



Discovering what kids need to succeed

Well-Being of Foster Youth and Families

The Voices of Children, Youth, and Families Impacted by the Child Welfare System

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Data Collection

Youth	Parenting Adults
The Link (10)	Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (7)
Connections to Independence (7)	Ain Dah Yung Center (7)
Leech Lake Human Services (4)	Minnesota Communities Caring for Children (6)
	Parent Mentors (5)
	Leech Lake Human Services (11)

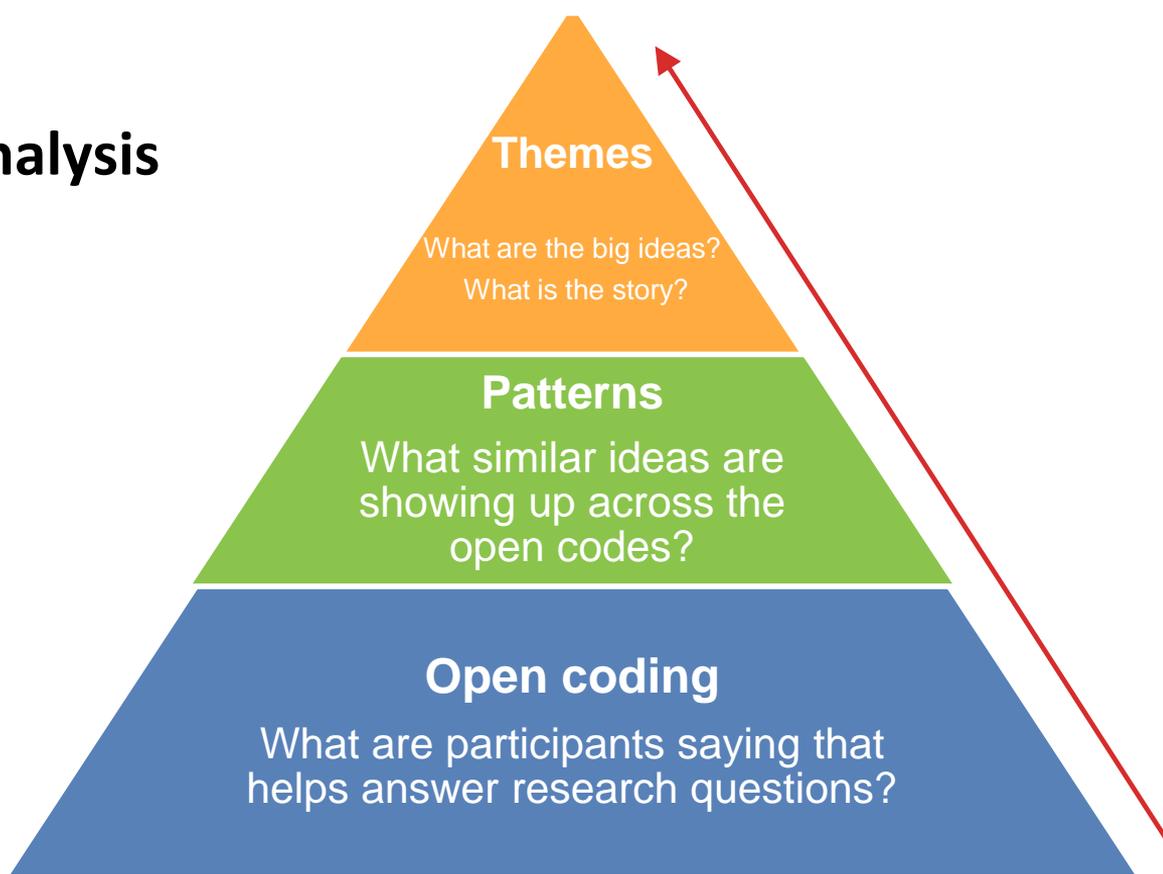
Methods

- Recordings of listening sessions and flip charts from discussion activities were transcribed.
- Analysis of the qualitative data used a **thematic analysis approach**, facilitated by NVivo software.
- Aim is to stay open to **participants' interpretation of their experience**.
- Open coding identified statements that helped answer our research questions. **Patterns were identified** in the open codes, gathering similar ideas together in themes.
- NVivo was utilized to easily access all statements attached to a theme and to develop a **nuanced description** of study participants' ideas related to that theme.

