# Walking with SAGE Clan Patrol:

# Practicing Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni in Healing Addiction

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**Acknowledgements**

As someone who religiously reads every word of acknowledgements sections and who is always curious about what led up to the finished product, I knew that mine risked being long. An Honours Thesis is as much a capstone to the research you complete as it is to your undergraduate degree, and so it feels fitting to reflect on some of the connections I have been lucky enough to make over the course of my time at the University of Lethbridge, which have all contributed to my taking on this project and ultimately, the shape it took. I am sure that to list the many people and moments I have to be grateful for over the course of this project would take up the space of this thesis itself, but in the spirit of brevity:

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**Abstract**

This thesis will examine if and how a local, grassroots, Blackfoot-led outreach organization, SAGE Clan Patrol (Serve, Assist, Guard, and Engage) is guided by traditional Blackfoot Ways of Knowing, and how the work of this organization intersects with other proposed approaches to addiction treatment in Southern Alberta, including harm reduction framework and abstinence-oriented treatment. Through an ethnographic account of patrols from June to August 2022, it will explore how the work of this organization fits into narratives of ostensibly competing FNMI (First Nations, Métis, Inuit) and Western frameworks of health in the context of addiction treatment, and specifically, whether SAGE Clan's approach can be said to map onto a "Culture as Treatment" model. Further, it will explore the possibilities (and limits) of conceiving of the work of this organization under the banners of decolonization and reconciliation.

## A Few Notes on Language and Spelling

*On Blackfoot Spelling*

I was fortunate over the course of my project to be introduced to several key Blackfoot concepts which Mark Brave Rock patiently helped me to pronounce and spell, although both remain a work in progress. Because Blackfoot was not originally a written language, there are sometimes many variations in spelling for any given word—particularly regarding the use of accents—which can differ between Nations and speakers. Some Elders have also described variations in the old Blackfoot spoken by their grandparents and the "new" Blackfoot spoken by residential school survivors. I have used the spellings and explanations that were provided to me in writing this work, and when important, have noted who taught them to me.

*On Using Italics*

Following a poem by Alice Te Punga Somerville, followed too by Zoe Todd, I have chosen to not italicize Blackfoot words in this work despite the preference of the Chicago Manual of Style to do so for non-English words. I hope this small act might help to unsettle perceptions of what words belong in academic texts, and with that, challenge the idea that some are not "at home" here; as Te Punga Somerville points out, addressing the deeply embodied meanings attached to language, language in these moments may stand in for a people in and of themselves.[1]

[1] Alice Te Punga Somervile, "Kupu rere kē.," Facebook post, March 15, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/notes/353634069035353/. As cited in Zoe Todd, "Decolonizing Prairie Public Art: The Further Adventures of the Ness Namew," in *Settler City Limits: Indigenous Resurgence and Colonial Violence in the Urban Prairie West*, ed. Heather Dorries, Robert Henry, David Hugill, Tyler McCreary, and Julie Tomiak (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019), 308.

*On the Term "Indigenous"*

When speaking in general about the original inhabitants of North America, I have opted to use the word First Nations or FNMI in place of Indigenous in most instances (exceptions persist where I paraphrase the work of an author who opts to use the latter term). I made this decision following a conversation with Keenen Weasel Moccasin, a SAGE Clan Team Lead, who explained that to him the term "Indigenous" necessarily means "colonized people," and that his preference is for the term First Nations or FNMI. Other SAGE Clan Teams leads agreed that they liked the term First Nations or accepted both, and I chose to go with the term that seemed to feel comfortable to most people.

In memory of Piikani scholar and activist, Dr. Betty Bastien, Sikapinaki.

To my SAGE Clan family: you are always in my heart.

# Introduction

*Beginnings*

On the evening of October 24, 2022, I stood in Lethbridge's Galt Gardens helping to serve a birthday cake and trying to hide my shivering.

I had joined a number of SAGE Clan Patrol volunteers and the people they serve, celebrating the organization's fourth anniversary. Mark Brave Rock, the organization's founder, was standing next to me, carefully slicing into a sheet cake lined with red, yellow, and green frosting and bearing the printed image of the SAGE Clan logo in the center, tucked between a cursive happy birthday message. We worked in relative coordination to plate the cake and hand it out to the people staying at or passing through the park that night—individuals who are often experiencing homelessness and addiction, and who SAGE Clan serves—before volunteers tucked in. People gathered in front of the plastic table where I stood to speak with volunteers, which was covered in an assortment of leftovers, pop bottles, paper plates, and plastic cutlery boxes. To my right, others slept or visited in camping chairs arranged in a circle around a small propane fire pit which, in conjunction with the tarps that had been strung across two brick pillars to block out the wind, provided the only resistance to the October chill. The anniversary was a success, having begun with a pipe ceremony lead by Elder Barnabas Tall Man, who typically performs these kinds of ceremonies for a range of SAGE Clan events in addition to providing advice to Mark, followed by a hot dog and chip dinner, handed out first, as always, to the people SAGE Clan serves. The group of volunteers was in good spirits, joking and enjoying in the festivities while also feeling a renewed commitment to their task thanks to the ceremony and some words from Mark.

This fourth birthday marked a significant achievement on the part of SAGE Clan Patrol volunteers. The Blackfoot-led outreach organization is a grassroots, volunteer-based organization that has managed, despite their fair share of challenges over the years, to maintain a recognizable and reliable presence in Lethbridge's downtown core and in the lives of the people they serve. Founded in 2018 by Mark Brave Rock in the wake of a mounting opioid crisis in Lethbridge, SAGE Clan (Serve, Assist, Guard, and Engage) began in part as a direct response to an attempt by the Lethbridge Police Service (LPS) to adopt a new initiative designed to enhance public safety. In the context of a prevalence of personal safety and property protection concerns from residents and local business owners described as "relat[ing] to substance abuse," in 2018, Lethbridge City Council put forth a resolution that LPS present them with options for implementing enhanced public safety initiatives at a September 10 Community Issues Committee (CIC) meeting.[2] Police Chief Rob Davis presented options being explored by the force, focusing largely on what would eventually become The Watch, which was to be based on a program by the same name in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Watch was intended to be a largely volunteer-based community patrol program, deriving its success from the visibility of members who are easily recognizable in their red outerwear, contributing to what the Chief termed a "perception of safety" in the downtown core with volunteers also acting as the "eyes and ears" of the force, having no arresting power themselves. Near the end of his presentation to council, Chief Davis briefly presented other possibilities for improving public safety in addition to The Watch, describing potential changes to the Lethbridge Cadet Program, a Police Auxiliary

[2] "Community Issues Committee Meeting (CIC) held on Monday, September 10, 2018," posted by the City of Lethbridge, September 10, 2018, video, 47:46, https://agendas.lethbridge.ca/AgendaOnline/Meetings/ViewMeeting?id=2051&doctype=2.

Program, the possibility of enhancing the existing Crime Stoppers and Neighbourhood Watch programs, and finally, the implementation of a Bear Clan.

Bear Clan, which like The Watch, began in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is a volunteer-based community patrol formed in 1992 who describes their approach as recognizing "the ongoing need to assume our traditional responsibility to provide security to our Aboriginal community."[3] While in this presentation, Chief Davis was unclear about whether and how a similar program might be introduced in Lethbridge, he spoke positively of Bear Clan, describing it as "basically another version of The Watch but very specific to First Nations populations" and noting that "there are discussions happening in the city about emulating that." Mark's retelling of SAGE Clan's origins begins here, with local newspapers reporting on the possibility of a Bear Clan initiative in the city. He recalls how when First Nations community members heard this, many questioned the police service's management of a fundamentally First Nations' organization, resulting in an emergency meeting among various First Nations organizations in the city who were troubled by an apparent lack of consultation. Mark was perhaps one of the most vocal of community members who also recognized the need for people with lived experience to assist those experiencing homelessness and addiction, as he had in his life. He also had experience with Bear Clan's approach, having patrolled with them in the year prior. Later, a board was formed to officially implement and secure funding for a Bear Clan-based initiative, which included a university professor, member of City Hall, LPS officer, AHS employee, the President of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Mark.[4] Sensing that non-First Nations members of the board were attempting to steer the organization in a direction that was at odds with what he knew to be true from his own lived experience, and finding that he had become "tired of the talking" and the

[3] "About," Bear Clan Patrol, accessed March 15, 2023. https://bearclanpatrol.org/about/.
[4] Interview with Mark Brave Rock, July 6, 2022.

slow process of bureaucracy, Mark and six other First Nations people with lived experience with homelessness and addiction—some still early in their recovery and unhoused—turned their attention to patrolling, which they had already begun despite the ongoing board meetings, effectively forming SAGE Clan Patrol.[5] This spirit of change-driven action (as well as it's distinction from City-facing organizations) would remain a hallmark of SAGE Clan by the time I began patrolling with the organization in June 2022 as the resident ethnographer.

I became interested in the work of SAGE Clan following a research project which centered on the supervised consumption site controversy in Lethbridge, and while working as an Addiction Support Worker at a former Lethbridge agency. I had accepted this position with the hope of connecting with clients and building positive relationships with them but found myself not quite able to do this in the way that felt important to me in this role. At the same time, I heard passing mentions of SAGE Clan from clients—an organization I knew very little about at the time—and could sense from these fleeting remarks that there was a strong sense of mutual respect between clients and patrollers. My initial interest in SAGE Clan Patrol was admittedly then both personal and academic: I wanted to understand what SAGE Clan was doing differently in the context of the different approaches to addiction treatment and support that exist in Lethbridge, but also to understand how I, as a settler who has lived in Blackfoot Confederacy territory my whole life, might be able to adopt a similar approach and better assist the people I had worked with.

My research is oriented around two broad research objectives, discussed in detail below, which include the "Culture as Treatment" model and the concept of decolonization. My initial and central research question seeks to understand, as I noted above, how SAGE Clan's approach

[5] Interview with Mark Brave Rock, July 6, 2022.

is similar to or different from other approaches to addiction treatment and support in Southern Alberta, with particular attention paid to how the organization and its members locate their approach in these broader debates, if and how their approach might be informed by Blackfoot cultural teachings, and what this might mean in a practical sense in terms of their day to day operations. As is typical of ethnographic research, my project was ultimately further shaped once in the field by the context of the present moment, expanding to include an examination of First Nations humour, the significance of kinship in Blackfoot epistemology, the meaning of true reconciliation, and most prominently, to detail the emergence of an unprecedented encampment in the downtown which revealed the deepening fractures in Lethbridge's social supports and the broader Albertan sociopolitical context in new and urgent ways.

*Southern Alberta's Opioid Crisis*

Within the last decade, Alberta, like much of Canada, has experienced a rapid rise in opioid-related deaths, routinely referred to as the opioid crisis. Beginning in 2016, the Government of Alberta released quarterly reports to monitor the growing number of drug overdose deaths (now termed drug poisoning deaths in provincial data) in the province; after June, 2020, these reports were replaced with the launch of the online Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System.[6,7] As evidenced in these reports, the city of Lethbridge has frequently faced high per capita rates of drug poisoning deaths, even when compared to much larger centres,

[6] Canada, Government of Alberta, Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System (Updated March 2023), *Acute Substance Deaths Overview*, accessed March 31, 2023, https://healthanalytics.alberta.ca/SASVisualAnalytics/?reportUri=%2Freports%2Freports%2F1bbb695d-14b1-4346-b66e-d401a40f53e6&sectionIndex=0&sso_guest=true&reportViewOnly=true&reportContextBar=false&sas-welcome=false.

[7] Please note the provided access dates, as data is frequently updated in the online system. The system further notes in a disclaimer that "some drug poisoning deaths in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 are currently review by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner," which will cause the number of deaths published in the data by the time of writing to increase. See Canada, Government of Alberta, Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System (Updated March 2023), *Disclaimer and Table of Contents*, accessed March 31, 2023.

sitting, for example, at a rate of 42.4 apparent unintentional drug poisoning deaths related to fentanyl from January 1 to June 30, 2020, compared to 21.4 for Calgary and 26.0 for Edmonton.[8] The last time I wrote about this crisis in an earlier work (April 2022), Lethbridge had in October 2021 experienced a record rate of 117.4 deaths per 100,000 person years related to any opioid compared to a province-wide rate of 41.6, with Calgary and Edmonton tallying 37.8 and 71.1 respectively.[9] Since the publication of updated data to the surveillance system, Lethbridge nearly doubled this record in February 2022, reaching a rate of 230.5 deaths.[10] While Alberta as a whole saw a decline in drug poisoning deaths in 2022, with 1,443 deaths following a record year in 2021 of 1,842, Lethbridge did not experience this improvement, experiencing 72 deaths in 2021 and 68 in 2022.[11]

Provincial responses to the opioid crisis have ebbed and flowed with Alberta's changing political tides, beginning with the election of Rachel Notley of the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2015, who was frequently seen to be a champion of a harm reduction approach, particularly in contrast to the emerging United Conservative Party (UCP) which would be led by Jason Kenney. In October 2017, Lethbridge and Edmonton became the first cities in Alberta to be approved by Health Canada for "safe [supervised] consumption sites,"[12] to be followed by Calgary soon

[8] Canada, Alberta Health, Analytics and Performance Reporting Branch, *COVID-19 Opioid Response Surveillance Report Q2 2020* (Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 2020): 11, accessed March 22, 2023, https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f4b74c38-88cb-41ed-aa6f-32db93c7c391/resource/e8c44bab-900a-4af4-905a-8b3ef84ebe5f/download/health-alberta-covid-19-opioid-response-surveillance-report-2020-q2.pdf.
[9] Deaths related to any opioid, both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical. Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System (Updated March 2023), *Acute Substance Deaths Overview*.
[10] Alberta Substance Use Surveillance System (Updated March 2023), *Acute Substance Deaths Overview.*
[11] These are drug poisoning deaths attributed to any substance, although in the Lethbridge case the vast majority are attributed to opioids.
[12] Supervised Consumption Sites (SCSs) are sometimes referred to as Safe Consumption Sites, although the appropriateness of the latter term is debated, a concern of some (on the part of both harm reduction advocates and critics) being that it falsely suggests drug use is rendered completely safe in these contexts. I prefer the term Supervised Consumption Sites, used by Alberta Health Services, and will use this term throughout my work.

after.[13] Supervised Consumption Sites operate following the principles of harm reduction, which in broad strokes, can be defined as "a set of compassionate and pragmatic approaches for reducing harm associated with high-risk behaviours and improving quality of life."[14] In the context of drug use, this typically entails reducing the harms associated with sharing injection supplies, overdoses, and has increasingly incorporated a discussion around Safe Supply. Supervised Consumption Sites are designed to reduce some of these risks, and are locations where an individual may bring pre-obtained substances—typically to inject (although the Lethbridge site was unique in also supporting inhalation)—and where individuals are provided with sterile supplies and observed by trained staff who are prepared to respond in the event of an overdose by administering overdose reversal medications such as Naloxone (an intramuscular injection) and/or Narcan (a nasal spray). They also typically provide programming and supports for those who wish to seek treatment or who have other medical and wellbeing needs. The Lethbridge site, operated by the Aids Outreach Community Harm Reduction Education Support Society (ARCHES), opened in February 2018 and was routinely recognized as "the busiest drug consumption site in North America," reportedly averaging 663 visits a day.[15] To support the program's start-up and operations, Alberta Health Services provided 71% of ARCHES' funding from April 2018 to March 2019, which amounted to approximately $14.2 million dollars for the

[13] Lara Fominoff, "Lethbridge and Edmonton first cities in Alberta approved for safe consumption sites," *Lethbridge News* Now, October 18, 2017, https://lethbridgenewsnow.com/2017/10/18/lethbridge-and-edmonton-first-cities-in-alberta-approved-for-safe-consumption-sites/.
[14] Susan E. Collins et al., "Current Status, Historical Highlights, and Basic Principles of Harm Reduction," in *Harm Reduction: Pragmatic Strategies for Managing High-Risk Behaviours*, eds. G. Alan Marlatt, Mary E. Larimer, and Katie Witkiewitz (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 5, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uleth/detail.action?docID=819614.
[15] Nadine Yousif, "A small Alberta city is home to the busiest drug consumption site in North America. We spent 12 hours inside," *Star Edmonton*, August 18, 2019, https://www.thestar.com/edmonton/2019/08/18/a-small-alberta-city-is-home-to-the-busiest-drug-consumption-site-in-north-america-we-spent-12-hours-inside.html.

SCS specifically.[16] Perhaps because of this funding, while the introduction of Lethbridge's first supervised consumption site was the result of an application by ARCHES to Health Canada for a federal drug legislation exemption, the NDP government was typically understood as more sympathetic to these sites and faced vocal criticism from their United Conservative counterparts as a result. In Lethbridge specifically, the discourse surrounding supervised consumption services grew to be a particularly polarizing issue, becoming nearly synonymous with the opioid crisis itself, and coalescing around concerns over personal safety and the success of local businesses in the immediate vicinity, among other issues.[17]

By the 2019 provincial election, the opioid crisis had become an important talking point. Significantly, while outlining an extensive plan to address the opioid crisis, in their election platform the UCP also expressed a concern with supervised consumption sites, implying that assisting those experiencing addiction in this way may not align with a desire to help "parks, neighborhoods, and communities to be safe."[18] This came to a head when UCP Leader Jason Kenney, apparently deviating from the more measured tone of his party as a whole, described the sites as a place where people go to "inject poison," receiving significant backlash.[19]

After winning the 2019 election, the UCP began pursuing an addiction and mental health strategy framed as a pivot away from the NDP's harm reduction approach and towards a

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[16] Canada, Alberta, Government of Alberta, Alberta Treasury Board and Finance, *Grant Expenditure Review for Alberta Health*, July 14, 2020: 2. Accessed March 22, 2023, https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/90fb3c93-79e7-481b-8e1f-3dbe122f4f27/resource/ec2eead9-1c42-4f72-8d88-4199daec44e5/download/health-grant-expenditure-review-arches-2020-07.pdf.

[17] Amy Cran, "'Why do They Treat us This Way?': Supervised Consumption Sites, Racialized Geographies, and Notions of Belonging in Southern Alberta," *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies* 1 no. 12 (Winter 2022), https://carleton-wp-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/111/2022/11/Updated_amy_cran.pdf.

[18] United Conservative Party of Alberta, *Alberta Strong and Free: Getting Alberta Back to Work* (Alberta: UCP, 2019): 54, https://www.unitedconservative.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Alberta-Strong-and-Free-Platform-1.pdf.

[19] CBC News, "UCP Leader Jason Kenney draws fire for saying safe consumption sites help addicts 'inject poison,'" *CBC News*, updated March 6, 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/jason-kenney-safe-consumption-lethbridge-1.4559556.

recovery-based model. In June 2019, the UCP froze funding for newly proposed supervised consumption sites in the province until they completed a review process, citing a concern regarding the impact of crime on nearby areas.[20] Two months later, in August 2019, an audit of ARCHES revealed financial mismanagement of up to $1.6 million, and the organization was ultimately forced to close their doors when their funding was not renewed despite eventually being cleared of any wrongdoing by December 2020.[21,22] Shortly after the initial news of the ARCHES audit, the UCP also began a period of public engagement under the newly established Supervised Consumption Services Review Committee, which was tasked with evaluating "the social and economic impacts of current and proposed supervised consumption sites."[23] In March 2020, the Review Committee released a report containing several considerations regarding the sites, two of which suggested that Alberta needed to move away from a focus on SCS services and towards a recovery orientation, a shift later captured in a final report by the Mental Health and Addiction Advisory Council established under Kenney which has been outlined as "The Alberta Model: A Recovery-Oriented System of Care."[24,25,26] While both the NDP and UCP have

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[20] Mark Villani, "Premier Kenney defends supervised drug consumption site funding freeze," *CTV News Calgary*, June 4, 2019, https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/premier-kenney-defends-supervised-drug-consumption-site-funding-freeze-1.4450648

[21] David Opinko, "BREAKING: ARCHES Announces Closure of Lethbridge's Supervised Consumption Site," *Lethbridge News Now*, August 12, 2020, https://lethbridgenewsnow.com/2020/08/12/breaking-arches-announces-closure-of-lethbridges-supervised-consumption-site/.

[22] Justin Goulet and David Opinko, "No Criminal Charges Against ARCHES, but province won't resume funding for SCS in Lethbridge," *Lethbridge News Now*, December 23, 2020, https://rdnewsnow.com/2020/12/23/no-criminal-charges-against-arches-but-province-wont-resume-funding-for-scs-in-lethbridge/.

[23] "Supervised consumption services review," Government of Alberta, accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.alberta.ca/supervised-consumption-services-review.aspx.

[24] Canada, Alberta, Government of Alberta, Supervised Consumption Services Review Committee, "Impact: A socio-economic review of supervised consumption sites in Alberta," March 2020: 37, https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/dfd35cf7-9955-4d6b-a9c6-60d353ea87c3/resource/11815009-5243-4fe4-8884-11ffa1123631/download/health-socio-economic-review-supervised-consumption-sites.pdf.

[25] Canada, Alberta, Government of Alberta, Alberta Health and Addictions Advisory Council, "Towards an Alberta model of Wellness: Recommendations from the Alberta Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Council," 2022, https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/bf379eb9-bd13-42b3-ac5c-2220e9e72a97/resource/7a0338fb-ab4c-4681-beea-27fdcb20d56e/download/health-toward-an-alberta-model-of-wellness-2022.pdf.

