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Indigenous Youth in Care

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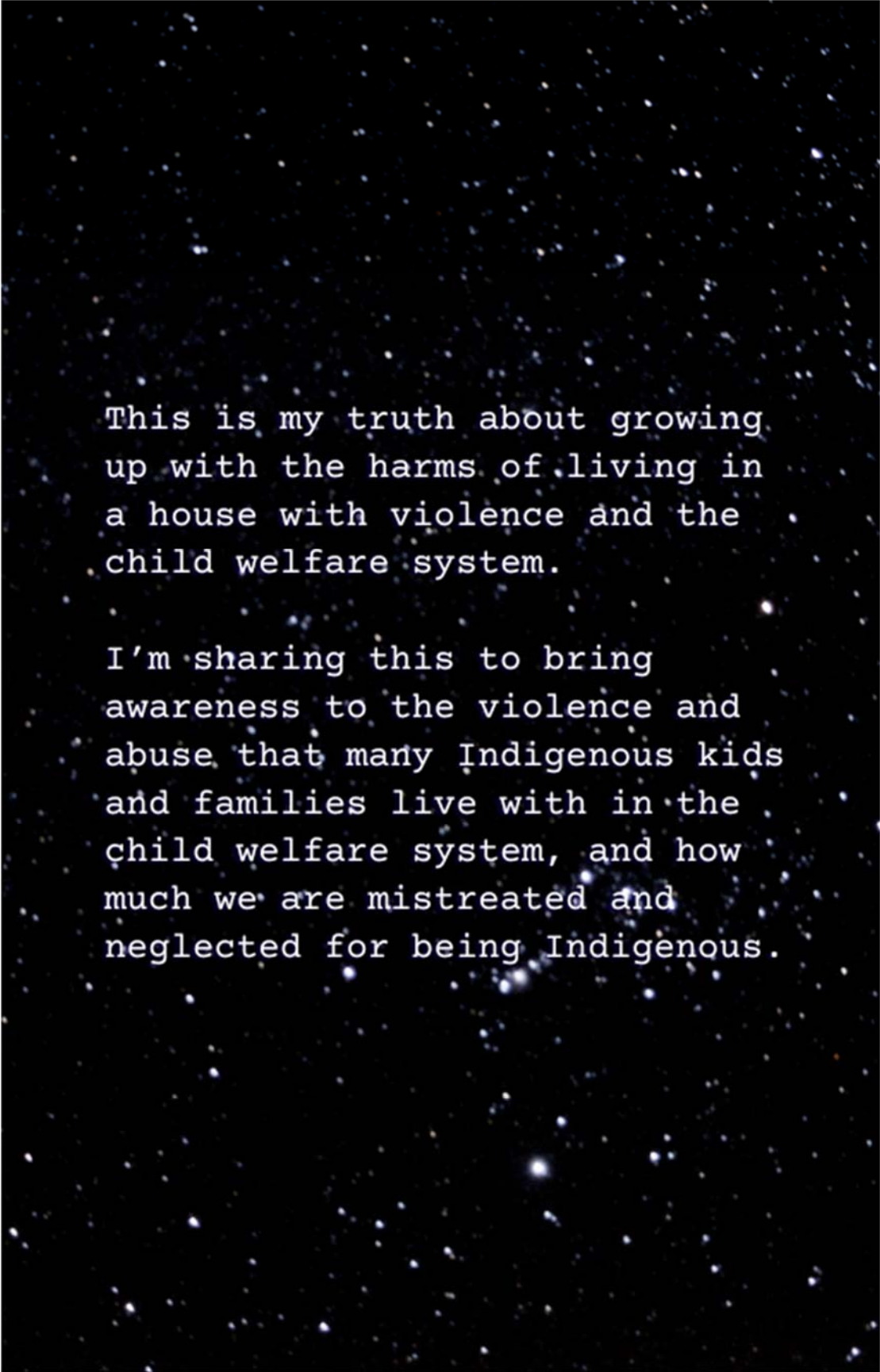
Keywords: Indigenous youth, Indigenous children/youth in care, racism in child welfare, neglect in child welfare, violence in foster care, Indigenous youth resurgence

Acknowledgement: We raise our hands in deepest respect and gratitude to the ancestors and families of the ləkʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ nations and to our own ancestors and Nations. We raise our hands to all Indigenous children and youth who have grown up in colonial systems, to those we have lost, and to those who survive, resist, and imagine justice and resurgence. INVINCIBLE is grateful for funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Insight grant 435-2020-1191) and the Canet Foundation.

Rayne Kakewash is an Indigenous youth in care and an INVINCIBLE youth storyteller/researcher who has been working with the Kinship Rising research project at the University of Victoria since 2021.

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This is my truth about growing
up with the harms of living in
a house with violence and the
child welfare system.

I'm sharing this to bring
awareness to the violence and
abuse that many Indigenous kids
and families live with in the
child welfare system, and how
much we are mistreated and
neglected for being Indigenous.

