

On Their Own

Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth
as They Leave Government Care

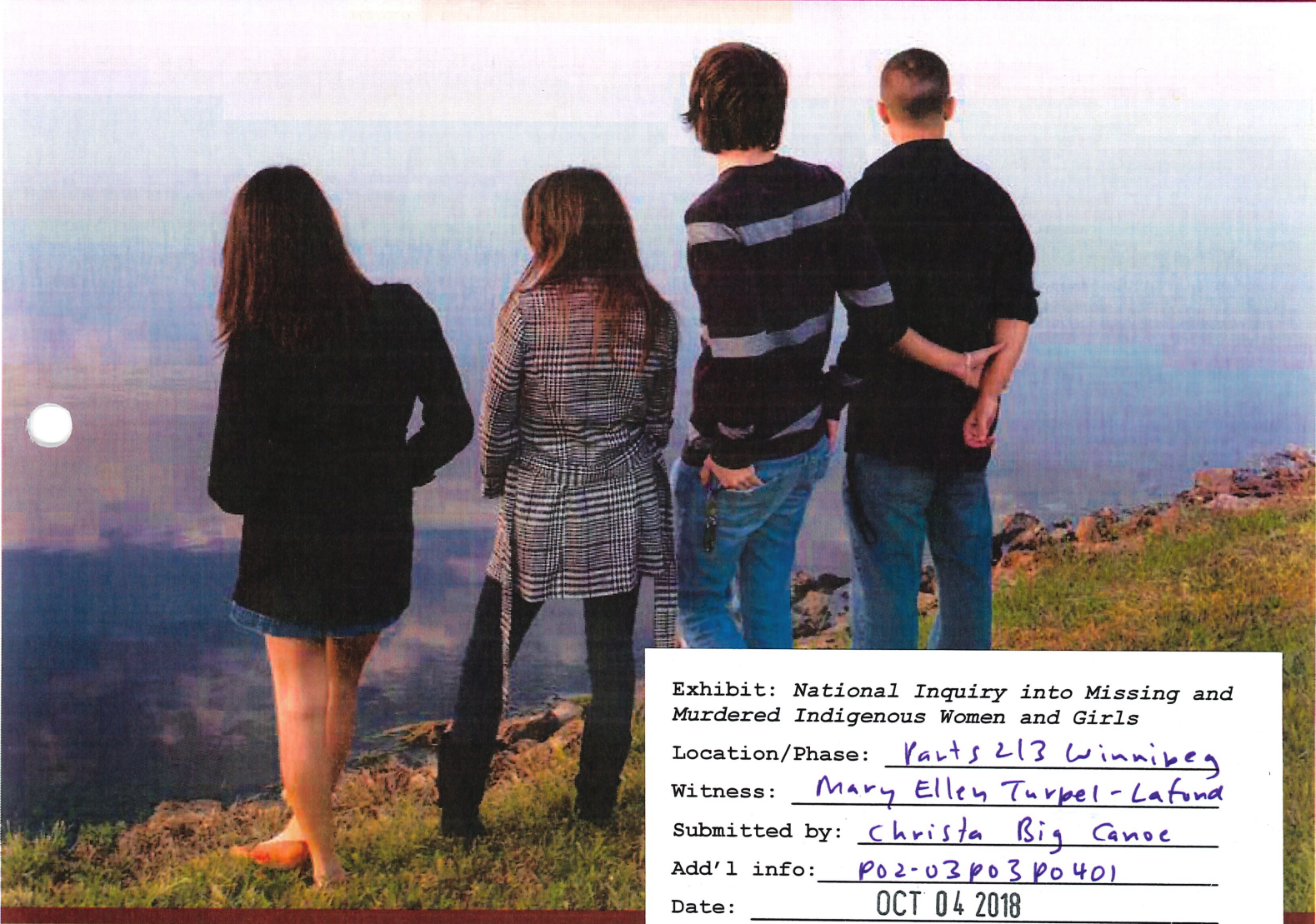


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Witness: Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond

Submitted by: Christa Big Canoe

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REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

April 2014

April 28, 2014

The Honourable Linda Reid
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Suite 207, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Dear Ms. Speaker,

I have the honour of submitting this special report, *On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth as They Leave Government Care*, to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. This report is prepared in accordance with Section 20 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, which states that the Representative may make a special report to the Legislative Assembly if she considers it necessary to do so.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond
Representative for Children and Youth

pc: Ms. Jane Thornthwaite
Chair, Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth

Mr. Craig James
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

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Executive Summary

Few parents in British Columbia would mark their son or daughter's 19th birthday by walking them to the front door of the family home, shaking their hand, wishing them "good luck" and then ushering them outside.

But that's essentially what happens to many youth in the care of B.C.'s Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) when they turn 19, become adults and "age out" of the provincial care system.

While more and more young British Columbians are now remaining at home into their early 20s and beyond, or relying on their parents and extended family for support with school, living expenses and advice, those kind of supports are not always available for youth leaving care.

More than 8,000 children are in the care of the B.C. government at any one time, with about 700 of them aging out in an average year. When youth in care reach their 19th birthdays, they are considered adults and no longer eligible for protection under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act)*. The following report by B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth examines the unique needs of those youth and makes recommendations about how those needs could be better met moving forward.

It's important to recognize the challenges faced by children and youth in care when examining what supports they might require in order to make a successful transition to adulthood. These youth have different life experiences than many of their B.C. counterparts. Many of them have had adverse experiences which can affect their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and, as a result, many have fallen behind their non-care peers.

Along with those struggles, youth leaving care are often without the family support system that can provide the financial, instructional and emotional base necessary to make the often difficult transition from dependent to independence.

The results can be devastating. Research shows that without adequate transitional supports, young people leaving care are less likely to graduate from high school and attend post-secondary education. They are more likely to have mental health problems, become parents at an early age, experience trouble with employment, be involved in the criminal justice system, receive social assistance, experience homelessness or have substance abuse issues. The costs of our society not helping them are far higher than the costs of providing adequate support at a time when they need it most.

A major factor in whether or not a youth's transition to adulthood will be successful is how well that transition is planned and supported. Therefore, in this report, the Representative recommends that MCFD establish a Youth Secretariat to coordinate

cross-ministerial efforts to ensure successful transitions to adulthood for youth in and from government care.

The Youth Secretariat would lead collaboration between MCFD and the ministries of Health, Education, Advanced Education, Social Development and Social Innovation and Justice to make services more accessible and effective. Chief among its goals would be to lead work on establishing a minimum income support level as well as access to health, dental and vision care for all former youth in care until age 25.

The Representative also recommends that the Ministry of Education begin a targeted initiative in all B.C. school districts to ensure that every youth in care has a career plan to prepare for education and skills training and that these plans be monitored by district superintendents for compliance.

The Representative also recommends legislative steps. In the short-term, she calls for the *CFCS Act* to be amended to permit, on a case-by-case basis, the extension of foster care up to age 25 for youth who are in post-secondary school or training programs. In the long-term, the Representative recommends that legislation such as the United Kingdom's *Children (Leaving Care) Act* be developed for B.C. to deal specifically with the rights and needs of young people leaving care.

The Representative believes educational institutions have a role to play as well, which is why she has challenged B.C.'s post-secondary schools to waive tuition for former children and youth in care. Businesses and the community at large should also help – an effort that has already begun by Coast Capital Savings' recent initiation of a fund to offset living expenses of former in-care youth while they are furthering their education.

However, when any child or youth comes into the care of the B.C. government, the province becomes the parent and assumes responsibility for the nurturing and development of that child. This report calls for government to do what any prudent parent would do – provide the necessary planning, support, advice and resources to give that child the best possible chance of success.



Introduction

Young people have tremendous inherent strengths and a capacity for growth. They successfully navigate many of the challenges they face in their lives. In spite of this, they are more likely to be successful when they are provided with a range of supports geared towards their particular needs.

