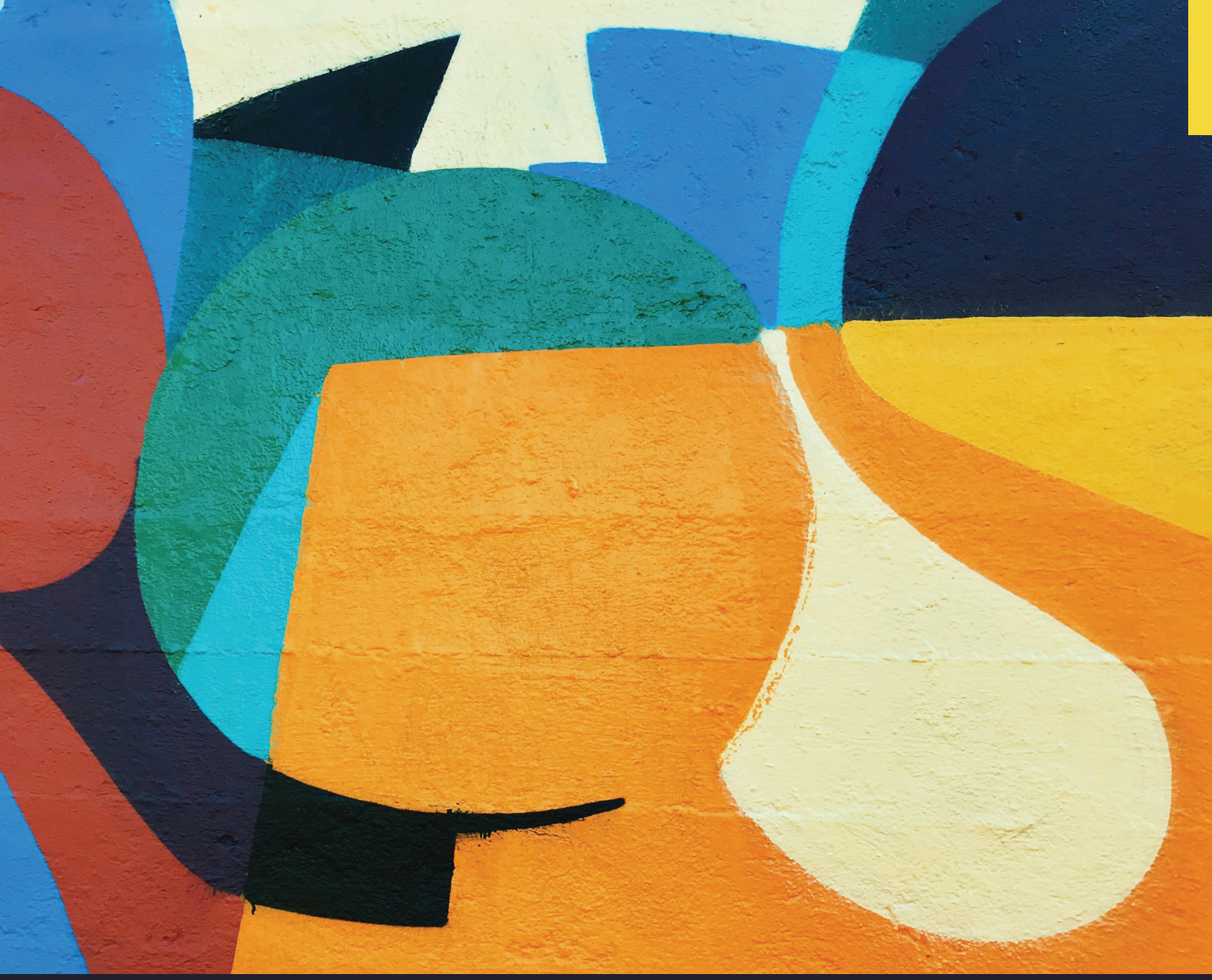

APRIL 2026

THE POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS AND RACIALIZED STUDENTS

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Executive Summary

Indigenous and racialized students continue to navigate structural and relational barriers in transitioning to and completing higher education, despite a growing body of research and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) (2015) calls for educational institutions to work toward decolonization and reconciliation. This longitudinal study explores the transition experiences of alumni from the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) Pathways to Education program in Winnipeg's North End. Using a community-based participatory research approach, data were collected through sharing circles and interviews with 27 participants over three years (2022–2024). The aim of the study was to identify barriers and supports influencing post-secondary education (PSE) access and completion for alumni of the CEDA Pathways to Education program, which serves predominantly Indigenous and newcomer youth in one of Canada's most structurally disadvantaged urban neighborhoods.

Findings reveal the following persistent barriers to PSE and the supports for success:

1. Barriers to PSE

- Financial hardship: A lack of funding was the most decisive barrier to PSE; many students worked precarious jobs and supported family members.
- Intergenerational trauma and mental health: A high prevalence of grief, anxiety, depression, and caregiving responsibilities disrupted students' education.

- System navigation: Students struggled with admissions, registration, and academic expectations without adequate guidance.
- Institutional racism: Experiences of exclusion, tokenism, and lack of representation among faculty contributed to feelings of alienation.

2. Supports

- Funding: Band funding, scholarships, and bursaries were critical.
- Social/emotional support: Family encouragement and peer networks helped students persist.
- Academic navigation: Assistance from CEDA Pathways staff and bridging programs such as Access Programs eased transitions.
- Culturally safer spaces and programs: Indigenous student spaces and programs provided belonging and reduced experiences of racism.

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Increase financial and housing supports: Scholarships, bursaries, and affordable housing for Indigenous and racialized students.
2. Extend educational support beyond high school: Ongoing mentorship and navigation assistance during early PSE years, similar to CEDA Pathways.
3. Mental health services: Grounded in Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices.
4. Indigenize and decolonize PSE: Hire Indigenous faculty, integrate Indigenous curriculum, and dismantle colonial structures.

Without systemic change, Indigenous and racialized students will continue to face inequitable access and outcomes in higher education. These students face persistent structural and relational barriers rooted in colonial systems, racism, and socioeconomic inequality. Decolonization and Indigenization are essential for creating equitable educational pathways.

Key Messages

1. Indigenous and racialized students continue to face inequitable access to PSE, encountering persistent structural and relational barriers rooted in colonial systems, racism, and socioeconomic inequality.
2. Supports for success include funding, culturally appropriate social and emotional support, and academic navigation supports including bridging programs.
3. Decolonization and Indigenization are essential for creating equitable educational pathways to PSE.

