

TL;DR

A THESIS

MOVING HOME:
THE ART AND EMBODIMENT OF
TRANSIENCE EMERGING FROM
CANADA'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

IN A ZINE



This zine is a summary of my master's thesis, *Moving Home: the Art and Embodiment of Transience Among Youth Emerging from Canada's Child Welfare System*, combined with written and artistic contributions from Toronto and Whitehorse co-researchers with lived experience in care. Several of the contributions are written directly to current youth in care. Hopefully social workers, youth workers, academics, community-based researchers and artists alike also find some value in the message and/or medium.

My initial interest in this topic stems from being in and out of care myself. The approach is from a human geography perspective (theoretically framed using children's geographies, emotional geographies, and mobilities; methods a combination of participatory action, indigenous, and arts-based research) essentially, how the past movements of young people in care affect them in the present day. Toronto represents the urban/suburban experience in care, and Whitehorse the Northern/rural in care experience.

TL;DR aka too long, didn't read is an apt title as the full thesis is over 160 pages. **What is the point of research if it is hardly read, especially by those it affects the most?** By creating and sharing this zine we are challenging traditional academic knowledge production and dissemination. The choice to have this zine void of citations is a conscious one. The aesthetic is slightly gritty, and it is hoped the thesis zine is embraced, typos, collages, unanswered questions and all. Zines, like songs, are a snapshot, a moment. The first edition of this zine was launched August 17, 2017, along with a public lecture and a curated art show (the 4th total from the Moving Home Project).

I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all fifteen co-researchers, both funders, and partner organizations for making this project, all the art shows, and this zine possible. For the full-text thesis and e-zine, please see ameliamerhar.ca



**Provincial Advocate
for Children & Youth**



Zine Design by: Meek
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embodiment

[em-bod-ee-mh nt] noun

1. the act of embodying.
2. the state or fact of being embodied.
3. a person, being, or thing embodying a spirit, principle, abstraction, etc; incarnation.
4. something embodied.



body an idea

embody
[em-bod-ee] verb (used with object), embodied, embodying.

to give form or substance to; express, personify, or exemplify in concrete form: to embody an allegorical painting.

2. to provide with a body; incarnate; make corporeal: to embody a spirit.
3. to collect into or include in a body; organize; incorporate.
4. to embrace or comprise.

transience

[tran-shuh ns, -zhuh ns, -zee-uh ns] noun

1. transient state or quality.

transient

[tran-shuh nt, -zhuh nt, -zee-uh nt] adjective

1. not lasting, enduring, or permanent; transitory.
2. lasting only a short time; existing briefly; temporary: *transient authority*.
3. staying only a short time: *the transient guests at a hotel*.

and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,

headed west toward a most useless place

The Waiting Place...

A THESIS IN A ZINE

Youth in care are the **MOST VULNERABLE IN CANADA**. Current statistics on youth in care are an example of ongoing colonial and racist practices.

Repeated "placement bouncing" can become a habit of movement that continues into adulthood.

Moving can keep us at a safe distance emotionally.

It can keep us busy, surviving.

There's lots of reasons including housing, poverty, and addiction as to why former youth in care move around so much.

And some former youth in care hate moving. Whatever the outcome, moving is not neutral.

Emotionally, there's a lot of heavy stuff going on that we still can carry with us. This shapes our lives, our dreams, our relationships.

But there's also a lot of hope. And resilience.

RESILIENCE IS OFTEN DEFINED AS RESISTANCE BY FORMER YOUTH IN CARE. SURVIVING IN-SPITE-OF, NOT BECAUSE OF, THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.

There's problems with our idea of resilience socially. It asks the less powerful to do even more unpaid work. And the label of resilient can be an uncomfortable pat on the head just for achieving social norms.

Hope, resilience, and giving back to other youth in care are entwined together in this community of former youth in care, and in this zine too.

Handwritten notes and calculations on the right side of the page, including mathematical equations like $6 + 2 = 7$, $21 = 21$, 63 , 12 , 75 , 18 , 10 , 13 , 30 , 16 , and various other scribbles and words.

Former youth in care are **CREATING THE COMMUNITY THEY NEED** through various outreach projects, networks, and on-going activism.