This is true for all young people. Support equals success. However, many young people leaving government care face significant struggles, with poor short- and long-term outcomes. Those who have been in care are consistently less likely to attain the academic levels and employment stability of those who have lived with their families. Youth in care are also more likely to be homeless, to become young parents or to have mental health challenges. These outcomes may be strongly influenced by their pre-care and in-care experiences.

In previous reports, the Representative has noted severe negative outcomes for young people that can result when rights, interests and needs are not well served while in care. A number of recommendations in these reports address issues faced by children and youth in care that relate to this report, particularly in the area of planning, so children in care can develop important relationships and feel connected. *Much More Than Paperwork: Proper Planning Essential to Better Lives for B.C.'s Children in Care* (March 2013) notes that proper planning for the lives of children in the care of the B.C. government must go from being an afterthought to a priority for MCFD, while *Still Waiting: First-hand Experiences with Youth Mental Health Services in B.C.* (April 2013) discusses poor planning for youth transitioning from youth mental health services into the adult mental health system. *Trauma, Turmoil and Tragedy: Understanding the Needs of Children and Youth at Risk of Suicide and Self-Harm* (November 2012) and *Who Protected Him? How B.C.'s Child Welfare System Failed One of Its Most Vulnerable Children* (February 2013) also reference poor planning for children in care.

Several recent and significant steps in the development of supports for young people leaving care in B.C. are worth noting:

- Funded by Coast Capital Savings, a trust fund has been established at the Vancouver Foundation to assist former youth in care to pay for costs associated with attending college or university.
- The Vancouver Foundation released the results of a survey highlighting the public's support of increasing the age of leaving care to at least 21 from 19.¹
- Following the Representative's challenge to all B.C.'s post-secondary institutions, Vancouver Island University and the University of British Columbia announced policies to waive tuition fees for young people who have been in care.

- The Representative has been working with MCFD and community partners, including Coast Capital Savings, to enrich the trust fund at the Vancouver Foundation and to encourage other post-secondary institutions to waive tuition fees.
- MCFD has made efforts to improve services, including updating transition manuals for youth leaving care.

In general, though, the processes and resources for leaving care do not adequately support the transition to adulthood. The lack of financial, educational and emotional assistance for these youth means that they often struggle to make ends meet while coping with personal challenges that can range from significant to debilitating. Youth who leave care face a major risk of social and economic exclusion, as they can no longer depend on continuous support from child and family services organizations and are less likely to receive support from their families. Their access to post-secondary education is often limited.

Gathering the information needed to analyze the state of supports for youth in B.C. and comparing them to the identified needs of youth is a complex task. There is no easy way to collect baseline or longer-term outcomes data for the young people served by the child welfare system, nor is there a B.C. or Canadian equivalent of the United States' National Youth in Transition Database. A data collection system that allows us to track who is in care in Canada or B.C. and what happens to them when they leave care does not exist. Nor is there a well developed way of evaluating whether the interventions and programs in place meet the short- and long-term needs of young people in care.

Comparisons are further complicated by the fact that young people in care are not a homogeneous group. Who they are, their circumstances and what they need varies so widely that it is difficult to build an accurate aggregate picture of young people in care.

There is a significant difference between a young woman who has moved from placement to placement and school to school since being brought into care at an early age because she was abused at home, and someone who came into care as a teen because of the accidental death of his parents and who has lived in one foster home and attended one school while under the care of the state. Similarly, there is a significant difference in the circumstances and needs of a young Aboriginal woman who has lived in a kinship care setting in her home community and that of a young Aboriginal man who has lived with a non-Aboriginal foster family and has had little or no contact with his family of origin or community. While it may be a cliché to state that every young person in care needs to be treated as an individual, it is nonetheless true.

The reasons and motivations for leaving care also differ between young people. Some age out of care after reaching the maximum age of support. Given an opportunity, some of these youth would continue to use support. Other young people leave at the earliest possible opportunity and lose supports they may have been eligible to continue to receive. Some young people simply run away and live under the radar of the child welfare

system until their files are closed. The way in which young people leave the child welfare system has a strong influence on how well they do in the short- and long-term.

This report provides a description of the issues and financial supports for youth in care transitioning to adulthood in B.C. It examines the transitional process of young people who have been in care compared to their peers who have not. Estimates are presented of what it costs, in dollar terms, to transition from adolescence to adulthood, and an overview is given of government financial supports that are in place for young people transitioning out of care. Finally, recommendations are made about how to better support young people as they leave care.

Methodology

While there is some excellent qualitative data and a great deal of anecdotal information about youth in care in this province and in other jurisdictions in Canada, there are a number of problems with the available information about young people transitioning out of care, including a dearth of reliable information about the short- and long-term outcomes of these young people. In addition, no solid longitudinal data exists about young people who are transitioning out of care.

It is difficult to generalize the Canadian research findings, as the samples are either too small² or employ data collection methods that make it difficult to determine if the participants are representative of the broader care-leaving population.³

This does not mean that the research collected is not useful, but there must be caution about drawing broad conclusions from studies where the ability to generalize is limited. Few broad-based or comparative evaluations regarding the effectiveness of the current transitional programs have been done. A relatively recent Campbell Review, involving systematic reviews of existing research and evaluation publications, did not come to any firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the independent living program being reviewed.⁴ This highlights a need to conduct more rigorous evaluations of programs to determine if they are meeting the needs of young people.

There is also a lack of in-depth profiles of the young people who are in care in B.C. and other Canadian jurisdictions. There is frequent mention of the disproportionate number of Aboriginal young people in care that does not discuss their diverse circumstances, characteristics and needs. The collection of accurate data regarding Aboriginal youth in care is further complicated by the varying levels of jurisdictions that have responsibility for these youth. This lack of in-depth information is also true of other young people in care. They are often described as a homogeneous group or, at best, sub-groups, with little acknowledgement of individual differences or needs.

This lack of in-depth information is a significant barrier when discussing transitional processes and needs. Further, there is insufficient information about the financial costs for young people transitioning to adulthood. While information is available about the costs of attending post-secondary institutions, there is a lack of information about the costs of setting up and maintaining a household in B.C. or elsewhere in Canada.

To compensate for this lack of information, data has been drawn from diverse sources. Information about the costs of transition for young people in care has been extrapolated from sources related to the cost of independent living for the general youth population and students attending higher education. Some contextual transition outcome materials have been borrowed from other countries. A number of comments made by youth who have recently left care, or by the social workers and foster parents who have worked with them, are included in this report. These diverse sources have painted as full a picture as possible of what is being experienced by youth exiting the care system in B.C.

The results from Canadian studies into the experiences of youth leaving care tend to fall in line with findings from the U.S. and the United Kingdom. However, there should be caution about using data from other jurisdictions to try to understand the needs and/or outcomes of young people leaving care in B.C. and Canada, since there are many differences in the systems and the people they serve. For example, in the U.S., the health outcomes of urban young people without insurance, such as those who are homeless after leaving care, will be very different from a similar homeless youth population in Canada, where high-quality health care services are relatively accessible regardless of ability to pay. Even within Canada it is difficult to make comparisons because of the diversity in programs, policies and environmental contexts.

I think that people assumed that because I was functioning, I was going to school, that I didn't need support. I was a capable young person. And that's where I think the system failed. Just because I was doing well in school or doing well in certain parts of my life does not mean that I don't need other supports.

Former youth in care

Responsibility for Youth in Care in British Columbia

a) Ministry of Children and Family Development

Mandated child welfare services in B.C. are the responsibility of MCFD. The youth in care who are the subject of this report are the ministry's responsibility. Approximately 8,000 children are in care in B.C. every year with about 700 of them aging out of care annually. There is no existing mechanism for following them post-discharge, and so it is not known what happens to them once they leave care.

Child welfare services in B.C. are mandated by the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act)*. Mandated services are provided by regional ministry offices or by 23 delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) that have signed agreements with the ministry. Through these agreements, the Provincial Director of Child Protection transfers authority to DAAs to undertake child welfare responsibilities. Since child welfare services for First Nations people are the responsibility of the federal government, services are provided under a bi-party agreement with the province, or under a tri-party agreement with the province and DAAs. The actual level of responsibility transferred is negotiated between the ministry and Aboriginal community served by the agency.