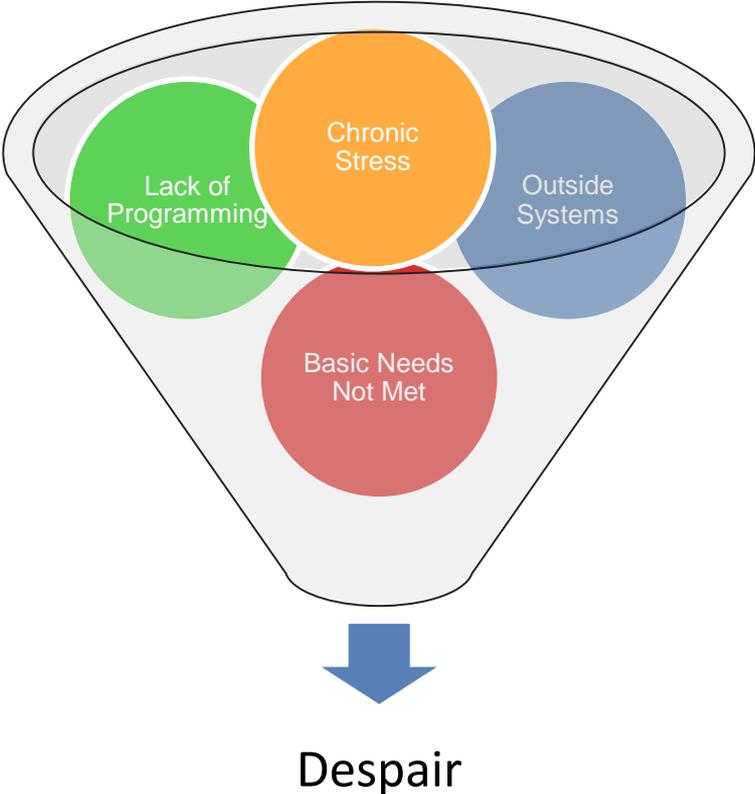
Research Questions

- What is going on around a person when life is good?
- What is going on inside a person when life is good?
- What specific to your ethnic heritage or culture makes life good?
- What examples do you have of times when the child welfare system made life good?
- In what ways does the child welfare system make life worse?
- When the things that make life good are not happening, why aren't they happening? What gets in the way?

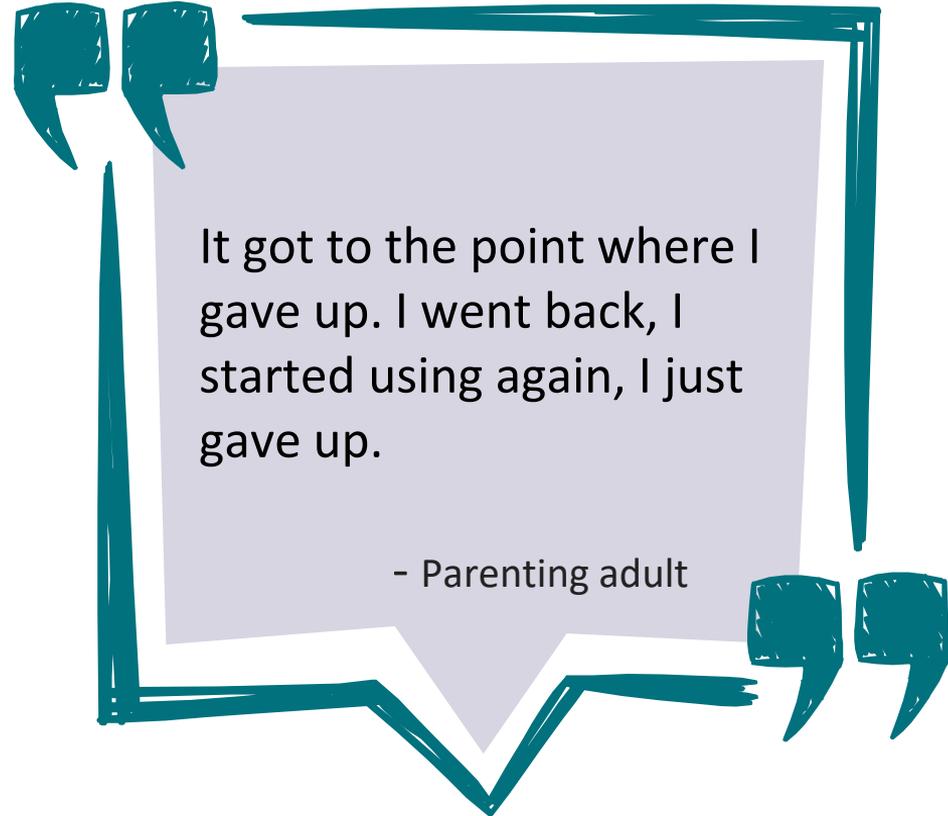
Thematic Analysis



Barriers to Well-Being



Barriers to Well-Being



It got to the point where I gave up. I went back, I started using again, I just gave up.