Being a youth in/from care is an invisible social identity, that one lives with forever. This project (among others) creates a peer space to reflect and share, and research has shown **THESE PEER RELATIONSHIPS ARE ESPECIALLY BENEFICIAL FOR YOUTH IN CARE.**

Wherever we move though, there we still are. The body is our home we always have with us. That is why this project used art, and explored feelings and thoughts about how all these placements have affected us.

Policy recommendations from Moving Home research project:

Social housing needs to be more accepting that former youth in care might move in and out and around more. Youth should not be penalized for how the state raised them as they transition to independence.

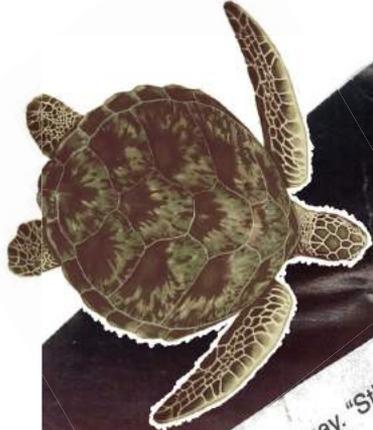
Former youth in care should be able to access services for their peer group across Canada, not just in the province/territory where they were in care. Especially because former youth in care move around so much.

More support for peer-based groups is needed, because being in care is an isolating experience, and sharing that identity with others is a much-needed space.

Further Research:

An interesting theme in the collective body of art was **POSITIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF AND IDENTIFICATION WITH NATURE.** What can we learn from the hyper-mobile in a time when transience is increasing for many? Is grounding ourselves through connection with nature a possible way to address the negative aspects of embodying transience?

-Amelia Merhar



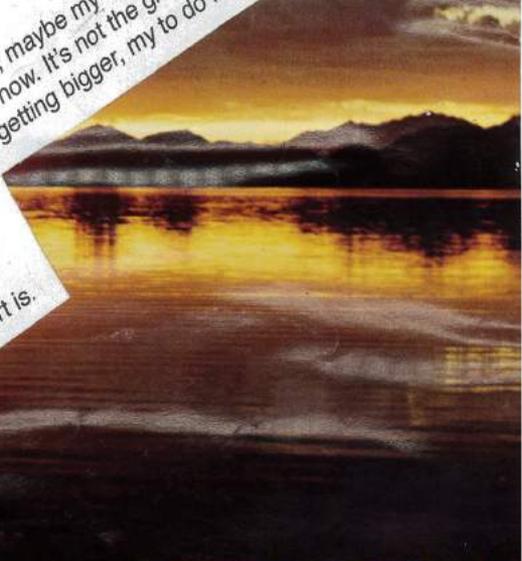
"Get organized!", they say. "Stick to the routine". The routine of what? which routine?

I don't know. I have a job, hobbies, a loving mother, some friends and certain favourite foods I love to eat. But.

I stay at a friends. I stay at a shelter, maybe my dad's? I stay where I can right now. Im a hermit crab. I found a little shell. It'l do for now. It's not the greatest though. I wouldn't mind a bigger one. One i could call my own. Im getting bigger, my to do list changes all the time. Some days i wish i was a turtle.

Now that's a steady home,

They say home is where the heart is.





To the boy who lived inside his head,

I don't know how to start this, it has been a long time, and I have shed many skins since I was a boy. Being 25 now, I am at the age my Mother was when her and her friends were raising me in my younger years. Those years where I was finding unheard of independence through circumstance and hardships. Those hardships, more times than not, went unnoticed to me and the abnormal became what normalcy was to me.

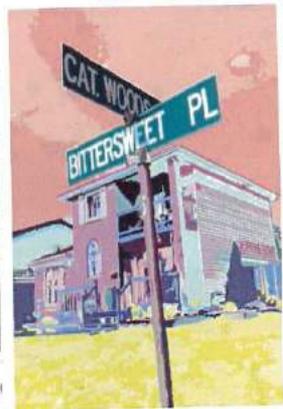
It is easy to feel so lost, alone, and uncared for. You try and fill the void with friendships, it works. Until all you can seem to do is compare what they have and how extraordinary it must be, to what you ultimately do not have nor ever really did. It is easy to think that just because they tore your family apart, that means you don't have one anymore. It is easy to forget yourself in that idea, and in the fact that you are forcibly subjected to live in someone else's home, under some else's rules and beliefs. You have to remember you. You are they key to everything you will need in your life. You will be your very best friend, and your own worst of enemies in the moments in your life that it will matter the most. You need to learn to recognize those moments when they come, and act accordingly to best serve yourself, at the very least.

