

IF CARE IS EVEN THE RIGHT WORD

Angel Houle

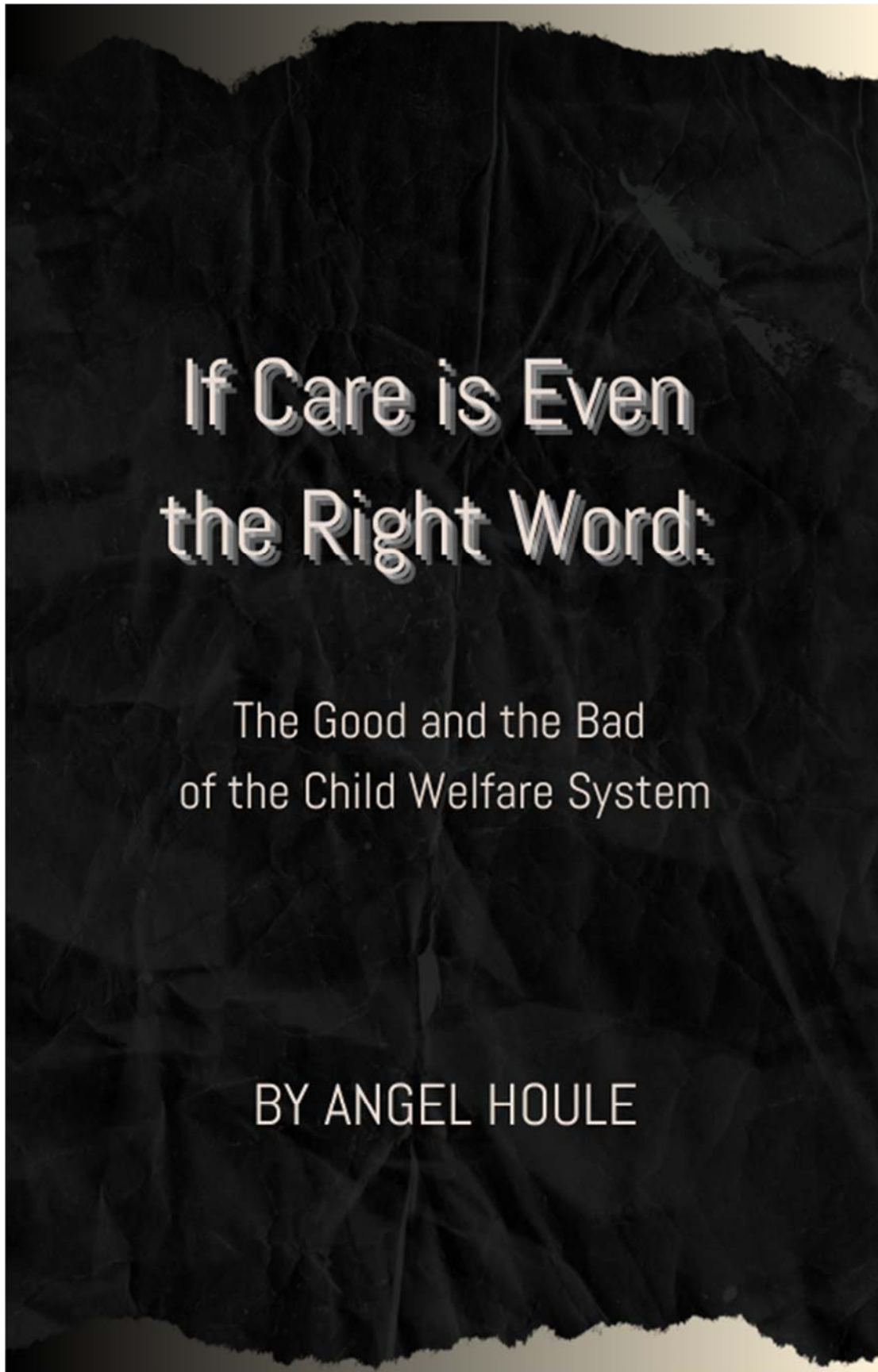


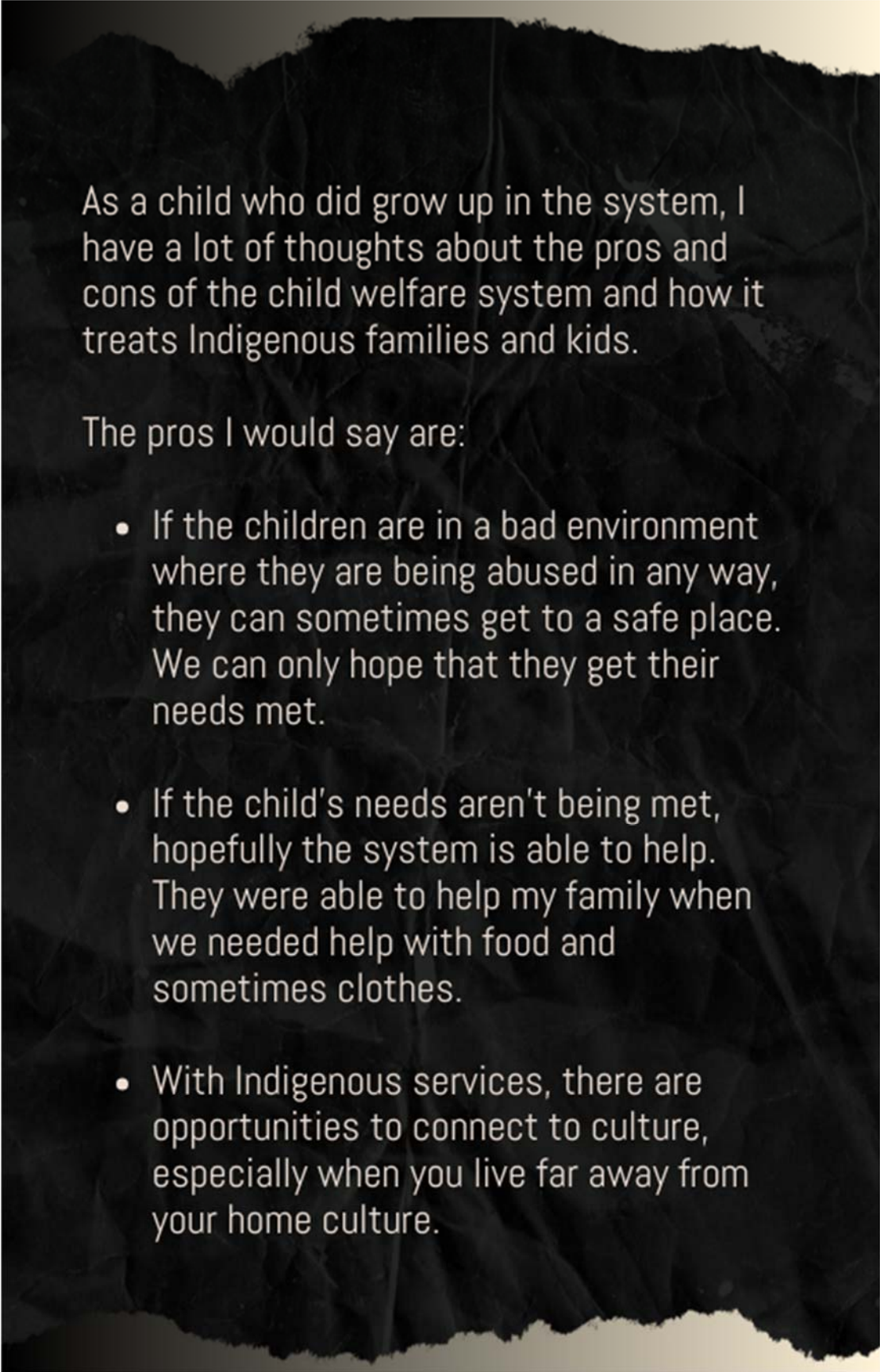
Keywords: Indigenous youth in care, Indigenous child welfare, child welfare files, rights of Indigenous children in care, racism in foster care, neglect in foster care

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

Angel Houle is an Indigenous youth in care and an INVINCIBLE youth storyteller/researcher who has been working with the Kinship Rising research project at the University of Victoria since 2023.