- Parenting adult

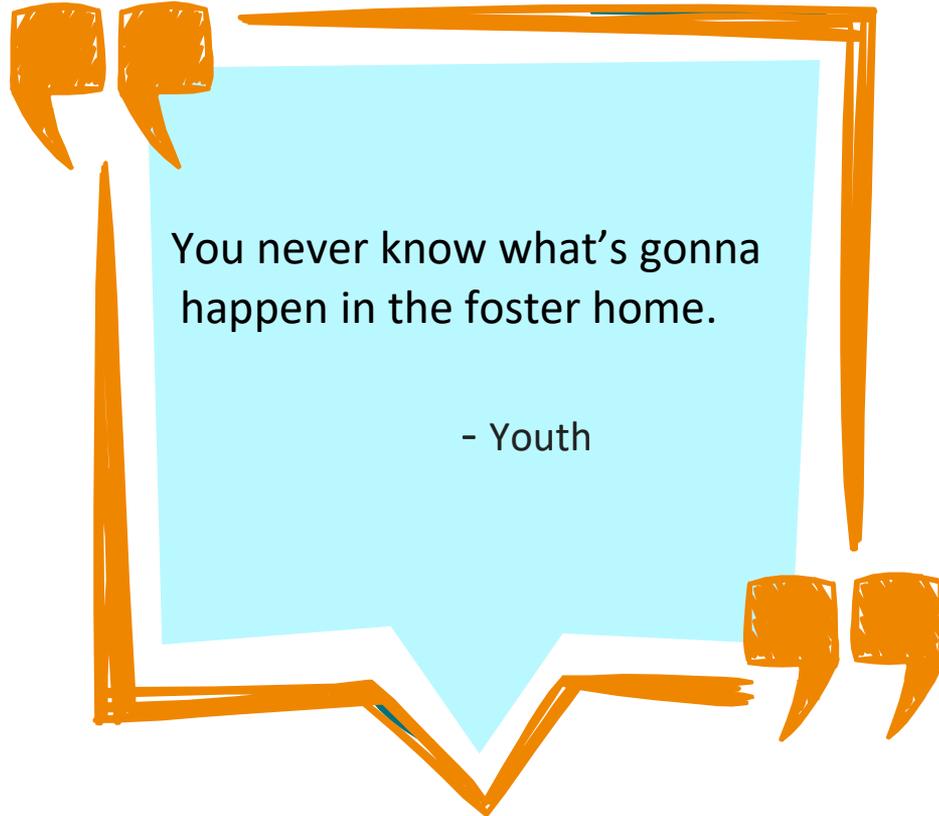
Barriers to Well-Being

- Across the focus groups, participants identified the following contributors to **feelings of despair and being “stuck”**:
 - Chronic stress
 - Lack of programming or mentors for help and support
 - Dysfunctional systems (such as CPS)
 - Struggling to meet basic needs
- Parenting adults noted that **transportation and childcare** remain barriers to participation for programming.

Strengths of Child Welfare System

- **Relationships with individuals**, such as a CPS worker or foster parent, made a difference when trust was present and the individual showed care and concern.
- **Providing resources and access to opportunities** (such as employment).
- Intervention by child welfare prompts realization of **what parenting adults need to do**.