Introduction

Indigenous and racialized students are underrepresented at post-secondary education (PSE) levels, even though PSE is generally acknowledged to be linked to improved socioeconomic status and life opportunities (Shankar et al., 2013). Despite a growing body of research, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) (2015) calls for educational institutions to work toward decolonization and reconciliation, Indigenous and racialized students navigate structural and relational barriers in transitioning to and completing PSE. Besides navigating colonial and Eurocentric systems, curricula, and pedagogies (Chichekian & Bragoli-Barzan, 2025; King & Brigham, 2023), Indigenous and racialized university students encounter high levels of racism (Motz & Currie 2019; Styres et al., 2020; Kanji, 2025), sexual harassment (Dion et al., 2022), and inadequate academic and financial supports (Bunjun, 2021; Cameron et al., 2024; King & Brigham, 2023). Compounding the impact of these experiences, students from Indigenous, Black, and refugee backgrounds also experience the generational effects of colonization (e.g., residential schools), slavery, and/or forced displacement (Adams, 1989; Maynard, 2017). Thus, access to PSE without support is not an opportunity (Jones et al., 2019, p. 2).

Given that colleges and universities are "contested spaces that foster and perpetuate institutionalized racism, oppression, and violence" (Tomlins-Jahnke et al., 2019, p. 45), racialized students, especially those who identify with an Indigenous identity, are more likely than white students to experience mental health related issues, such as self-harm, suicidal ideation, depression, and substance abuse, and gaps in educational outcomes (e.g., absenteeism, underachievement, and lower retention) (Bunjun, 2021; Hop Wo et al., 2019). This is why issues such as

race, ethnicity, and Indigenous identity are highlighted in the literature as predictors of PSE attendance (Pulchny et al., 2025).

In settler colonial contexts, such as in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, an increasing number of First Nation and Indigenous populations gain admission to college and university through 'bridging' or 'pathway' programs (Agosti & Bernat, 2018). These programs are considered "as a mechanism to redress disadvantage because of the second chance they provide" (Frawley et al., 2017, p. 4).

Pathways to Education is a national organization centered on improving high school graduation rates in low-income neighbourhoods with a vision of "breaking the cycle of poverty through the transformative power of education" (CEDA, 2024, para. 4). Although the program emphasizes removing barriers to education for high school students, its objectives include increasing opportunities to attain PSE. In Winnipeg's North End, the Pathways to Education program has been hosted by the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) since 2010.

The North End area of Winnipeg that the CEDA Pathways program supports is one of the poorest in Canada, lacking the same infrastructures (e.g., social and physical) afforded to other neighborhoods in Winnipeg (Dorries et al, 2019; Toews, 2018). Most students in the program identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, or Inuit) or as racialized newcomers (refugees and immigrants).

The CEDA Pathways program has been successful in supporting students to complete high school. To date, the program has supported over 600 high school graduates. Evaluations have shown the program's success in providing a welcoming environment and academic and social support.

The CEDA Pathways program offers up to $4,000 in scholarship money per high school graduate to pursue post-secondary studies. In addition, the CEDA Pathways program has been able to provide some basic support with post-secondary transition, including helping students with applications for college and university.

Post-secondary outcomes of CEDA Pathways high school graduates show that the support has not been enough. Only around 40 percent of alumni have applied to a program, indicating a low uptake of PSE. Moreover, fewer than half of alumni who applied to PSE have finished their studies. Only a few of these PSE graduates have earned a university degree or college diploma; the majority have finished certificate programs.

Since the CEDA Pathways program began, there has not been a formal follow-through with alumni to understand their experiences after

high school graduation. Past research on the education journeys of Indigenous students has emphasized the importance of understanding their experiences not just as they enter university or college, but also "the multiple pathways and complex circumstances" that influence their decisions to pursue higher education (Parent, 2017, p. 155). Attending to the experiences of Indigenous and racialized students in PSE is important for survival, anti-racism, and decolonization (Bunjun, 2021; Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020; Smith, 2021). Recent systematic review of PSE transitions research also highlighted the need for more research on the impacts of the education system on Indigenous students' PSE decisions (Pulchny et al., 2025, P. 8).

The purpose of this study is to further this research by assessing the barriers encountered and the supports needed for transition from high school to PSE for inner-city students. The findings of this study can benefit the CEDA Pathways program as well as programs in other communities. This study aligns with the TRC's calls for PSE institutions to decolonize and seek reconciliation (TRC, 2015).

Methods

The study design was longitudinal, following a group of students across three years to get a sense of their trajectories after high school graduation. The project relied on methods developed in past work with CEDA Pathways (MacKinnon et al., 2018) that have been used for evaluation and research at the organization for many years. These methods take an Indigenous approach that aligns with the philosophies that guide the program, as well as a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach that centers lived experiences of participants and requires a partnership between the researcher and the community organization (Springer & Skolarus, 2019). The research question and methods were designed in collaboration by the Program Director and a researcher who had both worked for the program for over a decade.

To guarantee that participants had relevant experiences to respond to the research questions, recruitment occurred through purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants had to have been enrolled in the CEDA Pathways program for at least two years and have graduated from high school at least one year prior to the first data collection. As well, participants had to self-identify as Indigenous or have been a newcomer during their time in the program, meaning they had lived in Canada for less than ten years. Alumni who were currently attending post-secondary, who had post-secondary experiences that were interrupted, and who never attended post-secondary were all invited to participate. Eligible alumni were identified by CEDA Pathways and were sent a recruitment poster by email. Follow-up phone calls were made to interested alumni to ensure all participation criteria were met. See Table 1 for the demographics of the participants.

Data collection occurred in three phases: summer 2022 (year 1), summer 2023 (year 2), and summer 2024 (year 3). For each phase of data collection, participants were invited to attend a small sharing circle, either in-person or online, with up to five other participants. Sharing circles were previously identified by the program as a preferred method of gathering information because of their familiarity to students and the safe environment they provide for giving feedback (MacKinnon et al., 2018). It is common procedure at CEDA Pathways to have a supportive staff member sit in circle with students when data gathering is taking place; as such, the Program Director who was known to all participants assisted research staff with circle facilitation. Participants were also given the option to participate in a one-on-one interview if they could not attend a circle. Circle and interviews were guided by semi-structured questionnaires.

Ethics approval for this study was received from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Winnipeg (HE15833). Prior to participation, written consent (verbal consent for online participation) was obtained from participants to ensure they understood the goals of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality and anonymity, and potential harms and benefits of participation. Sharing circles lasted one to two hours, while interviews lasted 20 minutes to one hour. Online data collection was done using the Zoom platform. As a token of appreciation for their time, sharing circle participants received $50 and interview participants received $25 for each phase of data collection. All data collection was audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were read multiple times and analyzed for themes. To further understand the experiences of the participants, the identified themes were then compared to one another (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Findings

Participants

Twenty-seven alumni of the CEDA Pathways program participated in this study. Eighteen alumni participated in all three years of the study; one participated in years one and two; one participated in years one and three; and seven participated in year one only. Participants were enrolled in the CEDA Pathways program for an average of 3.7 years prior to high

Table 1 / Participant Demographic Information

Characteristics	n
Indigenous	20
Newcomer	7
Gender	
Female	16
Male	10
Non-binary	1
Year of High School Graduation	
2012	1
2013	1
2017	1
2018	10
2019	6
2020	5
2021	3

school graduation. Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the participants.