It is easy to believe everything they tell you, they will condition you to fail. You will hear things about the failure rates reiterated time and time again. Drilled into you head so much that it will almost feel like a prophecy and you are the chosen one. But it is not. Although you are the chosen one, chosen for a rough life, a hard life. The kind of life that will make you both strong and resilient. You are a force to be reckoned, and you are not alone!

I made it this far, you can too.

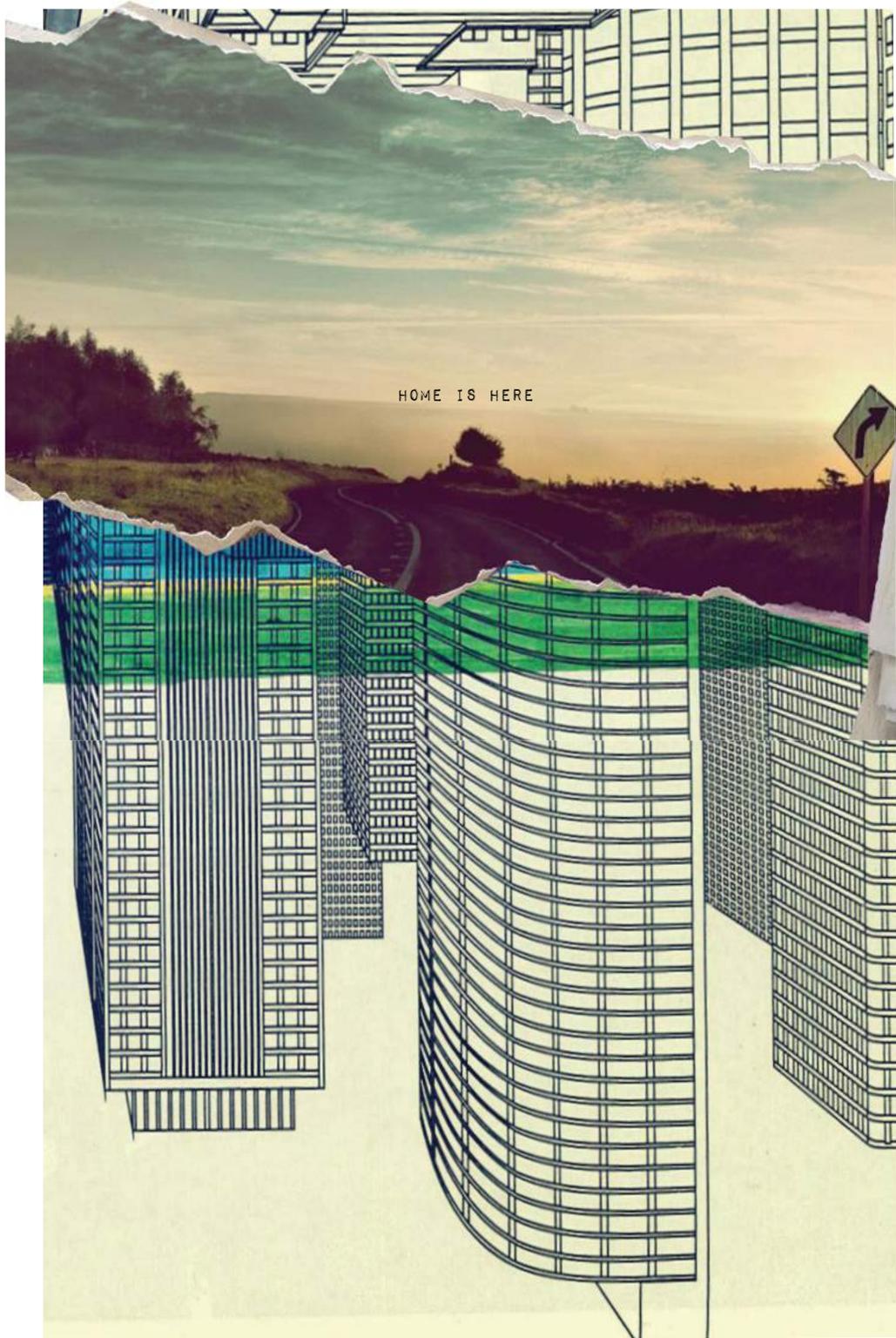
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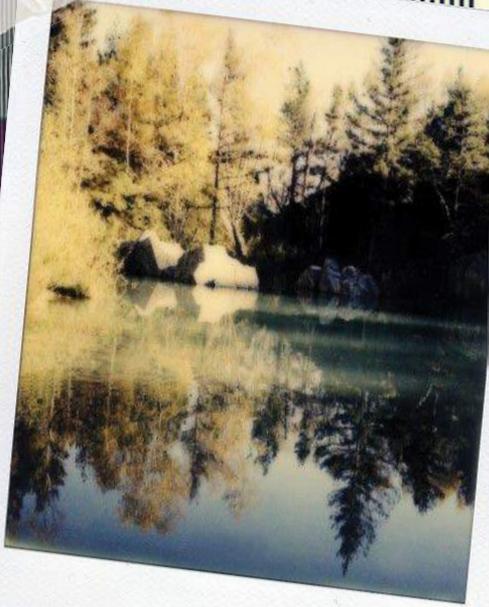