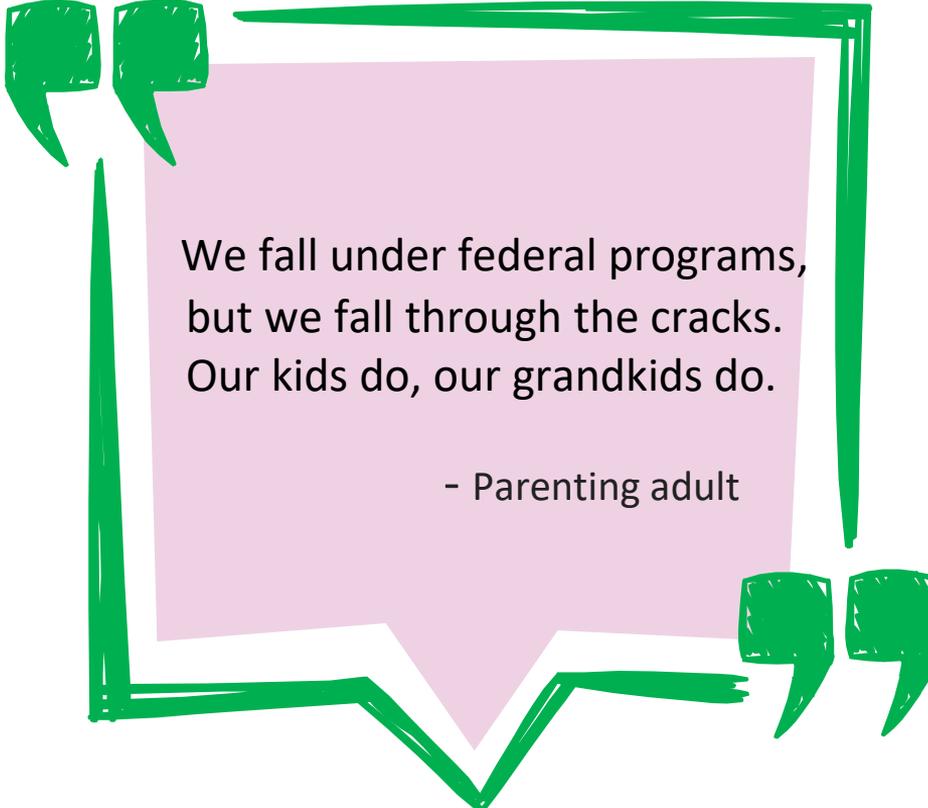
Challenges of Child Welfare System



Lack of Voice and Trust

- Parenting adults and youth both noted that there was a **general feeling of not being trusted** by those in the CPS system.
- Youth described **feeling surveilled**, either by actual cameras or by foster parents invading their privacy.
- In addition, youth **did not feel they had the power to make decisions** for themselves.
- Parenting adults said **it felt frustrating and disempowering** to not have a say in the process of child welfare or how their children were being treated.

Administrative Difficulties



We fall under federal programs,
but we fall through the cracks.
Our kids do, our grandkids do.

- Parenting adult

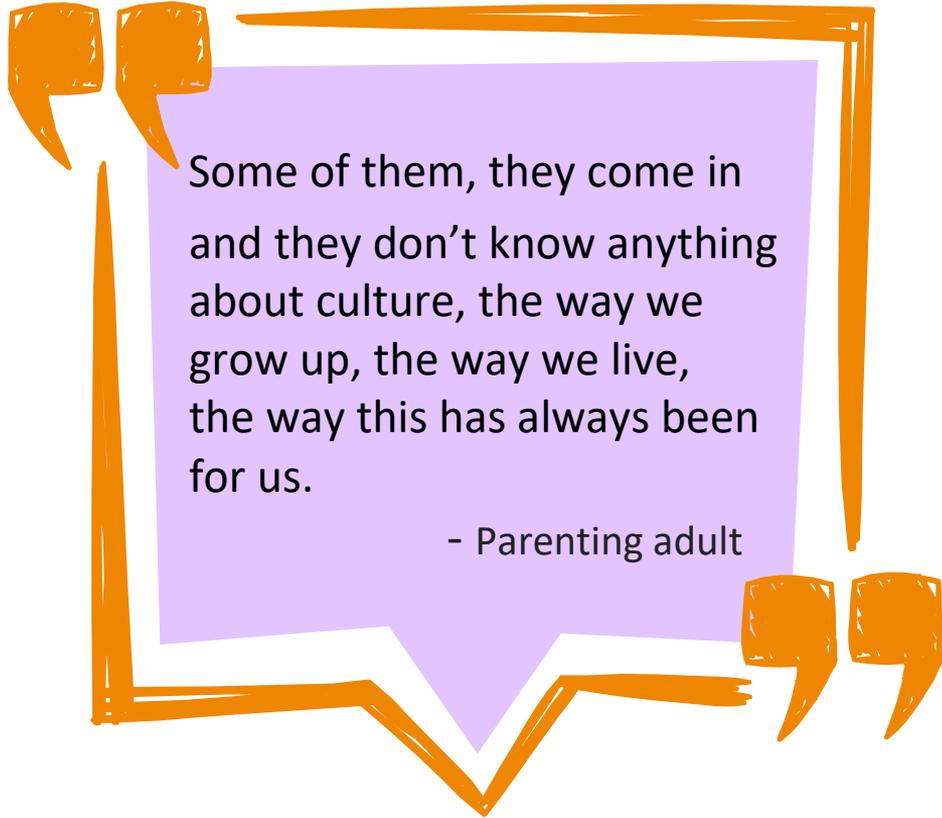
Administrative Difficulties

- CPS **policies and procedures are often difficult** for parenting adults and youth to understand, or are miscommunicated.
- Some participants had the sense that **workers in the system are not fully aware** of all policies, procedures and available resources.
- **Paperwork sometimes goes missing**, or is challenging to access.
- **Social workers don't follow through** or are not respectful of families' needs.

