



DEDICATION: WHAT OUR ANCESTORS DREAMED ABOUT

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Indigenous Youth in Care

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Keywords: Indigenous youth, Indigenous identity formation, Indigenous warriors, Indigenous ancestors

Acknowledgement: 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.

Yuxweluption Qwal' qaxala (corresponding author) has been fortunate to walk with the INVINCIBLE youth leaders as a cultural mentor and witness to a transformative practice. He has been humbly working with the Kinship Rising research project at the University of Victoria since 2021. Email: kinshiprising@uvic.ca.

In Lekwungen, we often refer to our *Sali* (spirit) as a key part of our identity. Our spirit, our identity, is formed by our actions, experiences, and behaviors. This often becomes the narrative of our journey — moments captured by wisdom, frustrations, anger, sadness, curiosity, and sometimes complete numbness. It is how the INVINCIBLES speak these emotions that reflects their powerful character.

We also use *kwum kwum* to denote individuals who demonstrate courage. The INVINCIBLES have demonstrated courage again and again with integrity and wisdom beyond their years. They have demonstrated the courage to tell their experiences to benefit their peers, the generations to come, and even many adults who have witnessed their good work. Courage doesn't travel alone and is often accompanied by *xi'sul* (fierceness). Our fiercest warriors don't always wear paint or brandish weapons that can physically harm. Rather, they are equipped with curiosity, compassion, and empathy — an acute understanding that they do not want others to experience hardship or feel alone in their walk. They wish folks to know that they can build safe places for their stories, for others to hear, to learn, or to simply listen to or witness. This *xi'sul*, this fierce quality, represents our warriors of today who are fighting for knowledge and wisdom for our next generations.

You can't fight for justice without *sni'nu* (being well disciplined). *Sni'nu* is a discipline that can only come from lived experiences and understanding. Walking in such a way naturally evokes integrity and emotional intelligence that can only be ignited by fierce steps and courageous moments. These moments acknowledge the past for a strengthened future. Through the INVINCIBLES' vulnerability they show their courage; that they are able to speak their vulnerability with an audience and open themselves up for critique is a testament to their ability to grow in their identity with a transparency that is admirable.

What we continue to learn in witnessing the INVINCIBLES is to step into humility and empathy with a renewed lens. These youth warriors teach us to broaden our instinctual capacity for empathy and compassion. These gifts are a stepping stone to our growth as humans, away from simple fight, flight, or freeze mechanisms. This is not to say that such instincts aren't important; rather, it is to accept that our hearts can be the connector for our minds, therefore making each experience a heartbeat for our next generations.

In working with the INVINCIBLES, I now understand what is meant by “we are the new ancestors”. I now see with my heart and spirit the INVINCIBLES living this truth through stories, powerful visuals, and experiences that lift others up so that they know they are not walking alone.

Hands raised to our Kinship Rising crew, Surrounded by Cedar family, and the many others who have walked with our INVINCIBLE family.

Hay'sxw'qa si'em (thank you, respected)

Yuxwelupton Qwal'qaxala

Numgum gwayum'tu'mu'tlas

(Bradley Dick)