Create! Don't let the constructs of society and authority deter you from being creative. Keep discovering who you are, don't let them stop your genius and uniqueness.

Nicholas Ridiculous



HOME IS HERE



WHERE DO WE BELONG?



Have faith in yourself, in your ability to succeed, in your ability to not become damaged by any negativity that may be around you - but to let it shape you into a warrior.

When in care, it can feel like the people around you who are meant to **FIGHT** your battles are losing. But after this is over, that's when your war to be the person you want to be begins. But you are a warrior. You can get through anything.

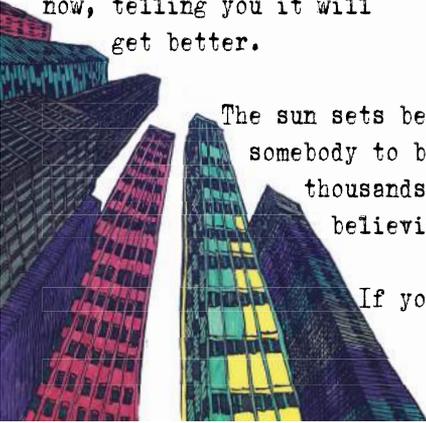
We know that houses come and go, people come and go, our homes come and go, it does not have to be that way.

Make your home within yourself. **BECOME HAPPY WITH YOURSELF** and the things you do and the way you handle your business.

Let the outside world go to absolute shit if that's what it needs to do today, if you can retreat to within yourself, to your home, it won't matter that everything around you is falling down. Focus on becoming your own comfort.

Let the outside world go to absolute shit if that's what it needs to do today, if you can retreat to within yourself, to your home, it won't matter that everything around you is falling down. Focus on becoming your own comfort.

Of course this sounds cliché, of course this sounds easier said than done. But these are words from a person who's been where you are right now. I've been there, I've been in care, I've been homeless, I've been abused, I've been unhappy, I've been without family or a single friend in the world but I am still right here, right now, telling you it will get better.



The sun sets before the sun rises. And if you need somebody to believe in you, please know there are thousands of us here, surviving, healing and believing.