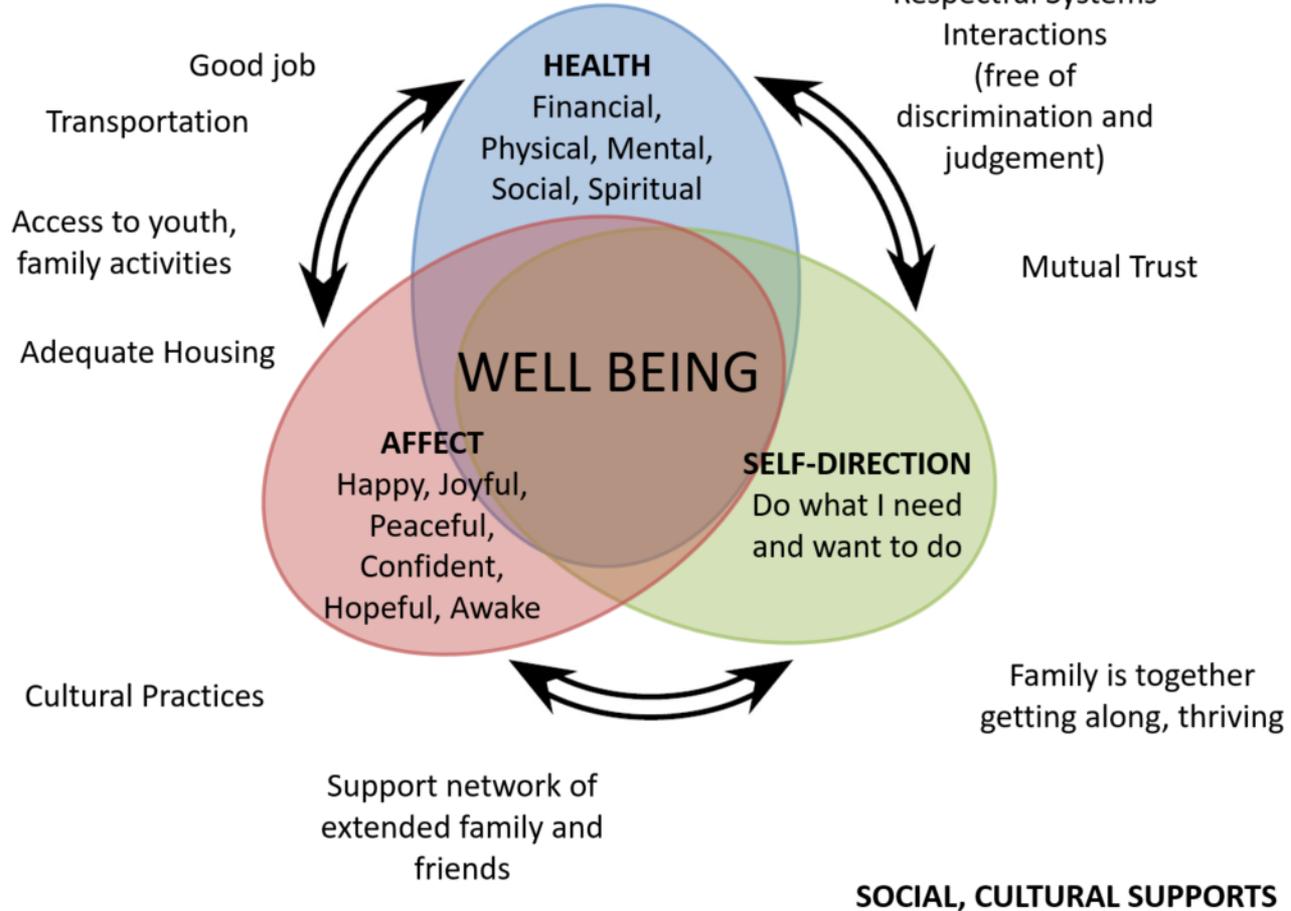
Racism and Lack of Cultural Understanding

- Parenting adults and youth said **child welfare workers were insensitive to cultural differences**, such as child rearing practices.
- Participants noted that **white privilege exists within child welfare**, both in the lack of diversity of CPS staff, and disrespectful, unfair treatment for people of color.
- Participants described **feeling labeled, and dealing with unfair assumptions** based in racial stereotypes.

Racism and Lack of Cultural Understanding



STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS



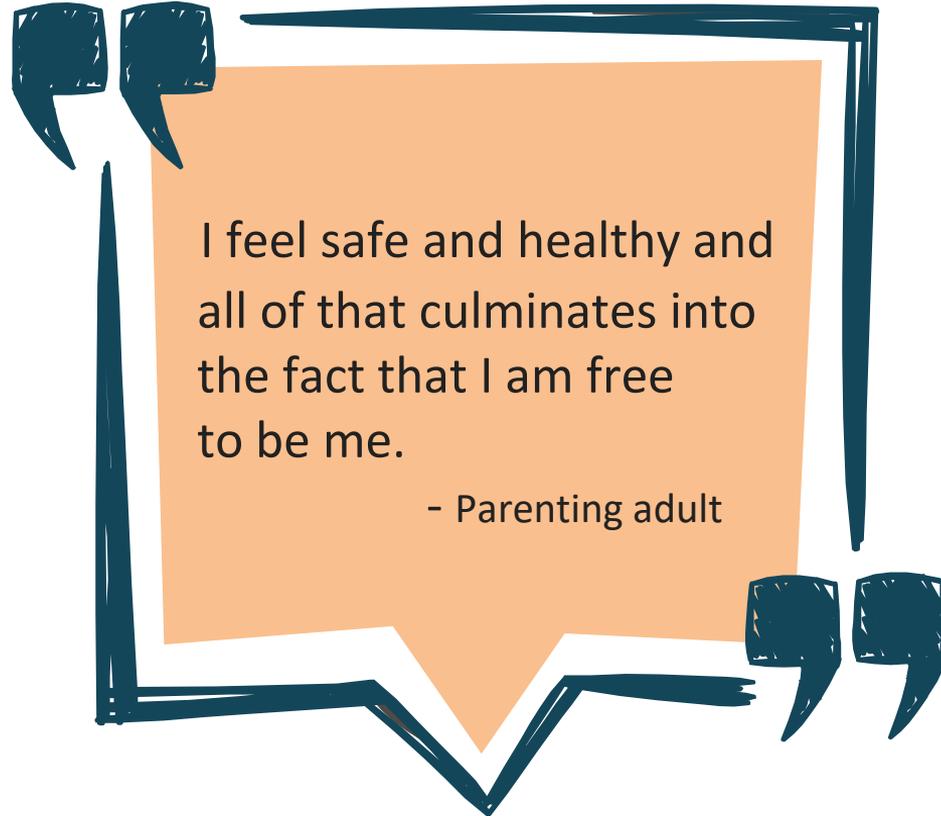
Respectful Systems
Interactions
(free of
discrimination and
judgement)

