g. temporary and voluntary agreements for supervision, treatment, support) |

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| | crown wardship orders | (e.g. permanent orders established through the court system) |
| | emancipation | (e.g. where young people formally become responsible for their own care/guardianship) |
| <u>Schools</u> | | |
| | punishments/discipline | (e.g. expulsions, suspensions, detentions, calls home, lost privileges and other forms of school based discipline) |
| | interventions/lack of interventions | (e.g. where the school initiates or fails to initiate a response or program on behalf of youth) |
| | "bullying" | (e.g. where young people describe being harassed or beat up or picked amnd/or other acts of targeted violence between young people) |
| | absences | (e.g. missing school, skipping school, phone calls home, truancy) |
| | "lates" | (e.g. recorded late for class) |
| | elementary | K-8 (ON) or K-6 (QC) |
| | secondary | 9-12 (ON) or 7-11 (QC) |
| | post-secondary | (e.g. CEGEP, College, University or Trades Programs/schools) |
| | alternative education | (e.g. including adult education, outreach, specialized programs) |
| | GED | (i.e. General Education Diploma) |
| | quitting/dropping out | (e.g. where you simply stop going to school or officially withdraw) |

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| | bursaries and scholarships | (e.g. money for post-secondary) | | |
| | credentializing/labour market | (e.g. getting credentials to get access to more school or jobs) | | |
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| | <u>Policing</u> | | | |
| | violence | (e.g. symbolic and physical violence; forms of brutality; where the police take you to the edge of the city and beat you) | | |
| | force | (e.g. where the police move you along roughly or search you roughly or knock your head off the side of the car while cuffing you) | | |
| | confinment | (e.g. in detention or jail, where one is isolated from others; where you are detained in police custody -- e.g. in a "drunk tank" -- but not yet (or ever) charged/arrested) | | |
| | legitimacy (not) | (e.g. where the police construct legitimacy through the choice or language/actions) | | |
| | warrant | (e.g. where a judge has given the police permission to search, hold, send to court, arrest a person or to monitor a person/place) | | |
| | conditions | (e.g. terms of release from custody e.g. curfew, substance, places of travel, who you can hang out with, etc.) | | |
| | tickets and fines | (e.g. for infractions of municipal or provincial | | |

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| | | or policies, laws or public and/or corporate fines eg. STM/AMT) |
| | searches | (e.g., where the police check your person and possessions) |
| | seizures | (e.g. where the police take your stuff) |
| | arrests | (e.g. where the police take you into custody and may or may not lay charges) |
| | charges | (e.g. where a person is official accused of breaking the law before courts) |
| | incarceration | (e.g. where a person has been charged, found guilty and is serving a sentence) |
| | detention | (e.g. where a person has been charged and is being held, pre-trial -- that is, they haven't been found guilty) |
| | | |
| Capital | | |
| | making money | (The process of accruing capital (e.g Squeegeeing, Panhandling, working, "putting in work") |
| | needing money | (The lack of capital (e.g "I was broke/ I didn't have enough for/ ect ect) |
| | spending money | (e.g. purchasing, loaning, paying fines, renting, leasing, bills) |
| | labour market | (e.g, the laws, economic relations, labour organizations, unions, etc that structure employment) |

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| | welfare | (e.g. state funded social aid) |
| | disability pension | (e.g. state funded social aid for people with diagnosed disabilities) |
| | employment insurance | (e.g. economic aid for up to one year after employment in the case of job loss) |
| <u>Legal rights/responsibilities</u> | | |
| | policy | (e.g. institutional rules that aren't law) |
| | law | (e.g. legislation) |
| | rights | (e.g. violations, upholding, demanding, knowing) |
| | criminalization | (e.g. social conditions that intersect with legal processes, leading to criminal responses and criminal sanctions) |
| | minors | (e.g. young people who are under 18 years) |
| | courts | (e.g. where legal processes are carried out and legal decisions are made/justified) |
| <u>Drugs & Alcohol</u> | | |
| | addiction | (e.g. where drug or alcohol use becomes a necessity instead of a choice; sometimes a clinical diagnosis) |
| | use | (e.g., where drug or alcohol consumption is a choice) |
| | others' use (e.g. parents, friends) | (e.g. where others' in one's life are using and/or abusing drugs and/or alcohol) |