[26] "The Alberta Model: A Recovery-Oriented System of Care," Government of Alberta, accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-recovery-oriented-system-of-care.aspx.

acknowledged the need for a broad "continuum of care" which includes both supervised consumption sites and options for accessing treatment, this new framing from the UCP and early inflammatory comments from former Premier Jason Kenney that characterized SCSs as "NDP drug sites"[27] have contributed to the general perception that two distinct treatment philosophies dominate Alberta: harm reduction and abstinence (or recovery-oriented) models.

I provide this political background to point to how polarizing the topic of supporting those experiencing addiction ultimately became in Lethbridge, inflamed by a generally hostile debate around SCS services and the ARCHES controversy. In the face of these two very different models oriented around harm reduction and abstinence, however, SAGE Clan appeared to offer something unique. As I will discuss in chapter two, SAGE Clan ultimately does not locate their approach within this wider debate between treatment models, but rather, centers it in developing trusting relationships with the people they serve and helping them to access the services they need—whatever these might be—effectively filling in what they describe as "gaps" in existing services.

These gaps manifest in several contexts. Lethbridge has, for example, continued to face difficulties with regards to service offerings since the closure of ARCHES, including a severe lack of supportive housing options and the recent loss of a supportive housing program for women,[28] a medical detox and day treatment program at the local Chinook Regional Hospital limited to only eight beds,[29] the lack of a consistent warming shelter during the winter, and an emergency shelter consistently over-capacity during these same months. Recent attempts at

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[27] Jason Kenney, Twitter post, January 22, 2020, 2:19 p.m., https://twitter.com/jkenney/status/1220093727609253888?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.
[28] David Opinko, "YWCA says lack of funding led to closure of permanent supportive housing in Lethbridge," *Lethbridge News* Now, March 20, 2023, https://lethbridgenewsnow.com/2023/03/20/ywca-says-lack-of-funding-led-to-closure-of-permanent-supportive-housing-in-lethbridge/.
[29] "Chinook Regional Hospital – Detox and Day Treatment," FWBA Architects, accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.fwbarch.com/projects/chinook-regional-hospital-detox-and-day-treatment.

improving access to much needed services in Lethbridge have also proved difficult. When in February 2021 The Mustard Seed was forced to withdraw an application to develop a supportive housing complex in the former Ramada hotel after failing to secure funding, and the following month were denied their application for rezoning to establish a sober shelter by City Council, the organization appeared to be leaving Lethbridge for good.[30,31] In addition to the suggested adoption of a Bear Clan Patrol by LPS, then, the lack of (or limited capacity of) services in the city is also part of the context in which SAGE Clan Patrol locates their emergence. Seeing themselves as a kind of go-between for people experiencing addiction and homelessness and other agencies, SAGE Clan seeks to respond to gaps in existing services, connecting them to the services they need and providing meals and warm clothing, among other donated items. As suggested above, their approach is not one that maps onto any one political party's mandate, or indeed, the polarizing supervised consumption site debate that has coloured discussions around addiction in Lethbridge since the advent of the ARCHES site. Rather, they offer an approach that is premised on connection and helping people however they can, drawing from an emphasis on both lived experience and Blackfoot epistemology. Part of this focus on connection, however, entails a desire to connect with the broader Lethbridge community to assist those experiencing addiction and homelessness, and to work with other organizations to accomplish these same goals. As I will discuss in detail in chapter two, negative experiences in attempting to bridge these gaps have presented challenges for SAGE Clan that have impacted their enthusiasm for

[30] David Opinko, "Mustard Seed pulls application for supportive housing after funding request denied," *Lethbridge News* Now, January 28, 2021, https://lethbridgenewsnow.com/2021/01/28/mustard-seed-pulls-application-for-supportive-housing-after-funding-request-denied/.
[31] Connor Gunn, "Mustard Seed leaving Lethbridge after sober shelter denied," *Lethbridge News* Now, March 24, 2021, https://lethbridgenewsnow.com/2021/03/24/mustard-seed-leaving-lethbridge-after-sober-shelter-denied/.

engaging with other organizations, particularly as they seek to maintain their autonomy and recognition as a fundamentally Blackfoot-led organization.

That SAGE Clan is a Blackfoot-led organization is also important given that First Nations individuals experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate in Lethbridge. The recent Point-in-Time Homeless Count conducted in Lethbridge in December 2022 found that 51% of individuals who participated self-identified as Indigenous, and suggested that this points to a "significant over-representation" given that only 6.6% of Lethbridge residents identified as Indigenous in the 2021 Census.[32] Although not a direct correlate for experiences of addiction, Indigenous peoples were also overrepresented in data on individuals accessing Lethbridge's former supervised consumption site, representing 53% of unique clients from a period of February 28, 2018 to December 15, 2019.[33] This is not to suggest that First Nations peoples have a predisposition to experiencing homelessness and addiction, as the racist discourse that followed the supervised consumption site controversy in Lethbridge often suggested;[34] rather, as the Culture as Treatment model (discussed in an upcoming section) would suggest in its premise, past and ongoing experiences with settler colonialism have contributed to this overrepresentation. It is because of the unique demographic of those experiencing homelessness and addiction in Lethbridge that SAGE Clan emerged as a Blackfoot-led organization, recognizing that healing as a community from historical traumas requires that Blackfoot people assist one another in this process. In recognition of this, during a Blackfoot Language

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[32] Canada, Alberta, Lethbridge, City of Lethbridge, *Lethbridge 2022 Point-in-Time Count: Full Enumeration and Survey Results Report* (Lethbridge: City of Lethbridge, 2022): 23, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.lethbridge.ca/media/hsmps32x/2022-pit-count-report.pdf.

[33] Canada, Alberta, City of Lethbridge, Community Social Development, *Lethbridge Community Wellbeing Needs Assessment Report* (Lethbridge: City of Lethbridge, 2019), accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.lethbridge.ca/livinghere/OurCommunity/Documents/Lethbridge%20Community%20Wellbeing%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report.pdf.

[34] Cran, "'Why do they treat us this way?'"

Symposium that took place in the summer of 2022, Elder Peter Weasel Moccasin proposed a new word for those individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction, Ii'yuuhkua,[35] which Mark described as translating roughly in English to "the collective" or "those we wait for," and as signifying that "no one gets left behind." While indeed, not all of those individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction in Lethbridge are Blackfoot, or necessarily experience these issues concurrently, I have opted to use this word throughout this work in order to better reflect the kinship-based way that SAGE Clan engages with the people they serve, which I will take up in the first chapter, and to assist in a small way in promoting use of this word, which is a goal of the organization.

*Methods*

I first met Mark Brave Rock, the founder of SAGE Clan Patrol, at Sonder Coffee in Lethbridge on the afternoon of May 25, 2022. My supervisor, Dr. Patrick Wilson, had exchanged text messages with Mark during the weeks leading up to this meeting and explained my interest in studying SAGE Clan Patrol for my undergraduate thesis. Mark had graciously agreed to meet us at the café to hear more about the proposed study and tell us more about SAGE Clan.

During this meeting, Mark shared an incredibly detailed history of SAGE Clan's formation and seemed satisfied that I had previously been an outreach volunteer and worked briefly as an Addiction Support Worker, which perhaps suggested to him that my intentions were genuine. He spoke too about the importance of lived experience in this work, cautioning that it cannot be replaced by education, and of the need to establish trust, a lesson that has remained important throughout my project.

[35] An approximate IPA phonetic respelling created by the author (a non-Blackfoot speaker) is eey$^{uh}$khkwa, where /kh/ is pronounced more raspily at the back of the throat, similar to a Scottish lo*ch* or German a*ch*.

My research consisted of standard ethnographic methods, and most centrally, participant observation conducted while acting as a volunteer with SAGE Clan Patrol during three-times weekly patrols. Although my personal life did not always allow for perfect attendance, I was able to produce thirty-seven separate fieldnote entries over the course of the summer. Patrols lasted about 2.5-3 hours and took place on Wednesday and Friday evenings at 7:30 PM and Sunday afternoons at 2:30 PM, with the occasional Friday "late-night" patrol beginning closer to midnight. While patrols were my primary source of observational data, over the course of my fieldwork I was also invited to participate in informal after-patrol meetings at Tim Hortons, tipi raisings, impromptu visits to a local encampment (discussed in detail in chapter two), visits to Kainai and Siksika Nations for speaking events, and Sundance (Aakokatssin).[36] Through this combination of interactions, and since then, I have come to form close friendships with many patrollers, whom I no longer feel comfortable calling "research participants." While claims to friendship have rightly been critiqued in the discipline as an attempt to assert ethnographic authority, and I recognize that my account of SAGE Clan is necessarily a partial one, as is the case with any ethnographic work, I continue to find that my most fruitful moments of learning were facilitated by these kinds of relationships, and that it was connecting with people in this way that also enabled the development of the kind of trust Mark immediately identified as necessary to complete my project. Furthermore, I would suggest that particularly in the case of studying deeply personal or emotionally charged topics (such as studying a group of people as they experience loss, frustration with a medical system that has often failed them, and the ongoing impacts of colonization), social science researchers cannot in good conscience take up the role of the distanced researcher. When I embraced a more hands-on approach—stepping in to

[36] My attendance of Sundance in particular was not for research purposes, but contributed positively to getting to know my interlocuters.

help clients the way I saw other volunteers do it, joining in on good-natured teasing, and sometimes just "hanging out"—I felt more in-tune with the inner workings of patrol, and this became an important part of my "methods," with learning becoming more embodied than observational at times. While a number of these events and conversations have not made their way into this thesis, I could not have written it any other way. Of course, mine is far from a novel experience in conducting ethnographic research and is in fact recognized by many as a necessary part of the project of anthropology.[37]

Ultimately, the relationships I developed with SAGE Clan patrollers spilled past the pre-defined edges of my "time in the field" and continue to this day. Although much more infrequently, I continue to attend patrol and stay in touch with volunteers, which has proved invaluable during the writing process as I have returned to earlier discussions and shared with them different parts of my thesis as it took shape.

While regularly attending patrol and more informal interactions proved the most useful during my research, I also conducted six one-on-one, semi-structured interviews over the summer, and one more informally in the spring of 2023. Five were held with SAGE Clan Team Leads (a white woman [two interviews, the second informal and not recorded], two Backfoot men, and a Métis Cree man), and two were held with employees of Alpha House Society, which formerly operated the city's emergency shelter and which I did not ultimately use in my analysis. Interviews varied from person to person, but broadly centered on the same pre-determined interview schedules designed for SAGE Clan volunteers and health care workers employed at other agencies. The semi-structured nature of these interviews meant they were more informal, taking place at the public library, a Tim Hortons (twice), during patrol, and at a park. Interview

[37] See for example a discussion by Phillippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

times ranged from thirty minutes to nearly two hours. Although I listened to all the interviews again, I transcribed only Mark's interview fully, and the rest were timestamped based on moments I identified as important in the conversation, and which I predicted might contribute to key quotes in the writing stage. While SAGE Clan patrols are attended by individuals of many racial backgrounds—on some patrols outnumbering those of Blackfoot or other FNMI ancestry—due to the nature of my research questions and the individuals who I eventually interviewed, my research has generally privileged the perspective of First Nations volunteers. Although all members of SAGE Clan were given the option of remaining anonymous in this research, all those who appear in this work elected to use their real names.

In my initial research proposal, I had hoped to conduct interviews with a larger number of health care workers employed in the field of mental health and addiction in Lethbridge, in addition to Blackfoot Elders. Over the course of my fieldwork, however, I quickly came to the realization that I was gathering such rich data from attending patrols alone that it would not be necessary to introduce voices outside of SAGE Clan, particularly given that my primary interest was accessing the organization's own understanding of its work. My ability to gather this kind of data was also limited in one instance by my close affiliation with SAGE Clan. In this instance, a local organization that has close ties to SAGE Clan (a number of employees have patrolled with them, and conversely, some patrollers have worked for this organization) stopped returning my emails requesting interviews with staff members despite initial interest after a dispute between members of the two organizations. While I cannot say for certain, I believe the fact that I had been seen by the organization wearing a SAGE Clan vest and spending time at the encampment with the patrollers involved in the disagreement dissuaded them from participating, although I had not been implicated in the event myself, or indeed present at the time. While this was

disappointing, I did not pursue the issue further, and do not feel that it impacted my ability to gather adequate data.

During patrols, I participated as if I were a regular volunteer—by speaking with Ii'yuuhkua and handing out items such as snacks, water, and clothing—while also observing the activity of patrol and speaking with SAGE Clan volunteers. I quickly realized that much like my initial handing out of informed consent paperwork, carrying around a notebook only served to highlight that I was observing, and I had the impression that this made people uneasy and initially, perhaps even doubt the intentions behind my taking up this kind of project.[38] While I gave frequent updates as to the progress of my project, so that my dual role remained clear, I also developed a habit of writing quick jottings during pre-determined "breaks" in patrol when we would wait for everyone to catch up and rest for a while, unless absolutely necessary. When I returned home in the evening—often quite tired—I wrote a few pages of bullets points for fieldnotes, which I expanded on the next morning. This led to producing very detailed, narrative accounts at the beginning of my research, and more "to the point" entries later on when I felt I had a sufficient grasp of what would become the background noise of patrol, including basic details such as the structure and timing of patrol.

My fieldnotes were subsequently printed off, read and re-read, marked up in pencil, and then highlighted according to emergent themes in a manual form of data coding. This was a repetitive, iterative process that allowed me to refine and reframe my themes as my understanding deepened with each new reading. Ultimately, these included themes of family, humour, the role of women, spirituality, kimmapiiyipitssinni (which I later changed to

[38] The small notebook that I dutifully tucked in my SAGE Clan vest for each patrol also became a source of good-natured teasing after I completed my fieldwork, with Keenen recalling when I "came into [their] lives, notebook in hand" in a birthday message.

Niitsitapiikiimapiiyiptssini, discussed in further sections), gaps, racism, connection, lived experience, trust, group tension, relationship with city/police/agencies/band, recovery, reconciliation, reception of research, and reflection (which included my own reflections or moments of reflexivity). Some of these themes figure more prominently in this work as they recurred more frequently, whereas others were ultimately not included due to the limited scope of a thesis completed at the undergraduate level.

*First Nations and Western Approaches to Health*

The strong reaction of the First Nations community when LPS suggested adopting a Bear Clan patrol and subsequently, the repeated emphasis of SAGE Clan Patrol as being Blackfoot-led, alerts us in part to what is understood as a broad distinction between First Nations and Western conceptualizations of health. As Murdena Marshall, a Mi'kmaw Elder notes, her Traditional Knowledges teaches her that "there are four components involved in human wholeness: spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual," and that an individual's health is jeopardized when these are not in balance or harmony.[39] While the concept of balance is generally important in Blackfoot epistemology—particularly in reference to engaging in proper reciprocal relationships with kin,[40] as I will discuss in chapter one—in Canada and the United States this concept has increasingly been taken up as a pan-Indigenous symbol, often represented visually by the medicine wheel.[41] Under this paradigm, health is typically understood as being

[39] Murdena Marshall, Albert Marshall, and Cheryl Bartlett. "Two-Eyed Seeing in Medicine," in *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health, Second Edition*, ed. Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, and Nicole Marie Lindsay (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018), 45.
[40] Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 95.
[41] See for example a discussion from Roselynn Verwoord, Ashley Mitchell, and Jair Machado, "Supporting Indigenous Students through a Culturally Relevant Assessment Model Based on the Medicine Wheel," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 34, no. 1 (2011), https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/supporting-indigenous-students-through-culturally/docview/1002737893/se-2?accountid=12063.

experienced through the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects of the self, although holism and the interrelations between these components are emphasized. Indeed, Mark echoed this during a phone call with me where he described a need to heal the mind, body and spirit when recovering from addiction, explaining that his early frustration with volunteering and working for Western agencies had been a lack of consideration for spirit as well as their "hands-off approach."[42]

The Western health paradigm, in contrast, is typically understood as focusing on the level of the individual, and as Mark pointed to, the realm of the biophysical, typically not integrating the broader conceptions of the self that FNMI conceptualizations variously do. Western understandings of addiction in particular have shifted through time, being understood through various models which have tended to paint it as either a moral failure or disease, placing it strictly in the realm of the biophysical. Beginning with the early 19th century, Caroline Acker examines the different ways in which opioid addiction has been conceptualized under the disease paradigm in the United States.[43] Beginning at this time, the allopathic (or biomedicine) paradigm dominant in the US saw a convergence of different views on opiate use, where it was considered at once "an example of inebriety (…) a functional disorder of disturbed psychological processes, or a moral failing involving a collapse of will."[44] While there is a sentiment that a broader acceptance of the disease model of addiction (and of mental health more broadly) has the potential to reduce the stigma around these health issues, the various conceptualizations pointed to by Acker remain firmly within a Western paradigm that treats only the body (and increasingly

[42] Phone call with Mark Brave Rock, March 17, 2022.
[43] Caroline J. Acker, "Stigma or Legitimation? A Historical Examination of the Social Potentials of Addiction Disease Models," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 25, no. 3 (July 1993), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/14940051_Stigma_or_Legitimation_A_Historical_Examination_of_the_Social_Potentials_of_Addiction_Disease_Models.
[44] Acker, "Stigma or Legitimation?" 198.

the mind) with no serious attention to elements of spirituality, as Mark described. Furthermore, as I will discuss in chapter two, whether treatment focuses on maintaining a hormonal balance[45] or taking personal responsibility for one's actions, the various iterations of the Western disease model consistently focus on the individual level, failing to consider the ways in which addiction can manifest (and so must also be treated) at the community level—a notion central to SAGE Clan's guiding principles and focus on building relationships of trust, which I argue both draws from existing kin relationships and amounts to a "making of kin" in other instances.

Partially in response to the shortcomings of the Western model and a recognition that the trauma and enduring inequities resulting from colonization have led to higher rates of addiction among FNMI people,[46] there has also been an increasing recognition of the value of an approach I am terming broadly "Culture as Treatment."[47] Of the literature I examined, this concept has been described in a number of ways and using different analogies, including "cultural wounds demand cultural medicines,"[48] and "culture as intervention,"[49] and often defined minimally. For my own purposes, I have understood the Culture as Treatment model to be that which recognizes the value of incorporating cultural elements in addiction treatment (or asserts the need to do this), whether this be through a connection to kin, specific spiritual/cultural practices, or land-based

[45] It is interesting to consider that when "balance" has been a theme of the Western approach to addiction treatment, it remains limited to the biological level. See Acker, "Stigma or Legitimation?" 195.
[46] See for example Carrie LaVallie and JoLee Sasakamoose, "Promoting indigenous cultural responsivity in addiction treatment work: the call for neurodecolonization policy and practice," *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* (2021): 7-8, https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2021.1956392.
[47] Of the literature I examined, two authors use this exact term, while others seem simply to allude to it. See for example Joseph P. Gone, "Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma: Theorizing Mechanisms for Indigenous Culture as Mental Health Treatment," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50, no. 5 (May 2013), https://journals.sagepub.com /doi/full/10.1177/1363461513487669.
[48] Michael J. Chandler and William L. Dunlop, "Cultural Wounds Demand Culture Medicines," in *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health: Beyond the Social (Second Edition)*, eds. Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, Nicole Marie Lindsay (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018).
[49] Christina Dobson and Randall Brazzoni, "Land Based Healing: Carrier First Nations' Addiction Recovery Program," *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing* 1, no. 2 (2016): 9, https://journalindigenouswellbeing.co.nz/journal _articles/land-based-healing-carrier-first-nations-addiction-recovery-program/.

activities. As mentioned briefly above, and in the context of addiction among FNMI people, the Culture as Treatment model also takes as its starting point a recognition that ongoing colonization—which has caused a rupture in the connection to culture—has led to the development of addiction among FNMI people, sometimes framed in terms of "historical trauma," suggesting that healing might occur if this disconnect is repaired.[50,51,52] This term, rather than individualize the experience of addiction, "calls attention to the complex, collective, cumulative, and intergenerational psychosocial impacts that resulted from the depredations of past colonial subjugation."[53] A prime example of this approach is the Carrier First Nations' land-based healing program, which is said to be "based on traditional culture" and frames the healing of participants as dual-pronged, from both colonialism and addiction.[54] This is accomplished through a combination of First Nations and Western approaches to health, with programming including daily smudging (which "purif[ies] the mind and spirit"), talking circles, "psychosocial education" sessions on topics such as relapse prevention, sessions with Addictions Counsellors, and other "cultural activities."[55] While the Culture as Treatment approach has gained a fair amount of traction—to the degree that many Western addiction treatment programs now include some form "cultural programming"—there still remains a limited understanding of how specific cultural content may be operationalized in these settings.[56] Being conscious, however, that my

[50] Maggie Brady, "Culture in Treatment, Culture as Treatment: A Critical Appraisal of Developments in Addictions Programs for Indigenous North Americans and Australians," *Social Science & Medicine* 41, no. 11 (1995), https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/027795369500055C.
[51] Warner Adam, "Reshaping the Politics of Health: A Personal Perspective," in *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health: Beyond the Social (Second Edition)*, eds. Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, Nicole Marie Lindsay (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018).
[52] Gone, "Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma."
[53] Gone, "Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma," 683.
[54] Dobson and Brazzoni, "Land Based Healing," 9.
[55] Dobson and Brazzoni, "Land Based Healing," 12.
[56] This is the question of Gone (2013), and while I agree that this is a valid pursuit, I share the hesitancy described by colleagues in an Aboriginal Health course taught by Dr. Janice Victor where this reading was assigned that seeking to understand how culture might be "operationalized" attempts to insert Traditional Knowledge into a Western paradigm in order to validate it. I argue that this risks reducing Traditional Knowledge to discrete cultural

positionality as a white researcher would make it inappropriate to receive certain Knowledge surrounding cultural practices, and particularly those related to ceremony, my interest in this research project was not to answer the question of "operationalization," but rather to use the power of ethnographic methods to understand if and how volunteers might conceive of their work as similar to the logic of Culture as Treatment. In this way, I see this work not as contributing to a definitive measure of Culture as Treatment's "efficacity," but rather, as articulating the value, from SAGE Clan's perspective, of embracing a Blackfoot-led approach in assisting those experiencing addiction and homelessness.