Mutual Trust

Family is together
getting along, thriving

SOCIAL, CULTURAL SUPPORTS

Physical, Mental and Social Health



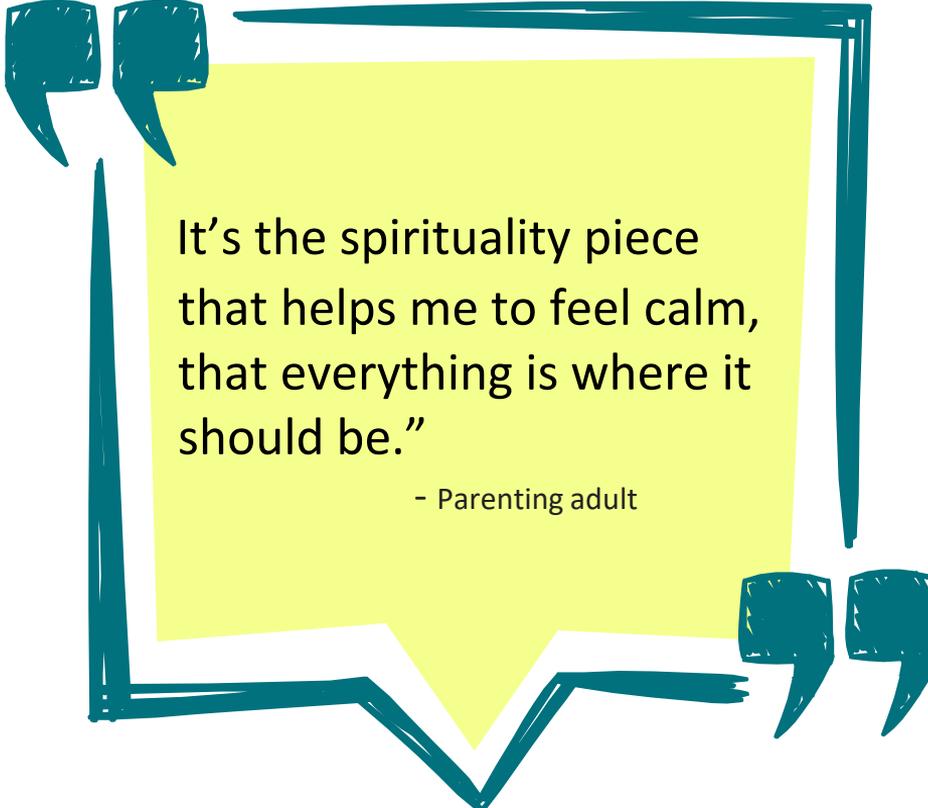
I feel safe and healthy and
all of that culminates into
the fact that I am free
to be me.

- Parenting adult

Physical, Mental and Social Health

- Participants said when life is good they are physically healthy, including **getting good sleep, eating well, and having more energy.**
- Youth and parenting adults said life is good when they experience mental health: **having clearer thoughts, emotional stability, and not feeling depressed.**
- Participants said when life is good **they want to be social.**
- Some youth who were interviewed said that relationships within their social circles are stronger when they are **not questioned about their disabilities or gender identities.**

Spirituality and Peace



It's the spirituality piece that helps me to feel calm, that everything is where it should be."