Child welfare programs in B.C. are delivered through the ministry's 13 service delivery areas. Each geographical area is typically covered by an intake team that assesses reports, makes community referrals and works with families for up to 30 days. If ongoing service is needed, files are typically transferred to family support or family development response teams. In many areas there are separate teams for youth, for children in the permanent custody of the ministry, and for children for whom the plan is adoption. In some areas, integrated teams provide services from intake through to adoption.

b) The Public Guardian and Trustee

The other provincial agency with responsibilities to youth in care in B.C. is the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee. Although established under provincial legislation and appointed by the provincial government, the Office operates as an independent agency. Its role is to protect the interests of those who do not have the capacity to manage their own legal and financial affairs. The Public Guardian and Trustee is property guardian for every child who becomes a permanent ward of the province of B.C. In that role, the Public Guardian and Trustee protects the legal and financial interests of children in continuing care.

The Public Guardian and Trustee plays a role when any child or youth in B.C. has an interest in an estate or receives money from an inheritance, accident or compensation settlement, life insurance or similar award. The Office reviews all personal injury settlements, legal contracts, trusts and estates involving minors. It has powers to hold money or property in trust for minors. It may act as litigation guardian, ensuring that children and youth are represented in civil proceedings, and offers financial planning support to its child and youth clients to help youth manage their estates as they transition into adulthood.



The Transition to Adulthood

It should be a simple task to calculate what youth need to transition to adulthood. The costs associated with the transition period are offset against available income. Yet if there is a consistent message from research over the last 20 years, it is that the transition to adulthood has become longer, more complex and much harder to define.⁵ Assessing what is needed to navigate this transition is now a significant public policy challenge.

In the middle of the 20th century, the markers of adulthood in North America were relatively clear.⁶ Most young people left school and moved quickly into employment, set up a home, married and started a family. Plentiful industrial jobs offered social and economic independence. Strong social values of the time channelled young females into adult roles as mothers and wives and young males into roles as breadwinners. By their early 20s, the vast majority of young people had achieved the status of independent adulthood.⁷

This traditional view of a short and relatively simple passage into adulthood is now largely obsolete.⁸ It is based on a relationship between education and employment that has shifted dramatically.⁹ In Western societies, there is an increasing demand for higher education and credentials to enter the workplace. Over the last half century, the number of highly paid unskilled and semi-skilled jobs has decreased, and many transitional supports, such as apprenticeships, have disappeared.¹⁰ In 1961, only 8.5 per cent of Canada's workforce had achieved any kind of post-secondary education.¹¹ In contrast, in 2011, 64.1 per cent of Canadians either had a university degree, a college degree or a trade certificate.¹²

Higher education institutions have responded to the changed marketplace needs by expanding dramatically.¹³ Most Canadian youth now expect to graduate from high school and go on to some form of post-secondary education. A Canadian 2001 study found 77 per cent of women and 66 per cent of men were in post-secondary education by the time they were 22-years-old.¹⁴ Post-secondary education is increasingly seen not as a luxury, but as a necessary step on the long road to adult independence. A person's level of education is one of the best indicators of the likelihood of achieving adult success, permanent employment and a living wage.¹⁵ However, there are significant social and cultural disparities within this indicator. For example, in 2011 48.4 per cent of Aboriginal people had graduated from a post-secondary program compared to 64.1 per cent of the general population with only 9.8 per cent having a university degree versus 26.5 per cent in the non-Aboriginal population.¹⁶

The economic and psychological independence once achieved by young adults by their early 20s is now typically delayed by about a decade.¹⁷ The transition from adolescence to independent adulthood has become so lengthy and complex that researchers believe it should be seen as a new developmental stage.¹⁸ Canadian social policy, however, has yet to catch up and is firmly rooted in a traditional understanding of the transition. Adulthood is defined across a range of policy and legislation as beginning at 18 or 19 years of age, although six of Canada's provinces and territories use 16 as the age when youth are no longer seen as children in need of protection. When it comes to assumptions about capacity and resources for independent living, Canadian social policy makes little distinction between adults in their late teenage years and those in their 40s and 50s.¹⁹

Case Example

Issue

An 18-year-old youth was in care with MCFD since he was six-years-old. Since the age of 16 he requested numerous times to move into independent living. His request was constantly denied without explanation. The youth had no transition plan to support him in leaving care, although he was eventually moved into independent living. The youth was connected to a youth worker who supported him in creating a "start up" list of basic needs that MCFD approved. The youth worker continues to support the youth in learning day-to-day life skills as well as connecting him to community resources.

Observation

Although the youth was eventually supported to move into independent living, the lack of a timely, well-developed and implemented transition plan meant the youth's opportunity to learn life skills prior to reaching the age of 19 had effectively been eliminated. The youth's negative experience, paired with his lack of support, will inevitably impact his transition as he moves into adulthood.

Meeting the Costs of Transition

The transition to adulthood is expensive. Young people associate leaving home with a significant decline in financial security.²⁰ In 2009, the average one-person Canadian household spent \$38,776 per year to cover food, shelter, clothing, household expenses, personal care, health and the normal expenses of daily living.²¹ Of course, many young people cannot afford to live alone, and the real cost for them – many of whom live in shared accommodation with other adults – is hard to determine.

One method to determine the cost for a young person living independently is to look at the one-person household annual spending figure. However, these costs are skewed high because they include the spending habits of the entire adult population, including highly paid professionals.

Another way to estimate costs is to look at how the federal government determines the cost of living for students in student loan programs. The numbers are closer to the costs that young adults will face when they move away from home, although they do not include the additional contributions that students or families are expected to make, and are about 30 per cent lower than actual total costs.

Young people are typically expected to meet these costs through some combination of employment income, government financial support and personal and family resources. While government grants and loans for part-time education support the growing trend for youth to combine schooling with part-time work, they are not intended to cover living expenses.

A typical breakdown of costs at a Canadian university requires 33 per cent of total expenses to be met through savings and earnings. For example, at the University of Victoria the average cost for a Canadian student living away from home for eight months and pursuing a Bachelor of Arts program in 2011 was \$16,244, based on the Moderate Standard of Living Guidelines established by the B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education.²² In such a case, federal and provincial student loans amounted to \$10,880, leaving a shortfall of \$5,364.²³

While the average income for Canadians in 2009 was \$39,300, it was only \$17,700 for 20 to 24-year-olds.²⁴ Estimates of annual incomes are traditionally based on the assumption of full-time employment, however, many entry-level positions do not provide full-time hours.

It is challenging for young people to find full-time employment, especially in difficult economic times. Young people are often the first group to be laid off during a recession and the last to be rehired. As well, those who enter the workforce for the first time during or immediately after a recession are likely to experience the negative consequences of doing so for much of their work career.²⁵ Those who do secure full-time jobs

become ineligible for social assistance, student grants and loans, and many educational scholarships and awards. Youth without post-secondary qualifications are most likely to end up in low-paying, unstable jobs.²⁶

There has been different ways to support myself. At the present time I am supporting myself through student loans and [an after-care financial support program] which is an independent – it's a program for children who have aged out of the foster care system and are now pursuing post secondary schooling. In the past – well I am working part time as well – in the past I have also worked in the sex trade to support myself through school.

Former youth in care

Young people leaving care often struggle to acquire basic household necessities, and cost-of-living estimates generally do not take into account what it might cost a young person to set up a first-time household. In Canada, there is a lack of information on these costs for the general young adult population and, more specifically, for young people transitioning out of care. In the United Kingdom, it has been estimated that it costs a young person leaving care approximately \$3,900 to buy the basic household items needed to establish an apartment.²⁷ We have no clear picture on what these costs would be in B.C.

Social assistance is the primary source of support available to young adults who are not working full-time or going to school.