*Beyond the Culture as Treatment Model*

As my summer with SAGE Clan progressed, I came to find myself problematizing what appeared to be the "typical" conceptualization of the Culture as Treatment model (often as articulated by Western organization), which from my perspective, sometimes paints cultural practices as additive or fails to seriously embrace different cultural positionings or epistemologies. Furthermore, the suggestion that culture alone might be applied to the issue of addiction the way medications are administered to treat symptoms in the Western health paradigm did not seem to fully capture the significance of SAGE Clan's work, and it seemed to be at odds with holistic, embodied understandings of culture. While I did not hear explicit references to the Culture as Treatment approach on patrol, SAGE Clan patrollers do see the importance of drawing from a FNMI epistemology to assist other FNMI people experiencing addiction and homelessness. However, this was not necessarily articulated as a distinct

"items," falsely divorcing them from their broader (and necessary) context, while also ignoring the way that Indigenous Ways of Knowing in and of itself represent a scientific approach that should not be seen as inferior to Western positivist dogma.

"approach" taken up intentionally to assist those experiencing addiction, and more often, was framed as a way of assisting kin and of simply being Niitsitapi (a Blackfoot word meaning "the Real People"). What this simplistic framing of Culture as Treatment sometimes fails to capture, from my perspective, is that deeply holistic understanding of health and a way of being with others and in the world that is embodied by FNMI and Blackfoot patrollers in particular.

When I was introduced to the Blackfoot concept of Niitsitapiikimmapiyipittsinni,[57] SAGE Clan Patrol's guiding principle (which I draw my attention to in chapter one), it felt a disservice to this very meaningful and integrated concept that speaks to a broader Blackfoot epistemology to restrain it within an analysis of Culture as Treatment, which I feel is limiting. Niitsitapiikimmapiyipittsinni, which is a way of being in the world and of extending care to others, has implications at the individual, interpersonal, and societal level, speaking to what it means to be Blackfoot, and even how one becomes Blackfoot. Largely implicitly, this concept dictates the proper ways of engaging in reciprocal relationships, and it is by following this teaching that kinship is ultimately (re)asserted during patrol through acts of empathy, the offering of food, and often, humour. Humour, also discussed at length in the first chapter, is a key medium through which patrollers connect to the people they serve and to each other, and it is often used during patrol as a creative way to respond to the ongoing impacts of colonization in small but significant acts of resistance. It also reveals the ways in which patrollers conceive of each other and the people they serve as family, serving as an entry point to discuss the significance of Blackfoot conceptions of kinship and SAGE Clan's broader emphasis on the importance of connection.

[57] An approximate IPA phonetic respelling created by the author (a non-Blackfoot speaker) is neetsitahpeekeemahpeeyipitsinee.

*Extending an Offering from the Past*

Moving beyond the ways in which SAGE Clan conceives of their work, I sought to understand how the organization negotiates the process of working with or alongside other Lethbridge agencies who might make up a different segment of the continuum of care or adopt a different operational philosophy from that of SAGE Clan. In doing so, I learned of a tension within SAGE Clan's desire to work with others, on one hand, being a grassroots organization that is protective of their action-oriented approach and flexibility—not being tied to organizational or bureaucratic mandates—while also maintaining a strong desire to extend their approach to other organizations as "an offering from the past" that must include the participation of the broader community in order to be successful. Gaps in existing services—evidenced clearly in the case of Tent City, discussed in detail in chapter two—produce sites of activity, creativity, and negotiation, where SAGE Clan patrollers alternatively decide whether to act independently or to work with other agencies, attempting to reconcile the value they place on community collaboration with past negative experiences with these same organizations who engage in acts of governmentality directed at their organization. In chapter two, I explore how this tension reveals reconciliation, rather than decolonization, to be a more apt analytic through which to understand the ways in which SAGE Clan reads their approach vis à vis those of other organizations in the city. While I suggest that aspects of SAGE Clan's approach might still be understood as decolonial in nature, more important to patrollers is assisting the people they serve in accessing whatever services they may be seeking, regardless of whether this entails going to treatment or includes more distinctly "cultural" practices.

*Walking With SAGE Clan Patrol*

In the subsequent pages, I wish to invite readers to accept SAGE Clan's offering from the past and to walk with them in my own way: by presenting an ethnographic account that I hope captures the spirit of this organization, the work to assist kin they so tirelessly pursue with compassion and patience, and how this is done with a sense of hope against the backdrop of repeated failures at multiple levels of government to address these worsening crises. In spite of this, SAGE Clan Patrol continues to draw from their grassroots, Blackfoot-led origins to creatively work towards healing their community in what I ultimately argue represents a powerful relocating of addiction as a responsibility of the community and a call to Lethbridge residents to adopt a similar responsibility of care.

## Chapter One: Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni

On July 1st, 2022, I stood inside a painted tipi erected on the grounds of a school yard in Bowness, Calgary, set up for that year's "Bowness Fest," a celebration of Canada Day which included a number of local vendors, food trucks, live music, and under my feet, a grassy area marked on the site map as the "Indigenous Pavilion." I felt shielded inside the tipi, which that day had served to block out a sudden downpour that had forced the vendors to quickly pack up their wares, which comprised of an array of clothing, jewelry, and bath products typical of Southern Alberta farmer's markets and trade shows. Having anticipated with my fellow patrollers that our presence at this particular event would be met with a sense of discomfort, I also felt protected from the eager, smiling faces of the attendees donning red and white, which seemed in stark contrast to the somber message conveyed by our orange t-shirts and reflective vests. Despite our initial hesitations, however, the event had been successful so far, and our reception warm; the earlier comment of a woman who noted Josh's orange shirt and called out, "It's Canada Day, you know!" was quickly overshadowed by the curious faces of children lining up to see inside the tipi, and their parents who gently told them about how people "used to live in them."

I was watching Mark Brave Rock inspect a banner that had moments ago been strung across two poles near the back of the tipi, expertly secured by his knots, a task that Mark was rather particular about. Once initiated, volunteers often exchanged knowing glances waiting for his frustration to bubble to the surface when someone did not follow his directions exactly, fodder for some good-natured teasing. Today, the banner had the double purpose of advertising the organization to those who came inside and discouraging people from disturbing the smudge box that had been used moments ago to bless the tipi. It was made of white vinyl and had the

Blackfoot word Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssin written in bold across the top.[58] Directly below was the SAGE Clan logo, designed by Mark—an eagle, outlined in black, with sage sprouting from its center and extending to the tips of its wings, capturing three white arrows pointing upwards and crossed over one another. Behind the bird's silhouette was the outline of a yellow sun. On either side of the logo, in bullet points, were the words that make up the acronym *SAGE*: serve, assist, guard, and engage.

Later, Mark would tell me that this acronym had not been intentional from the start, but rather had "just worked out that way," and was something that he had not questioned. I would come to realize that this explanation—one of serendipity, or more significantly, of an unanticipated gift from the past—was one often used by Mark to describe the series of events that led SAGE Clan Patrol to become what is today, including the presence of the word Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni on that banner, which would come to capture the organization's values, goals, and affect. What had begun as a grassroots movement, unplanned and taking shape as volunteers began those first few patrols, eventually came to be recognized by Mark as something akin to a traditional Blackfoot Society, which he described as typically being given a specific task, theirs being to assist with the emerging opioid crisis.[59] Mark also frequently speaks of SAGE Clan as an "offering from the past," indexing once again how the organization draws its approach from the model of Blackfoot Societies and how this model is being taken up in a contemporary period to deal with contemporary issues. After standing there for a moment, it finally dawned on me that I should ask Mark what the word meant, having not seen it or the banner before.

[58] In fact, this is a slight misspelling. Mark spells this term Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, which is the spelling that I have adopted and used throughout.
[59] Phone call with Mark Brave Rock, March 17, 2023.

"You don't know about that one yet?" Mark responded immediately, and I felt almost guilty for having asked. Mark is a man with a steady presence that commands respect without the kind of flashiness others require, that day wearing a blue plaid button up shirt, ever-present blue jeans, running shoes, and a ball cap that kept his graying, shoulder length hair out of his eyes. Among members of SAGE Clan, he is considered an Elder, valued for his personal insight as a former "street person"[60] and seen as the final authority for most decisions. Even when not on patrol, it was not uncommon for volunteers to invoke what "Mark said" or to withhold a final decision until they could speak with him about it. At sixty years old, no one would have blamed Mark if he decided to take a more permanent step back from the organization he had co-founded in 2018 to spend more time with his twenty-eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, as he sometimes talked to me about doing. Yet Mark continued to assist Ii'yuuhkua (as mentioned in the introduction, a Blackfoot word meaning "those we wait for") in the downtown, not infrequently spending entire nights driving around in his truck, stopping to talk with people and keeping an eye on things. Mark is a well-known individual in the downtown core, nearly always called out to by the people SAGE Clan serves by name. One Sunday patrol when he was not in attendance, Mark suddenly pulled up in his truck at the bus station where we were taking a break, parking it in the bus lane and smiling broadly as he got out. When I commented that he might not be allowed to park there, Keenen jumped in with a teasing tone clearly meant to address Mark, commenting that everyone knows Mark downtown, and that he can park wherever he wants.[61]

[60] Mark uses this term to describe himself and other people who experience homeless and addiction.
[61] …and a few seconds later, added "I've never seen him move like that before!" when Mark had to dash back to his truck to make way for an arriving bus.

After admitting that I didn't know the word in question yet, Mark took to breaking it down for me, listening patiently as I stumbled through the pronunciation. The root word, Niitsitapi, was one I knew, and meant "the Real People," which denoted the Blackfoot. Mark, however, took this a step further, adding that it could mean anyone, "Indigenous and non-Indigenous" if they walked with SAGE Clan and embraced their way of assisting those in need. This sentiment can also be seen on the SAGE Clan website, which asserts that "'we all become Niitsitapi' walking with good spirit for our homeless, addicted, mentally challenged and marginalized"[62,63] and Mark's assertion that:

> Before…Niitsitapi was me, [it] wasn't you. But no, Niitsitapi is Real People. And it pertains to anybody. It is what you attain in life, to be a Real person, a real human being. [Inaudible] being a good person, that's Real People.[64]

Mark described the second half of the word as meaning "caring, sharing, loving, looking out for" those the organization assists; kimmapiiyipitssinni is also sometimes translated as "empathy" in English.[65] Taken together, Mark explained how these two elements, "the Real People," "caring, sharing, loving, looking out for one another" were done as a "way of life" or as a society. It was clear in the way Mark repeated this back to me, emphasizing with hand gestures, that he found it difficult to get the true nature of this word across to me; indeed, Mark would

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[62] "Our Story," SAGE Clan Patrol website, accessed October 12, 2022, http://sageclanpatrol.org/sage-clan-our-story/.
[63] As I have discussed in previous sections, since June 2022, there have been conversations within the organization to move away from the terms "homeless and addicted" to describe the people the organization assists, in line with the coining of a new term by Elder Peter Weasel Moccasin at the Blackfoot Language Symposium this same summer. However, this is not to suggest that the terms "homeless and addicted" necessarily dominated the conversation beforehand; more frequently, I have heard First Nations volunteers use the term "loved ones," "family," or "our people," whereas white or non-First Nations volunteers tend to talk about "people on the street," and "the unhoused," although that is not to say that there is no crossover.
[64] Interview with Mark Brave Rock, July 6, 2022.
[65] As I will discuss in further sections, some SAGE Clan Patrol volunteers conceive differently of how to treat someone with empathy, noting that it should not be conflated with sympathy or just "feeling bad" for someone.

later comment that it was difficult to translate Blackfoot words into English, because they just "have a deeper meaning" in Blackfoot. Such is the complexity of translating embodied cultural concepts into a language other than their own. Standing in the tipi that day, it was indeed hard to wrap my head around the different elements of the word: what is the significance of The Real People? How is empathy embraced at every level, as a way of life? Continuing to walk with SAGE Clan, however, I came to realize that part of the difficulty in describing Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni is that it needs to be practiced and felt. There is no single act or ethnographic example I could tease out that demonstrates this practice: rather, it is made up of a constellation of interactions, from addressing someone on the street by name, to invoking kin ties, to encouraging them to come get a lunch, to teasing them and accepting teasing in return. In this way, Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni is also practiced with a degree of closeness not typical of Western patient-practitioner relationships, leading to a deeper, arguably "truer" degree of trust, a concept that was also central to my learning from SAGE Clan that summer.[66]

To truly understand how SAGE Clan Patrol embraces Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, then, one must walk with them, an action which necessarily has two meanings. The first points to the centrality of patrol in SAGE Clan's work: it is a common refrain that patrol takes place "rain or shine," shining a light on the importance of consistency and reliability in building trusting

[66] James Clifford has critiqued a tendency in anthropological writing where ethnographers structure their work temporally from a period of "early ignorance, misunderstanding, and lack of contact" to the eventual development of an "adult" perspective of "disabused knowledge"; following the analogy of childhood, this style of writing tends to allow the ethnographer and their positionality to disappear into the background, so that they are accepted as knowledgeable spokespeople of the group they are studying. Orin Starn has rightly added that this further leads to an obfuscation of "the persistence of ignorance and miscommunication" in fieldwork, cementing ethnographic authority by eliminating all doubt of uncertainty. See *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 40, and *Nightwatch: The Politics of Protest in the Andes* (Durham: Duke University, 1999), 13. While it may function in the same way inadvertently, my goal in pointing out that it took time to understand the concept of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni is meant only to point to the fact that Blackfoot is a deeply embodied language, and that in order to truly understand this concept, it needs to be practiced. This is not to suggest that my understanding of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni represents a complete or authoritative account, but rather to showcase a moment where I felt the ethnographic method of participant observation was particularly well aligned with the subject matter.

relationships with those they serve. The simple act of going on patrol is said by Mark to be "the magic" of SAGE Clan because it serves as an avenue through which to connect directly with clients "in their own environment" and at times when they are more likely to be "out." This is often contrasted with other organizations who may only operate during business hours and cannot always meet with clients on an on-call basis or in times of crisis, and are even less likely to do so in places like alleyways, Galt Gardens (a park in the downtown core), or Tent City, discussed in detail in chapter two.[67] It is this practical operational difference, coupled with specific anecdotal examples of negative experiences with particular agencies (experienced by both clients and SAGE Clan volunteers, some of which I witnessed to this summer) that have contributed to an uneven degree of trust, where SAGE Clan is perhaps felt to be more approachable to clients.[68] Despite these differences and the occasional disagreement, however, Mark remains invested in working with other agencies, seeing the participation of all community members as central to SAGE Clan's broader impact, and to assisting vulnerable community members as fully as possible. In Mark's view, other agencies have a positive role to play if they engage seriously in SAGE Clan's approach:

> Give SAGE Clan a chance. Walk with us, don't try and walk ahead of us, don't try and walk behind us and watch us with your group or whatever. You know. Just besides us, and we'll learn together.[69]

[67] "Tent City," which grew out of the intensifying affordable housing, homelessness, and addiction crises facing Southern Alberta, was the term frequently used by volunteers (and residents alike) to describe an encampment that was set up in the field next to the Civic Centre running track in downtown Lethbridge from June to October 2022, approximately.
[68] Due to the scope of my research project, established in my ethics application, it was not possible to interview Ii'yuuhkua for the purpose of this study, and to capture their feelings about SAGE Clan and other agencies. My view that Ii'yuuhkua trust SAGE Clan more than some other Lethbridge agencies is purely observational and based in part on my own previous work experience in this sector.
[69] Interview with Mark Brave Rock, July 6, 2022.

To walk with SAGE Clan requires truly embracing the approach of the organization and goes far beyond the physical act: appreciating that it is Blackfoot-led, understanding it as an offering from the past, as discussed in the introduction and further in an upcoming section, and following the direction (or teachings) of Mark. Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, importantly, should be embraced not only by individuals, but at a community level and as a way of life.

*The Magic of Patrols*

As discussed above, SAGE Clan Patrol's primary form of operation are their three-times weekly patrols which take place in the downtown core. While patrols offer a reliable, barrier-free point of contact for Ii'yuuhkua, allowing them to receive a meal, clothing donations, and assistance in accessing needed services (ex: related to detox, treatment, mental health, sexual violence advocacy, employment, etc.), there is also a powerful symbolism embodied in the act of walking itself. In her work, aptly titled *Trekking Through History* (2002), Laura Rival discusses the way in which the Huaorani people understand their territory and their place within it through the act of walking, an activity they take great pleasure in and which is akin to "walking through a living history book in which natural history and human history merge seamlessly."[70] While not acknowledged specifically by FNMI or Blackfoot volunteers, I suggest that there is a similar significance when Blackfoot people walk through the downtown core that is encompassed within their traditional territory, their continued presence serving to challenge narratives around the incompatibility of Indigenous bodies and urban spaces.[71] This act of walking in service to

[70] Laura Rival, *Trekking Through History: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002), 1.
[71] For a general discussion of First Nation urbanization, see Evelyn Peters, "'Urban' and 'Aboriginal': An Impossible Contradiction?" in *City Lives and City Forms: Critical Research and Canadian Urbanism*, ed. Jon Caulfield (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uleth/detail.action?docID=3254948.

others—an approach markedly different from that of other organizations, which might similarly engage in outreach but generally have access to an office building and tend to schedule appointments—is in its physicality a powerful assertion of volunteers' enduring connection to this land. Much like the forest of the Huaorani, Treaty 7 territory is home to a collection of sites, memories, and stories inscribed on the landscape and important to Blackfoot epistemology; the urban landscape is no exception, Blackfoot people having long been connected to this space even when limited in their movement by the pass system.

Patrols themselves, however, remain friendly but pragmatic events. They begin at the Lethbridge Pregnancy Care Centre on 8th Street South, for the simple fact that this parking lot is close to the Galt Gardens, often the first stop on patrol, and parking is free by the time patrols begin on weekday evenings. On a typical patrol, volunteers arrive anywhere from twenty minutes early onwards, some tasked with bringing "the gear" that they have been storing since the previous patrol, others bringing the bagged lunches prepared by SAGE Clan volunteers at a local church, and most simply bringing themselves. Patrols typically host around fifteen individuals, but sometimes there are as few as five present or more than twenty. Larger patrols typically occur when another organization is invited to attend, which over the summer often included members of the Blood Tribe Opioid Response team. Other groups in my time as a SAGE Clan volunteer have included a group of social work students, members of the Crazy Indian Brotherhood (CIB), firefighters, and EMS recruits, some of who participated in patrols arranged specifically to get them acquainted with people on the street (discussed in chapter two in the case of EMS recruits). Lunches are transported by way of canvas wagons, of which there are typically 4-5 in use at any given patrol. Patrol often begins with friendly conversations over cigarettes and Tim Hortons coffee, enjoyed huddled near the entryway of the Pregnancy Centre

until the volunteer with the gear arrives.[72] Then, wordlessly, a handful of the volunteers will break off from their conversations, snuffing out their smokes or keeping them in their mouths while they help to set up the wagons and carry over the rest of the gear. This consists of two "search" backpacks (or search bags) with diverse contents used by a group of patrollers whose job is to search for discarded injection supplies and people in distress: typically, they carry an assortment of Narcan or Naloxone kits, small black sharps containers, larger yellow sharps containers, small tongs for picking up discarded needles, miniature first aid kits, and four walkie-talkies (always referred to as radios), but sometimes they are also home to the odd flashlight or fateful discovery made during patrol, like an ID or cellphone.

A red Rubbermaid tub dutifully hosts many of the same supplies, plus odds and ends such as hand sanitizer, medical gloves, and more first aid supplies. Depending on how easy it is to get Naloxone and Narcan orders at a given time, there may also be additional brown cardboard boxes of either if there is a chance for the organization to stock up. Finally, there is a bag of vests for those who are not Team Leads or otherwise granted the privilege of taking one home each patrol: they are black, overlayed with a yellow reflective material, and each bears a SAGE Clan patch depicting the organization's logo above the right breast pocket. Some vests are decorated further, often those belonging to Team Leads, and may include a purple ribbon for opioid overdose awareness and patches or beaded Every Child Matters pins.

At this point in patrol set-up, lunches will often not have arrived quite yet, likely due to the personality of particular patrollers more than anything. Karen, a retired elementary schoolteacher, lovingly nicknamed "Grandma SAGE" by Keenen, is more often than not the one

[72] Cigarettes figured so prominently during patrol, in fact, that I was often reminded of the need to write about their importance in my thesis (while also frequently discouraged from taking up the habit myself, although I became known to always carry a lighter and occasionally, a pack to hand out).

to offer up the backseat and trunk of her Honda CR-V, and always arrives to patrol early. She chats with each volunteer, asking them how they are doing and how they have been since last patrol, particularly if she hasn't seen them in a while, while they set up the wagons and move everything over to the sidewalk in front of the Pregnancy Centre. Not too long after, another volunteer will arrive with five or more flats of bottled water, and 2-3 large cardboard boxes, open at the top and almost overflowing with brown paper bags: the lunches.