In year one of the study, three participants had completed certificate programs and were employed. Six students were attending university with one completing their degree and one leaving university to return to their reservation and find employment by the third year of data collection. Another seven participants had previously attended post-secondary programs but had their schooling interrupted and were not attending at the start of data collection; three of these students returned to school by the third year of data collection and one had plans to return in the near future. Eleven participants had never attended post-secondary education, however two entered programs before the third year of data collection.

For anonymity, participants are referenced by the letter P and a number through this report. The following participants identified as Indigenous: P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13, P14, P15, P17, P18, P19, P20, P21, P22, P26, and P27. The following participants identified as newcomers: P5, P6, P11, P16, P23, P24, and P25.

Barriers to Post-Secondary Education

During the sharing circles and interviews, participants discussed many factors that influenced their decision to enroll in post-secondary programs and that affected their experiences within those programs. Four main barriers emerged from the data, experienced by both Indigenous participants and newcomer participants: (i) socioeconomic inequality, (ii) intergenerational trauma, mental health, and caregiving responsibilities, (iii) navigating the complex system of PSE, and (iv) racism.

Socioeconomic inequality

Socioeconomic inequality is tightly linked to intergenerational trauma and ongoing colonialism. Many participants in this study discussed growing up in very low-income households. A few of them described living with food insecurity, while others talked about housing instability resulting in frequent moves, periods of homelessness, and unsafe housing including being exposed to gang violence. Now being young adults, participants described how socioeconomic inequality impacted their trajectories after high school.

> "I think the biggest barrier to post-secondary is always the financial stuff." (P6)

Lack of funding was the most definitive barrier to post-secondary education that emerged from the conversations with alumni. All 11 participants who had never attended post-secondary at the beginning of the study cited a lack of money as a reason. For instance, when asked what he would need to assist him to decide whether to enroll in a post-secondary school, P15 gave the concise response, "funding." Most of these participants were in low-pay, precarious jobs and many had experienced periods of unemployment since graduating from high school. As well, most of them were living on their own supporting themselves and in some cases, financially supporting other family members. As P13 explained:

> I didn't have the privilege of going straight into college. I didn't have the finances for that. My family was 'either go to school or work.' And once I was done [high] school, I didn't have the money to go to post-secondary… I had to pay the bills, had to put food on that table…. I chose that because my parents always sacrificed a lot for me…. I have to make sure there's a roof on their head and food on the table. Make sure they don't have to stress about bills…. Like, look, look at my shoes. I don't even buy myself shoes or clothes to make sure everyone else around me is taken care of.

Another participant, P17 had a similar story. When asked if he had ambitions towards post-secondary in the future, he replied, "Not that it's not for me, it's just, I end up supporting my family, like my mom and my brothers and sister. Like, stopping working and going back to school isn't really an option for me." Another participant (P1) discussed how they were always the financial support in their family ever since they could start working and were never able to take time off. After their parents had become more independent, this participant was adjusting to no longer being the breadwinner.

For those who did attend post-secondary schooling, funding also impacted their journeys. Two students opted for shorter and less expensive programs that worked within their limited funding. As one participant explained, "I decided that I was going to go to R. B. Russell because they had a cheaper program that they were offering" (P10). She used her CEDA bursary to support her studies. Another alumnus (P5) chose a shorter, affordable certificate program to become a health care aide; she intended to save money while working as an aide with plans to eventually return to school for a more costly medical technician course.

Other participants who were able to attend post-secondary, but without full funding, described the stress of balancing school and working to help their family. When P6 turned 18 and his mom no longer received the Canada Child Benefit, he needed to contribute to the household income and find some parttime work to do "on the side" while going to university full time. P11 also lived at home and needed to help her family. She opted for reducing her courseload at school to lower her stress when family circumstances required her to work more:

> Yeah, I was having a lot of trouble with just mainly focusing on school and working part time. It just felt so, like, chaotic for me. And then back in December, my dad got sick, so then my sister was the only one who was working full time. So I had to step up and start working full time. And then I've been doing school part time. (P11)

Although the need to work has slowed down her progress in university, she finds the balance much better.

Furthermore, for participants balancing work and school, finding suitable employment was a major challenge. As P11 stated, "it's really hard to find a job that works with your schedule [as a student]. So then you end up with like, these really bad customer service jobs … which like stresses you out and then you can't focus on school. Like, I remember just crying so much from the job…" Much like the participants who went directly to work after high school, participants working and studying described having low-pay, precarious jobs often with difficult hours and sometimes with "mean" bosses.

A handful of participants who were living on their own described the challenges of paying for their living expenses while going to school. One student (P2) described the stress of working full time to cover rent and bills while going to post-secondary. She contrasted it to high school when she did not have the responsibilities of living expenses. For a few participants who had children, the need to work and make a living created a clear barrier to start or return to a post-secondary program. One of these participants (P21) chose to leave university after a year; he explained that he could make $5000 to $6000 per month doing labour jobs, substantially more than the $1200 per month living allowance he received from band-funding while attending university.

Another participant (P23) was working multiple jobs to make ends meet while living on her own and waiting to get her permanent residency. Most post-secondary programs are significantly cheaper for Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

Previous CEDA Pathways evaluation work has shown that youth in the North End often take on adult-like responsibilities that can interrupt their schooling, including household tasks such as meal preparations, childcare including daytimes when parents are working, and financial contributions once they are old enough to obtain employment. This study shows that these responsibilities can continue, and in some cases intensify, after high school graduation. One participant talked about her drive to continue with her post-secondary studies despite her grief and care-giving responsibilities. She said, "I honestly don't know what pulls me through.... I take a lot of things...a little too seriously sometimes. And that's just because I feel like I grew up too young." (P8)

Research in Manitoba with Indigenous and refugee communities show that many young adults must navigate the added family and/or work responsibilities (Ennab, 2022; Silver, 2025). These responsibilities along with institutional racism explain why "Indigenous high school graduation rates are, on average, lower than those of non-Indigenous youth" (Silver, 2025, p.5). It is not surprising that Indigenous university and college students often identify insufficient and inconsistent financial support as a major barrier (Cameron, 2024; Restoule et al., 2013; Styres et al., 2020; TRC, 2015; Walton, 2020). Similarly, for newcomers, the need to earn a living often overrides options of furthering education (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). Thus, it is important to enhance financial supports, scholarships, and opportunities for Indigenous and racialized students.

Intergenerational Trauma, Mental Health, and Caregiving Responsibilities

Many participants discussed the context of their lives, growing up with intergenerational trauma in their families and in the community. Various participants talked about exposure to the Child Welfare System, the Criminal Justice System, substance use, and loss of family members or friends from overdoses and suicides. As one participant described:

> I was raised by my grandmother. She was a residential school survivor, and so growing up with her, as you know, intergenerational trauma plays a factor in any First Nation household. ... But like, I grew up ...in a very traumatic environment. I grew up with all my aunts, my uncles, my cousins. There'd be three people to a room, four people to a room. Everyone had their own issues. ...I did lose a lot of family members to overdoses. (P8)

In fact, losing loved ones at a young age was very common amongst the participants. Many had experienced the death of cousins, siblings, or parents. As one participant (P19) indicated during an update in Year 2,

"Yeah, there's been no death. Surprisingly, like every year since like 2019 there's been a death in the family. But no, nothing [this past year]."