The average annual income support for a single employable adult in Canada is \$7,300, although this drops to \$6,500 for those between 20- and 24-years-old.²⁸ The current Canadian policy approach is that social assistance should not meet all the needs of employable adults.²⁹ Lower than average living conditions are seen as an incentive for people to move into employment, and it is assumed that employable adults on social assistance can supplement their income with personal resources and community supports.³⁰

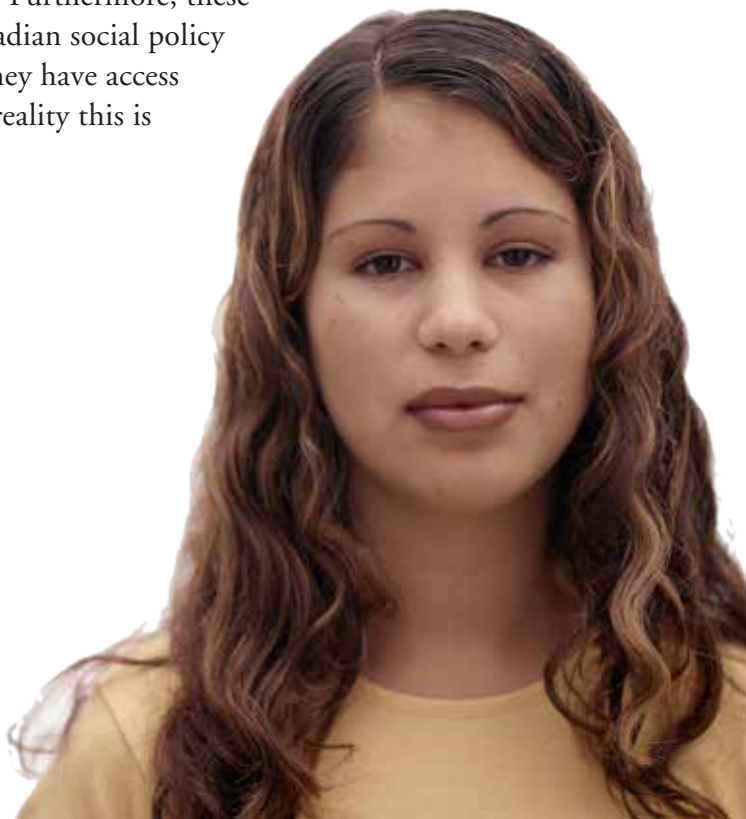
Canadian social policy rests on the belief that young people have access to family support to make up any shortfalls. It is federal government policy that parents are expected to plan for and make adequate financial preparation in anticipation of the student's post-secondary education. It is expected that the funding of the student's education will be a priority for the family.³¹ The time taken to transition to adulthood has increased along with young people's reliance on family resources to see them through.³² This has significant negative implications for youth in care.

Research in the U.S. and Europe suggests most young people do not leave home until they feel they have sufficient resources and stable employment.³³ This means that in times of unemployment and recession, young people stay home longer.³⁴ One United Kingdom study conducted prior to the recent recession found that 78 per cent of students still lived with their parents for financial reasons.³⁵ Many find that they simply cannot make it on their own, and leave only to return to the parental nest.³⁶ The 2011

Canadian census showed that 42.3 per cent of young adults ages 20 to 29 that year resided in the parental home either because they had never left or because they had returned home.³⁷ The “boomerang kid” is a response to the changed economic and social circumstances of the 21st century.

As a result of these societal changes, it has been estimated that in the U.S., parents provide an average of \$38,000 in material assistance to each child between the ages of 18 and 34 as they move into adulthood.³⁸ This does not include costs associated with attending post-secondary education. There is little reason to believe that the situation is different in Canada. During the period 1981 to 2001, the percentage of Canadians ages 25 to 34 who were still living at home with their parents more than doubled.³⁹ Parental financial assistance during the transition years amounts to 23 per cent of the total amount provided during childhood.⁴⁰ Consequently, youth in lower economic classes face many more challenges than their peers in accessing the post-secondary education and permanent employment that mark adulthood.⁴¹ Their parents are less able to provide the assistance that has now become an accepted factor in the complicated transition to adult independence.⁴² In addition, many young people who have been in care do not have the intangible resources that other young people enjoy, such as a family to visit over the holidays, a place to do their laundry or someone from whom to borrow small amounts of money to cover unexpected costs.

Young people leaving care face a double challenge: less access to the informal resources of family, friends and community and a greater need for support in each of these informal areas of their lives. Furthermore, these youth are situated in a Canadian social policy context that assumes that they have access to these supports, when in reality this is not the case.



The Experiences of Youth in Care

While there is much that is unknown about young people in care, it is clear that many have had significant struggles in their lives as young children and will continue to have these as adults.⁴³ This is to be expected given their life experiences prior to coming into care. For the most part, these young people come from high-risk family and community environments where many adverse experiences negatively influence their social, emotional, cognitive and, sometimes, physical development.⁴⁴ As a result of these experiences, youth in care can fall behind their non-care peers – at least temporarily – on a number of developmental measures.

The negative effects of these early experiences can be compounded by additional adverse experiences while in care. Many young people in care experience numerous placement changes and school disruptions that contribute to a deep sense of loss and instability, as well as other related negative consequences.⁴⁵ A significant number of young people in care struggle with ongoing mental health and behavioural issues.⁴⁶ Young people in care who have the least stability in their lives are more likely to experience difficulties. For example, those young people who move three or more times in a year are more likely to attempt suicide than their peers who move only once.⁴⁷

Case Example

Issue

A young adult who was previously a child in care and was on an Agreement with Young Adults (AYA) needed extensive dental work costing approximately \$1,400. That amount was over and above the yearly dental limit of \$700 that the young adult had already exhausted. The dentist urgently recommended that the young adult have the dental work completed or the result would be increased pain and, inevitably, infection. The young adult had no other means to pay for the dental work. MCFD eventually agreed to an exception of policy and covered the cost of the dental work.

Observation

If the young adult had not been on an AYA at the time of his dental emergency, he may have suffered undue discomfort and pain because he had no means to pay for his medical needs. Youth who transition out of care continue to have medical emergencies with no means to cover extraordinary costs.

Without adequate levels of transitional supports, young people in care are at greater risk experiencing negative outcomes as young adults than their non-care peers.⁴⁸ For example, they are significantly more likely not to graduate from high school and are less likely to attend or complete college or university.⁴⁹ They are more likely to have mental health issues,⁵⁰ become parents at an early age⁵¹ and be unemployed or underemployed.⁵² They

It is worse in the care system. It is like a cycle. It's like people don't get out. They stay on welfare. I'm fighting to get out. It's really hard right? We can only afford to live in areas that don't really take us away from our negative environments. Like the apartment I'm living in right now. There's a drug addict living there. It's like how do you get out? You need the help. You can't do it on your own.

Former youth in care

are also more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system,⁵³ experience homelessness,⁵⁴ receive social assistance,⁵⁵ have substance abuse issues⁵⁶ and have health problems.⁵⁷ They are also less likely to have personal stability in their lives.⁵⁸ As many of these issues are inter-related, young people may experience them concurrently, with an attendant increased risk of poor life outcomes.

Not every young person who has been in care struggles throughout his or her life. In one longitudinal study tracking youth leaving care, some had managed to make progress towards productive independence. A small but still significant portion of young people in the study finished high school, secured stable housing and employment, were not in contact with the criminal justice system and self-reported having good physical and

mental health. A smaller proportion of the young people had either completed post-secondary education or were in the process of doing so. As expected, the young people who do the best tend to have a range of well-developed internal and external resources.

The manner in which young people exit the care system appears to have a significant affect on their life chances. Those young people who leave the system by choice at the earliest possible opportunity and those who age out without later access to additional supports tend to be at the most risk for adverse outcomes.

There's so many of those kids that just want out of the system. And because we haven't supported them in making those connections with family or community, they're out there on their own.

Care provider

Educational attainment is closely associated with positive personal outcomes. And in terms of education, young people who continue to receive support past the age of majority appear to have a higher likelihood of successfully transitioning out of care.



Case Example

Issue

An 18-year-old youth in care applied for funding to take two courses at her local community college. Her social worker was doubtful that funding for the second course would be approved, leaving the young woman unable to plan for her future education. This uncertainty was exacerbated by the lack of a plan for the youth's exit from care and the complete absence of any written information to guide her through transition. She was offered no help and no information that would help her through the next phase of her life.