Lunches are made the day of patrol at the Amazing Grace Community Church on the north side of the city by SAGE Clan volunteers and the occasional volunteer from the church itself. SAGE Clan Patrol does not have an office, and so the organization makes use of a small pantry, half of a fridge, and prep space granted to them by the church for free. Typically, lunches consist of a sandwich—either a "meat" (most often bologna or ham and cheese) or "PB&J" (most often made with raspberry jam)—and a few other small snacks, including soft granola bars, fruit cups, or a bag of chips. There are also particular days when specific foods are handed out: on "Muffin Sundays" one of the patroller's, Glen's, wife Leanne drops off batches of muffins that the pair arrange to have baked through an independent Facebook page where volunteers can sign up to cover a week. During my summer with SAGE Clan, a second specific day emerged, coined by volunteer Taylor as "Weiner Wednesday," which consists of a boiled hotdog and bun, bag of chips and other snacks, and a handful of ketchup and mustard packets. While this is the consistent format of lunches, there are exceptions when organizations or other individuals may offer to make lunches for a patrol, provide additional ones, or when a local foodbank will drop off food items, most notably donations of sandwiches, paninis, and baked goods from a local Starbucks via one of the food banks. A meal often received with fondness is stew and warm frybread, made fresh by volunteers.

The beginning of patrol is a steady stream of moving parts: volunteers catching up with each other, sharing a cigarette, looking through the bag of vests for the size they prefer, and helping to arrange bagged lunches and bottled water into the wagons. Wagons are essentially divided in two, one half hosting water bottles stacked horizontally, the other with sandwich bags tucked closely together. Depending on what other items are to be given out on patrol—extra chips, granola bars, foodbank donations, bags of feminine hygiene products, warm clothes—another wagon will often hold these and any additional bottles of water. In winter months, I am told, a wagon will sometimes host a large carafe of hot chocolate, a welcome addition to the typical food offerings which, albeit appreciated, do very little to stave off the chill of Alberta's winters.

Once the wagons are set up, volunteers naturally begin to arrange themselves into a circle around them, continuing to chat while some prepare search bags. This shifting to a circle is both in preparation for the instructions to be given by whoever is leading, and for the prayer that marks the beginning of each patrol, which requires that all the food be encircled while it is prayed over. The sharing of the Blackfoot prayer to mark the start of each patrol is perhaps the most explicitly "cultural" or "spiritual" element of patrol, but as I hope to demonstrate, Blackfoot epistemology guides SAGE Clan's approach from start to finish.

On the night of my first patrol, directionally challenged as I am, I didn't understand the directions provided by Mark over text and arrived late after finally noticing a collection of reflective vests that I recognized as belonging to SAGE Clan gathered in front of the Pregnancy Centre. This was not how I had intended my first day of fieldwork to go, but I quickly gathered my courage and approached the circle, feeling the eyes of many volunteers on me and exchanging a warm smile with one of the young women who had turned towards me when she

heard my footsteps approaching. Mark was addressing the group, as I would learn he always does to mark the beginning of patrol when he is in attendance. For most of the summer, however, Mark was busy with personal matters, and had entrusted SAGE Clan to his Team Leads. This had ultimately established unwritten rules around addressing the group and prayer that were not broken once during my time spent with SAGE Clan. If Mark is in attendance, he always addresses the group first, often to speak about the work SAGE Clan does and highlight its mission, or to address any problems the group may be having. This is teasingly referred to as his "speech," and is always followed by more specific instructions from Josh, who will update the group on upcoming events, make note of any people they need to find (often at the request of worried family members, to follow up on a health concern, or because they have a detox bed available), and assign volunteers to either "lunches," to hand out food, or "search." If Mark is not present, Josh may give a similar speech, or may simply get to the details. When Mark is present, he always delivers the Blackfoot prayer; if he is not, Josh, who is Métis Cree, encourages an older Blackfoot patroller and childhood friend of Mark's, Eric, to do so, who never presumes this responsibility despite the fact that he is the only person besides Mark I have heard deliver it.[73] On even rarer occasions, when neither Mark nor Eric are in attendance, I have heard Josh deliver a non-denominational prayer in English, and once, a white volunteer deliver one in English directed to Creator.

On this particular night, Mark was addressing not only volunteers, but also a group of recovery coaches who worked in Kainai, and I recognized immediately that what he told the group echoed in many ways what he had shared with my supervisor and I upon our first meeting with him to discuss the possibility of my project. Mark identified himself to the group as a "street

[73] In January 2023, after having completed my fieldwork but continuing to act as a volunteer with SAGE Clan, a younger Blackfoot patroller, Skylar, learned and began delivering the prayer.

person," having experienced homelessness and addiction earlier in his life, and with this, the importance of lived experience, noting that although education can act as a tool to helping people with addiction (and so is valuable) it ultimately must operate in tandem with this kind of experience in order to truly be effective. Mark's speech this evening felt to me very intentional, echoing our first conversation when he had also been adamant that no amount of education could supersede lived experience. This oft-repeated sentiment reveals a concerning theme, however, that Mark is less likely broach directly in front of an audience: Mark's continued difficulty in being taken seriously by City officials and other community organizations, which I discuss further in chapter two. He has on a few occasions spoken to me about a tension between being valued for his experiences but also doubted because of them. While Mark is often asked to participate on committees and in discussions around homelessness and addiction because of his lived experience and position in the downtown, the fact that this knowledge comes from his own past struggles is also routinely weaponized against him, where he is, in his own words, constructed by bureaucrats and officials (those who are typically understood as "educated") as a "stupid Indian" who "doesn't know what he's talking about."[74]

Once Mark had finished addressing the group, the crowd of volunteers began to be split up by Josh and Jasmine, both Team Leads, who assigned people to either a lunch or search crew. Mark invited me to come with him on search with two members of the Blood Tribe Chief and Council, introducing my project to them quite enthusiastically, and encouraging me to ask him any questions I had. We made our way down the block, turning right at CASA towards the Galt Gardens, where we would start our patrol under a still-warm sun and amidst a crowd of smiling faces in vests.

[74] Mark Brave Rock, panel at University of Lethbridge, November 1, 2022.

*First Nations Humour*

I would learn of the role humour plays in patrol and the larger work of SAGE Clan Patrol almost immediately, and quite to my surprise. While patrolling that first night with Mark, one of the first people our group approached in the park was a woman sitting a short distance from the path, clutching a colourful eyeshadow pallet in one hand and a small brush in the other, in the process of doing her eye makeup. Expecting that we would simply ask the woman how her night was going and let her know that there was another group of volunteers in the park with lunches, I found myself taken aback when Mark, with a grin, whistled at the woman, who turned around smiling and laughing to look at him. This was followed up with a comment from Mark about whether she was painting watercolour with her pallet, which was again met with laughter, before he asked how she had been doing. New to me, it became clear as my summer with SAGE Clan Patrol progressed that this kind of humour among clients and volunteers themselves—which could range from goodhearted, to lewd, to dark—is used not only in the addictions sector, but also as a "coping mechanism" in dealing with trauma in the Blackfoot and broader FNMI communities, as it was so often put to me. In fact, there was a concern among some Team Leads early in my fieldwork that because of the prevalence of this type of humour, which they classified as "First Nations'," and as a white woman who was not accustomed to it, I would become offended by their jokes, and particularly their teasing around race.

Rather, I found that my being white and participating in a Blackfoot-led organization had little effect on my sense of belonging, and while some of the jokes I endured or heard shared between volunteers were certainly coded as being about race, most of them in fact coalesced around shared or intergenerational trauma or took the form of generalized teasing. Perceived class differences, for instance, seemed to take precedence over or otherwise coded for racialized

difference in teasing directed at me. I famously earned the nickname "Tupperware" when I brought a large container of sliced watermelon to a potluck hosted in partnership between SAGE Clan Patrol and Fresh Start Recovery Centre. Keenen commented on what he perceived to be the "fanciness" of these containers, contrasted with Blackfoot families' use of margarine containers to store their leftovers, joking to the group, "she has *money*" to resounding laughter.[75] My insistence that we had also used margarine containers to store leftovers in my childhood home was in vain, and for the rest of the evening if the conversation directed itself towards the organization's need for funding (as it often does), Keenen gave me a pointed glance, starting the laughter again.[76] Another oblique reference came from Armande during a late-night patrol in July, when our group of patrollers was taking a break and sitting on the steps of a business while some smoked, joking that onlookers would probably think the group was homeless and that I was their social worker.[77] The only time I can recall in which my whiteness was used explicitly as a source of humour was in order to tease a client who I had offered a hand to stand up while in the Galt Gardens on a Sunday patrol in July. Unaware that I was being "hustled" by the man, who did not really need my help to get to his feet, Keenen chastised him, saying, "you're gonna make

[75] Similarly, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld demonstrates the close interaction between race and class—articulated through consumption patterns—in discussing the nicknames of two interlocutors, known as "Chevrolet" and "Bread," which denote one man's proximity to cosmopolitanism and the other's attempt to attain it, respectively. See Rudi Colloredo-Mansfield, *The Native Leisure Class: Consumption and Cultural Creativity in the Andes* (Chicago: The University of Chicxago, 1999), 173-174.
[76] The nickname has since stuck, to the point of my being gifted a new Tupperware set by Keenen for my birthday.
[77] It is worth noting that of the six volunteers present that evening (myself included), two were white. Mikala, a former Team Lead who is also white was not included in the joke perhaps because she had been a volunteer with SAGE Clan Patrol for so long that she was understood as "more First Nations" than me. What made Armande's joke land, however, was the fact that despite onlookers' first impressions, I was indeed not a social worker, implying perhaps that as Mark described, the category of Niitsitapi was also open to me. Andrew Canessa has discussed similar instances during his fieldwork in Bolivia in which he was understood by the villagers of Wila Kjarka to adopt "Indian" traits through actions such as carrying his own pack up the mountain or working the fields—behaviours not practiced by white people. See Andrew Canessa, *Intimate Indigeneities: Race, Sex, and History in the Small Spaces of Andean Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

a little white girl help you up?" causing the group of Ii'yuuhkua and volunteers alike—the man included—to burst into laughter.

It was experiencing this kind of good-natured teasing that helped me to better understand SAGE Clan's approach of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, and in particular, how their use of casual conversation and humour with clients figures into this. The same man who Keenen had teased for requesting my help in getting to his feet had a few moments later, upon commenting that he was cold, had an emergency blanket draped over him with excessive enthusiasm, his face fully covered as he lay on the ground while Keenen, in exaggerated flourishes, tucked his feet in as if there were a race to accomplish the task. It was not lost on me that what we were witnessing was possibly very sad: an elderly man who, for whatever reason,[78] was laying on the concrete of the Galt Gardens amphitheatre, cold. However, SAGE Clan volunteers did not treat the situation with pity, and instead behaved casually, engaging with Ii'yuuhkua much like friends or family would, which almost always included the use of humour. Much like Clifford Geertz argues is the case in Bali, for Blackfoot people, "to be teased is to be accepted,"[79] and it was clear in his laughter and in how he offered no protest to Keenen's theatrics that the man took comfort in this; however, I would suggest that something more significant than mere acceptance took place. Indeed, as was often pointed out to me explicitly by volunteers, as well as through the constant stream of shared last names and discussions between clients and Ii'yuuhkua about shared relatives, this level of comfort perhaps stems in some instances from direct kin relations, both of friends and family, which are (re)affirmed in the act of patrolling. As discussed in an upcoming

[78] Not all those who spend time in the Galt Gardens are experiencing homelessness, although they are often marked this way. Some may be precariously housed, not define their living situation in these terms, or simply be visiting family that is unhoused.
[79] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play" Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972): 4, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024056.

section, for Keenen, this is reason enough to not use the word “client,” a term I had previously imagined as a neutral way of addressing those who SAGE Clan Patrol serves, coming from my own experience working in the addictions sector.

Joking also remains an important coping mechanism for FNMI volunteers, who share in intergenerational trauma stemming from settler colonialism, and especially in the context of the often emotionally difficult work that is community outreach. This was emphasized for me on my second patrol, during a smoke break at the bus station, when what had started out as a light-hearted conversation around some perhaps “outdated” parenting techniques volunteers had endured (tugging on ears, etc.) quickly transformed into a serious topic when Keenen commented, hardly having finished chuckling, that they should all receive money for what they experienced as the children of residential school survivors. While others may have read this response as off colour, or flippant—and indeed, that was my own initial reaction—it should instead be understood as an acknowledged approach among FNMI people more broadly to cope with the trauma they have faced. Asking my friends to reflect on First Nations’ humour a few months later, telling them I was working on a section about it for my thesis, the notion that humour serves as a coping mechanism was reiterated explicitly, Jasmine noting that in telling jokes, people will tend to bring up things they normally wouldn’t and that they might feel uncomfortable or ashamed of, as if to take the sting out of it. On another occasion, when I asked Armande why he thought people joke about trauma, he spoke about connecting with other people through humour who had faced similar circumstances of abuse to his, and “not letting it have power over you.” Skylar likewise addressed the ability of humour to relieve stress by “getting it off your chest,” repeating with a laugh the refrain that “laughter is medicine.” It was also not uncommon for volunteers to recount to one another the occasionally funny or shocking

behaviour or comments of the people they served, especially those they knew well and interacted with on a frequent basis. While again this might seem cold or even meanspirited, this was never done unkindly, and is rather a reflection of the closeness between these individuals and particular volunteers, as well as a typical approach taken by health care workers more broadly to cope with the emotionally difficult work they do.[80] Over the course of the summer, I also had many conversations with Josh about the need—from both our perspectives—to find humour in moments like this, or else the seriousness of the situation would weigh you down, preventing you from helping anyone at all.

While when asked directly, First Nations volunteers tended almost unanimously to describe their self-asserted category of humour as a way of "coping," it became apparent that there was something significant in the pattern of topics this kind of joking tended to address, including addiction, intergenerational trauma, residential school, and structural racism. This is not to suggest that all joking on patrol has this same serious subtext—more often than not, joking was situational or took the form of teasing. However, that this particular category of joking was cast off to me as "First Nations humour," and was understood to be something I might not typically have access to, or even potentially become offended by (Jasmine had gently prefaced her concern by asking if I "had any native friends") indicates that there is a thematic significance to these jokes. Ultimately, I argue that they have a subversive-like quality and can be understood as pointing to tensions in the social order. Donna Goldstein, in her work on Brazilian "black humour" argues that humour is a way to "[express] sentiments that are difficult to communicate

[80] See for example Cindy Cain, "Integrating Dark Humour and Compassion: Identities and Presentations of Self in the Front and Back Regions of Hospice," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 41, no. 6 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241612458122 for a discussion of humour among hospice health care workers. For a general discussion of common ethical debates surrounding this kind of humour, see Katie Watson, "Gallows Humour in Medicine," *Hastings Center Report* 41, no. 5 (2011): 37-45, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1552-146X.2011.tb00139.x.

publicly or that point to areas of discontent in social life," revealing both "cracks in the system and the masked or more subtle ways that power is challenged."[81] I am here suggesting that First Nations humour, as articulated in the context of SAGE Clan patrols, points to a historical "discontent" in social life that has placed FNMI people in a socially stratified position, acting as a subtle challenge to the logic of the systems of settler colonialism and white supremacy. While Goldstein recognized the subversive potential of humour, more interestingly, in my view, her work also points to the way in which joking illuminates how individuals navigate the intersecting boundaries of race, sex, and class. For Goldstein, this is both about understanding the ways in which people make sense of their lives, as well as locating apparent cracks in society and larger systems of power.[82] I take these cracks to represent not necessarily challenges to the dominant hegemonic narrative, but rather moments of tension, absurdity, and incongruity that are humorous because of these very qualities.

This incongruity was amplified by the fact that I and other non-First Nations volunteers were brought into jokes that pointed to the endurance of the very systems of structural inequality that we benefit from as a function of white supremacy; while on one hand the colour of my skin represented the "white people" implicitly indexed in these sorts of jokes, that they were shared with me suggests I was *expected* to laugh, and perhaps to be somewhat incompatible with the category of whiteness the jokes addressed and that I was "supposed" to conform to. One such example occurred on a rainy Sunday patrol in July while "on search" with Josh and Keenen. We had just finished cutting through the Lethbridge Public Library to see if there was anyone inside to check in with, and after coming up unsuccessful, exited through the doors across the street

[81] Donna Goldstein, *Laughter out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 5.
[82] Goldstein, *Laughter out of Place*.

from the encampment discussed in a later section, where we saw two police vehicles parked. Josh asked if we wanted to go and see what was going on, and we agreed, Keenen commenting that we had better take the crosswalk instead of jaywalking. I joked about being ticketed by the officers and Keenen, without missing a beat, replied, "just us, though," and the three of us laughed. Without saying so explicitly, it was clear that the "us" Keenen was referring to were him and Josh, and that he was indexing the history of negative experiences between racialized people and police, and specifically, between LPS and Blackfoot people. It was a joke, but only because it could very well happen.

This reading of humour among FNMI volunteers lends itself to obvious correlates in social theory, including James Scott's "weapons of the weak"[83] and Max Gluckman's early discussion of "catharsis" or blowing off steam in rituals of rebellion[84]—particularly Skylar's comment about "getting it off your chest" in the latter case. In his seminal work of the same title, Scott explores an "unwritten history of resistance"[85] which, as opposed to large-scale or more overt attempts at revolution, occur in the everyday by way of "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth."[86] Rather than challenge authority openly—those who "seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest" from the peasant class Scott uses to frame his analysis—the power of these small, counterhegemonic acts stems from their subtly and ability to take place under the nose of oppressors.[87] Further, they exist as proof that the project of hegemony is never completed, and

[83] James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[84] Max Gluckman, "Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa," in *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 126.
[85] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 28.
[86] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 29.
[87] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 29.

that the ideology of the dominant class is not universally acceded by the subordinate.[88] Indeed, Scott saw powerfully that everyday forms of resistance "are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes."[89] In a similar way, I wish to suggest that the themes of jokes told by First Nations patrollers assert a refusal to accept the success of the settler colonial project—from the content of jokes told, to the very fact that a relatively defined category of "First Nations humour" persists.

While one might wonder the true capacity of jokes to act subversively if they are told only in like-minded circles—such as amongst SAGE Clan patrollers who presumably share a negative opinion of residential schools, for example—Scott has in other work examined how this itself amounts to a fruitful form of resistance. Recognizing that "ideological resistance can grow best when it is shielded from direct surveillance,"[90] he encourages a close examination of places where resistance is able to flourish out of sight of the dominant class, leading to the development of what he terms a "hidden transcript": that discourse which, when shared freely, is expressed in a disguised form and has a "double meaning."[91] This double meaning contains a critique of power in the form of the ideology of the dominant class, couched in terms that may make it possible to elide if intercepted, including mediums such as "rumour, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms."[92] More clearly than his conceptualization of weapons of

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[88] This, in fact, deviates from Scott's own reading of the concept of hegemony, which he imagined as resulting in "a total mystification of the subordinate class" (38-39). I embrace Mary Weismantel's critique of this and her view that the ideological struggle of hegemony is one "which the dominant class never completely wins," similarly constituted in Smith's (1999) reading of Antonio Gramsci, often credited with the concept. See Mary Weismantel, *Food, Gender, and Poverty in the Ecuadorian Andes* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1998), 37 and Gavin Smith, "Dialectics of History and Will: The Janus Face of Hegemonic Processes," in *Confronting the Present: Towards a Politically Engaged Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999).
[89] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 32.
[90] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.
[91] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 19.
[92] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 19.

the weak, Scott's concept of the hidden transcript lends itself to both SAGE Clan volunteers' medium of resistance and the space in which these jokes are shared. While likely shared among people who will "get" the joke—which is a matter of recognizing the "cracks" in the settler colonial system and rejecting its logic, to draw from Goldstein—in the case of upset, it remains possible to hold up the medium itself as a defense, to throw up one's hands apologetically and say, "it was just a joke!" If caused, however, this discomfort only serves to reveal the subversive potential of humour; Mary Douglas, speaking to jokes received "in bad taste," has argued that this judgement (which is itself a form of social control) is "exerted either on behalf of hierarchy as such, or on behalf of values which are judged too precious and too precarious to be exposed to challenge."[93] In spaces of collaboration with the City of Lethbridge and other Western organizations, for example, it is likely that this kind of humour would violate the norms of "professionalism," a pre-emptive policing of proper behaviour I will examine more closely in chapter two.

Jokes about race, captured in the good-natured teasing I experienced and often veiled through discussions of class, may not appear to directly confront structures of white (settler) supremacy, but they do point to its enduring logic and prevalence. The Tupperware joke, for example, only lands if these containers are understood as more "cosmopolitan" and inaccessible to FNMI people, and if I am conversely understood to hold the required social (and class) position to own them, perhaps because of my status as a university student, position as a researcher, or more clearly, the colour of my skin. In its place, a rhetoric of proximity and familiarity was asserted that for the purpose of the joke I could not be a part of, despite my claim to similar childhood experiences. However, as I have already noted, it is unlikely that I would

[93] Mary Douglas, "Jokes," in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 151-152, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203029909.

have been teased so openly had Keenen thought I would become offended, suggesting that these jokes are not a direct attempt at subversion, and leading me to take a pause of caution. Sherry Ortner, speaking to the field of resistance studies, has argued that ethnographers must be weary of attributing counter-hegemonic or subversive goals to every action of subaltern people, a rhetorical move she has termed *sanitizing politics* for its tendency to overshadow a group's own ethos and paint them as purely reactionary.[94] Indeed, Keith Basso, in his conclusion to his work on Apache jokes about "the whiteman," determines that he has taken his analysis far enough, noting "a joke, after all, is a joke. And one must be careful not to stretch a relationship too far."[95] Keeping these fair warnings in mind, I want to suggest that while it is perhaps a stretch to characterize individuals jokes told in this context as subversive, the genre of First Nations humour on the whole—at least within the context of SAGE Clan patrols, where I observed it—can still be conceived of as an act of resistance. While SAGE Clan patrollers do not necessarily conceive of their joking as a "weapon of the weak," and rather as a way of dealing with trauma, connecting with one another, and enjoying in each other's company, the patterning of these acts can be understood to constitute a bold narrative of resistance and resiliency that operates within the logic of kinship.[96] In telling these jokes, a number of claims are denied about the success of the settler colonial vision, pointing not only to its incredulity, but ultimately its futility.