These participants went on to describe the impact the trauma has had on their post-secondary education. Many described mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and grief. Two indicated their own struggles with substance abuse. Several had the responsibility of caregiving older family members (parents or grandparents). These issues undoubtedly put pressure on their studies and resulted in time away from their programs. One participant (P8) described the impact of both caregiving and grief on her studies:

> I am [my grandmother's] caregiver... she was sick for weeks at a time, and this was during exam season, so I didn't have a lot of time to study. I passed my exams, but not with high grades as I would have liked.... I did experience a lot of other barriers with family that did prevent me from doing well in school.... My third year [university] definitely was my hardest... And I ended up withdrawing from the term. I couldn't do it anymore. I just dropped all my courses. And that's just because I had a family member who passed away as well ... a youth that I was close to, they overdosed. To top it all off, I had a nephew who was recently diagnosed with cancer.

Another participant (P20) described how his families' health nearly prevented him from graduating from high school. Now a university student, the impact has continued:

> My second year, I kind of struggled with some family stuff. I just stopped showing up to classes. Like, my dad had some health stuff, and I was not really working as hard as I should have and just kind of getting by with C's and D's. ... I was the first in my family to graduate high school ... and go to university. ... My family really kind of sucks lots of life out of me, just trying to make sure that everyone's okay... I couldn't really put my 100% in school and just kind of lost my passion for it eventually too.

Because of a lack of guidance and support, this student's absences and subsequent failing grades eventually led to a suspension from university.

Yet another student (P22) described the impact of substance abuse in her extended family. Her mother spent a lot of time supporting family members including providing foster care for nieces and nephews. The participant played a significant role with the childcare of the foster children, and she struggled with balancing this with her first term at university. As she said, "It completely broke my mental state." She eventually left university without finishing the term.

Post-secondary school interruptions due to the impact of intergenerational trauma and grief did not only impact Indigenous participants. One newcomer participant (P5) talked about mental health challenges that arose from losing friends in high school who died by suicide, overdose, and from violence. She took time away from her college program to seek mental health supports to cope with her grief.

Consistent with these findings, research stresses the importance of centering the academic well-being of Indigenous and racialized students (Bunjun, 2021). Indigenous students in higher education across Canada experience higher prevalence of mental health and related issues compared to the non-Indigenous student population (Hop Wo et al., 2019; Steinman & Sánchez, 2023). Indigenous students "are more likely to experience mental health issues, including a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, increased self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, and higher rates of binge drinking, marijuana and other substance use compared to their non-Indigenous peers" (Hop Wo et al., 2019, pp. 270–271). For these reasons, one of the demands of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) is for the federal government "to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (p. 208).

System Navigation

Navigating the complex systems of post-secondary education was a large theme amongst participants. During a circle, one participant (P1) describing the challenges of post-secondary education said, "Feeling like you don't know what the hell is going on…I just didn't feel like I knew what I was doing." The interviewer paraphrased, "The confusion," to which the participant replied, "Yeah." Two other participants (P3, P5) in the circle expressed strong agreement with this statement.

Participants who attended post-secondary programs talked about the difficulties of being independent in a system that was unfamiliar to them and not having any support with navigating it. They talked about struggling with a range of things from choice of program to administrative tasks such as enrolling in classes to finding the buildings their classes were in during the first week of school. Other hurdles included figuring out how much to study for each class and scheduling their time. As one participant (P6) explained, "I think one of the hardest parts, like for me, was like figuring everything out on your own. Right? …And there's no one to help me with this because my family doesn't really understand this kind of stuff … So figuring out is, like, the hardest part." This student felt that the first year was the hardest; he dropped two courses and found a

balance that worked better for him. Almost all the participants who had attended a post-secondary program were the first in their family to do so, therefore there was little mention of practical support from family in figuring out the web of post-secondary education.

Another student (P11) went back to CEDA Pathways to get help from a staff member to register for their classes at university. They described feeling scared and unsupported after having so much support from CEDA through high school.

> It felt like I had no one to reach out to. I had no one to help me with that. … I feel like since I graduated [from high school], I should already know what I'm doing. I should be more independent. … But after starting university the first few days, I was so scared it felt like I needed [a CEDA Pathways staff member with whom she was close] to hold my hand because it felt like everyone was so much smarter than me. (P11)

Although some participants were able to overcome the challenges of navigating post-secondary education, for others, it presented barriers. For example, one student (P19) had not been advised properly on the requirements for an honours degree, which thwarted her plans to go on to do a master's degree. Another student (P20) who stopped attending classes during a family crisis was unaware of the options available to him to withdraw from classes or get extensions. Instead, he accumulated low grades and failed some courses, resulting in probation and eventually an academic suspension. He talked about having a large network of support in high school and then feeling abandoned in university. Thus, it is important that students feel they are supported in high school and as they transition into university.

For students who had never attended a post-secondary institution, a lack of information about programs was a large barrier. They talked about not knowing where to go or how to apply for programs or funding and needing support to "figure it all out." When asked if he thought about attending post-secondary in the future, one student replied, "I don't know where, or what? I have no clue. Student loans…don't know how to navigate, where to begin." (P17).

Similarly, for another student (P2) who had left her program for a while, not knowing how to re-enroll in classes was causing her stress and delaying her return. "I am still figuring it out [how to re-enroll]. … I would love to get support cause I'm, I don't know, just, like trying to figure out what steps to take first. I feel overwhelmed, and I guess it's making me put off actually doing something."

Indigenous and racialized students often struggle to navigate the colonial and Eurocentric system, including curricula, in higher education (Bunjun, 2021; Steinman & Sánchez, 2023; King & Brigham, 2023). Research shows that post-secondary admissions application processes confuse and frustrate Indigenous students (Restoule et al., 2013). Students often make decisions about which institutions and courses to pursue based on limited information and personal familiarity, while the resources needed to do well in these settings tend to favor those from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds (Webb, 2018, p. 529).

Racism: "The whiteness of it all"

Many participants who attended post-secondary programs described an uncomfortable atmosphere that made them feel like they did not belong. Some students felt that spaces on campuses are "for white people" and "Asians" (P3 & P5). One student described the feeling of not having people she could identify with in her program to work with:

> Well, they [other students] were getting by like so easy because they have ... people who like they turn around and see like another person, they are easy to communicate with.... I was the only black kid in my class, so who am I going to turn to? ... CEDA was diverse and like, post-secondary is just not. (P5)

Similarly, another student added: "You get used to your bubble in the North End, and then you go over there [to post-secondary] and there's not really many people who look like you.... you're lucky if you have one course with one [Indigenous student]." (P3)

One Indigenous student (P21) talked about the disconnect between his past experiences in the criminal justice system and working labour jobs and the post-secondary environment. He shared his feelings of discomfort and his experiences of racism at university:

> I grew up with like a lot of people in the hood. And then when you go to university...[you've] got to fit into this weird mold in the university, and I just didn't want to do that. It was just a very different dynamic for me.... I just felt really different from all the people around me. And then everyone else had laptops, too. And I just like write notes by hand.... I was still wearing steel toed boots and shit like that, and everyone else had, like, these nice fancy new clothes and are always doing something cool with their spare time.... One of the weirdest comments I always got was, "you're so smart." But I always felt like, "Smart compared to what? Other people? Or other native people?" You know what I mean? That's always something that stuck with me.... There's just a lot of underhanded racism and stuff like that, you know.