Observation

Last-minute funding for both college courses was eventually approved and although a good outcome in itself, this uncertainty contributed to this young woman's feeling of insecurity and instability as she approached the age of 19.

This lack of positive support from her social worker, combined with the woeful lack of planning and preparation for her transition out of care, resulted in a missed opportunity to have provided this young woman with the best possible move into her adult years.

It is increasingly obvious that the costs of not helping young people successfully transition to adulthood are far higher than the costs of providing adequate support. When the transition to adult independence is not successful, the social and economic costs of support and treatment can be enormous. An equally important consideration is the loss to society of the positive contributions these young people could have made. A key first step is recognizing that the personal and financial consequences of letting young people leave or age out of the system are significant. Once this has been acknowledged, changes can be identified to make policies and programs more supportive for young people in care, so they can become healthy and productive members of society.

Supports Needed for Successful Transitions

What do youth need for a successful transition to adulthood? While young people in care are different from each other in terms of their cultural, ethnic and class identities, pre-care experiences, individual needs and in-care experiences, they seem to share similar core needs as they transition from child welfare services into independent adulthood. These needs were classified by Reid and Dudding into the seven interdependent categories of relationships, identity, education, housing, emotional healing, life skills and youth engagement.

For each category, youth leaving care need a “pillar” of support, and each of these pillars must be built upon a foundation of adequate financial assistance. Current knowledge suggests that the provision of sufficient supports in these areas will increase the likelihood of a successful transition into adulthood.

Taken together, the seven pillars and a strong financial foundation create a bridge by which youth in care might cross successfully into adulthood. The pillars must be taken together – if one pillar or part of the foundation is neglected, the bridge is likely to collapse. Initiatives undertaken to address shortcomings in one area will only highlight weaknesses in another. It is only when adequate attention is paid to each pillar, and the financial foundation on which it stands, that youth in care will consistently achieve the education, employment, positive relationships and sense of self-worth necessary for productive, self-supporting adult lives.

It is necessary to break down in more detail the pillars of support to understand how each can meet the particular needs of youth in transition from the child welfare system.

1) Relationships

There is no shortage of research showing that relationships are the cornerstone of human development and that all youth need love, affection and reliable support. Like all of us, young people need to turn to those who care about them when they face change. They need the encouragement of their peers and important adults to feel a sense of accomplishment and belonging. They need someone to celebrate or commiserate with them when they move out, end their first relationship, mark important holidays, graduate or find their first job. However, many youth transitioning from care feel they do not have meaningful relationships like this to depend on. They reported mixed feelings about the level of support they received from their social worker—the person who carries primary responsibility for their welfare.

Youth in care can struggle to find long-term, committed relationships for a number of reasons. Being abused or neglected within their families may leave them unwilling to risk further hurt, separation or betrayal by investing in new relationships. Adult survivors of abuse often experience difficulties in maintaining stable relationships, and

describe feeling socially isolated and distrustful. Entry into care can create a physical and emotional distance from family members, especially when the child is placed far from home or family contact is deliberately restricted. It is not uncommon for youth in care to have their placements changed annually, which can often result in a change of school. It is not hard to imagine how moving so frequently undermines children's ability to trust the new adults in their lives and put down new roots.

Research clearly shows that youth in care do better when they have strong social supports and feel connected to their families, schools and communities. Perhaps the greatest change that could support youth in building relationships is decreasing the number of times they are moved. When youth no longer have to worry about when their next move will happen, they can begin to invest in new lasting relationships, to repair existing ones and to engage in activities outside the home.

Sometimes youth just need to talk. They feel alone and they don't want to necessarily talk to their peers or their peers aren't going to help them. They need someone who will offer them some advice or some wisdom or just someone to listen to sometimes. Maybe they are not even looking for anything. They just need someone to vent to in a safe environment. They want to know that people actually care and they're actually being heard.

Former youth in care

However, relationships go beyond simply being connected to a significant person. In order to thrive, people need to feel that they matter to someone and that they have people who matter to them. This sense of mattering is what allows a feeling of connection to other people and to communities. For young people in care or leaving care, it is not simply having a stable living arrangement that makes a difference. Young people also need to feel that they matter and to see proof of this in their lives.

Those who live with their families may get this sense of mattering when their parents help them financially transition to independence. For example, parents often buy household items for their children when they move into their first apartment. It is a concrete statement that the young person matters to his or her parent. Young people in care have this same need, but are less likely to experience such displays of support. This makes the transition to adulthood more difficult

Youth report that they need at least one supportive adult relationship when they transition out of care. Many youth return to their birth parents' home at this time. Those who continue to have relationships with their birth parents and extended families while in care have better outcomes. Some youth also view past or present foster parents as significant supports, although these relationships often end when the youth changes placements or ages out of the system. Where it is in the best interest of the child, supporting their relationships with their birth family and important foster family can have a lasting impact

I was kind of rebellious. It was like I can take care of myself at age 16. I thought I knew it all. I ended up just running away. Eventually, I got into an independent living program where they kind of worked on my terms and they didn't get mad if I missed an appointment. My worker really understood me. She honestly wanted to give me the supports that I needed. I was able to stick it out and make the transition. She didn't give up on me. I'm in college now.

Former youth in care

on their ability to move successfully into adulthood.

Mentoring programs can be another way to connect youth to an adult who will stand by them into independence. Although research on mentoring programs is limited, there is strong evidence to support the benefits of mentoring for the general population of at-risk youth. The National Youth in Care Network supports mentoring and peer programs as an important means for youth in care to develop lasting networks of peer relationships.

In addition, participation in extra-curricular activities can be an important source of

relationships with adult role models. Youth in care who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to form significant relationships, to complete high school and to have better outcomes, supporting the argument that these activities should be funded as a core need rather than an optional extra. The broader the level in which youth positively engage in their communities, the higher the likelihood that they will have successful outcomes in life.

It really felt overwhelming to have to take care of everything on your own. It was just too hard to keep going through these things over and over.

Former youth in care

2) Education

Graduating from high school increases the likelihood of finding employment and earning a living wage in Canada. Most Canadian youth expect to graduate, and many will go on to a post-secondary education that their parents help fund. Yet youth in care graduate at significantly lower rates and tend to take longer than their peers to complete high school. In addition, very few go on to post-secondary education. When one of the best indicators of future success is the level of education achieved, this pillar deserves significant attention.

Youth in care can struggle in the education system for a number of reasons. Early experiences of abuse and neglect can impair a child's self-esteem and ability to learn, putting them behind in school before they even enter the child welfare system. While in care, placement instability can lead to a revolving and unmanageable sequence of school

changes, leaving children to negotiate making new friends, managing new teachers and learning a new curriculum in a system where they are consistently playing catch-up. For some, the time and attention that would normally be applied to studying is spent dealing with complicated home lives, the consequences of maltreatment and the challenges of living in the system. Teachers cannot always offer the necessary time, psychological and practical services that would help students move from focusing on their emotional and daily living needs to making their educational needs a priority.

As older youth face increasing academic demands, those in care simultaneously face the prospect of losing their child welfare support. It is hard to study for an exam when you are worried about paying bills and finding a cheap enough place to rent. Those sufficiently resilient to graduate often don't have access to the full range of financial support that would make post-secondary education a possibility. Youth in care need financial support to cover accommodation, tuition and supplies if they are to attend post-secondary education. Education is a key factor in successful transition to independent living, and youth in care need more time and financial support to complete it before they are discharged.

It is clear that youth have better educational outcomes when their move into independence is delayed until they have completed their education. One study found that youth in care with their high school equivalent were more than three times as likely as their counterparts no longer in care to be enrolled in a two- to four-year college program.

For some youth in care, education involves a process of restoring the educational deficits associated with a history of maltreatment and attending multiple schools, so they have the same expectations of graduating as their peers. The child welfare and education systems need to collaborate more closely to design and resource individual learning plans that span school and placement, and address a child's educational and emotional needs simultaneously.