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[94] Sherry Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (January 1995), 176-177, https://www.jstor.org/stable/179382.

[95] Keith Basso, *Portraits of "The Whiteman": Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols Among the Western Apache* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 82.

[96] Here, I am speaking of the resilience of First Nations cultures in the face of repeated attempts at genocide and assimilation. The repeated framing of First Nations peoples as resilient at the level of individuals has rightly been critiqued for failing to account for persistent structural inequalities and for "misdirect[ing] the responsibilities away from governments and colonial policies and onto the individuals themselves," and I have similar fears about when this framework might move from empowerment to enablement on the part of those systems of inequality. See Darren Thomas, Terry Mitchell and Courtney Arseneau, "Re-evaluating resilience: from individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities," *Resilience 4*, no. 2, 2016: 116, https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2015.1094174.

Joking is perhaps on a basic level also understood to generate and sustain intimate connections between people by "establishing or reinforcing community."[97] This is certainly what I saw on patrol, where it is common to overhear volunteers laughing, teasing, and joking with one another despite what outsiders might presume to be a sombre event. When I spoke to volunteers about this quality of patrol, they often framed it in terms of SAGE Clan's family-like quality, and of First Nations humour in general, which knows no bounds in terms of timing or context. Even when experiencing particularly difficult personal circumstances, such as the illness or loss of a family member, volunteers were likely to continue attending patrol, sometimes describing it as "healing" during these times. Indeed, as I will discuss in the upcoming section, that SAGE Clan is felt by volunteers to represent a family explains perfectly the healing capacity of attending patrol.

*Finding Family, Making Kin*

As I have suggested in the previous section, that volunteers engage in humour with those they serve is perhaps indicative of the fact that these people are conceived of as family, and in multiple senses that challenge Western (and standard anthropological) conceptions of kinship. Sometimes these kin ties are recognized immediately— Ii'yuuhkua may be close family members or friends that the volunteer grew up with—while other times they are ascertained only through prolonged conversation, where a First Nations volunteer might ask Ii'yuuhkua who their relatives are, and the pair will figure out their connection that way. Other times, it is not uncommon to hear First Nations volunteers refer to each other and the people they serve as "uncle," "auntie," or most commonly, "cousin," even in cases where it is unclear how closely

[97] Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), as cited in Watson, "Gallows Humour," 41.

they might be related. Generally speaking, Blackfoot conceptions of kinship emphasize more distant relationships than Western conceptions tend to (First Nations volunteers frequently joked about all being related), and in a broader epistemology, also incorporate non-human living beings. A function of this understanding is that it becomes difficult to delineate what might be termed fictive kinship from consanguineal kinship. In anthropology's conception of kinship, "fictive kin" is not intended to invalidate these very real ways in which people understand their relatedness, although the term retains the connotation of "non-real." I draw out the distinction here simply to point to the fact that for some patrollers, addiction and homelessness hit particularly close to home, impacting the family members they grew up with and driving some to patrol in the first place.

Kinship was invoked during my first patrol with Mark, when, in the Galt Gardens, he addressed a young man by telling him, "we're related, you know?" The man's mood seemed to change as he considered this for a moment, before stepping towards Mark and embracing him without saying a word. Besides being an incredibly touching moment to witness, this points to the degree of trust SAGE Clan is able to establish, and in a few different ways. First, there is the fact that Mark is known as a "street person," and as such is perhaps seen to understand the experiences of people on the street more intimately. Mark, in particular, and SAGE Clan as a whole, are also a reliable presence in the downtown core, producing a kind of dependability that results in trust. Finally, I have heard from many volunteers that just seeing another First Nations person out on patrol puts Ii'yuuhkua at ease; the fact that Mark was able to expand on this by citing his shared kin relations with this young man only served to increase their level of social proximity. In contrast, Mikala, a former Team Lead who is white and devoted many hours to the organization and from my view, has established close connections with a number of Ii'yuuhkua,

has done so despite not being Blackfoot herself. For Mikala, it is a combination of SAGE Clan's reputation and individual reliability that produces this trust, not entirely dissimilar to the case of Mark:

> …it's a lot on the individual, they're [Ii'yuuhkua] not just gonna trust anybody in a SAGE Clan vest. It will give you more trust, that they will talk to you or approach you, but it won't give you that full aspect [of trust].[98]

As I have already suggested, it is also not uncommon for patrollers to be drawn to volunteer as a way to "check in" on family experiencing homelessness. Eric, for example, often sees a nephew during patrol, who will approach other volunteers on a regular basis to ask if his uncle is out that night, and often say that he would like to meet him somewhere to talk. Another young volunteer might spend patrol walking with her mother or father, both of whom are experiencing homelessness. Out of interest, I tend to ask new volunteers why they decided to join patrol to this day, and it is not uncommon to hear First Nations volunteers in particular cite, as a motivation for them to join, a friend or family member who used drugs, experienced homelessness, and more often than not, is currently experiencing these issues. Most clearly, one Friday patrol in June, a First Nations man tentatively approached the group of volunteers preparing for patrol with young women I later learned were his daughters in tow, identifying himself and their purpose for being there in saying simply "we're here to help out—we have family on the street."

In addition to facilitating connections between relatives, I argued that patrol is a site where kin is ultimately made. This is perhaps the most significant effect of SAGE Clan's

[98] Interview with Mikala Onalee, July 19, 2022.

approach, guided by Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, where in the act of extending care to Ii'yuuhkua—be it through conversation, a shared joke, or food—Blackfoot patrollers work to draw them back into community, asserting that they are their relations and worthy of respect and love. This act of caring and looking out for one another as a way of life, coupled with a refusal by the very term Ii'yuuhkua to leave individuals behind is also a reparative step in the healing process given understandings that homelessness—due to isolation and a loss of contact with others—is often conceived of as a breakdown of kin relationships. It is further significant given that coming to know oneself as a Blackfoot individual and in terms of one's relatives is understood as both a site of knowledge production and of healing,[99] a connection that Mark pointed to in reflecting on his own journey of healing and embracing his spirituality, noting "when I first sobered up, I started realizing I was Blackfoot."[100] It is perhaps due to this quality of (re)affirming or making kin during patrol that a distinction seems to emerge between First Nations and non-First Nations volunteers in naming those the organization serves:

> I don't like the word *clients*, I say *family* because one way or another we're all related out here. So whether it be family, whether it be friends—you know them, you know their family, you know their kids, their aunts, their uncles, their siblings.[101]

Keenen, a Blackfoot Team Lead from Kainai First Nation, told me during an interview one patrol that he does not like to use the term *client*, which as I have previously suggested, has felt to me to be an appropriately distancing term in the past, where I took this distance to be a form of professionalism. To Keenen, however, to use this term is to omit kin ties, and perhaps to distance oneself from or even reject the people SAGE Clan serves, which would wholly

[99] Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing.*
[100] Phone call with Mark Brave Rock, March 17, 2023.
[101] Interview with Keenen Weasel Moccasin, July 27, 2022. My emphasis.

contradict SAGE Clan's ethos of connection. Developing relationships of trust and mutual respect with Ii'yuuhkua is understood as foundational to SAGE Clan's approach, as indexed through the banner of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni. While volunteers did not specifically address this with me, relationships are also foundational to the Blackfoot cosmology, and Blackfoot concepts of health and healing in particular. As previously alluded to, kinship ties premised on reciprocity—what Piikani scholar Betty Bastien alternatively terms "natural alliances"—are understood to be "the conduit through which [Blackfoot people] gain knowledge."[102] Maintaining close connections with kin, understood to extend to both human and non-human relatives, can also restore the balance needed for health,[103] particularly where health is conceptualized as more than a simple absence of illness, but rather an interaction between physical, mental, social, and spiritual elements or parts of the self, as is typical of FNMI epistemologies. This healing was understood to extend to patrollers as well through the family-like quality of the organization itself: Josh, for example, who was adopted during the 60s Scoop and grew up without a connection to his Métis and Cree culture, often positively credits SAGE Clan for feeling like a family and allowing him to connect with and learn more about his FNMI identity.

That healing should be understood as more than curing physical (or even psychological) ailments is underscored in a phrase often repeated by Keenen: "it's not just a sandwich." While Keenen is directly referring to the connection that takes place in moments where volunteers offer Ii'yuuhkua a meal (as well as the Blackfoot teaching of never refusing food when it is offered), he is also perhaps pointing to how engaging in practices of care maintain and establish a kinship relationships, reminiscent of anthropological analyses which have spoken to broader conceptions

[102] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing,* 4.
[103] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing*, 4.

of kinship in terms of shared substances other than blood, or that food produces certain kinds of (raced) bodies.[104] Writing about the Napo Runa of Ecuador, Michael Uzendoski describes their conception of kinship as one in which "consanguinity is a transformative relationship by which people become related through shared living, exchange, and ritual transformations," one such shared element being food.[105] A husband and wife establish this type of relationship, for example, by sharing particular food items marked as either masculine or feminine with each other, and adopted children are understood to become "blood relatives" after sharing "time, food, and soul-substance" with their adoptive families.[106] In a similar way, the offering of food is a culturally meaningful act in the Blackfoot worldview, establishing a respectful reciprocal relationship.

In terms of acts of care directed towards Ii'yuuhkua, the reciprocal nature of this relationship is made clear in expectations the organization has of those they serve: to treat volunteers with respect, and specifically, to come to the lunches team to receive a meal, rather than call out for one to be brought to them. Mark explains these rules as contributing to a small degree of "discipline" for Ii'yuuhkua, which he sees as needed to encourage stability given the often unpredictable nature of life on the streets; this is also related to the consistent scheduling of patrols, walking "rain or shine," and taking similar routes each time. Expecting that Ii'yuuhkua engage with volunteers in this way speaks not only to the mutual quality of this relationship, but also SAGE Clan's treatment of people experiencing homelessness with a form of empathy Keenen distinguished from the "pitying" approach taken by other organizations and community

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[104] Mary Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 190-191.
[105] Michael Uzendoski, "Manioc Beer and Meat: Value, Reproduction and Cosmic Substance Among the Napo Runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological* Institute 10, no. 4 (December 2004): 895, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3803859.
[106] Uzendoski, *Manioc Beer and Meat*, 886; 890.

members. Part of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni appears to require recognizing people experiencing homelessness as adults who have the capacity to engage in proper social relationships, in contrast with other agencies who might inadvertently infantilize Ii'yuuhkua by pitying them or forgiving a lack of manners by assuming they don't know any better.

The implications of embracing Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni are far-reaching, impacting perceptions and treatment of people experiencing homelessness and addiction, and contributing directly to their healing. This healing can be thought of as occurring on both an interpersonal level, when Ii'yuuhkua feel respected and are humanized by being treated as kin by SAGE Clan, and sometimes means recovering from addiction altogether. SAGE Clan's consistent presence and ability to work outside the constraints of bureaucracy, as they are not licensed as a non- or not-for-profit organization, allows them to seriously embrace what is in fact a tenet of harm reduction: meeting people where they are. Over my summer with SAGE Clan, I learned that one of the biggest challenges in helping people get into detox and treatment programs was that their desire to go did not always line up with resource availability, and that while waiting for a ride or a bed to access these services, individuals tend to become nervous or demotivated, and may talk themselves out of attending. While SAGE Clan experiences similar issues, as these are structural in nature and unfortunately built into the province's health care system, their willingness to have Mark provide rides in his truck, meet someone at the time and location of their choosing, and guaranteed, consistent presence should someone should change their mind about detox but wish to go in the future, takes the pressure off individuals and amounts to creatively reducing some structural barriers to treatment, which I will explore further in chapter two.

*Revisiting Culture as Treatment*

It was perhaps this reliable and unassuming quality of SAGE Clan's presence in the downtown that in fact made it difficult for me to understand at first the degree to which this amounts to Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, and in turn, how central this concept is to the work of the organization. As described in the introduction, when I began my fieldwork, I had an eye on the dominant First Nations/Western dichotomy in understandings of healthcare frameworks, and arguments around the use of "Culture as Treatment," variously defined, in healing addiction. I was also initially interested in how the work of SAGE Clan may represent a move towards Culture as Treatment (or perhaps a more intentionally First Nations approach to health) and away from a more Western treatment paradigm, whether conceived of in terms of harm reduction or abstinence-oriented, twelve step programs. In his work on Q'eqchi Maya healing techniques, James Waldram begins with the warning that anthropologists have tended to overemphasize a difference between "traditional or indigenous healing" approaches and those of Western biomedicine, which has ultimately reduced the analytical value of these types of comparisons.[107] This warning is apt in examining the work of SAGE Clan in terms of which "paradigm," First Nations or Western, they might fit best with, as not only do patrollers draw from a range of approaches to assist those experiencing addiction, but these ostensibly distinct approaches occasionally converge and are not necessarily contradictory. Apart from the Blackfoot prayer that begins each patrol, and the occasional use of the Blackfoot words Oki and Kaitama'tsin by volunteers (hello and goodbye—roughly, in the latter case), there were very few "tactile" or distinctly Blackfoot elements present during any one patrol, and patrollers rarely spoke of

[107] James Waldram, "'I Don't Know the Words he Uses': Therapeutic Communication Among Q'eqchi Maya Healers and Their Patients," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2015): 279, https://journalindigenouswellbeing.co.nz/journal_articles/land-based-healing-carrier-first-nations-addiction-recovery-program/.

connecting people to culture, language, or the land, as the literature on Culture as Treatment had oriented me to; instead, they talked about getting people into detox, treatment, and supportive housing, which are typically conceived of as belonging to the Western medicine paradigm. I also heard them laugh at dirty jokes with Ii'yuuhkua, share packs of cigarettes, and visit with each other, kinds of behaviour that might not initially be labeled as "cultural" but are in fact clear examples of practicing Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni as they reveal the way patrollers treat Ii'yuuhkua as kin. To suggest then that a "traditional" approach to healing premised on Blackfoot epistemology is at odds with Western biomedicine is inaccurate: teachings about how to interact with kin create an environment where Ii'yuuhkua are comfortable sharing their struggles and seeking assistance with the guidance of patrollers, which often does entail accessing Western treatment options. To be clear, I am suggesting that to label Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni as an approach similar to Culture as Treatment and thus contrast it with a Western biomedical paradigm, following the First Nations/Western dichotomy, is to make a false equivalency, in part because the former cannot necessarily be subsumed within the latter. Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni is a way of being and living as Niitsitapi, an ontology informing how patrollers interact with kin, and is not simply reducible to the Culture as Treatment concept.

Much of the existing applied literature around Culture as Treatment centers on specific treatment programs or centres where there is a clear "cultural programming" mandate, often including elements such as smudging, talking circles, and land-based activities.[108] Naively, I had anticipated that because SAGE Clan identifies strongly as a Blackfoot-led organization, I would hear similar programming championed. Indeed, I occasionally did hear of the value of engaging Ii'yuuhkua in these kinds of activities, typically framed through the Western lens of "recovery

[108] Dobson and Brazzoni, "Land Based Healing," 12.

maintenance," and SAGE Clan also occasionally organized "cultural activities" such as tipi raisings, served dishes such as Indian tacos, frybread, and berry soup, and once had arranged for Elder Barnabas Tall Man to paint the faces of Ii'yuuhkua, although the event eventually fell through. These typically constituted special events marked off from the regularity of patrol, where similar elements were often absent; however, I do not mean to suggest that Blackfoot culture was absent as a result. While the daily activities of SAGE Clan—oriented around casual conversation and joking with clients, occasionally setting up detox and treatment stays, handing out lunches and other donations, and picking up needles—may not initially appear to amount to an engagement with Blackfoot culture, this is only the case if one fails to account for the holistic and embodied quality of cultural practices, which guide each of these interactions with Ii'yuuhkua.

Furthermore, Blackfoot culture and SAGE Clan's approach of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, characterized by Mark as a "way of life" or ontology cannot be contained within isolated practices to be applied to addiction and other illnesses like a salve, as the imagery of Culture as Treatment might suggest. Where Culture as Treatment is reduced to a kind of programming that is divorced from Blackfoot ontology, foregrounded in a connection to kin, it fails to capture the significance of SAGE Clan's approach. The angle of inquiry is then misaligned, focused more on the level of how culture might be *used* (or operationalized) rather than how it is embodied with and practiced as a form of healing. As described previously, what remains the most important in Blackfoot approaches to healing is a connection to kin, for these kin ties conceive the Blackfoot worldview, and act as the channels through which an understanding of self, the universe, and health are all achieved. Following the Culture as Treatment formulation, conceptualizing this connection purely in terms of a cultural "item" and

thus as a form of "treatment" omits the depth of connection and reciprocal nature of kin ties in the Blackfoot worldview. I am not here rejecting the validity of Culture as Treatment, but instead, suggesting that it would be inappropriate to attempt to re-label Blackfoot ontology (encompassed in Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni) through this framework, at the risk of simplifying it to be rendered more "legible" within a Western biomedical model. Further, when thought of in terms of "programming" activities, Culture as Treatment does not capture Mark's description of SAGE Clan Patrol as an "offering from the past," which he described as mirroring the structure of Blackfoot Societies and indicating a return to old ways and a time when people looked out for one another. Speaking to the concept of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, he described the word as "[coming] from our grandmothers" and how:

> That's in spirit of our old ways. You know, it's brought forth today. We care for each other, love one another, understand each other. It's survival, it's together. Not individual.[109]

Mark locates SAGE Clan's approach in Blackfoot history and teachings passed on from grandmothers about how to engage in proper kin relationships and care for one another. By framing SAGE Clan and its concept of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni as an "offering from the past" being given by SAGE Clan Patrol to the community of Lethbridge, and in particular, by noting its focus on the community rather than individual level, Mark contrasts it with Western approaches to addiction treatment that place the burden of recovery on the individual or require a degree of isolation to achieve healing. He also reasserts the importance of community-wide participation in SAGE Clan's mandate, extending once again the ability to engage in these

[109] Interview with Mark Brave Rock, July 6, 2022.

practices and ultimately, become Niitsitapi, to both First Nations and non-First Nations community members.

While Western treatment programs that often require individuals to leave their communities were sometimes spoken of in desirable terms by Ii'yuuhkua who wanted to remove themselves from the potential negative influences of the city in which they had experienced addiction, for others, particularly those whose family members were also experiencing addiction and homelessness alongside them, this was seen as undesirable and even antithetical to their own healing. One afternoon at Tent City, I spoke with Josh about a woman who was interested in going to treatment but would only go if her daughter went with her. Well-intentioned, but parroting a Western addiction treatment line without realizing it, I wondered aloud to him if perhaps the woman needed to focus on her own recovery before she would be able to help her daughter through hers. Kindly, Josh pointed out to me the guilt and worry she must feel as a mother while attending a treatment facility knowing that her daughter is still on the streets and using. The obviousness of this statement struck me immediately, and I realized how naïve I had sounded; of course, it would be difficult to feel encouraged and positive about treatment and recovery while worrying about the wellbeing of a family member, especially knowing their struggles so intimately oneself. It is this incongruity in the dominant Western treatment paradigm that SAGE Clan points to so clearly, embodied in the very word Ii'yuuhkua, or those who we must not leave behind: healing cannot be achieved if it results in kin ties being forgotten or abandoned, because it is these connections that provide healing in the first place, but also that individuals bear a traditional responsibility to. And yet, the Western treatment facilities that many choose to attend do not recognize the centrality of these kin relationships in the healing process—at least not during the initial period of recovery, which is typically oriented around

individual self-reflection. In the case of the woman I described above, she and her daughter benefitted from having different last names, and each earned a spot on the same waiting list after placing a call to the same treatment centre minutes apart, resolving to hide their relationship as long as would be tenable.

While I have suggested that the act of kin taking care of one another—whether in the form of a SAGE Clan volunteer, or a parent encouraging their child to join them in treatment—is conceptualized as key to healing from addiction, and indeed as following customary practice, this is also a very real survival strategy adopted by a group of people who have faced intense abandonment by the state on multiple levels. By engaging in acts of forced assimilation through discriminatory amendments to the Indian Act, the implementation of the residential school system, the 60s Scoop, and many other less-frequently cited examples, the Canadian Government succeeded in separating generations of Blackfoot people from the cultural Knowledge that is their birthright, as well as the bonds with kin that would allow them to learn about their place in the world and develop a strong sense of identity. Recognizing the importance of these kin ties in maintaining health, the forced separation of generations of children from their families is somehow revealed to be even more insidious. After facing these ruptures and having frequently faced abuse during their time at residential school, it should not be surprising that a number of Blackfoot people experiencing homelessness and addiction in Lethbridge today are residential school survivors, or the children of survivors, as was sometimes shared with me on patrol. For some SAGE Clan members, this is directly related to their complicated feelings towards the Every Child Matters movement, who feel that while increasingly, many non-First Nations community members are becoming more aware of the truth about residential schools, and eager to participate in Orange Shirt Day events, few have taken the next step of recognizing

that many of the Blackfoot people experiencing homelessness and addiction in Lethbridge were impacted by these events, and of supporting policies that would have a tangible impact on the lives of these survivors.