A racialized newcomer student had a similar feeling at the college she attended:

> And then there'd be like, a culture day, and you see the European flags and all.... I feel like our whole experiences, people of colour, are just not welcome to come to post-secondary school, because professors are not happy that you're in the class, and the white people just look at you like, "Oh my God, how did she get in here?" ... like you're stupid. You're not worthy to be here. (P5)

P3 agreed with P5's comments, surmising, "An outcast."

Participants also discussed a lack of representation among instructors at post-secondary institutions. As P3 said, "Sometimes when I'm taking my Indigenous courses, they're taught by a white person." P2 agreed and added, "It would have been nice, like, if the teachers were Indigenous." P5 continued, saying, "I think another thing is that for a class like an Indigenous class or like any other culture class, be ready for it to be whitewashed." For example, P20 shared how off-putting it was to have a "white guy" that was teaching Indigenous spirituality. P8 summarized her thoughts saying, "There's definitely a lot of systemic racism [in the education system]. And a lot of my education background does go into Indigenous Studies. And I guess a lot of the instructors I was taught by were people who shouldn't be teaching Indigenous Studies. So, a lot of racism."

The participants went on to discuss how white instructors can often tokenize non-white students. P3 said, "If you're doing an Indigenous course with someone ...who isn't of that race, be ready to teach the class because that's what's going to happen." P5 added, "Or it's like you're an example then.... So be ready to accept that if they're talking about the North Side, you're the example.... If they're talking about ... anything else that is not of the white culture, you are basically the example." P3 concluded, "Like we're the token." In addition, these participants felt like they were not viewed as "treasured" but rather a negative example.

Participants also experienced racism through exclusion from the curriculum. P5 talked about Black History Month not being acknowledged in any of her classes or in the university in general. "Just nobody celebrates Black History Month. So we can, like, just forget about how we celebrate, you know, how people of colour celebrate it. But the system does not celebrate." P3 shared that there were professors who "outwardly expressed their disdain for [Truth and Reconciliation Day] because they had to plan their whole course around it."

One participant's (P1) experience demonstrated that sometimes racialized instructors can align with the colonial systems of education. "There's so much missing when you went in a course.... There was, like, no spirit to it. That's what it felt like. And that's especially with learning Anishinaabemowin, like the language, you have that spirit with it explained. Like a word, it doesn't just mean, oh, like "Nokomis" ... doesn't just mean "grandmother." It means like a comforting experience, like that maternal comforting experience. That stuff was just missing from it."

For some participants, the "whiteness" of PSE contributed to a feeling of alienation. As P9 described, "I just can't help but feel more separated from my friends [since graduating from high school and starting PSE].... I've never felt more alone than this." P27 shared similar feelings, "I felt really isolated as compared to in high school. Like, I didn't really talk to anybody." These students did not have a sense of belonging in the PSE environment.

For several of the participants, the racism of post-secondary had a major impact on their education journeys. In P5's words, "Once we leave our safe bubble, you get attacked from...and you're like, "I don't want to do this. I don't want to go to school." And it seems negative if I'm not like appreciative being in there." P1 added, "That's mainly why I haven't gone back yet. ... Like, you know, the whiteness of it all." P21 made it very clear that he left university because he was uncomfortable with the environment. These participants shared that they wished that CEDA Pathways had prepared them for the racism and the whiteness of PSE.

Race, ethnicity, and Indigenous identity continue to be highlighted in the literature as predictors of post-secondary attendance (Pulchny et al., 2025). Research shows that Indigenous students are exposed to high levels of racism, which can negatively impact their attendance and progress (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Motz & Currie, 2019; Restoule et al., 2013; Walton, 2020). For example, an Indigenous student at the University of Manitoba has documented "racialized and sexualized violence by neo-Nazis while conducting my responsibilities as a Teaching Assistant for a first-year introductory course to Indigenous Studies" (Hourie, 2022, p. 7). This student, like many Indigenous students, felt there is no accountability for anti-Indigenous racism in post-secondary institutions, as she explained "the disciplinary authorities, due to their inactions, had me continue with my studies and work as if nothing had happened" (Hourie, 2022, p. 93). Similarly, (pro-)Palestinian university students and faculty are experiencing heightened levels of repression and anti-Palestinian racism (Kanji, 2025). Thus, it is important to address institutional racism not just through explicit anti-racist policies, but also

through hiring more Indigenous and racialized faculty and Indigenizing the curriculum.

Supports for Post-Secondary Education

Participants who attended PSE discussed the things that helped them on their journeys. The main supports were consistent for both Indigenous and newcomer participants and included funding, social/emotional support, places that center Indigenous and newcomer realities, and help navigating PSE. One participant (P19) who completed her degree over the course of the project described how she had supports in these key areas:

> I actually have a lot of supports. My sister attends the university with me, so I'm never alone. I don't have to worry about school supplies, because CEDA always has that covered. And when I get nervous, I do have my mom who's really supportive. My sister, too. Whenever I'm having trouble with a class, Access can help me … by providing a tutor.… I guess if I ever exceeded [the maximum tutoring hours], I could also go to my band because I'm band-funded. Oh, and that's another thing. I don't have to worry about tuition and books. It's all covered.

Funding

PSE is an expensive endeavour. Significant costs include program tuition and living expenses for students who are living on their own. Just as a lack of funding was a decisive barrier for the participants who did not attend PSE, the presence of funding was an essential support that enabled many participants to attend PSE. Most Indigenous participants who attended PSE had band funding which covered tuition fees, textbooks and supplies, and in some cases living expenses. Newcomer participants who attended PSE had scholarships and bursaries that helped reduce the burden of tuition and textbooks.

Student loans were not a widely used resource by participants. While some students struggled to get loans (P11), others avoided them after witnessing the debilitating financial impact on family members that extended years or even decades after finishing PSE programs.

Social/Emotional Support

Family relationships were a major source of support for many participants attending PSE. As P11 stated, "My parents always encouraged me to

try hard, even though, like, they feel bad that they can't help me much other than encouraging words." Another participant (P8) described the unconditional support she received from her grandmother. "She's always proud of me no matter if I do bad or not. She just always tells me, you know, take it one day at a time and to always show up to my classes, even if I don't know what's being talked about.... My grandma is definitely my number one."

For some participants, having a family member in PSE was an influence on their own journey. P9 described how his father's success in college has impacted him positively. His father was his primary source of support and was able to understand the challenges of PSE. P19 talked about the impact of her older sister who was attending the same university: "Yeah, she studies a lot. That's what makes me do it, too. I feel proud of myself after." Family members who attended PSE could also provide information. As P22 responded when asked about what support she received during PSE, "My sister. Yeah, my sister was about as much support I had gotten out of everything. She was the one who told me to apply for the Access program. That's how I found out about it."