3) Housing

Any young person transitioning into independent adulthood needs a place to live. It is estimated that between 150,000 and 300,000 people are homeless in Canada and that nearly a third of them are 16- to 24-years-old. A growing number of youth are living with their parents well into adulthood. In the absence of this kind of family support, a high proportion of youth leaving the child welfare system find themselves homeless or in unstable housing. One study in the U.S. found that 22 per cent of youth were homeless for one or more nights within a year of being officially discharged from care.



It is more difficult for youth leaving care to stay with others during housing crises because they have fewer reliable relationships with adults. It is more difficult to afford rent because they tend to be less educated and less likely to secure stable work with adequate pay. Youth in care may have experienced such instability and exclusion within the care system that they don't expect a permanent home, and describe the fear that misbehaviour will lead to placement change.

What were my fears? Not being able to support myself. What would I do? I think that's – again that goes at your basic needs, you need food, you need shelter and that is your basic need. Where am I going to live?

Former youth in care

For many, the feeling of never knowing where to call home, or how long a place to live will last, can be emotionally damaging. One study found that even those children who had lived in the same foster home for more than three years felt insecure. The experience of placement transience and being excluded from decision-making processes increases the risk to placement stability.

The Child Welfare League of America recommends that youth not be discharged from the foster care system before they secure

They need to have a base until they are 25 where they can screw up and not be kicked out. They need to have someone work with them and to try to figure out how to fix things.

Care provider

stable and sustainable housing. In Canada, these systems are not yet in place. Youth in care consistently identify the need for greater stability while they are in the care system and for stable housing that allows them to leave care. They need more opportunities to participate in placement decisions and to develop the skills needed as adults to decide where and how they live.

4) Life Skills

All youth need practical life skills to make it on their own. Life skills develop over time. They are learned by watching a parent cook dinner, a grandparent pay the bills or a family friend shop for groceries. They are developed through observation and practice within relationships where youth feel able to ask questions and model desired behaviour.

Youth in care are less likely to have the consistent home environment and relationships with caring adults that support the development of life skills. Youth who have left care say

As I was aging out, I received no training of any kind; it was just assumed that I would know.

Former youth in care

they needed more practical skills, like cooking, budgeting and time management. Those who have been traumatized in family relationships talk about the need to learn about personal relationships, parenting and child development to compensate for those areas where they did not have effective role models. To transition to adulthood successfully, they also need skills in job searching, career planning, communicating, finding a home, accessing community services, self-care, work and study habits, and social interaction. It is critical that early training for independence begins young, and is not just a pre-discharge afterthought.

They need someone to teach them those skills on whether it's becoming completely independent or finding resources in adult services to help them. They need someone to help them do that and closing a file at 18 does not give you the opportunity. I have 18-year-olds on my caseload functioning at maybe a 16-year-old level.

Case worker

Research suggests that youth who receive independent living training are more likely to be able to pay all their housing expenses and have higher levels of high school graduation, employment and self-sufficiency. More life skills programs are needed over longer periods of time to allow youth to integrate the lessons into their living situations. It is far more useful for a youth to practice budgeting by going shopping than to learn about it in the classroom. Youth in care develop the tools for independent living when they can practise them and integrate the lessons of their successes and mistakes while still being supported by the child welfare system. It is important that these tools are age and culturally appropriate, and that they are accessible to youth in all circumstances and regions.

5) Identity

One of the most important development tasks of adolescence is identity development. When youth have a strong sense of who they are and where they come from, they are more able to set career and life goals that will determine what kind of adult they want to be. Specifically, a strong sense of cultural identity can help youth feel proud of who they are and more able to pass their cultural knowledge along to future generations.

Healthy development is in part dependent upon young people having a strong sense of their culture. This is true for all young people but particularly the case for Aboriginal youth, given the impact of residential schools upon families and communities. Disconnection from family and community means children in care often have difficulty accessing information about their history and culture. Cultural knowledge tends to be passed on within families and between generations during the normal rhythms of daily life, and it can be hard for out-of-home caregivers to replicate this in a meaningful way.

Youth in care can feel undervalued as they absorb stigmatizing social messages that link involvement in the child welfare system with stereotypes of delinquency or psychological difficulty. If these messages come from peers or people who are important to the youth, they often become incorporated into the youth's self-identity. This inhibits the

developing sense of self during adolescence. It is hard to properly claim your own identity if you feel ashamed or belittled by it. When this is the case, youth are less likely to see themselves as agents of their own lives and work towards positive future goals.

I was scared and I'm still kind of mad. I was mad at the system. I was mad at people who had everything handed to them. I was scared and nervous and I really didn't believe in myself.

Former youth in care

Youth leaving care say they wish more work had been done with them to develop a sense of belonging to their own history and cultural community. They need caregivers and the child welfare system to accept them for who they are, to actively challenge their stigmatization and to support them to explore who they are and what they wish to become.

6) Youth Engagement

When youth feel they own the plan for their lives, they are far more likely to work towards agreed goals than if they are simply told what to do. If supported to make their own decisions, to make mistakes and to deal with the consequences of those mistakes, they build the skills they need to plan, prioritize and manage themselves as they transition into adulthood. It can be hard for youth in care to develop this sense of ownership as they are often less involved in decisions about their lives than are their peers. Not having a sense of control over their lives can create a great deal of fear and worry.

In the care system, decisions are often the responsibility of several adults, some of whom may not know the youth, his or her interests, and how to engage them. When youth in care make decisions that raise issues of risk and liability,

it can be difficult for child welfare agencies to continue to listen to the youth and to maintain ongoing supportive relationships.

I was a puppet and child protection held the strings. I was afraid of what would happen when these strings were cut.

Former youth in care



Youth in care have the right to have their voices heard. They want to be supported to define and work towards their own futures. Over the last 20 years, they have been increasingly recognized as stakeholders in the child welfare system, with a right to be heard in decisions about their own lives. Youth need authentic and full engagement within the system to assist them to develop the self-advocacy, self-awareness and goals they need to see them into adulthood.

Case Example

Issue

An 18-year-old youth has been in care since age four. She has lived in multiple placements and reports that in recent years she has been homeless much of the time. She struggles with substance use and acknowledges that she engages in survival sex work to meet her basic needs for shelter and food. She wants to have a plan for placement and drug and alcohol treatment set up now, as she knows that after her 19th birthday she will be cut off MCFD services.

Observation

This youth has been homeless, engaging in high-risk behaviours and needs assistance to get the supports to help her to transition into adulthood. She requires a carefully developed individualized transition plan developed by professionals who are informed, skilled and empathetic in dealing with a young person who has experienced trauma and abuse. Her planning process needs to take into account the challenge of establishing a trusting relationship with an adult. Her social work team may need to remain engaged to assist her after she ages out of care.

7) Emotional Healing

Risk-taking behaviours such as binge-drinking, unprotected sex, most types of substance use and dangerous driving peak between the ages of 18 and 25. Loneliness and suicidal ideation are particular concerns during adolescence and into the early 20s. Yet the biggest gap in children's health services is for adolescents. Whether they live at home or in care, youth often don't have access to mental health services at the very age when emotional issues create the greatest need for them.

Youth in care are particularly in need of supports to heal from past experiences of separation and trauma. The effects of family-based trauma are often exacerbated by changes in placement, schools and adult relationships over which youth feel little sense of control. When youth act out their feelings of anger, grief and fear, they can be punished for their actions. Much needed treatment services may be unavailable, or youth may feel unprepared to address their difficulties and miss out on a chance to heal. As a result, a significant proportion of youth leaving care face mental health challenges. One U.S. study found that more than 50 per cent had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder at some point in their childhood, and Canadian research found that 24 per cent of youth leaving care were concerned about their own mental health.

Emotional healing comes from having someone to listen, care and help a person rebuild a sense of belonging, acceptance and security. Traumatized youth in care need the support of committed adults who can approach trauma-based behavioural challenges with compassion rather than punishment.