A second layer of state abandonment is perhaps represented in the fact that the opioid crisis has impacted Alberta for nearly seven years with no signs of slowing down, and options for treatment (if available in a timely manner) have typically been limited to a Western, individualized paradigm. Angela Garcia, in her study of heroin addiction in New Mexico's Española Valley, notes that in this context—which could similarly be described as a "crisis"—"practices of care become reconfigured through heroin, intensified at the kinship level,"[110] a description which parallels the role played by Blackfoot people as they attempt to care for their loved ones experiencing homelessness and addiction. Noting a similarly high level of importance placed on family in the Hispano culture, Garcia further recognizes that "this intensification of kin relations is concurrent with processes of intensified disengagement at the state level,"[111] a situation also not unlike that of Southern Alberta where First Nations people have had little choice but to fill the gaps left by the state. The emotional toll of the responsibility taken on by kin was revealed to me in many moments over the course of my research: when Elder Dr. Mike Bruised Head commented on having attended so many funerals as a result of the opioid crisis that he had "no more tears to cry"; when Tina Weasel Moccasin, Keenen's mother, expressed to me her fear of being unable to use Naloxone and save a family member from an overdose; and Armande's blunt but salient point when discussing the difficulties faced by FNMI university

[110] Angela Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession Along the Rio Grande* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010), 67.
[111] Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic*, 67.

students that certain school-related worries become irrelevant when “you have to keep stopping your family from ODing.”

While SAGE Clan succeeds in creatively and empathetically navigating a system that often feels at odds with their own assertions of kinship and connection to those experiencing homelessness and addiction, Mark and other volunteers frequently speak to the importance of other community members and agencies opening themselves to walk with them—both physically, and in the sense of taking up seriously SAGE Clan’s embrace of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni. For SAGE Clan, this would amount to a serious and much-needed adoption of reconciliation that moves beyond a mere symbolic recognition of the harms of the Canadian Government’s assimilative policies, and towards productive change that would both improve the lives of those experiencing homelessness and addiction and encourage meaningful relationships of understanding and mutual respect between First Nations and non-First Nations community members. If embraced, this might also contribute to reducing the gaps that presently exist when seeking treatment for addiction in Lethbridge, as discussed in the upcoming chapter.

## Chapter Two: Possibilities for Reconciliation

*Tent City Emerges*

At the time, it seemed as if the encampment that sprang up at Civic Centre Park that summer did so overnight. In hindsight, this was clearly a remarkable event, and one which presumably made my summer with SAGE Clan Patrol unique to the preceding years; patrollers, however, treated this new development with a kind of steadiness that betrayed its unusualness, adapting quickly to the change in the downtown topography. What would be playfully termed "Tent City" by volunteers began as a handful of tents, set up along a chain-post fence line that runs parallel to the pathway which divides the track and field space from the vacant field and parking lot that had once belonged to the YMCA. Then gradually, the number of tents more than doubled, growing to encompass much of the YMCA field, with others clustered in small groups against the borders of the plot of land at the end of the city block. The growth occurred so gradually that it felt, paradoxically, as if it occurred within the blink of an eye. When Tent City emerged, it brought with it the feeling of having always been there.

Undoubtedly, my experience of coming to know Tent City's existence rather suddenly was also a quality of patrol itself more than a reflection of the actual development of the camp. For the first few weeks of my summer with SAGE Clan, I did not join the search group that went to "the track," joining the volunteers that walked west towards Galt Gardens rather than east, where the former group headed. Often, these patrollers would radio back a headcount so that enough lunches could be separated into a wagon for a smaller group of patrollers to bring over after a brief stop at the Esso service station for a rest. One Friday patrol on June 17, 2022, I finally joined this small group of patrollers to hand out lunches, learning about the encampment for the first time. After joining the group, I caught up with Jasmine and followed her as we

walked up 6th avenue and past the Civic Ice Centre before taking a left onto the path that divides the track from the now-vacant YMCA lot and leads directly into the City of Lethbridge parking lot. “The track,” I realized, referred to the adjacent running track, and that the headcounts radioed by searchers ahead of time were for the people staying in the five or so tents that were set up on either side of this pathway.

I had seen what might be termed encampments at the former Alpha House Shelter before, but never more permanent structures like these, which were large, nylon camping tents that appeared to be filled with a number of belongings. In the jumble of things, I could make out bicycles and an assortment of parts, tools, clothing, blankets, shoes, packaged foods, plastic water bottles, and cloth bags filled to their brim with personal items. Volunteers began to hand out sandwiches and waters from the wagon, most of which had been left behind with the main group of volunteers, who in the meantime were making their way towards the bus station, where they would continue to hand out lunches and wait for us to return. I hung back with Jasmine and watched the volunteers, asking her whether this encampment was typical of the summer months; confirming my suspicion, she noted that it was a relatively new phenomenon. Indeed, a point often emphasized to me by Josh was that while the size and location of this encampment was unprecedented in Lethbridge, and despite how this event seemed to both polarize and grip residents’ attention, this was not the city’s first encampment. As the weeks progressed, Tent City would grow in size significantly, so that the lunches that used to feed everyone SAGE Clan met on patrols through the downtown core and on the way to the shelter ran out before we returned to the Pregnancy Centre. In response, the direction of patrols began to alternate, beginning in the direction of the track one day to ensure everyone there received a lunch, and beginning at Galt Gardens the next. For many weeks, there were barely or not enough lunches to feed everyone

SAGE Clan encountered, and trips to the shelter, where volunteers were often able to hand out leftovers to people staying in small encampments or sitting outside, were halted.

The advent of Tent City highlighted not only the coalescence of multiple crises in Lethbridge—those of opioids, mental health, and affordable housing—but also, I argue, the gaps that persist in addressing these issues. Furthermore, examining the case of the encampment reveals the creative ways that SAGE Clan attempts and often succeeds in addressing these gaps, while still pointing to their limitations and potential areas of improved support by the City of Lethbridge and other agencies. While over the summer numerous conversations occurred about the possibility of making SAGE Clan a not-for-profit organization—which could have provided more support by way of funding and job security for volunteers—many volunteers in fact expressed to me that SAGE Clan's effectiveness came from their ability to operate outside the confines of the bureaucracy that might be associated with this designation. As discussed in the previous chapter, SAGE Clan's operations are not limited to business hours or bound to other regulations that might impact the ways in which they can assist Ii'yuuhkua, allowing them a degree of flexibility that other agencies may not have. For example, while employed with one Lethbridge agency, Keenen was not permitted to be at Tent City unless accompanied by another member of any Lethbridge organization (SAGE Clan included), despite feeling quite comfortable being there and doing so frequently as a SAGE Clan Team Lead and in his personal time. Relatedly, it was also not uncommon for volunteers to follow up with Ii'yuuhkua outside of patrol to assist them in attending doctor's appointments, submitting applications to detox and treatment programs, being transported to these programs, or going to the hospital, to name a few examples. While I cannot fairly suggest that no one employed with licensed organizations (ex: Streets Alive Mission, Canadian Mental Health Association, Alpha House, the Indigenous

Recovery Coach Program) engages in similar practices, there was a strong sense that SAGE Clan's grassroots origins allow them a certain kind of flexibility that was seen as necessary to truly assist Ii'yuuhkua.

Part of this flexible, perhaps unconventional approach was a sense shared by some patrollers that emotional boundaries were not as firmly established between volunteers and the work that they do. There was a sense that organizations that operate with strict protocols and standard business hours allow employees to embrace a level of emotional distance from the work they do (as well as their clients), while for SAGE Clan volunteers, this is nearly impossible as they tend to become deeply invested in their wellbeing, dedicating hours of unpaid personal time to assist any given individual. On a few occasions, Josh wondered to me if this approach was too emotionally taxing (and perhaps unsustainable) while also recognizing this as the power of SAGE Clan's approach and a hallmark of their ability to truly engage with Ii'yuuhkua and build relationships of trust. As discussed in the first chapter, this depth of engagement, and the impossibility of maintaining emotional distance for a number of patrollers is directly related to the fact that many patrollers and Ii'yuuhkua are relatives.

This kinship, and the metaphor of community specifically, became an important way to conceptualize Tent City—by Ii'yuuhkua themselves as well as patrollers. While volunteers acknowledged that moments of violence did occur at the encampment, it was important to them to highlight in any communication to city residents that the encampment also represented a community of care for Ii'yuuhkua, emphasizing the way in which people connected positively with one another: for instance, enjoying music played on speakers and (anecdotally) turning it down when others went to sleep, sharing food, clothing, and other supplies, and responding to overdoses and seeking new naloxone kits when they ran out. One resident of the encampment

characterized it specifically as a community and spoke of feeling safe and supported there, contrasting it with her first experience of being homeless and alone on the street. Similarly, Armande commented that the encampment was "a small community, just like Lethbridge" that was beneficial to those who preferred to remain close to the downtown and closer to the agencies where they could receive support. He noted too the futility of the encampment's eventual takedown, commenting that "wherever they go, that's their community" while acknowledging that the fact that people had since dispersed throughout the broader downtown made it difficult to check in and follow up with them.

Indeed, the largest benefit to the encampment for the purpose of SAGE Clan and perhaps Ii'yuuhkua as well was the ability to find one another. That people could be expected to be in a particular location at each patrol facilitated follow-up, particularly in regard to the availability of detox and treatment beds, for which individuals are often placed on a waitlist. Tent City served as a way of finding these individuals when their bed became available and making arrangements for transportation right away, limiting a risk of beds going unclaimed or an individual growing hesitant of their decision. In my experience, it also appeared to facilitate conversations about going to detox and treatment and slow down the pace of decision making, reducing potential feelings of pressure on the part of Ii'yuuhkua. There is a greater sense of urgency, for instance, in conversations about detox held on the sidewalk when a volunteer might not know when they will run into an individual again compared to conversations held at someone's tent, where they generally feel comfortable and perhaps empowered to take more time to reach their decision, knowing that the same volunteer will likely return within a few days' time.

The benefit of this is well highlighted, I believe, by contrasting it with the experiences of an individual SAGE Clan assisted before the advent of Tent City. Volunteers managed to secure

a spot for the man at a treatment centre and arrange for transportation (two steps which were felt to go unusually smoothly, in fact), but this remained stressful for volunteers logistically, for they had to hope that the individual would meet them at an agreed upon location to be picked up, having no guarantee that he would remain in the same place. SAGE Clan was also not able to remain in contact with him upon his admission to the program due to the privacy regulations of the facility, something that might have been ironed out ahead of time if he had the opportunity to submit paperwork to grant SAGE Clan this permission. This was a major concern for Keenen and Josh, who had been directly involved in getting the individual into this program, as they worried about his adjustment after leaving treatment, and if he would be connected to adequate support to maintain his sobriety. Both Keenen and Josh often addressed the importance of "recovery maintenance," steps taken to ensure that an individual is adequately supported in their transition from treatment programming into a more independent living environment. Josh characterized this moment as a "gap" where without adequate resources or support, Ii'yuuhkua might begin using or become homeless again.

A related gap, which I do not have the space to develop adequately in this work, is that of housing. Housing was conceived as a way of providing stability, and perhaps dignity, to people attempting to become sober, and part of the gap in recovery maintenance is a felt inadequacy of transitional housing programs or similar supports to ensure clients have a smooth transition from detox, to treatment, to more independent-style living as they continue to work on their recovery. Team Leads who made arrangements for clients to access detox or treatment services often expressed a need to ensure that clients could enter treatment immediately following detox, and perhaps a second program afterwards, before finding housing of some kind to ensure that clients had the stability needed to focus on their recovery. This requires a certain degree of finesse and

coordination between different agencies to ensure there is no gap in living arrangements, and the difficulty of navigating these bureaucratic systems and ensuring a smooth transition is often felt to be a hindrance to Ii'yuuhkuas' recovery and to contribute to cases of people "giving up," particularly with regards to waitlists for treatment programs, arranging transportation to and from facilities, and finding housing. One such example involves a requirement of some treatment centres that applicants on waiting lists call in each day to verify the status of their application; a failure to do so results in the individual losing their spot. This expectation, however, is difficult for people experiencing concurrent homelessness and addiction to meet, who may not have a consistent sleeping schedule, reliable access to a phone, or be sober enough to make the call. The general difficulty of navigating these systems was further highlighted by a story shared by Mark on the evening of my first patrol with SAGE Clan, in which he described the case of a woman experiencing homelessness who was attempting to get a house and hopeful about reconnecting with her children, seeing securing housing as an important step in her healing. Ultimately, the woman was unsuccessful in her attempt to secure housing, and later passed away while still unhoused. Mark expressed that this was a great shame, pointing to the woman's determination to heal, a decision which she had come to on her own and which he recognizes as an important step in recovery. While I cannot speak to the specific events that led to the woman not receiving housing, Mark's anecdote speaks to a general sentiment shared by volunteers and Ii'yuuhkua alike: when people make the decision to begin their healing, there is a lack of support and resources in Lethbridge that leads to discouragement and sometimes, lives lost as individuals fall through the cracks.

While SAGE Clan's grassroots, volunteer-based structure means that they often do not have the capacity to work in the ways they would like to (ex: funding more lunches, cultural

activities, transportation to treatment), they are ultimately successful in their ability to form relationships of mutual respect and trust with Ii'yuuhkua. That SAGE Clan draws from and reinforces kin ties, and operates flexibly to meet people where they are in a very literal sense is not only effective because it creates bonds of trust between clients and volunteers—deepening this relationship so that the term "client" is felt inappropriate by many—it is also a powerful rejection of Western understandings of addiction that frame this as an individual failure, despite a more recent shift towards biological interpretations. SAGE Clan's refusal to create bureaucratic distance between themselves and the people they serve, to let people slip through the cracks, or to expect individuals to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" is encapsulated in their banner of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni and represents a powerful way of responding to the gaps present in addiction services in Lethbridge. By the very term Ii'yuuhkua, SAGE Clan instead asserts that community members have a responsibility to one another, and affirms that those experiencing addiction and homelessness belong to this community.[112] It is not merely Blackfoot people, or members of SAGE Clan, however, who are understood to bear this responsibility to care for one another; as I will discuss in an upcoming section, the need for broader community support in tackling these issues was a common topic of discussion on patrol, conceived within the framework of reconciliation.

Beginning with the encampment at Civic Centre Park and tracing the multiple attempts of the City of Lethbridge to disperse it, this chapter will examine the "gaps" revealed in these moments, as well as the ways in which SAGE Clan's presence at the encampment differed from

[112] I have argued elsewhere that in Lethbridge, "belonging" is often constructed in a way which at once confounds Indigenous peoples with those experiencing addiction and homelessness and positions these individuals in opposition to tax-paying, law-abiding citizens coded as white. In this conceptualization steeped in neoliberalism, addiction and homelessness are understood as failures of the individual, and as antithetical to community, rather than a community responsibility. See Cran, "'Why do They Treat us This Way?"

that of other organizations. Further, it will explore the tension present between SAGE Clan's strong desire to collaborate with other organizations and community members and the difficulties they have faced in attempting to do so in the past. Finally, it will examine SAGE Clan's approach to assisting Ii'yuuhkua within the context of the concept of decolonization, problematizing this framework and exploring the ways in which reconciliation might better articulate both the function of the organization and their desire for broader community support.

*Community and Connection*

At the start of a Wednesday patrol in July, Josh announced to the group that there were officially plans to take down the encampment at Civic Centre Park the following morning, and that a few SAGE Clan volunteers would be present to support the people on the street, offering that anyone who wanted to come along and help was welcome to. I decided that I would, and the next day, on July 14, 2022, I arrived at the encampment shortly after 8:00 AM, parking near the Lethbridge Public Library entrance that faces across the street. Already, some people who I recognized as having been staying at the encampment were milling around, crossing the street towards the library and carrying backpacks and small possessions. The parking lot of the former YMCA had been blocked off by traffic barricades, and a few police vehicles were parked within. Reportedly, the front lawn of City Hall had also been blocked off, which a woman staying at the encampment had implied to Keenen was intentional, joking that she was planning on moving onto the mayor's lawn instead.[113,114] A group of Clean Sweep workers with a small trailer pulled

[113] While I cannot accurately comment either way, my perception was that the lawn of City Hall had been blocked off for some landscaping work and was not related to a fear that the people staying at Tent City would occupy this space, as the woman seemed to index.

[114] As explored in an unpublished version of my previously cited work (2022), this is a notable inversion of local Facebook comments which took a negative stance towards supervised consumption sites in Lethbridge, which suggested that they might be better located on the lawns or in the backyards of local politicians who were deemed

by a truck arrived, and I watched as they approached Ii'yuuhkua and the entrances to tents while holding up objects retrieved from the ground, seemingly speaking to them about these generally larger items (tarps, blankets) before throwing them in the trailer bed, presumably to be discarded.[115,116] I met up with Josh shortly, who was handing out some scones, granola bars, and juice boxes purchased that morning from Save on Foods, and wearing his SAGE Clan vest. Normally cheerful, he seemed distant and contemplative as we surveyed the events unfolding in front of us.

In my fieldnotes, I struggled to capture the feeling of being at the encampment that day, writing:

> The energy of the morning is hard to describe. Certainly, it felt sad, but there was also a sense of an impending argument or something similar (…) it didn't seem that anyone would actually be leaving the encampment.

In fact, Josh and Keenen talked to some of the self-asserted "ringleaders" of the encampment that morning, who confirmed they had no intentions of leaving. Josh told them that he would support whatever decision they made, but gently wondered if resisting would be worth

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sympathetic to them. This also further plays off a discourse of "NIMBY"-ism (Not in my Backyard) popular in Lethbridge.

[115] Although I do not have the space to discuss this thoroughly, the hiring of Clean Sweep employees for this job was viewed by many as particularly cruel given that the organization employs individuals who are experiencing homelessness and addiction or in early recovery. There was a concern that workers would ultimately be participating in the eviction of friends and family, and unable to refuse this work due to the precarity of their social and financial situations. See Tyler Hay, "Aspects of Lethbridge Clean Sweep program 'reeks of exploitation': U of L professor," *My Lethbridge Now*, November 8, 2022, https://www.mylethbridgenow.com/27797/featured/lethbridge-clean-sweep-program-reeks-of-exploitation-u-of-l-professor/. For the original letter described see Yale Belanger, Twitter post, November 3, 2022, 4:38 PM, https://twitter.com/ydbelanger/status/1588299511612702720.

[116] What became of the property collected during this and subsequent "compassionate cleanups" is unclear; however, it was well recognized that belongings were often thrown away if cleanups occurred when their owners were not present. Although City employees at times asserted that property was being stored within the Civic Ice Centre for individuals to collect at a later date, and at one point, in a sea-can on property, individuals staying at the encampment maintained that their property had been thrown away. I will never forget the anguish of one woman who told me that her blanket and art supplies had been thrown away during the initial July takedown.

the potential consequences. By August, these individuals would be among those to receive multiple tickets of up to $600 for petty trespass after refusing to leave the encampment which, when unpaid, resulted in the issuing of arrest warrants and time in jail for at least one of the "ringleaders." In the end, the encampment remained relatively intact the day of the first attempted takedown, with only a few ultimately choosing to leave. The warnings of planned takedowns or later, "compassionate clean-ups"—which were said to involve moving tents to clean the area of "biohazards" and did not represent full-fledged takedowns—eventually began to lose the sense of urgency that that initial July attempt held, occurring regularly every week or few weeks. When the encampment was officially taken down on October 26th, 2022, and fencing was erected to prevent further entry,[117] the event was received by volunteers with a mix of resigned acceptance and shock. There was rarely a moment when the site that had become a fixture in SAGE Clan patrols was not under threat of being disbursed and yet, it seemed inconceivable that it would disappear so definitively. Perhaps pointing to a felt irony in the name of the clean-ups that preceded the final takedown, a former resident of Tent City, Leanne Michelle Crow Eagle, argued that City officials did not know "the real meaning of compassion" and described her experience at the encampment:

> [Just] because they shut down tent city, doesn't mean the problem will go away—it's just going to escalate and make people want to fight back because they were angry. That is all we had.
>
> We didn't choose this lifestyle, it happens, life happens and some people are fortunate and some people aren't. All you can do is just pull together like a community and try to help each other the best we can and that's what tent city was supposed to be.[118]

[117] Tyler Hay, "Residents express concern after encampment disbursed and fences put up," *My Lethbridge Now*, October 28, 2022, https://www.mylethbridgenow.com/27656/news/residents-express-concern-after-encampment-disbursed-and-fences-put-up/.
[118] Hay, "Residents express concern."

Mirroring powerfully SAGE Clan's approach of connection and community, Crow Eagle suggested that Tent City was a place of care and a survival strategy for those experiencing homelessness and addiction in the city. However, she also pointed to Tent City as being symptomatic of deeper problems that won't simply "go away," whereby the encampment represented both a failure (or refusal) of the City and the broader Lethbridge community to assist vulnerable community members, and a powerful attempt by those same individuals to engage in practices of care in spite of this. While I do not wish to romanticize the suffering that undoubtedly occurred at Tent City, agreeing with Josh's fear of "sugar coating" the events of the summer by over-emphasizing the positive display of community associated with them, I do still wish to suggest that SAGE Clan's engagement with Tent City represents a politics of care that is radical in the face of the deeply neoliberal conceptualizations of homelessness and addiction present in Lethbridge. I saw pain and sadness at the encampment, and heard of cases of violence, but this was also a place of connection between Ii'yuuhkua and volunteers, moments that affirmed kin ties and belonging to the Lethbridge community while also challenging one-dimensional narratives of the encampment (and people experiencing homelessness and addiction in general) as antisocial and violent. This was exemplified in an evening Keenen and Jasmine spent at the encampment where they enjoyed s'mores and hotdogs with the people staying there, telling jokes and swapping ghost stories, a memory Keenen once shared to assert that the encampment was not inherently violent or dangerous.