The reciprocal nature of family support was also a theme for participants. P6 shared, "The biggest support would be my family, right? They're always there for me. Like, always.... If I don't even feel like doing something, they're my drive.... What I'm trying to do is for [them], that's my drive." These remarks show how a person's family can serve as a source of both encouragement and motivation to give back to them. Several other participants indicated they wanted to complete PSE in order to be a "good example" to their children, nieces and nephews, and younger siblings. P20 shared, "You know, with [my child], it definitely motivates me to finish my degree.... I'll be like the first in my family to get it, too. So that's just like the ultimate goal. And hopefully with that too, my [child] is like 'oh wow, let's achieve that, too!' So just setting that standard in the house."

Friends were also a significant source of social and emotional support for participants attending PSE. As described previously, many participants described feeling lonely after graduation from high school, and in particular, found PSE to be a very isolating environment. Having friends in their programs and classes was beneficial. As P5 emphasized, "You have to make one friend. I survived with one friend. I was okay with just one person." For P1, applying to a program with a friend is what got her to go. "My best friend wanted to go, and so I was like, 'Okay, I'm not going to be doing it alone.' I feel like that was the scary part, that doing it alone." For another participant (P2), having another CEDA alumni in

her class helped her feel more comfortable with the limited diversity including a lack of Indigenous students in her program. As she said, "For the Indigenous courses that I took, there wasn't really much Indigenous students. It was just like, white people, immigrants. But another student there who had attended CEDA, she was in my class as well, so I was like, 'okay!'"

In addition to emotional support, having a friend in class can also be a practical support. P19 added, "Once you know a few people, [it helps]. ... I always made sure to have at least one friend in a class just so they could help me when I needed it and so that they could give me notes when I couldn't be at a class for whatever reason."

Outside of support from family and friends, several participants mentioned receiving free counselling that they found beneficial, whether through their PSE institutions or from community clinics. P1 shared, "I'm currently working with a therapist, ... just realizing I don't have to do it on my own, yeah." Some participants received counselling support during their programs, while others sought it out during an interruption from PSE. P7 added, "I'm getting support and therapy, and it's going alright. Some teachings, [I] sat with an Elder a few times. It's been okay so far." A few participants made the connection between the mental health supports they were receiving and coping with intergenerational trauma they experienced.

PSE Navigation and Academic Support

Some participants' decisions to attend PSE were influenced by receiving assistance in navigating their options, applying, and registering. P3 shared, "Nobody in my family attended university, so there was a lot of pressure to attend. Honestly, if [a CEDA Pathways staff member] didn't register me, I wouldn't have gone. She registered me for U of M. Yeah, I wouldn't have gone. I didn't know how to register." P6 had similar comments about receiving support with his decision to attend PSE, "People like my student counselors and CEDA, right, they helped me navigate my path, too, so there was that help." In fact, P6 listed navigation assistance as one of the main supports that impacted his choice to attend PSE.

Participants talked about the overwhelm of transitioning from high school to PSE and how the continued connection to CEDA Pathways was helpful. P5 described the challenges of her first few weeks of attending a college program: "I was out here at 6:00 AM to catch the bus...and I was exhausted. It was stressing. You're like new to the whole building, ... I was at the [main] campus, so it was big and confusing. We got lost a

lot. It's just, confusion!" P6 made similar comments about his early PSE experiences:

> Because at university, ...you're navigating it yourself. When you're in high school, there's lots of people to help you. But when you're at university, it's like no one's there really to help you. You can talk to them, but you got to set meetings. It's like a long process. ... Classes are like 200 in size, so you don't really have a connection with your professor either.

These students felt reassured that they could still call CEDA staff members and get support. P6 said, "They will always try to help me out." Although most participants acknowledged that CEDA Pathways was meant to support high school students, having a connection to a staff member for guidance after graduation had a beneficial impact. "Yeah, CEDA, knowing they're there was helpful. I didn't use it a lot but just knowing that they were there to help if I ever needed any help, you know, it was helpful," said P7.

A handful of participants started their PSE journeys in bridging programs, such as the Access program at the University of Manitoba. These participants all felt that they benefitted from the programs. In particular, the small class sizes, reduced courseloads, and preparatory classes that helped students be ready for regular university courses, all offered by the bridging programs in first year, made their transitions to university less overwhelming. As P3 shared, "After I graduated [from high school], I went to U of M to the Access program there. And basically, what that is, is instead of going to a class of like 100 people, I got to go into classes with 12 people for my first year, which was nice." P26 credited his success transitioning to PSE after having been out of school for four years with a bridging program:

> The thing that helped me a lot was the bridging program had bridging courses. ... They weren't for credits or anything, but they were like, ... learning how to learn, teaching about university and ... how to do the academic stuff. Writing. Researching. ... Study habits. ... Trying to find different strategies to stop procrastinating. I also think the reduced workload, like not being full time, helped [me] ease into it more.

P19 talked about the orientation class of the Access program that provided an opportunity to brush up on math ahead of the regular university session. She also commented on the benefits of smaller class sizes helping with the transition from high school to PSE, in terms of both the social and academic setting, as she met many people in the Access

program and felt less intimidated once she started regular university classes.

> I think that comfort of just knowing some people already at the university helped me with my larger classes. When I did go into [larger classes], … so when I did have to go for, like, chemistry, it wasn't as overwhelming because I did take classes with Access and I did do well in them. And I did know some people in the [regular] classes, and I guess it was easier to make friends because I already knew that university students weren't that different from high school students. They would just study a lot more. … [Without the Access program,] I would have been really stressed about the huge classes in first year. I'm glad I got a break in first year. Second year, I just felt more relaxed.

In addition to bridging programs, several participants mentioned free tutoring services as a necessary support to navigate the academic challenges of PSE. Students were aware of the greater difficulty of PSE courses relative to high school and not being able to "slide by" (P3). Some participants had access to tutors through their PSE school, others had tutors through their bridging program, and some mentioned having tutors covered by band-funding.

Places That Center Indigenous and Racialized Students

Participants described feeling supported in PSE when their surroundings reflected their experience as Indigenous or racialized students. Several participants indicated that they did not experience racism in these spaces. Participants described the spaces as comfortable and welcoming, in some cases drawing comparisons to the feeling they had in the CEDA Pathways program in high school.

For a few students, these safe places were in programs in the North End. One student (P10) described the support she received during her time in a certificate program when she was having challenges with her housing situation and was house jumping.

> So I always had somebody to talk to there [at the PSE program] and they were just super nice and helpful. If I couldn't afford my lunch pass for the week, you know, the counselor would go out of her way, and they had a budget to support students who couldn't afford that, which is absolutely amazing. Because at that moment in time, like I was barely working part time straight out of high school. I'm in the North End. I grew up in the North End. I didn't have any support. I don't have any savings. … I really did appreciate

> having those little things just like CEDA Pathways did, as a matter of fact, you know, it was very nice.