- Parenting adult

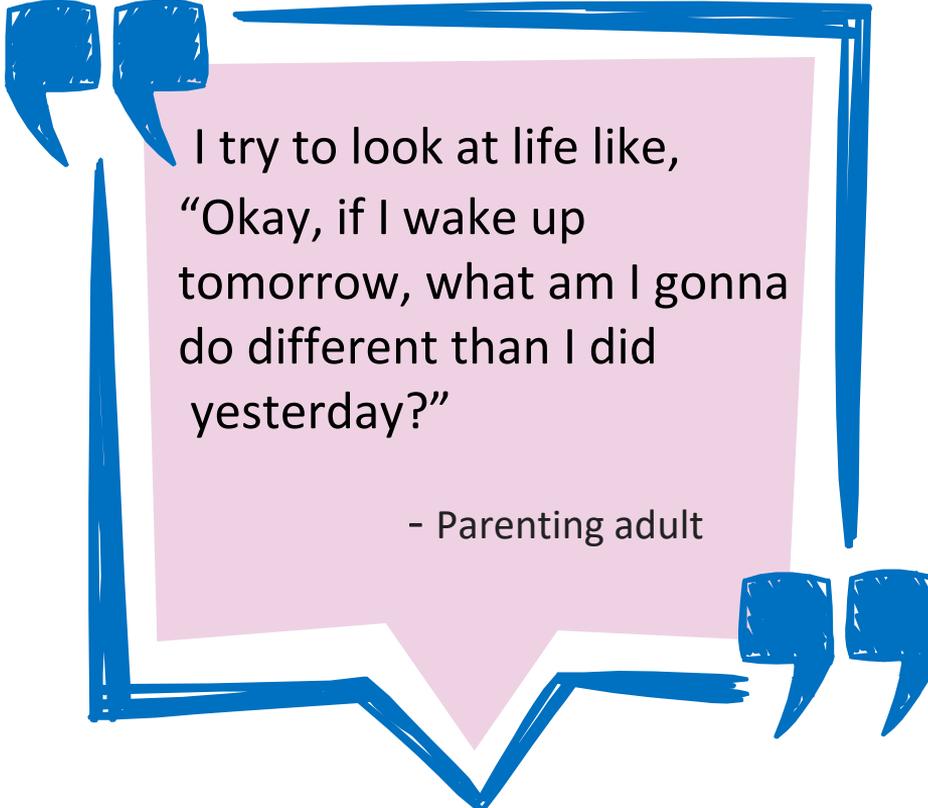
Spirituality and Peace

- For many participants, well-being **included a spiritual component**. They expressed **a sense of inner peace and joy resulting from spiritual practices**.
- They want to feel connected to **a higher power through spiritual rituals**, such as prayer and meditation.

Positive Emotions

- When life is good, youth and parenting adults described several **positive emotions** they experience:
 - Happiness
 - Joy
 - Peace
 - Confidence
 - Hope
 - Excitement

Self-Direction



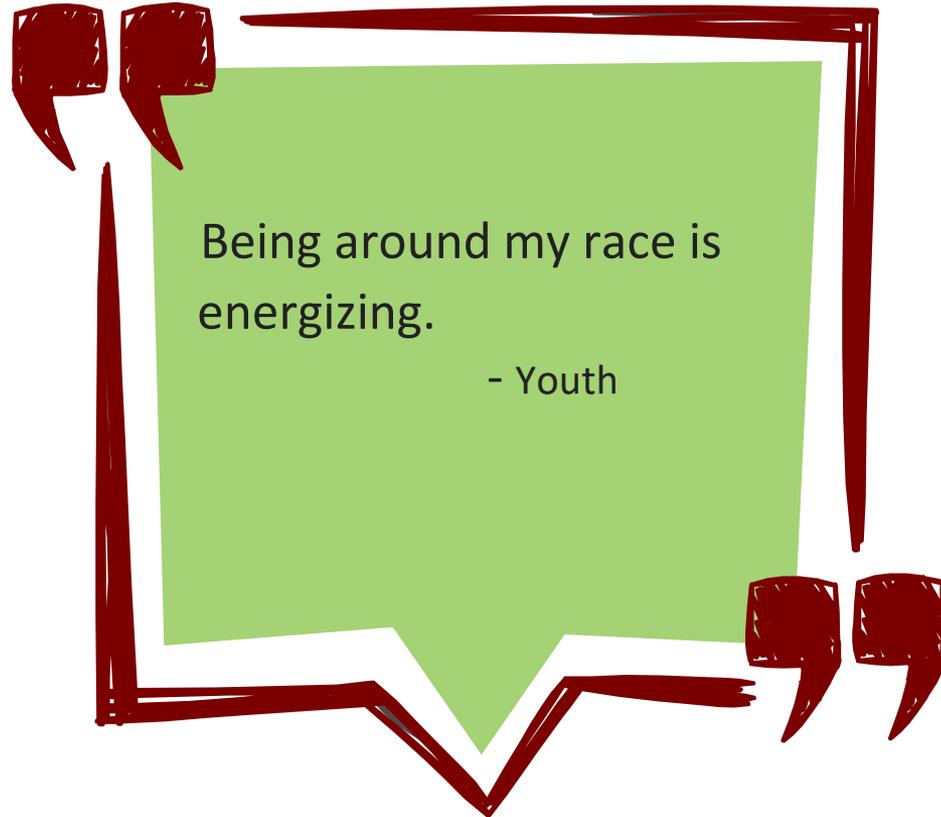
I try to look at life like,
“Okay, if I wake up
tomorrow, what am I gonna
do different than I did
yesterday?”