Finding Out

I want to give a heads up and disclaimer about violence in this story.

When I was one, my five-year-old sister was murdered by my parents in our home. She was severely, severely abused for a very long time, and child services did not do anything to protect her. I went into the child welfare system at that age, and I am still a youth in care today.

My sister was the oldest daughter in my family. There was a lot of abuse and violence that I am not going to share here. Social services would come knocking, and my parents would say she was fine, but social services would not go see her physically – that is how this was allowed to happen.

She was innocent and she could not fight back. She was just a baby, and she didn't deserve that.

Our story hit the news and became public for everyone to read. Our family was harassed by reporters and lawyers. That alone was very hard. It was such a big case, so many people know about it. I try to move away from feeling like it's always there, that I'm part of a family that everyone knows about.

It's not hard for me to talk about it, but it's not comfortable, because it's not my story to tell – but I lived it. I want to know what else went on behind closed doors. I have so many questions I'll never get answers to.

I knew only a little bit about it until 2019, when I found out that everything I thought I knew about my life and my family wasn't true. It felt like finding out a deep family secret. There was a lot of hurt and distrust. I wish I could've gotten the help and closure I needed much sooner.

Foster Care

When I was taken out of my family's home and put in foster care, that foster home was not good at all. The family would treat me badly and I would always scream and cry whenever I had to go back to their home.

Being put into foster care led me to have all these great opportunities, but growing up wasn't the greatest. I paid a high price for whatever opportunities I have.

Everyone deserves a safe and happy childhood. I always wonder what would happen if that didn't happen, how would my life be different.

This all came from history. Our treaty rights were not respected and the government took all our lands and cultures from us without paying their dues. White people took our families into residential schools. It happened to my family. I know my own family went through residential schools, that's where the violence started. Our kids need to be protected, safeguarded, and loved.

Trauma, my psyche

I was about one so I don't have memories of being there, but I know it's gone into my memories, into my psyche – because it stays in you. My psyche remembers it.

A lot of my trauma from my childhood and teenage years lives in my psyche. As a result, I tend to avoid things like confrontation or risk, or being in an unknown situation where I can't control my safety or my well-being. It was a relief to be diagnosed later in life because I can get the help that I need and want.

My Healing

Judgement is a very big part of my life, I'm constantly getting judged for the life I have now, but I'm humble about it. People don't know what I went through. I will never judge somebody, because you never know what has gone on in their life and what goes on behind closed doors.

Some of my healing came from good counseling with someone I trust, as well as taking part in projects, cultural ceremonies, and smudging.

It took until I was about 17 before I knew I wanted help; something snapped and I felt like I matured. I got the help I needed and feel so much happier about life. Acknowledging that you need help is not an easy thing to do, and I'm proud of myself for figuring that out.

I feel safe in my life now, but I am still healing.



1 Foster homes and caregivers need much better screening – make sure they are safe! Because there aren't enough caregivers, the agencies approve placements too easily, and they don't investigate all the things they should be looking into. A home should be free of abuse.

2 Caregivers need to be trained properly to have the right mind space – they must be mentally and emotionally capable of caring for a youth, not just doing it for the money.

3 Homes and caregivers must know they have to let Indigenous kids have more connection to their culture and put in the effort to help them connect with their cultures and communities.

4 Social workers need to listen to their youth and children more, and believe us when we bring something up. In the past I would say something, and they would think I was lying or making it up for attention, and the harm was allowed to continue.

5 Social workers should make more of an effort to connect with us one-on-one. They need to spend more time connecting, doing home checks, making sure we're safe and OK, and building a relationship.

6 A youth in care should always have someone they know will believe them and that they can go to for help – this is essential to fix the issues of harm in care and to make sure we are safeguarded.

7

The inconsistency is harmful – there is no oversight of what happens. CFS will take kids who are not being abused and neglected, but they will leave some kids who are being abused and neglected, so there is a lot of harm either way. There is no justice, or rhyme or reason, as to why some kids get removed when they should not be removed, and other kids never get removed and supported when they should be removed.

Kids get removed for false reports, racism, and poverty, but some kids who should be removed don't get removed. So many times, reports from us Indigenous people don't get taken seriously: I have called to report serious abuse and they never looked into it. There is a lot of neglect of duty on their part.

8

Young native women are especially at high risk, and they may not have anywhere safe to go. They are at risk of abuse and violence – they need a lot more supports and safety. They need to be honoured, protected and respected.

9

There's a lot of horrible racism. There's a lot of stereotypes that we're just bums or alcoholics or addicts. Especially in group homes, they'll favour kids who are not Native, and they get treated better.


10

There's no communication in so many ways; they just ignore your calls. So many times, I had the experience of them not even calling me back. So much harm is allowed to happen because there's no follow up.



RAYNE

Born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Life plan:
Become a surgeon or a nurse because I'm really passionate about caring for others

Likes:
Cats, gaming, concerts

[Click here to view this story on the INVINCIBLE website](#)