In addition to feeling supported in the program, this participant indicated that she did not experience racism since most of the students were also Indigenous.

Two students described similar feelings of comfort at other PSE programs in the inner city. One student (P7) attended Urban Circle, a school that offers a variety of training programs for Indigenous students, located a block from CEDA Pathways. Another student (P20) took a few of his university courses in the department of Urban and Inner-City Studies (UIC) at the University of Winnipeg (UW) which shares the same building and classroom space as CEDA Pathways. He felt more comfortable with the community and appreciated the supportive professors and smaller class sizes in relation to the main UW campus. He shared that he did better in his UIC courses than his other courses.

A few other Indigenous participants who attended PSE outside of the North End also found spaces within institutions that gave them a sense of belonging. P1 attended an Indigenous program at a college. They described having access to a smudging room, Elders if you needed to talk, and regular drumming circles, which they enjoyed. "It was nice to be around other Indigenous people. It made it feel more comfortable. Especially the professors being Indigenous. It [was] really nice." They added that participating in the drumming and Sundance helped them deal with the losses they experienced over the previous year. "Just trying to focus on my cultural knowledge. It's really helped with the grieving process."

A few students found support and a sense of belonging within student associations. P3 indicated that joining a student association was a lot of work but "a good way to make some friends." They appreciated the diversity of students in the organization, including international students, Black students, and LGBTQ2S+ students. Similarly, P8 said, "I'm also an Indigenous person and I didn't see a lot of Indigenous representation on campus until I found the Indigenous Students Association." Finding connections and a sense of community within these organizations seemed to serve as a buffer to the "whiteness" on the rest of campus.

Finally, many students who started university through bridging programs, such as the Access program at the University of Manitoba, felt that they avoided experiences of racism because they were with other BIPOC students in these programs. Although the primary benefit of these programs seemed to be with navigating PSE and academic

supports (discussed in the next section), making connections to other students from diverse backgrounds was also a benefit. As P19 said, "I managed to make a lot of friends [in the program] that I kept throughout the remainder of my university year." Similarily, P26 said that because he identified as First Nations, he received emails about events, clubs, or services for Indigenous students at the university. "Personally, I didn't experience any racism. A lot of the people I interacted with were also [BIPOC] students." Similar to diverse student groups and organizations, bridging programs seemed to function as a protective mechanism for these participants after they entered regular university classes. P19 described how she coped after transitioning to regular university classes:

> It can be hard at first because of all the students. But once you manage to find something that brings you comfort, like I found that sitting in the front row really helps me. I can't sit in the back row because like constantly seeing all the students around me on their laptops, all taking their own notes which look really nice, it really made me nervous and I just couldn't do it. So, sitting in the front row just really helped me focus on the lectures. And I guess once you find those little comforts like that, … you're good. You know how to do the rest of the classes.

Recommendations

Indigenous and racialized students talked about a variety of recommendations to advocate and support students in PSE. These recommendations include supporting students as they transition out of high school by preparing them for what to expect in PSE and offering more holistic supports to help navigate institutional racism and the barriers (e.g., academic, emotional, social, and financial) they encounter.

Financial and Housing Supports

Several participants noted that they were experiencing challenges with making ends meet, especially those students who were not band-funded. Besides being concerned about covering the cost of tuition and living expenses, some students were struggling with finding affordable housing and providing for their own family. This is why the TRC (2015) demanded that the federal government provide adequate funding to allow First Nations students to attain higher education. Research on Indigenous and racialized students continues to show that insufficient and inconsistent financial resources is often a barrier that students consistently experience (Bunjun, 2021; Cameron, 2024; Restoule et al., 2013; Styres et al., 2020; Walton, 2020). The pandemic has worsened the conditions facing students and their families, which has a substantial educational impact on students (Blaskovits et al., 2023; Ennab, 2022). Thus, it is essential to increase existing financial supports and provide more funding opportunities for Indigenous and racialized students, which can help them not just with financial security, but also with the interconnected

issues involving university workload, health, jobs, along with family responsibilities, including childcare (Cameron, 2024; Oliver et al., 2015).

The CEDA Pathways program should consider increasing the value of scholarships available to students who wish to attend college or university programs. The current maximum $4000 scholarship is only sufficient for short-term, low-cost certificate programs that lead to low paying jobs. In addition, it is essential that the federal government be pressured to align with the TRC (2015) call to action to provide adequate funding to allow Indigenous students access to PSE. Funding must be in the form of grants and scholarships, not loans that could have crippling long-term financial impacts. Furthermore, funding must be flexible, allowing for variations in courseloads and program interruptions. Indigenous and racialized students should not be punished with restricted access to financial support when other barriers prevent them from taking a linear path through post-secondary education.

Advocacy and Support With Navigating Post-Secondary Education

To navigate the barriers with PSE, participants felt that it is important to have access to academic and social supports in ways that promote a sense of empowerment and relationality. Many participants in the study indicated that existing supports offered by the CEDA Pathways program should continue to be available until students graduate not just from high school, as is currently happening, but also from PSE. As one participant explained,

> To actually go to university... all on your own is quite hard. So, I think if we had that ongoing support for maybe six months to a year after graduating, a lot of people who go to post-secondary would follow through. They will have that security at the beginning where it's the scariest part, and then they can spread their wings (P10).

Similarly, another participant expressed how it was "hard to jump from almost being babied at CEDA [during high school] to being by yourself [in university]." For these reasons, many students involved with the CEDA Pathways program during high school suggested that it would be beneficial if the students had access to a similar program during post-secondary education. The continuity of relationships and supports can allow students, rather than feel cut off from their "support system" or "thrown into the deep end and forced to learn to swim," to feel more supported and connected to their peers.

Participants emphasized the importance of having a source of social and emotional support which they can depend on, "if they ever have a question". Participants wanted supports with finding employment (e.g., searching for a job, writing a resume, preparing for an interview), managing finances (e.g., budgeting and paying bills, obtaining a mortgage, and filing taxes), and "life skills" (e.g., cooking and finding a place to live). Some participants also noted that it is important to have academic supports (e.g., mentorship, tutoring, and bursaries). This is helpful because, as one participant explained, "these kids don't have the luxury of just trying out programs and switching, and they certainly don't have much guidance if their original plan doesn't work out." Thus, having access to a support program or a drop-in centre is beneficial to support Indigenous and racialized students transition to university.

These findings are consistent with studies in Manitoba and across Canada, which show that providing "quality culturally relevant, integrated, holistic and intensive programs" or resource centres can facilitate a smoother progression in PSE (Ottmann, 2017, p. 106; see also Cameron et al., 2024; Chichekian & Bragoli-Barzan, 2020; Gallop & Bastien, 2016). Similarly, in Australia, research shows that the Indigenous Higher Education Centre at the Australian National University (ANU) helps students deal with the challenges of transition to university, which helps to increase Indigenous students' retention and graduation rates (Kruk-Buchowska & Wood, 2019). This centre is considered successful because "it does much more than address socio-economic disadvantage and learning difficulties — it creates a community, an Indigenous spot on the cultural map of ANU, where Indigenous students can feel at home" (Kruk-Buchowska & Wood, 2019, p. 62).