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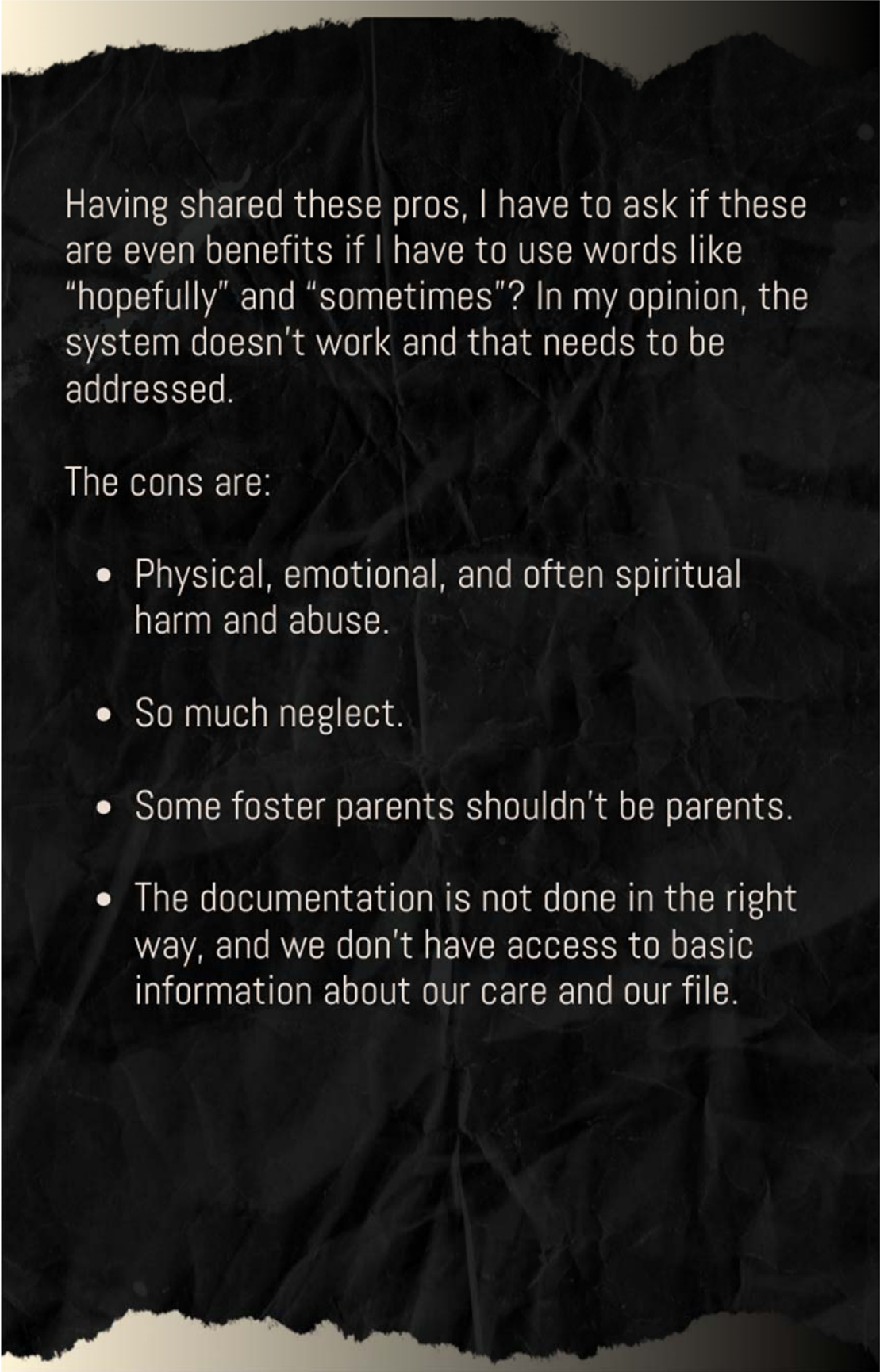




As a child who did grow up in the system, I have a lot of thoughts about the pros and cons of the child welfare system and how it treats Indigenous families and kids.

The pros I would say are:

- If the children are in a bad environment where they are being abused in any way, they can sometimes get to a safe place. We can only hope that they get their needs met.
- If the child's needs aren't being met, hopefully the system is able to help. They were able to help my family when we needed help with food and sometimes clothes.
- With Indigenous services, there are opportunities to connect to culture, especially when you live far away from your home culture.



Having shared these pros, I have to ask if these are even benefits if I have to use words like “hopefully” and “sometimes”? In my opinion, the system doesn’t work and that needs to be addressed.

The cons are:

- Physical, emotional, and often spiritual harm and abuse.
- So much neglect.
- Some foster parents shouldn’t be parents.
- The documentation is not done in the right way, and we don’t have access to basic information about our care and our file.