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| | selling | (e.g. where someone is trading drugs/alcohol for something else they want -- e.g. money or sex) |
| | buying | (e.g. where one trades something for drugs or alcohol) |
| | moving | (e.g. where someone is transporting or transferring drugs or alcohol) |
| | detox | (e.g. the process of stopping using and going through withdrawal as part of a program or not; detox is also a program) |
| | addictions services | (e.g. the other services to help people quit or reduce their usage) |
| | | |
| | | |
| | <u>Relationships</u> | |
| | friendship | (e.g. platonic positive relationships) |
| | romantic/intimate | (e.g. non-platonic relationships) |
| | convenience/necessity | (e.g. where relationships occur largely for survival, rather than friendship) |
| | sexual (non-romantic) | (e.g. where a relationship is only sexual -- not intimate or friendship) |
| | sexual (non-consensual/coercively consensual) | (e.g. sexual assault, sexual coercion) |
| | coercive/manipulative | (e.g. other relationships that are coercive or manipulative e.g. where people are crashing at your place and you can't get them to leave) |

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| | violent | (e.g. sexual, verbal, symbolic, physical forms of violence) | | |
| | animals | (e.g. pets) | | |
| | | | | |
| | <u>Movement</u> | | | |
| | inter-provincial | (e.g. moving house, travelling between provinces) | | |
| | intra-city | (e.g. moving house, travelling in a single city)_ | | |
| | inter-city | (e.g. moving or travelling between cities) | | |
| | borders/international movement | (e.g., crossing a border for seasonal work or travel or migration) | | |
| | immigration | (e.g, the institutional coordination of border travel; refugee status; residency and citizenship) | | |
| | | | | |
| | <u>Family</u> | | | |
| | conflict | (e.g. disagreements within a family or between some members of a family; can be violent or not) | | |
| | demanagement (moving house) | (e.g. with your family or in between family members) | | |
| | violence | (e.g. where conflict becomes hurtful, physically and emotionally) | | |
| | support | (e.g. within family; by, from and for family) | | |
| | trauma | (e.g. events present and historical that lead to distress, pain, wear and tear, stress) | | |
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| <u>Time/Age</u> | | | |
| | child (12 and under) | | |
| | youth (13-24 years) | | |
| | young adult (25-29) | | |
| | having time | (e.g, disposable time that is not taken up with necessities of life; idle time; personal time) | |
| | waiting | (e.g. not getting immediate access to a resource, person, place, etc; can involve waitlists) | |
| | agism | (e.g. demeaning someone's experiences as a consequence of their youthfulness) | |
| | mentorship | (e.g. where relationships are between experienced and less experienced people; could be formal work mentorship, peer mentorship, etc.) | |
| | hindsight | (e.g. rear-view window phenomena re. your own life) | |
| | | | |
| <u>Bad Seed reputation</u> | | (e.g. troubled kid or problem child diagnosis/stigma) | |
| | | | |
| <u>Not being believed</u> | | (e.g. where a person is stigmatized as untruthful -- e.g. because of drug-use; or fears they won't be believed; or isn't believed -- e.g. by authorities) | |
| | | | |
| <u>Referral/Lack of Referral</u> | | (e.g. institutions guiding you or not guiding you towards | |

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| | | perceived needed services() | | |
| | | | | |
| | | (e.g. institutions recording or not designated important events eg injuries, potential harm) | | |
| | | | | |
| | | (e.g. difficulty with 'continuity of care' or referral issues or transitions across systems/organizations) | | |
| | | | | |
| | | (e.g. getting what you need and want from an institution or not) | | |
| | | | | |
| | | (e.g. where you are put on a list of people to get access to something you need or want, based on overall service volume and resource availability) | | |
| | | | | |
| | | (e.g. where professionals or young people actively endeavour not to do or offer or say something - e.g. refusing access to a service because you are drunk) | | |
| | | | | |
| | | (e.g. where professionals or young people rebel or push back against something (e.g. a rule or program or system etc). | | |
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| | | (e.g. discrimination, double standards, where rules/approaches -- e.g. zero tolerance -- are applied in different ways for different people) | | |
| <u>Institutional manipulation/bias</u> | | | | |
| | | (e.g. where professionals or young people don't know their rights, don't understand how a process is supposed to work, etc) | | |
| <u>Lack of institutional understanding</u> | | | | |
| | | (e.g. institutional know-how; knowing how to make the institution work for you/others; knowing when to lie/tell truth) | | |
| <u>Institutional Savvy</u> | | | | |
| | | (e.g. points of possibility, points of opportunity, "it was the right approach &/or the right time") | | |
| <u>"It worked"</u> | | | | |
| | | (e.g. points of failure, "it was the wrong approach &/or the wrong time") | | |
| <u>"It didn't work"</u> | | | | |
| Identity | | (e.g. race, ethnicity, Indigenaity, gender, class, religion, sexuality) | | |
| <u>Attempt to Access</u> | | (e.g. when a young person leads/makes a claim/enters into an institutional process) | | |
| <u>Risk</u> | | (e.g, risk to self, risk to institution, mention of risk) | | |