When I look back all I see is darkness, craziness, and drama. I remember that somewhere in there I had a light. There were goals and vision and dreams and somehow, thank God, I had resiliency to make some of that happen later on in life. But how much easier would it have been if I had been supported and I had some grounding and some roots and my desires were understood and I could express them?

Former youth in care

In some situations, youth also

need access to mental health specialists. Mental health services need to be accessible

to youth in the child welfare system, while they are transitioning out of it, and as they establish themselves as independent adults. These youth are likely to face multiple and qualitatively different stressors compared to most of their peers. Unlike many youth who move out for positive, opportunity-oriented reasons, such as attending post-secondary education, youth in care often feel forced into independence by the loss of state support. This can feel like abandonment and re-awaken past experiences of loss and trauma.

It was really helpful that my social worker was saying you are not on your own. It felt really good that it wasn't just "you're all on your own and if you screw up that's it."

Former youth in care

Premature transition to adult roles can have negative long-term consequences for youth. Youth leaving care often have to take on these adult roles not only before their peers, but also before completing key transitions such as finishing high school and finding stable employment and housing. The intersection of historical trauma, system-based stressors such as multiple placements and stigmatization, navigating the normal developmental tasks of adolescence and managing the challenges of premature independence can create enormous stress. In the face of this, youth need ongoing social and emotional support to promote emotional healing and resilience into adulthood.

Housing is a huge barrier, employment is a huge barrier, surviving is a huge barrier, alcohol is a huge barrier, mental health, transitioning from youth services to the adult system for sure. Also all of your support systems drop you. Like everything and good luck. Here's your birth certificate, goodbye.

Former youth in care

The Foundation of Financial Support

What level of financial support is needed to support youth to transition successfully into adulthood? How does the state act as a prudent parent to ensure that the youth for whom it is responsible have the best chance at independence?

It seems the current B.C. policy views youth leaving care as no different from other adults seeking income support. Financial support for youth leaving care is most often linked to social assistance rates, frequently leaving young people unable to afford adequate nutrition, safe housing, transportation and extended health, dental and vision care. The belief is that lower-than-average living conditions are an incentive for people to move into employment. Employable adults are expected to supplement government assistance with personal resources and community supports. But such assumptions simply do not fit for youth leaving care. Their needs are profoundly different from those of the general population of unemployed adults.

Youth leaving care need financial support to help them establish their footing in the world as adults and to prepare for a future as productive, independent citizens. They need broadly-based, accessible and publicly-funded financial programs to replace the patchwork of financial supports currently offered by government, private and non-profit organizations to supplement income assistance.

In order to be effective, these programs need to adopt the principle that the state's obligations to youth leaving care are the same as those of any prudent parent. A prudent parent would recognize the need to invest in and support their child through the critical development period between late adolescence and early adulthood. A prudent parent would show sufficient flexibility in meeting the unique needs of each youth and providing adequate financial support during post-secondary education. Canadian social policy generally accepts that families of children with special needs should receive additional state support to give these children the best opportunity to reach their potential. Government should apply this same standard to meet the special needs of youth leaving care.

Youth in and from care are among the groups most vulnerable to poverty. While the rising cost of post-secondary education is becoming a major issue for all young people, youth in care face additional financial barriers. They do not have the option of choosing to remain at home as a debt-avoidance strategy. Until recently, although the federal government invested in post-secondary education by supplementing parental Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) contributions, there was no mechanism in B.C. that allowed the state as parent to make RESP contributions for children in care. In March 2014, the B.C. government introduced legislation that will allow for contributions to a fund for youth who have been in care to attend post-secondary education.

However, many of those who do receive some financial support for their post-secondary education lose it before they finish their studies due to arbitrary cut-off points based on

age rather than need. The available financial support rarely takes into account that youth from care usually complete post-secondary education later than their peers.

They don't have the supports our own children, our own kids do. Often they are trying to figure out where they are going to sleep at night and where their next meal will come from and [it is] hard for them to think about getting up in the morning and going to school every day when they are just trying to meet their basic needs.

Case worker

Ensuring that young people in care receive the preparation and support necessary to become self-sufficient, fully participating citizens is an important public policy objective. There is overwhelming evidence that such support can prevent significant future problems in physical and mental health, social relations and finances. Supporting youth through the short-term transitional crisis into adulthood can prevent them from becoming trapped in poverty and unemployment and possibly requiring lifetime assistance. The longer-term benefits of support are seen in increased high school graduation rates, more stable housing, healthier relationships and outcomes that are similar for the general youth population.

Every young person is a little bit different in terms of what issues they are struggling with. Often once they turn 18 they still don't know how to live independently let alone find a job, keep a job or go to school or get funding. All these things are complicated. Many of them have suffered huge amounts of trauma and abuse in their lifetime.

Case worker

Providing the necessary supports makes solid economic sense. The Conference Board of Canada recently determined that a young person now leaving care will earn about \$326,000 less over his or her lifetime than peers who have not been in care. The Conference Board further estimated that the average former young person in care will cost governments more than \$126,000 in lower tax revenues and higher social assistance payments.

As Canada's birth rate decreases, making the time-limited investment to support youth leaving care to become educated, productive and engaged adults becomes a social and economic necessity, as well as the right thing to do.



Direct Provincial Support for Youth Leaving Care

Young people in B.C. are considered adults when they turn 19. This means they are no longer eligible for protection under the *CFCS Act*. With the exception of one clause, this Act, which gives MCFD responsibility for the care and/or guardianship of youth in care until their 19th birthday, no longer applies.

Between 16 and 18, youth may be eligible for a Youth Agreement if they experience a significant adverse condition such as homelessness, behavioural or mental disorders, severe substance abuse or sexual exploitation *and* they cannot live with their family *and* government care is not the best option.

Under a Youth Agreement, youth may receive financial and other support in return for their commitment to work with service providers on a plan for independence. Funding may cover accommodation, daily living and other one-time-only costs such as start-up expenses, damage deposits and training course fees. Services might include regular support and monitoring from a social worker, a one-to-one support worker, life skills programming and connection to appropriate treatment, education, job readiness or employment programs. Youth may live in one of a range of residential options, from substance abuse or other treatment centres, to supported room and board, to accommodation with an independent landlord.

Participating youth sign a three-month legal agreement with their social worker that can be renewed for up to six months at a time until they turn 19. Non-compliance with the agreement may lead to its termination. This leaves these youth little room to fail in their attempts at independence. It does not necessarily allow for the multiple attempts at independence which are needed by many “boomerang kids” outside the care system. No youth can be on a Youth Agreement beyond his or her 19th birthday.

The *CFCS Act* contains one provision that allows some youth to continue to be supported between the ages of 19 and 24 – through the Agreements with Young Adults program. Youth may be eligible for this program if, on their 19th birthday, they were on a Youth Agreement or in

Youth Agreement (YAG)

A Youth Agreement is a legal agreement between MCFD and youth ages 16-18. The purpose of the agreement is to help youth gain independence, return to school, or gain work experience and life skills.