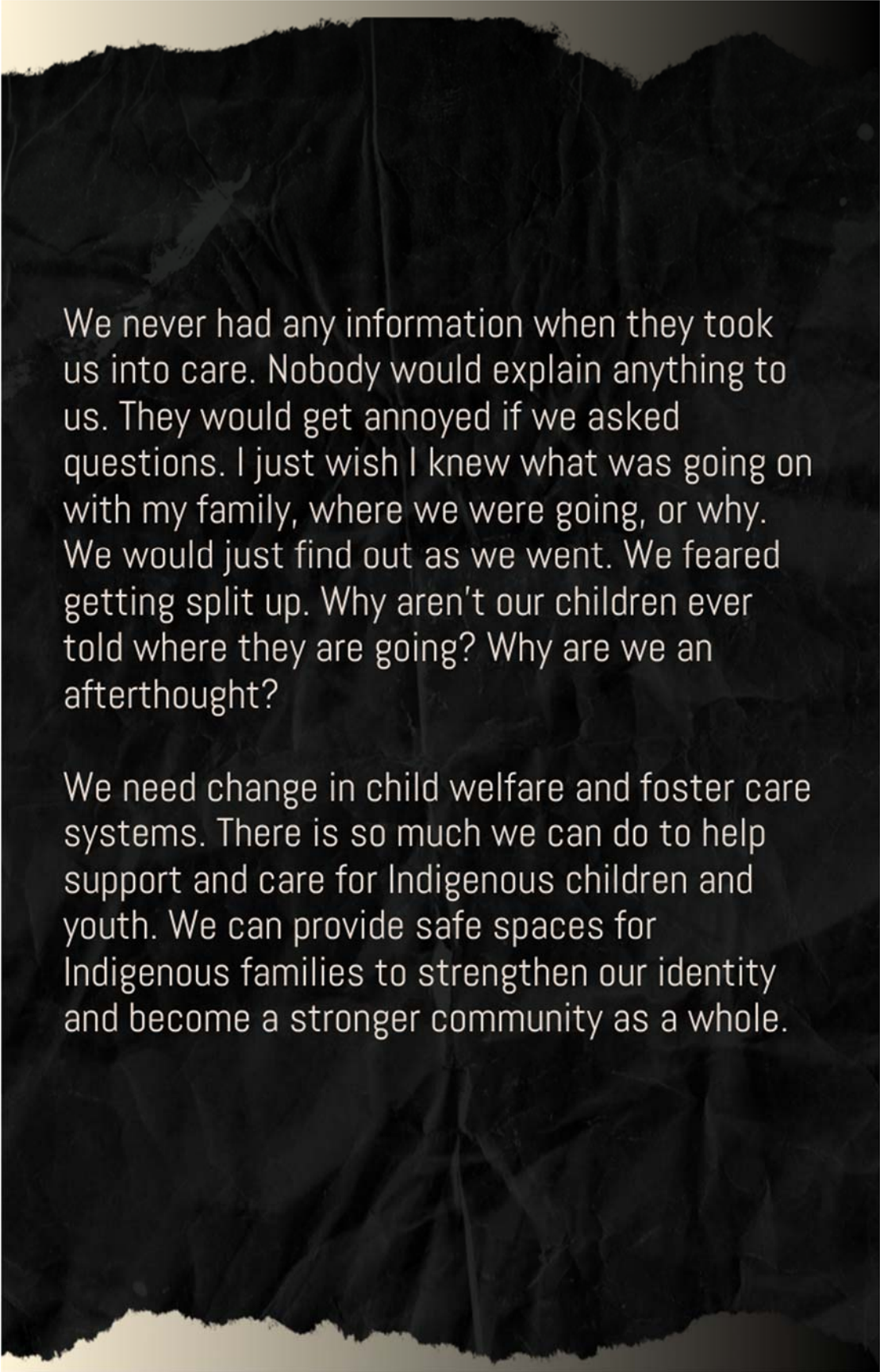
Cons continued...

- Often feeling like a stranger in a place that is supposed to be a home.
- Some workers are not around and don't communicate or respond to requests for assistance or services. A related issue is that it can be hard to contact the child's Band for anything, especially over long distance. Workers want to be contacted for every change for the child, but they might not respond when they are contacted.
- The system has to do more to help the families that can't feed or clothe their children, rather than taking them away and paying someone else to take care of that child. Families could use that money to clothe and feed their children.

Reading my file...

When I got older, I finally read my files. It was a thick stack. My file noted that I was high risk and difficult. The workers who picked me up would always say that I was such a good kid. These workers were surprised because my file said I was a bad kid. When they got to know me, they realized that I'm not like that at all. It was just the environment I often found myself in.

The files also showed me why I often found myself alone and separated from my siblings. As I was the oldest, they thought I could take care of myself. As a result, I missed out on a lot of visits with my mom, birthdays, and more, as everyone thought I could handle myself more compared to my siblings. But I needed someone too.



We never had any information when they took us into care. Nobody would explain anything to us. They would get annoyed if we asked questions. I just wish I knew what was going on with my family, where we were going, or why. We would just find out as we went. We feared getting split up. Why aren't our children ever told where they are going? Why are we an afterthought?

We need change in child welfare and foster care systems. There is so much we can do to help support and care for Indigenous children and youth. We can provide safe spaces for Indigenous families to strengthen our identity and become a stronger community as a whole.



Angel Houle
First Nation

Life Plan: Enjoy as many pretty views I can as I love to explore nature.

Likes: Collecting rocks and sea glass from beaches, and playing boardgames.

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