- Parenting adult

Self-Direction

- Participants discussed that when life is good, they are able **to do what they need and want to do**.
- This included feeling **capable, motivated, and inspired to complete tasks**.
- Participants also described **thinking about future plans** when life is good.

Cultural Practices and Pride



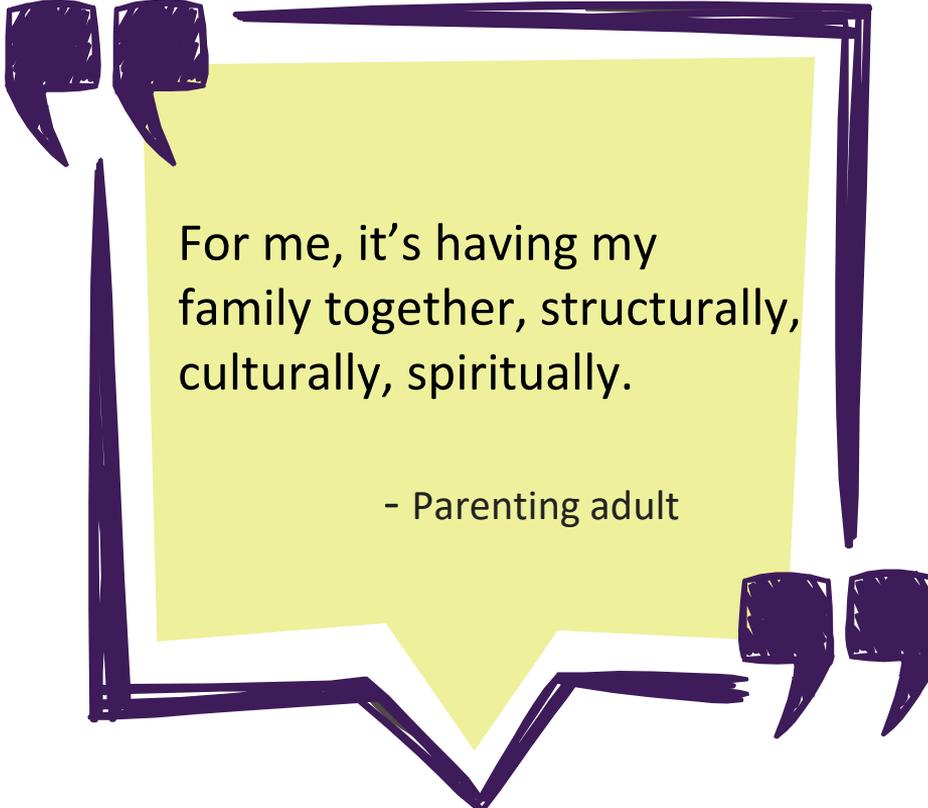
Cultural Practices and Pride

- Many participants noted cultural practices as contributing to their well-being, including **participation in ceremonies** and **celebrating cultural music, food, and activities**
- Both youth and parenting adults referenced **cultural history and pride** as elements of their well-being.
- Parenting adults desired to pass on their **history and cultural practices** to their children.
- Youth said they felt a **sense of community among people of their same race.**

Community

- Parenting adults described how it is important for them to feel, as one participant noted, **“a sense of belonging to a larger society.”**
- While both youth and parenting adults **valued time with their family**, youth, in particular, valued time with other supportive individuals.
- When life is good, parenting adults identified that they were **more likely to give of themselves, their time, and their resources.**

Relationships with Family



For me, it's having my family together, structurally, culturally, spiritually.

- Parenting adult

Relationships with Family

- Parenting adults and youth alike discussed in depth ways they experience well-being through **family relationships and memories.**
- Youth described **families as their support system.**
- Parenting adults said life is good when their **children are healthy and thriving.**

Suggestions for Improvement of Child Welfare System

- Participants provided suggestions for improvement of the child welfare system, including:
 - **Hold CPS staff accountable** for culturally sensitive practices, follow through
 - **Cultural responsiveness training** for all CPS staff
 - Increase hiring of CPS staff who are **people of color and parents themselves.**
 - Accept parents' "side of story," **halt judgment of families and trust them.**

Suggestions for Improvement of Community

- In addition, youth and parenting adults also described suggestions for the improvement of their local communities:
 - **Increase assistance to families**, such as for affordable housing and transportation
 - **Provide more programming and mentors** for youth and parenting adults
 - Examples: learning about traditional ways, prevention before CPS involvement
 - Remove barriers to participation in programming, such as transportation or childcare