Arguing that neoliberalism must be understood within its unique cultural context, Catherine Kingfisher has articulated an iteration born of the Canadian prairies and developed in

the context of "prairie notions of rugged individualism and industriousness."[119] Following Kingfisher, I have elsewhere explored the ways in which neoliberalism is steeped into the Southern Albertan psyche, particularly evident in a frequent contrast between those "tax-paying," "law-abiding" citizens and those who accessed supervised consumption services in Lethbridge, where proper citizenship was afforded to those of the former category and raced as white, and those who accessed SCS services were marked as Indigenous and seen as "out of place" in this urban setting.[120] In this context, proper citizenship is afforded to those considered to be "self-governing, autonomous, entrepreneurial, and able to transcend the dependencies engendered by the Keynesian welfare state,"[121] and along with this, addiction is understood to amount to a failure of the individual who maintains a responsibility to solve it by "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps."[122] This view, I argue, allows proponents to conveniently sidestep the reality of the impacts of the ongoing settler colonial project, in what may be understood as a "settler move to innocence."[123] While imperfectly, this notion maps onto the argument dominant in the Western addiction treatment paradigm that recovery is up to the individual, and might explain a felt lack of responsibility on the part of Lethbridge residents to participate in assisting those experiencing addiction and homelessness. In contrast, I argue that both Tent City and SAGE Clan represent a radical departure from this view, embracing a community-centered ethos which both acknowledges the role that connection and community

[119] Catherine Kingfisher, "Spatializing Neoliberalism: Articulations, Recapitulations, and (a Very few) Alternatives," in *Neoliberalization: States, Networks, and Peoples,* ed. Kim England and Kevin Ward (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2007), 197.
[120] Cran, "'Why do they treat us this way?'"
[121] Kingfisher, "Spatializing Neoliberalism," 197.
[122] I cannot resist noting how particularly Southern Albertan this imagery feels given our propensity for cowboy boots.
[123] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554.

have to play in healing addiction, as well as (in the case of SAGE Clan particularly) the very real impact that structural inequalities and historical traumas have had in contributing to experiences of homelessness and addiction. SAGE Clan's kinship-centered approach rejects the very premise of neoliberalism that individuals alone are responsible for their own success and healing, reasserting instead a powerful element of Blackfoot epistemology that sees strength as being formed within the bounds of relationships. Theirs is a patient, compassionate approach not well captured within the "rugged individualism" of the prairies, perhaps suggesting an epistemological misalignment broader than that general distinction between FNMI and Western approaches to health which has preemptively limited the possibility for meaningful collaboration.

*Possibilities (and Limits) of Collaboration*

A contrast between SAGE Clan's connection and relationship-based approach with that of other Lethbridge organizations also reveals the kinds of gaps that many volunteers understand SAGE Clan as existing to fill. The initial July encampment takedown proved one of these moments, when according to a City employee tasked with managing the event, agencies such as Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)—which were initially expected to be present—had determined they would not be offering their services because they did not wish to be associated with the takedown, perhaps implying a disagreement on moral grounds or fear of bad press.[124] Instead, according to this City employee—who had weeks prior attended a SAGE Clan patrol himself—they would be offering support to those

[124] To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that individual employees necessarily supported these measures or did not volunteer their time at the encampment in other capacities. In fact, a number of SAGE Clan volunteers are employed by these two organizations. Rather, I am pointing to the fact that the structure of more formal agencies generally did not encourage the same degree of direct engagement with Tent City as SAGE Clan's grassroots approach did, being limited in some instances by their policies.

staying at the encampment before and after the takedown, although this ultimately did not seem to occur on the ground the day of the event.[125] In contrast, a number of SAGE Clan volunteers—myself included, having decided that for my own morals, the moment called for a more engaged form of activist anthropology that tilted closer to the participation end of the participant observation spectrum[126]—spent entire days at the encampment speaking with Ii'yuuhkua, handing out snacks and waters, and making a number of detox calls. The work was at times overwhelming and emotionally taxing, and although employees from other agencies occasionally spent time at the encampment (and as I have noted, in some instances were dual SAGE Clan volunteers as well), volunteers frequently expressed the view, supported by my own observations, that SAGE Clan was the only organization spending any significant amount of time at the encampment. Later, this would place volunteers in an important position to describe the events that had taken place that summer, and presenting a measured depiction of the encampment which captured its nuance and complexity was a task approached with great care when attending two speaking events in Siksika Nation that August and one at the University of Lethbridge the following November, which Josh addressed in his above-described concern of "sugarcoating" what had taken place.

That SAGE Clan met a need that other organizations had perhaps been unwilling to produced complicated feelings for some volunteers, adding to the already complex prospect of working with other agencies that persists in general. As discussed in the first chapter, Mark (and

[125] I arrived before much of the attempted takedown had begun, staying late into the afternoon, and did not see any employees from either agency, and confirmed with other volunteers that they had not either.
[126] I will admit that the urgency and severity of the moment meant that I did not approach my time in the field with the same analytical eye as routine patrols, and that on days spent at the encampment I found myself a "vulnerable observer" where I was more apt to answer Ruth Behar's question, "if you can't stop the horror, shouldn't you at least document it?" with a research approach that relied more on embodied experience and neglected a documentation of the number of tents present on given days, for instance, and sometimes even pulling out a notebook. See Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 3.

a number of other volunteers) often spoke of a positive desire to increase SAGE Clan's influence and collaboration, which sometimes involved inviting members of different agencies to attend patrol. Despite, from what I observed, these moments often being received well by both parties and encouraging active discussion, there were also moments of frustration in these interactions which led to a hesitation towards working with others that did not always map onto SAGE Clan's assertion of wanting to collaborate. One such example came from an afternoon patrol dedicated to walking with new EMS recruits. In my experience, the perception of EMS is often a negative one on the part of Ii'yuuhkua, who describe experiencing racism and mistreatment due to their experiences of drug use and homelessness, and SAGE Clan Team Leads had hoped to improve this relationship by both showing new recruits how they connect with Ii'yuuhkua and perhaps bridging a gap in trust by accompanying them on a patrol. During this patrol, however—which I was not a part of, but which was recounted to me afterwards by Josh and Keenen—a recruit asked Josh about having heard that SAGE Clan has videoed interactions with EMS in the past, suggesting that this signaled a misplaced degree of scrutiny or lack of trust. This comment was discouraging to Josh and Keenen, who understood the use of cellphone recordings as protecting the rights and wellbeing of both Ii'yuuhkua and patrollers. Coming from a new recruit, who could only have heard about this practice from a superior, they also saw it as speaking to a negative culture of collaboration. The exchange seemed to sow doubts as to what degree recruits were embracing what they experienced on patrol with an open mind.

The concern that possibilities for true, open collaboration were limited prematurely was also present in interactions with City-associated committees, such as the Finding Solutions Committee SAGE Clan was a part of along with the Downtown Lethbridge Business

Revitalization Zone (BRZ), LPS, a former manager of The Watch, and a City official.[127] Although designed around the representatives' shared interest in improving the crises of homelessness and addiction downtown, at times, there was both a sense that the terms of engagement in these settings were preemptively set in a way that prevented serious collaboration, and that community leaders were not willing to take seriously SAGE Clan's approach as a Blackfoot-led organization. Meetings with these kinds of committees sometimes included requests for grace by non-First Nations community leaders who asserted they were "still learning" about culturally-competent solutions and how to work with the FNMI community, requests that were felt by many Team Leads to have been made for too long, preventing actionable change from being forwarded. Related too was the sentiment that unlike the hands-on, grassroots approach SAGE Clan took, these sorts of relationships involved prolonged dialogue which did little to create concrete change for people on the street and likewise did not seem to recognize what SAGE Clan volunteers understood to be a very urgent situation. When asked to describe SAGE Clan's approach in contrast to other agencies, Mikala was quick to highlight that the organization is "not a not-for-profit" and therefore has more "freedom from the colonial system that obviously doesn't work," noting specifically a freedom to express particular views and engage in particular work without a fear of losing funding or similar repercussions.[128] In the past SAGE Clan has received funding from organizations like the BRZ and Anglican Church, and Mikala (who for a long time handled the organization's finances) explained that while helpful, there was still a discomfort in the case of funding from the BRZ in having to request approval to access funds for each purchase rather than having the freedom to make these decisions independently. This is related to a fear of an overexertion of control by other

[127] Interview with Mikala Onalee, March 13, 2023.
[128] Interview with Mikala Onalee, July 19, 2022.

organization, which initially founded Mark's hesitancy for working with LPS in SAGE Clan's early development. Funding from the Anglican Church in the form of a grant also retained a stipulation that the money only be spent on (the Church's conception of) "traditional" items; when SAGE Clan attempted to use the funding to hold a tipi raising, the menu served had to fit this conception (despite a concern that these richer foods would be hard for Ii'yuuhkua to eat) and they were not able to put it towards disposable plates or cutlery which would not have been used "traditionally."[129] The tone of the grant requirement, while perhaps unintended, was one of extreme paternalism and made both holding the event (and eventually using all the money) challenging.

This enduring tension within SAGE Clan's operations between desiring support from other organizations while also emphasizing their autonomy is perhaps best summed up in a frustration expressed by Josh that SAGE Clan is routinely expected to change their operational norms to fit those of the organizations they seek to work with, while the reverse is never presented as a possibility. This suggests that SAGE Clan Patrol is rarely considered to be an equal partner in collaborative contexts, such as those engaged in with the City of Lethbridge. Rather, in these contexts SAGE Clan is regularly asked to adopt certain standards, and patrollers certain behaviours: in the case of the Finding Solutions Committee, examples included regular attendance at meetings (which is a challenging commitment for a volunteer-based organization) and accepting that a bureaucratic, discussion- rather than action-oriented process be adopted, necessarily operating at a slower pace than SAGE Clan is used to. These are also spaces in which Mark has suggested he has developed a reputation for complaining or being uncooperative when expressing very real frustrations and concerns that stem from the degree of urgency he senses

[129] Interview with Mikala Onalee, July 19, 2022.

towards addressing the crises affecting the city, crises which he has a tremendous personal connection to. Mikala, who began attending some of these kinds of meetings in Mark's place in part because of this frustration, also spoke to a perceived preference of City officials to speaking with her as a white volunteer, which she identified as something that both made her uncomfortable but that she attempted to "weaponize" by passionately advocating for SAGE Clan's interests and those of the people they assist. I had similar experiences to Mikala's over the course of my fieldwork with SAGE Clan, the first being when I unexpectedly found myself walking into a City Council meeting during an afternoon at Tent City with Josh and Keenen when we received word that a proposal to shut down the encampment was being discussed.[130] Afterwards, Josh expressed that it was helpful to have someone around who was comfortable navigating these kinds of political spaces, and (in the context of SAGE Clan potentially sharing and "debunking" council's proposal via social media), that I would be taken more seriously than he or Mark because of my education. Given that Josh is trained in his field and has much more practical knowledge on addiction than I do, and read in the context of similar instances, "educated" seemed to me an oblique reference to my being white. Mark too noted the significance of my research "findings" being developed and disseminated by a white woman, suggesting that City officials and other professionals would be more receptive to what I had to say, and that my positive description of SAGE Clan and very interest in the organization might somehow legitimize it.

Collaborating with the City and other organizations then often means that SAGE Clan must insert themselves into spaces of whiteness and accept that officials will attempt to govern

[130] In fact, what was proposed at that meeting was increased funding for further "compassionate cleanups" and of implementing a "controlled encampment" at another location, not an imminent dispersal of the encampment.

or "conduct the conduct"[131] of volunteers—whether this means conforming to stereotypical images of "traditional" Indigeneity, not losing one's cool lest being marked as aggressive or uncooperative, and operating within spaces of "professionalism" and bureaucracy (also marked as white). Developing the concept of "the will to improve," which contains an enduring tension between an extension of benevolence and the exertion of control, anthropologist Tania Murray Li defines government (drawn from Foucault) as "the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means."[132] While noting its distinction from discipline, which "seeks to reform designated groups through detailed supervision in *confined quarters*,"[133] Li suggests that in the context of development, seeking improvement necessitates an unequal relationship between those who are understood to know what is best and a population that is felt to be in need of this guidance, where the will to improve "hinges upon positioning oneself as an expert with the power to diagnose and correct a deficit of power in someone else."[134,135] Accomplishing this involves first locating these areas of deficiency within this population and further, seeking to alter their behaviour, encouraging individuals to behave in certain ways and to make certain decisions of their own volition while establishing the terrain and rules of engagement. These unwritten rules often "blend seamlessly into common sense" and in the case of SAGE Clan's engagement with City officials and related organizations, I argue, map onto discourses of professionalism and are built into the very structures of collaboration in the form of meetings, consultation periods, and broader organizational norms. This approach to collaboration, routinely framed as simply being "the way things are done," (aligning with Li's description of common

[131] Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.
[132] Li, *The Will to Improve*, 4-5.
[133] Li, *The Will to Improve*, 5. My emphasis.
[134] Li, *The Will to Improve*, 4-5.
[135] Li, *The Will to Improve*, 275.

sense) is not ideologically neutral and is often in conflict with SAGE Clan's grassroots origins and Blackfoot-led approach. Rather, these spaces represent an example of what Belanger and Dekruf have described as "whitestreaming," being steeped with white settler values and linked to a "series of discourses centered on equality of opportunity, colour blindness, and universal citizenship" which hide the ways in which FNMI values have been systematically excluded from these spaces.[136] Although SAGE Clan frequently expresses an openness to working with other organizations as part of their guiding principle of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyippitssinni, as I will discuss later in this chapter, unfortunately, attempts to conduct the conduct of the organization and a general misalignment in operational philosophies appear to be representative of their attempts to do so, and have sometimes resulted in a preference for tackling emerging issues independently. An early example of this misalignment is perhaps a story shared by Mark about a meeting with LPS leading up to SAGE Clan's inception which involved a key moment, told with a laugh, when an unknown gentleman sitting behind him announced, "keep talking, we're walking," as they walked out, perhaps an early call to both the centrality of the walk and an enduring distinction between SAGE Clan and other organizations.

Members of SAGE Clan routinely locate the organization's independence and "rule-breaking" spirit as its strength. When communicating with other organizations at the height of the controversy surrounding Tent City became particularly tense, Josh frequently joked (perhaps only half-heartedly) of wanting to "go rogue," pointing to a strong desire for the organization to be able to do things their own way. There have been key moments of rule-breaking (or bending) in SAGE Clan's history, in fact: the organization does not have a food safety handling permit to

[136] Yale Belanger and Katherine A. Dekruyf, "Neither Citizen nor Nation: Urban Aboriginal (In)Visibility and Co-Production in a Small Southern Alberta City," *The Canadian Institute for Native Studies* 37, no. 1 (2017), 6. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/neither-citizen-nor-nation-urban-aboriginal/docview/2250519836/se-2.

serve Ii'yuuhkua, nor have they, in some instances, secured a permit to raise their tipi—a particularly notable time being when it was raised in a vacant RCMP lot to serve as a warming shelter in January 2022 in response to extreme cold temperatures and the limited capacity of the Lethbridge Shelter. This is not done simply for the sake of breaking rules and is not tied to an inability to work well with others, as some might suggest, but rather, demonstrates clearly SAGE Clan's commitment to assisting their kin, as well as a recognition that the seriousness of the moment calls for this kind of action. It is inconceivable, from a Blackfoot perspective, that one must secure a permit to feed family or to raise up a tipi, particularly when food is such an important site of connection in Blackfoot culture, and when being done on their traditional territory. While the municipal governance structure of the settler city has naturalized these as governable spaces,[137] SAGE Clan volunteers reject this and assert their autonomy by caring for those they serve in the ways they know to be important.

*Decolonization Revisited*

When I began this research project, I contemplated the work of SAGE Clan Patrol as potentially decolonial in nature. This thinking emerged partly in response to an assumption that a Blackfoot-led organization may—by virtue of their epistemological orientation and apparent emergence in response to felt gaps in the Western approach to addiction treatment—reject the ways in which healing has been "shackled and reshaped" by colonialism[138] and in turn reassert an approach that affirms Blackfoot Ways of Knowing. It was also partly informed by literature which—accepting the premise that among Indigenous communities, historical trauma is at the

[137] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31-34.
[138] Adam, "Reshaping the Politics of Health," 279.

root of addiction—understands decolonization to be an important step in responding to the ways in which the dominant Western healthcare system remains impacted by colonization. Speaking to this point, Maggie Brady argues that "the idea that culture provides a pathway out of addiction" comes from a specific Indigenous understanding of the "etiology" of addiction as rooted in assimilative policies and dispossession caused by colonialism.[139,140] Further, she considers that Culture as Treatment may signal a rejection of colonization and "the culture of the colonizers,"[141] suggesting perhaps that traditional healing practices are fundamentally decolonial in the context of addiction. Warner Adam likewise argues that Indigenous health will only be decolonized when Indigenous peoples are given sole determination of this system and empowered to (re)embrace "preventative medicine that is rooted in culture,"[142] which I imagined to be accounted for in SAGE Clan's grassroots, kin-oriented approach. Powerfully, LaVallie and Sasakamoose also suggest that decolonization must be taken up by Indigenous peoples experiencing addiction themselves, which involves "questioning subjective characterizations and learned stereotypes" that might impact an individual's perception of their own experiences.[143]

While conversations with SAGE Clan volunteers and an examination of humour on patrol revealed that despite perhaps not using the framing of Culture as Treatment, volunteers accepted the view that homelessness and addiction resulted from colonization and related assimilative policies such as residential schools, volunteers additionally tend to frame addiction in terms of the disease model typical of Western treatment paradigms. This is perhaps a result of the fact that SAGE Clan volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, some having lived experience with

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[139] Brady, "Culture in Treatment, Culture as Treatment," 1487.
[140] Similarly, LaVallie and Sasakamoose locate addiction among Indigenous peoples as resulting from an introduction of colonization and associated assimilative policies and white supremacy. See LaVallie and Sasakamoose, "Promoting indigenous cultural responsivity," 18.
[141] Brady, "Culture in Treatment," 1487.
[142] Adam, "Reshaping the Politics of Health," 280.
[143] LaVallie and Sasakamoose, "Promoting indigenous cultural responsivity."

homelessness and addiction, and some (often overlapping) being trained or employed at various points in Western treatment paradigms as addiction counsellors, community support workers, nurses, paramedics, and social workers. The organization does not orient itself around a particular "approach" to addiction treatment and support (harm reduction, abstinence-oriented, etc.), but rather one premised on values of connection informed by Blackfoot Ways of Knowing. Volunteers, too, draw from a variety of treatment philosophies to frame their views on addiction and ultimately assist Ii'yuuhkua which at first glance might appear to be in ideological conflict, and at times hold contrasting views from one another. The topic of harm reduction, for example, was one of strong personal opinion for some volunteers, while others were uncomfortable taking any definitive position. The Team Leads I interviewed did not feel comfortable orienting SAGE Clan as having a harm reduction approach and at times disagreed with this outright, while the organization does use and distributes Naloxone and Narcan and arguably engages in one of the key tenets of harm reduction: meeting people where they are. What made Team Leads uncomfortable with this label perhaps reveals SAGE Clan's general approach to assisting Ii'yuuhkua: while some do support harm reduction in the form of supervised consumption sites (with varying levels of conviction), all suggested that further supports in the form of treatment and housing need to be made available, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach to addiction treatment would be ineffective. This seems to speak well to patrollers' focus on listening to the needs to those they assist and doing so without judgement. In this way, SAGE Clan operates much like the bricoleur Claude Lévi-Strauss originally conceived of as opposing the engineer, the former being that which operates creatively using "whatever is at hand" and whose "means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project."[144]

[144] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

While a number of volunteers embraced ostensibly "Western" approaches to addiction treatment—whether drawing from the disease model of addiction, working or participating in abstinence-oriented programming such as twelve-step programs, and variously engaging in components of harm reduction—I argue that SAGE Clan should be understood not by the tools of support or treatment they engage with, but rather, the ways in which they ultimately connect with Ii'yuuhkua and in turn, connect them to the supports they believe to be effective or that are sought specifically by the individual. When SAGE Clan patrollers engage in acts of care directed towards Ii'yuuhkua, they are (re)affirming kin ties which were once hoped to be weakened by assimilative policies that resulted in the separation of individuals from kin and place. The refusal to accept that Ii'yuuhkua should be "left behind," coupled with patrollers' affirmed connection to the land—which is asserted through their routinized physical presence in the downtown core—can be understood as fundamentally decolonial acts, particularly given that Lethbridge resides on the traditional territory of Blackfoot patrollers. In other words, SAGE Clan's work can be understood as decolonial because it entails a return to traditional forms of caring for one another that settler colonialism sought (and ultimately failed) to sever. Importantly, however, patrollers more often conceive of the broader project of SAGE Clan through the lens of reconciliation, which I will discuss further below.