If you have nothing else, **HAVE FAITH.**

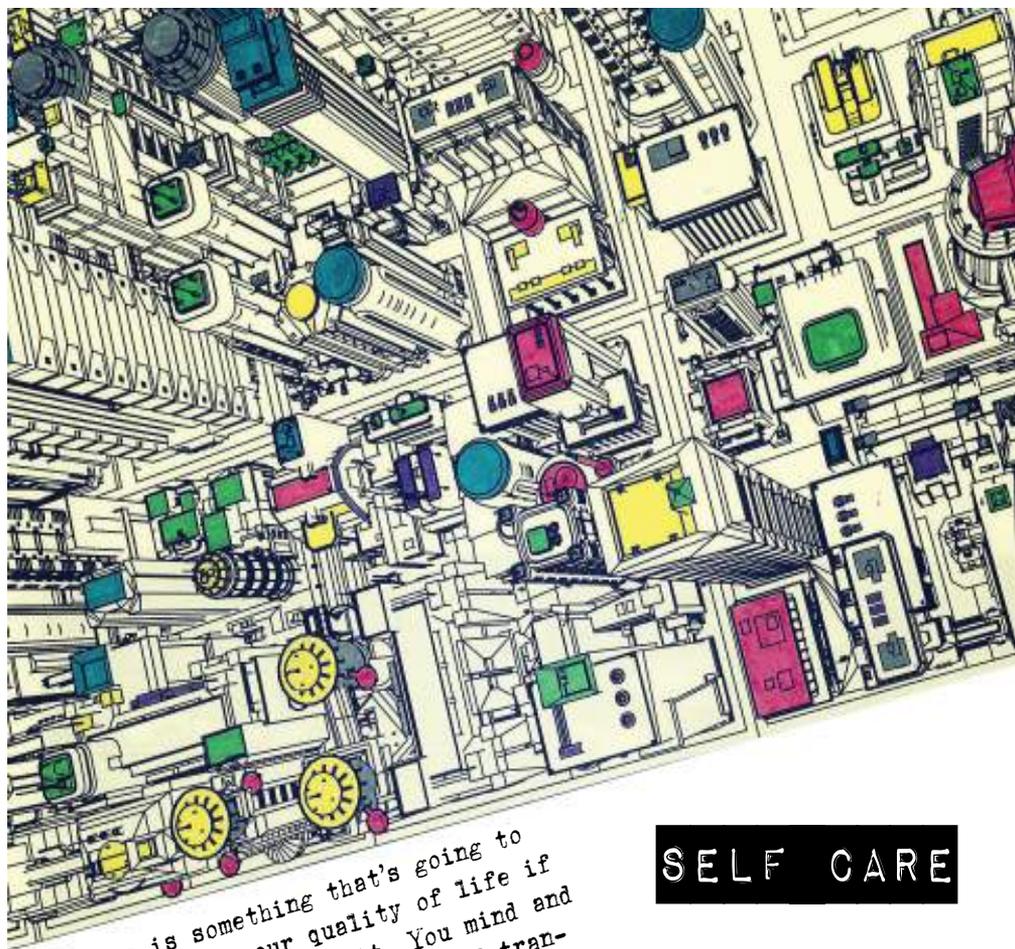
- Sophia N



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

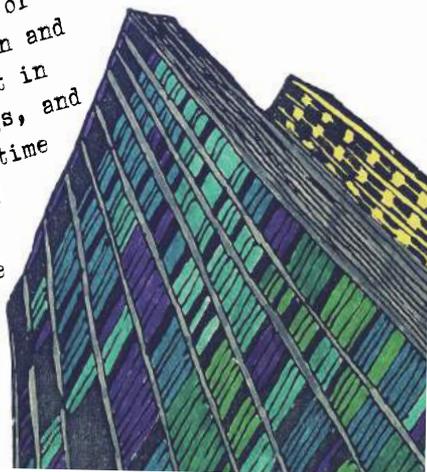
You can get so confused
that you'll start in to race
down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace
and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.

The Waiting Place . . .



Self care is something that's going to greatly improve your quality of life if you make a habit out of it. You mind and body are your anchors in times of transience. Exercise, ranging from full gym time to a thirty minute walk, is a great way to boost endorphins. Just make sure you listen to your body and slow down or stop as needed. Eat as well as you can and hydrate after. Sleep can be difficult in times of stress; eye masks, ear plugs, and fans to block noise all help. Take time to create. Write, draw, make music, repair broken things. Your art is yours, nobody else has to even see it, let alone like it.

SELF CARE



Socialize, even if it's just a little bit. Make sure the people you let into your life have your best interests at heart. You are not obligated to remain friends with anyone. Practice harm reduction. Use condoms, lube, and other safe sex supplies. If you use substances, know your limits, use harm reduction supplies, and get educated on how to be safe from local harm reduction clinics. Clean your space! An organized space, no matter how small, feels better than a dirty one. You deserve to be safe and happy. Anyone who tells you otherwise is wrong.

Elijah M.