One recommendation that CEDA Pathways could undertake is to create a position dedicated to supporting students with the PSE transition. Starting with students in earlier high school years, this position could provide information about post-secondary programs, organize information sessions, and provide links to various programs, including ACCESS and other bridging programs. Upon student transition to PSE, this position could provide ongoing support that maintains the relationship to the CEDA Pathways program. This could include regular check-ins and monthly meetups with other alumni to provide opportunities for peer support, as well. In addition, it is advised that this position work to build relationships with post-secondary institutions with the intention of growing post-secondary transition supports for CEDA Pathways graduates. This could include tailoring a bridging program specific to a CEDA Pathways cohort of students.

Mental Health Supports

Navigating institutional racism, colonial trauma, and daily stressors can have an adverse impact on the mental health of Indigenous and racialized students in PSE (Hop Wo et al., 2019; Shankar et al., 2013). This is why several participants wanted students to have access to mental health supports that are grounded in Indigenous worldviews, including land-based learning and cultural ceremony. For example, one student mentioned how learning about Indigenous traditions like sage picking had a "calming" effect on them. These cultural practices and mental health supports should be sufficiently supported and not constrained by institutional racism (Steinman & Sánchez, 2023).

Indigenizing Spaces and Pedagogies

Participants emphasized the importance of having access to anti-racist faculty and support staff who represented their own lived experiences — "someone who understands or who's been through it all" (P11). When racialized students interact with staff from similar backgrounds as them, they can receive "micro cultural validations," which play a significant role in supporting their cultural identity development and enhancing their educational achievement (Lunda et al., 2024, p. 1271). This is why several participants stressed the importance of having Indigenous and racialized faculty and teachers.

Besides hiring more Indigenous and racialized staff, Indigenizing the university requires Indigenous curriculum, bringing in Indigenous Elders, ethical guidelines, and promoting dialogues and networks (Battiste et al., 2002b; Ruta et al., 2021; TRC, 2015). Brant's (2023) research with Indigenous women in higher education show that they "desire for a university program that weaves in cultural elements along with knowledge they can bring back to their families and communities and use toward their career goals in a variety of professions such as teaching, language revitalization, counselling, social services, and Indigenous midwifery and doula care" (p. 32). Thus, changing pedagogical and administrative practices in PSE to be more consistent with Indigenous ontologies can promote "individual and familial advancement, cultural growth and identity formation, community development, and Indigenous sovereignty" (Kristoff & Cottrell, 2021, p. 46).

While Indigenization can promote needed changes in educational institutions, Steinman & Sánchez's (2023) study with Indigenous students and faculty show that Indigenization can "also produce many moments and types of painful, traumatic, and stressful experiences for Indigenous peoples and consequently, require great care and awareness in its

execution" (p. 309). It is important, then, to consider ways to promote Indigenization while also addressing, in accountable and relational ways, the effects of institutional racism and coloniality.

Decolonizing Post-Secondary Education

Given that Indigenous and racialized students' educational achievements are related to structural and systemic barriers of the "educational industrial complex" (Bunjun, 2021, p. 27; see also Simpson, 2011), it is important to consider the need for meaningful action beyond those aimed at reforming existing educational systems or supports. Advocates and scholars continue to emphasize that meaningful transition or "socially just pathways" to PSE must begin with processes of decolonization and Indigenization (Frawley et al., 2017, p. 4; Smith, 2021). As Howard Adams (1989), a Métis scholar and activist, argues "for education to be truly liberating, however, it cannot take place within the present institutions and bureaucracy.... The structures will have to be destroyed and new ones built that embody freedom and humanness as well as political power" (p. 138). Educational reforms create meaningful change "only if it is attached to the social relations of production" and the forces of decolonization (Adams, 1989, p. 138). Today, to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission requires meaningful action, which "must attend to, at the very least, the colonial structures, control of knowledge and its production, and decision-making" (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020; p. xviii). PSE becomes both possible and desirable for Indigenous and racialized students when it is connected to lived experiences.

Decolonization also requires challenging educational practices and pedagogy that homogenizes racialized students' diverse backgrounds (Bunjun, 2021; Ennab, 2017). While Indigenous students experience "accumulated multi-generational education deficits" (Kristoff & Cottrell, 2021, p. 47), there are intra-Indigenous difference: First Nations with Indian Status and the Inuit, do not perform as well as non-Status and Métis peoples (Gordon & White, 2014). This is why it is important to consider "the intersection of racialized and classed identities in shaping aspirations for higher education" (Patfield, 2022, p. 82). For example, research shows that Indigenous students with children can experience significantly more racially-motivated housing discrimination than other Indigenous students (Motz & Currie, 2019). Similarly, Luzeckyj and colleagues (2017) argue that students who are First in Family, an under-recognized equity grouping, referring to those who have no other family members available to discuss aspirations and share the

experience of university life, can face more educational disadvantages than other students. Thus, attending to Indigenous and racialized student experiences requires a consideration of multiple factors and contexts that avoids multicultural liberalism, which flattens Indigenous experiences as simply another 'visible minority issue' to evade Indigenous demands for liberation from settler colonialism (Byrd, 2011).

Conclusion

This longitudinal research study explored the transition experiences of Indigenous and racialized students from Winnipeg's North End into post-secondary education. Most participants discussed how transitioning to and continuing in higher education is challenging, as they must contend with a colonial space and/or standards. Besides navigating racism and whiteness with limited, if any, supports, some students had the added responsibility to support and take care of themselves and their own families. For these reasons, students emphasized the need to have supportive and caring relationships to navigate institutional racism in educational settings. This requires not just diverse staff and implementing anti-racist policies and curriculum, but a critical pedagogy in the classroom that promotes caring relations. It is important, then, to prioritize and enhance supports to Indigenous and racialized students to start and continue their post-secondary education.

In the absence of action to decolonize educational institutions, Indigenous and racialized students from Winnipeg's North End will continue to face persistent challenges to access and transition into post-secondary education. Indigenous and racialized people, as the late Dr. Barry Lavallee argued, have "no pathways" to support them "when they experience the violence of racism" (Kush, 2018, para. 5). This is why we need radical change to decolonize higher education to better ensure that students are provided the supports they need in ways that are accountable and relational to their communities. Besides focusing on the individual trajectory of students, it is important to consider experiences of institutional racism in educational spaces along with the broader social and political context that Indigenous and racialized communities struggle against.

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Acknowledgements

We are thankful to all the CEDA Pathways alumni who participated in this project and shared their experiences with us. We are grateful for the research assistance provided by Sonja Stone and Sheri Shorting. Their contributions were essential to the success of the project. Thank you to the CEDA Pathways program for their partnership on this project. We are pleased to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Manitoba Research Alliance's Partnership Grant Community-Driven Solutions to Poverty: Challenges and Possibilities.

Cover Photo

Josep Martins on Unsplash

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