In a similar vein, scholarship on Culture as Treatment is varied, with some disagreeing that the approach is fundamentally anti-colonial[145] or that decolonization should be a goal in the

[145] I use the term anti-colonial here, rather than decolonial, to describe an approach that rejects the dominant Western paradigm but does not necessarily achieve decolonial ends. Although discussing a contrast between anti-colonial *critique* and decolonial *framework*, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that the term *anti-colonial* differs from that of *decolonial* because it is oriented around subverting colonialism rather than fundamentally undoing it. See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 19.

context of addiction treatment at all, preferring a two-eyed seeing approach in its place.[146,147,148] Although engaging in a genuine two-eyed seeing approach necessarily requires at least an unsettling of the dominant Western approach, or the development of an "ethical space" for collaboration,[149] this approach does not argue for a complete rejection of Western approaches the way that true decolonization is meant to. Likewise, while seeing the value in cultural practices premised on a connection to kin, and attempting to connect Ii'yuuhkua to Blackfoot foods, language, and spirituality when funding allows, SAGE Clan volunteers do not seek to replace existing Western approaches to addiction treatment in Southern Alberta with what might be conceived of as a "traditional Blackfoot approach."[150] Rather, volunteers seemed to understand Blackfoot epistemology as guiding the ways in which volunteers engage in kin relations and form connections with Ii'yuuhkua, and that "Western" treatment centres—which do generally variously include a degree of cultural programming—could be an effective next step in healing from addiction. Keenen, who has training as a nurse and is a licensed addictions counsellor, often seemed to positively address a two-eyed seeing approach, speaking to his ability to walk in two worlds because of his cultural Knowledge and Western biomedical training.

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[146] Jocelyn Sommerfeld, David Danto, and Russ Walsh, "Indigenous Grassroots and Family-Run Land-Based Healing in Northern Ontario," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* (2021): 4, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11469-021-00496-0#citeas.

[147] David Danto, Russ Walsh, and Jocelyn Sommerfeld, "Learning from Those Who Do: Land-Based Healing in a Mushkegowuk Community," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 19 (2021): 2143, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00306-z.

[148] Grace Kyoon Achan et al., "The Two Great Healing Traditions: Issues, Opportunities, and Recommendations for an Integrated First Nations Healthcare System in Canada," *Health Systems & Reform* 7, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/23288604.2021.1943814.

[149] Willie Ermine, "The Ethical Space of Engagement," *Indigenous Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2007), https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ilj/article/view/27669/20400.

[150] In fact, whether there is such thing as a "traditional Blackfoot approach" to healing addiction is challenged in part by the view that colonization brough forth addiction. I recall attending a course on traditional Blackfoot healing where another student asked an Elder how addiction would have been treated in the "dog days," to which the Elder answered simply that it did not yet exist.

As I began to consider the ways in which patrollers engage with the Western medical system, I grew hesitant to put forth an analysis that suggested SAGE Clan's approach should be understood as purely decolonial. This was in part informed by a desire to not paint SAGE Clan as purely reactionary and overshadow the powerful way in which they assert a Blackfoot epistemology through their work, the sanitation of politics that Sherry Ortner cautions against and which similarly informed my decision to not interpret humour oriented around historical trauma as a straightforward act of resistance. [151] This decision was also informed by Tuck and Yang's important caution that "decolonization is not a metaphor" in a piece of the same title, in which the authors argue in part that the term "decolonization" risks becoming a meaningless buzzword when divorced from what they see as its original context in the reappropriation of land—particularly in the context of settler colonialism.[152] While I certainly agree with their premise that settler colonialism is primarily about the occupation of land—land which is inextricable from Indigenous epistemologies, for

> Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place—indeed how we/they came to *be a place*[153]

—I find it difficult to accept that efforts of decolonization should be limited to this area and thus not directed towards areas such as education, as they suggest, which has certainly been impacted by colonization in a simultaneous affirmation of Western/settler logic and a rejection of Indigenous Ways of Knowing.[154] However, I appreciate their caution, similar in spirit to that of Ortner's, to avoid empty uses of the concept of decolonization, as these often do not account for

[151] Ortner, "Ethnographic Refusal," 176-177.
[152] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," 1.
[153] Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, 6.
[154] Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, 1.

its intended radical, "unsettling" effects. As they put it, decolonization in its true conception "cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourse/frameworks" no matter how well-aligned they may appear to be,[155] and to attempt this grafting would be a radical departure from Franz Fanon's original claim that "decolonization is always a violent event."[156] This is why, although I certainly see SAGE Clan as operating within a frame of decolonization, I prefer to draw attention to the way in which the organization affirms an approach foregrounded in the development of kin-based relationships and supports the choices of Ii'yuuhkua, regardless of the treatment paradigm eventually selected. It is also why I wish to further contemplate the ways in which volunteers navigate both Western and Indigenous epistemologies and frame the need to support Ii'yuuhkua as a community through the lens of reconciliation.

*Possibilities for Reconciliation*

One of the more explicit references to the ways in which SAGE Clan engages in reconciliation came from Josh at the start of one patrol, when he recounted a moment of realization shared with Jasmine, told again during an interview:

> A few weeks ago, me and Jasmine, another Team Lead, were walking behind probably fifteen—including yourself—fifteen SAGE Clan volunteers on patrol. We were about ten feet back and we both sort of saw this at the same time, and we were just saying like "look at this." (…) Everyone there has a different story and has a different background and everything, and that's reconciliation. It's just dropping all the bullshit, all those thoughts that are put into our heads by politicians, or churches, or anything. And it's just opening your eyes and seeing it actually work and getting to know people. I have very good friends in SAGE Clan, including yourself, that are twenty years younger than me and come from different cultural backgrounds and different places in the country that we all grew up in, and

[155] Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, 3.
[156] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 1, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/The_Wretched_of_the_Earth/-XGKFJq4eccC?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover.

> we're a family. From a First Nations point of view that's what reconciliation is, it's becoming a community, becoming a family, and working together.[157]

In sharing this anecdote, Josh suggested that the composition of SAGE Clan patrols themselves—which include a range of individuals of different races, classes, ages, and lived experiences (the SAGE Clan website highlights this in further detail)[158]—are evidence of reconciliation by this virtue, where reconciliation is understood as working together as a community (or family) in order to achieve a common goal of assisting those experiencing addiction and homelessness. For Josh, this also appears to be about recognizing a common humanity (or perhaps kinship) that is at times obfuscated by those ideologies which might separate us, such as those of religion or politics. Most importantly, however, given Josh's continual emphasis on the role of SAGE Clan in providing connection and compassion to those they serve, is perhaps his description of SAGE Clan as functioning as a kind of community based on notions of kinship and shared responsibility, where SAGE Clan stands in for a model of how Lethbridge might approach assisting those experiencing homelessness and addiction. Indeed, to look to SAGE Clan in this way would fulfil Mark's desire that Lethbridge residents accept SAGE Clan as an "offering from the past" and a legitimate way of addressing the multiple crises affecting the city.

Similarly, Keenen also drew from patrol to articulate his view of reconciliation in an interview, referencing our interaction on patrol directly in saying:

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[157] Interview with Josh Cummins, July 29, 2022.
[158] Specifically, it notes that "the people who make [up] the SAGE Clan Patrol are Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Cree, Metis [sic], White, Black, East Indian, Jamaican, Sioux, Anishnabe [sic], and so many more" arguing that patrollers "become Niitsitapi" by embracing SAGE Clan's approach. See "Our Story," SAGE Clan Patrol, accessed March 3, 2023, http://sageclanpatrol.org/sage-clan-our-story/.

> This is reconciliation. That's what I meant when I said, "I don't see colour in SAGE" (…) Kat, you, Surrey, you know, I don't [see colour]. You guys may be white on the outside, but you have the heart of a Blackfoot person. (...) The fact that you guys are out here donating your time when you clearly don't have to proves a lot about how a person is.
>
> I think that's reconciliation, and seeing people be able to separate themselves from their job titles—we have people from huge organizations coming out. The fact that they're able to separate themselves from their job title and come out as a SAGE Patrol volunteer and offer whatever their services are from their background of work, I think is reconciliation.[159]

Like Josh, Keenen articulated a view of reconciliation that is premised on individuals coming together despite their different backgrounds, again emphasizing the importance of non-First Nations people embracing SAGE Clan's approach to connection, and this time highlighting how this is done despite a lack of the same responsibilities to kin that might be seen as informing a Blackfoot person's need to participate in patrol. Further, he sees the ability of individuals employed at different agencies—perhaps embracing competing approaches to addiction treatment—to "separate themselves from their job title" in working with SAGE Clan as a key part of reconciliation, highlighting what is at stake for patrollers in attempts to collaborate with other organizations. His assertion of not "seeing colour" also powerfully points to the ways in which a Niitsitapi identity might be understood as something that is at least partially developed by engaging in proper kin relationships which, as Betty Bastien has described, are the way in which a Blackfoot person comes to know themselves.[160] This is not to suggest that myself or other non-First Nations volunteers in fact succeeded in becoming Blackfoot over the course of our time with SAGE Clan—to do so would be to engage in something of a settler adoption

[159] Interview with Keenen Weasel Moccasin, July 27, 2022.
[160] Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing.*

fantasy, an example of a "settler move to innocence"[161]—but rather, to point to the ways in which the work of SAGE Clan represents a very significant aspect of Blackfoot epistemology.

Mikala, a former Team Lead who is white, laughed when she began her answer to my question about reconciliation, almost shouting, "not a land acknowledgement!" Echoing Josh and Keenen's discussions, she too saw SAGE Clan as a site of reconciliation where people of different backgrounds worked together as a community, while also speaking of a need—perhaps from a point of view specific to a non-First Nations person—to begin the process of reconciliation with inquiry:

> We're not trapped in the same way in the colonial system—what we are trapped in is we think it's the right way and don't see another way. And so we have to inquire about other approaches, we have to take that method, that line of inquiry, in order to break through that, and everyone has a different starting point with that.[162]

While Mikala's view of reconciliation stressed the importance of First Nations and non-First Nations people learning from one another, relating this to her relationship with Mark and some of the frank conversations they have had about their different experiences in the world, as discussed briefly in this chapter, she and other Team Leads also identified a point at which it no longer felt acceptable to lack cultural sensitivity or be uninformed about aspects of Canada's history, such as the residential school system. For some volunteers, there was a distinct gap in the willingness of some Lethbridge residents to truly engage in these conversations around reconciliation, going so far as adopting land acknowledgements or wearing an orange t-shirt but failing to recognize the ways in which these assimilative policies have had a direct impact on the

[161] Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor.*
[162] Interview with Mikala Onalee, July 19, 2022.

Blackfoot community and contributed to the existing crises of homelessness and addiction. A common refrain pointed to the fact that the children referenced in the "Every Child Matters" movement were in many cases the very Ii'yuuhkua who volunteers understood residents to look down upon while simultaneously being troubled by the recent discoveries of unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools. Volunteers expected that residents engage not merely in symbolic acts of reconciliation and rather hoped that they would embrace SAGE Clan's view of community by participating in assisting those experiencing addiction and homelessness, recognizing that as well as the organization succeeds in addressing gaps in services, the support of the broader community is needed to make more widespread or permanent change. As my summer with SAGE Clan Patrol drew to a close, there were perhaps hints of this hope coming true.

## Conclusion: Moving Forward, Together

While SAGE Clan Patrol remains committed to their mandate and original vision as an organization premised on people with lived experience helping those experiencing homelessness and addiction, in addition to Blackfoot people assisting other Blackfoot people, the organization remains ever-changing, in part due to the shifting nature of the multiple crises affecting Lethbridge and the grassroots nature of the organization itself. Since beginning this project, SAGE Clan has faced important changes, including the possibility of forming a sister organization in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and the assumption of the Lethbridge Shelter contract by the Blood Tribe Department of Health in January 2023, which currently employs four Team Leads and some regular patrollers. This represents an exciting moment for patrollers, who already have connections with many of the people the shelter serves, providing an initial degree of trust that is likely different from that which might have been developed with employees in the past, and perhaps representing a hint of being offered a true place at the table by the City. However, this also represents a moment of adjustment for volunteers as they navigate a different kind of space than some are used to when assisting Ii'yuuhkua: one structured by operational policies, shift schedules, and funding agreements. While the transition has not been without the odd hiccup—expected for any organization that takes over such a large operation—early chatter suggests that this is a serious step in the right direction. Given the overrepresentation of Blackfoot people experiencing homelessness in Lethbridge, volunteers I have spoken with have suggested that having a staff that is also largely comprised of Blackfoot and other FNMI individuals provides a source of much needed comfort to those accessing these services.

I began this work with the goal of understanding what was potentially unique about SAGE Clan Patrol's approach to assisting people experiencing addiction and homelessness. In

particular, I hoped to understand how their approach might map onto the broader topography of organizations and approaches to treating addiction in Southern Alberta, and to determine if and how they might draw from Blackfoot epistemology in their approach. Ultimately, I was introduced to an approach that is fundamentally different from the operational philosophies of other organizations in Lethbridge, and which does not locate itself within a particular "paradigm" of addiction treatment or support such as harm reduction or abstinence-oriented treatment. Rather, SAGE Clan Patrol is premised on Blackfoot epistemology, related to understandings of kinship, values of connection, and captured under the banner of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni. This approach, which recognizes the value of embracing connections to kin, rather than distancing oneself from them, runs parallel to a view that assistance is sometimes best offered by those who have had similar lived experiences with addiction and homelessness. In emphasizing connecting with and drawing from the lived experience of others, however, SAGE Clan conversely points to the fact that healing from addiction is a journey unique to each individual; while something to be pursued collectively and as a community, the organization prides itself on respecting and listening to the needs of Ii'yuuhkua and assisting them in accessing the services they need, regardless of what treatment paradigm these may ultimately align with.

Further, SAGE Clan represents a powerful (re)assertion of the purpose of traditional Blackfoot Societies in seriously adopting Blackfoot epistemology in their work, where similar to Bear Clan's mandate, Blackfoot volunteers engage in a traditional responsibility of care through the act of patrolling. In practicing Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, volunteers also seek not to "operationalize" Blackfoot culture under the paradigm of Culture as Treatment, but rather to embrace a way of being in the world that recognizes the importance (and in fact, necessity) of extending compassion and kindness to one's relatives in order to live and succeed as a

community. In doing so, the possibility of engaging in Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni is also extended to non-Blackfoot individuals should they be willing to forgo (white settler) operational norms and embrace a more radical form of engagement and collaboration that recognizes SAGE Clan patrollers as equal partners. To do so would also entail community members accepting the offering that is being extended to them—taking seriously the cultural and spiritual significance attached to this act—and recognizing the role that all Lethbridge residents have to play in healing from these intersecting crises. Following SAGE Clan patrollers, and given the ongoing nature of Alberta's opioid crisis, it is no longer acceptable to engage in protracted discussions with limited signs of action, dismiss the ongoing crises in Lethbridge (surrounding addiction and homelessness in particular) as being limited to FNMI people, or to remain ignorant to the past and ongoing effects of settler colonialism. Rather, SAGE Clan Patrol hopes that by embracing Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni on a community level and treating these crises with the urgency they deserve, it will be possible to move forward, together, in a serious act of reconciliation.

*The Future of SAGE Clan Patrol*

At a recent conference at the University of Lethbridge, I had the opportunity to present a portion of my thesis work and was asked two questions by attendees that caused me to reflect on what the future might hold for SAGE Clan Patrol as well as, fundamentally, what it might mean to be a SAGE Clan patroller. The first moment occurred when a woman asked me whether burnout occurs among volunteers. The question caused me to pause as I reflected on the experiences of Team Leads and more "regular" patrollers who have rarely (if ever) missed a patrol or SAGE Clan event since I began walking with the organization in June 2022. These individuals have been a part of SAGE Clan for multiple years in many cases, and their consistent

attendance has made them particularly invested in their work: they tend to have closer relationships with the people they serve—being recognized and called out to by name by Ii'yuuhkua —and to put in volunteer hours beyond those of patrol, making them more vulnerable to exhaustion as well as heartache when tragedy occurs and Ii'yuuhkua are lost. At the same time, many have also experienced the loss of family members and managed their own recoveries. And yet, despite these incredible challenges, while some took breaks as needed, there were very few moments when patrollers would reach a level of burnout that would cause them to stop coming to patrol altogether. I found myself answering the woman that no, burnout does not exactly occur: if only because volunteers are not in a position to step away, and because of the healing nature and relational quality of patrol itself.

Many Blackfoot or FNMI SAGE Clan patrollers are driven to begin volunteering with the organization because of their existing connections to people on the street, who may be close family members. While burnout is indeed possible, then—anyone, no matter how closely entwined with a cause, can reach this point, after all—on some level, stepping away from this responsibility to kin is simply not a possibility for a number of patrollers because of this deeply personal connection to the people they serve. The participation of these patrollers is not simply *volunteering*: rather, it is a continued act of survival taken up at the level of the community, a proud assertion of enduring Blackfoot culture in the face of settler colonialism, and a powerful refusal to leave kin behind. While then it is possible to experience burnout, acting on this by reducing time assisting Ii'yuuhkua or stopping doing so altogether is simply not a possibility afforded to many First Nations volunteers, whose families remain directly impacted by these crises and who they bear a responsibility of care towards. Keenen pointed to this responsibility

directly in speaking positively of non-First Nations volunteers' participation when he noted: "you guys are out here donating your time when you clearly don't have to."[163]

Further, the affect of patrols themselves might help to limit the effects of burnout given that the conceptualization of SAGE Clan as a family suggests a kind of kinship which, drawing from a Blackfoot perspective, acts as a site of healing. Indeed, this aligns with volunteers' own descriptions of patrol as "healing." It is perhaps this unique characteristic of patrols that helps volunteers to continue with their efforts, the very structure of the organization itself acting as a way of responding to the hardships faced by individuals when navigating this grieving independently. This was a difference I experienced myself on patrol, contrasted with my previous position as an Addiction Support Worker, where I found the professional and distanced atmosphere among my work colleagues did little to provide comfort. While patrol is a serious event, often articulated with somber or sad inflections, patrollers treat each other with love and kindness, looking out for one another, sharing jokes, and keeping up on each other's lives; Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni is practiced at all levels of SAGE Clan's operations.

The portrait of this family, however, is not a homogeneous one. As noted in the introduction, and as another question asked of me addressed—how can SAGE Clan maintain a Blackfoot approach when there is an increasing number of white volunteers? —many SAGE Clan Patrol volunteers do not have a FNMI background. Indeed, while SAGE Clan has suggested that "we all become Niitsitapi" by walking together and embracing the organization's broader approach of Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni, it is impossible to ignore the value of First Nations volunteers assisting other First Nations people experiencing addiction and homelessness. There is a degree of comfort and trust evident in these interactions—when Ii'yuuhkua are able to

[163] Interview with Keenen Weasel Moccasin, July 27, 2022

interact with people who look like them, speak like them, have similar life experiences to theirs, and may even be their relative—that does not seem to be replicated when a non-First Nations volunteer puts on a SAGE Clan vest, although this may help to build the beginnings of trust. I would suggest, however, that the thrust of the question, while well-intentioned, is perhaps misdirected in terms of SAGE Clan's goal of reconciliation. While I struggle to imagine a time when it will not be an important part of SAGE Clan's work to include a number (or perhaps majority) of Blackfoot and FNMI patrollers, SAGE Clan is not a Blackfoot organization by virtue of including Blackfoot patrollers, but because of the ways in which they conceive of and engage with Ii'yuuhkua —as kin who are not to be left behind, informed by Blackfoot epistemology. Further, the goal of the organization has remained centrally about helping those in need in whatever way they can, necessarily opening the possibility of including non-First Nations volunteers and Western organizations more broadly in this process. While then it is crucial that volunteers of all backgrounds recognize and respect SAGE Clan's orientation as Blackfoot-led, it is equally important to recognize that in its conception as an offering from the past, the organization represents an approach that is being given to the broader Lethbridge community, including non-First Nations community members as well. Thus, it is perhaps more important to SAGE Clan patrollers that non-First Nations volunteers be open minded of their approach and be willing to truly walk alongside them, not "ahead of us" or "behind us" as Mark has asked.[164]

The future of the SAGE Clan, however, does raise important questions for its orientation as Blackfoot-led. The expansion of SAGE Clan to Saskatoon, for example, which is Treaty 6 territory, has been one approached cautiously in terms of Traditional Protocol and that Mark has

[164] Interview with Mark Brave Rock, July 6, 2022.

explained will require close consultation with both Blackfoot and Cree Elders: how might SAGE Clan, as a Blackfoot organization akin to a traditional Society, be transferred to Cree territory? Might there come a time someday when Mark is required to share with a non-First Nations or Blackfoot patroller Knowledge which is not typically available to them to allow the organization to continue? These are questions that are not easily answered, but which speak further to the continued emphasis SAGE Clan places on sharing their approach with others for the benefit of the broader Lethbridge community and the people they serve.

Mark has long asserted that "Lethbridge is very solvable": despite the severity of the opioid, mental health, and housing crises in Lethbridge compared to other communities, the city boasts a relatively small population compared to larger centres such as Calgary and Edmonton, which are also faced with these issues, and strong relationships already exist between volunteers and the people they serve. It is a recurrent frustration then when the city continues to face a lack of supportive housing options, timely access to treatment, and adequate shelter space, among other limits to available services. While these gaps persist, and likely past this point, SAGE Clan will continue to meet Ii'yuuhkua with compassion where they are, to navigate these systems with creativity, and to invite community members to walk alongside them. Niitsitapiikimmapiiyipitssinni—Niitsitapi, caring for one another as a way of life or society—is a way of being in the world that has been practiced since time immemorial, and which will continue to be practiced for future generations to come.

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