Agreements with Young Adults (AYA)

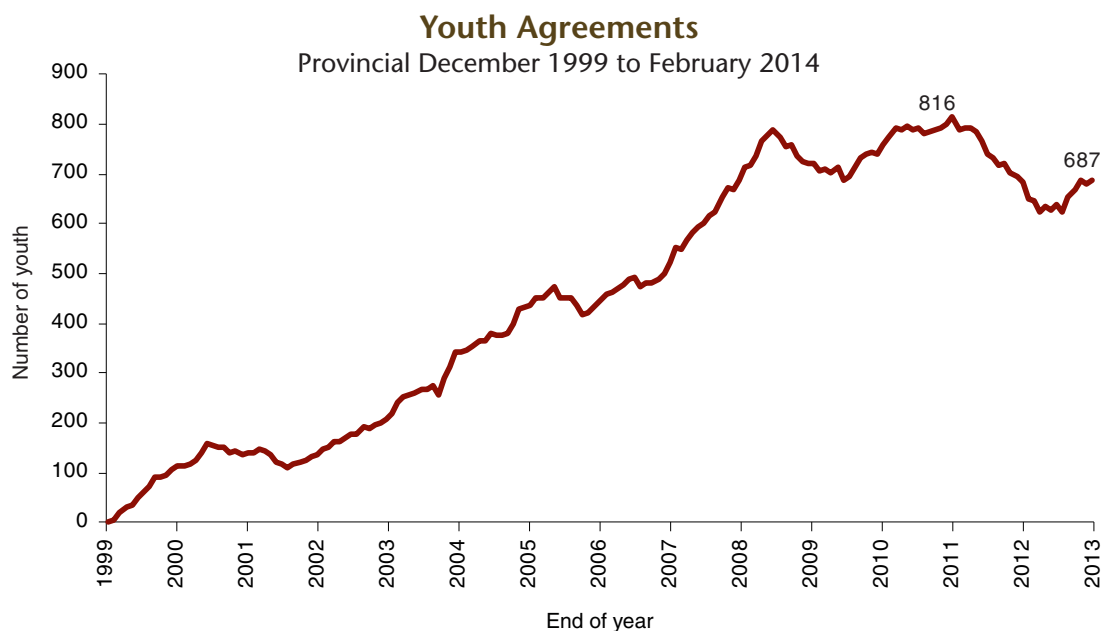
Agreements with Young Adults is a program offered by MCFD that supports young people ages 19 to 24 who are transitioning out of government care and into adulthood. The program provides financial assistance and support services to young adults, helping them to finish high school, learn job and life skills, attend college or university or complete a rehabilitation program.

Financial assistance may include living expenses, child care expenses, health care expenses or tuition fees.

the permanent legal custody or guardianship of the ministry. Youth in care subject to a temporary legal order are not eligible.

The intent of this program is to financially support youth so they can complete educational, vocational or rehabilitation options. Youth must attend these programs, which can include high school completion and treatment programs, at least 15 hours per week. Youth in education or vocational programs must carry a minimum 60 per cent of a full-time course load (40 per cent if they have a permanent disability). The money is intended to cover food, shelter and daily basic living and medical expenses. It may also pay for tuition and program supplies if these cannot be covered another way. Youth receive guidance and support from a social worker who remains involved throughout the term of the agreement. Agreements with Young Adults last for up to six months. The total of all agreements cannot be more than 24 months and they cannot extend beyond the youth's 24th birthday.

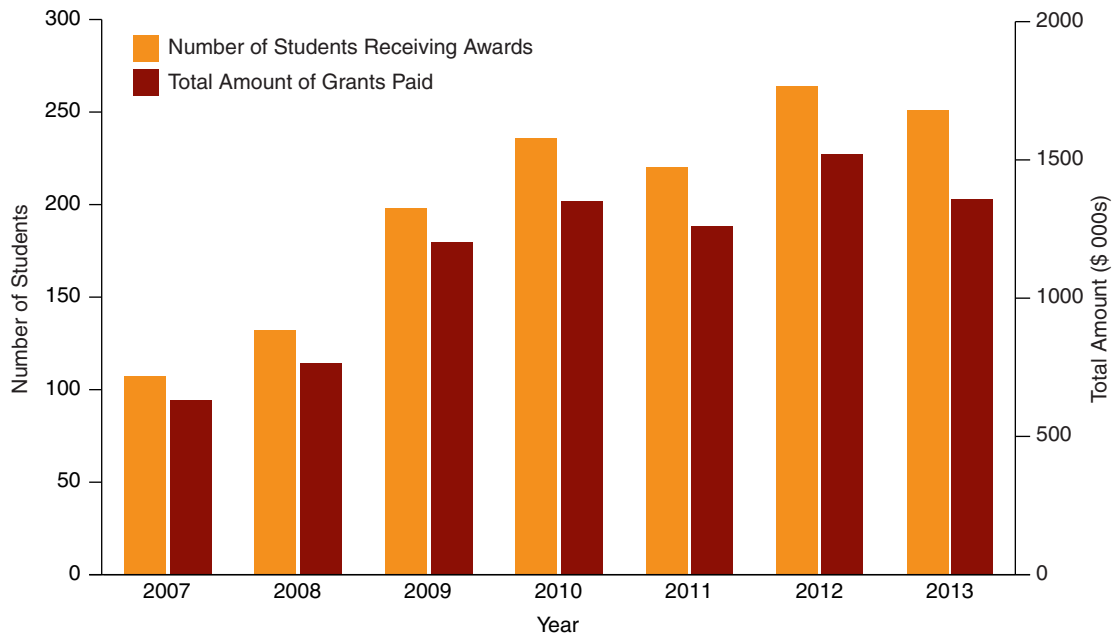
The number of young people under Youth Agreements has increased significantly since the fiscal year 2000/01, although there has been a decrease in recent years. The number of young people with Youth Agreements peaked in February 2012 at 816. As of February 2014 687 youth, of whom 25 per cent were Aboriginal, were on Youth Agreements.



Two provincial government funds also offer bursaries for former youth in care to attend post-secondary education. These are the Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEOF) and the Public Guardian and Trustee Educational Assistance Fund. However, these funds are only available to youth over the age of 18 who have been in the permanent legal custody of the ministry. They are not available to youth for whom the ministry has assumed legal guardianship on a temporary basis or those on a Youth Agreement.

YEOF is for young adults ages 19 to 24, who are in post-secondary education or vocational training and were formerly in the permanent care of the ministry, with taxable grants of up to \$5,500 towards cost of living expenses, tuition and books. These youth may apply annually for a maximum of four years for bursaries that can extend until their 24th year. For each bursary, their program must be at least 12 weeks long at a designated post-secondary institution, although the program does not have to be in the province. Students without disabilities must carry a minimum 60 per cent of a full-time course load. Students with disabilities must carry a minimum 40 per cent of a full-time course load. Funding is provided by MCFD and administered through a partnership between the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Victoria Foundation.

YEOF – Students Receiving Bursaries and Amount of Trust Funds Grants Awarded by Year



Total number of students who have received a YEOF award since its inception in 2002: **1,890**

The Public Guardian and Trustee Educational Assistance Fund offers annual bursaries of up to \$4,000 for youth who were formerly in the permanent care of the ministry to attend post-secondary education. According to the trust, applicants are assessed on their grades, financial needs, career goals and other considerations. Funds available are dependent on rates of investment return. A total of \$129,500 has been awarded to 112 applicants since 2007/08. A total of \$16,600 was awarded to 13 applicants in 2013/14.

In addition, a fund was established in early 2014 at the Vancouver Foundation to help former youth in care offset living costs while they are attending post-secondary institutions. Coast Capital Savings contributed \$200,000 to launch the new fund. Efforts are underway to solicit additional donations to this fund from private sector businesses and individuals.

MCFD has designated a provincial lead for Young Adult Services who will focus on improving outcomes for young people ages 19 to 24 who were in care or on youth agreements. MCFD has also set up working groups to try to improve youth input in decision-making processes and to increase staff knowledge regarding transition policies and services. MCFD has also recently updated the transition manual first published in 1999.

MCFD's new care plan for youth provides detailed guidance for developing a transition plan, including the setting of educational goals for youth. The ministry has also stabilized its funding to YEAF, with \$1.4 million now provided on an annual basis. In addition, a Cross-Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs is in place. The focus is on young people between the ages of 14 and 25 who require significant additional educational, medical and social support to transition to adulthood.

While MCFD has recently made improvements to transition supports, they do not measure up to initiatives in Ontario. For example, Ontario provides after-care benefits to former youth in care up to age 24. These include prescription drug, dental and extended health benefits. (See Appendix 1)

Federal Sources of Financial Support for Young People Leaving Care

The federal government provides Canadian families with benefits and tax measures to assist with the costs of raising children. Since 1998, the federal government has provided direct financial assistance to families through the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB), a non-taxable monthly payment determined by the family's net income and number of children.

Generally, all families with children under the age of 18 are eligible to receive the CCTB. It consists of two components: the base benefit, which is paid to low- and middle-income families, and the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS), an additional benefit paid to low-income families. The NCBS is needs-based, with a ceiling that is determined annually. It is a joint initiative of the federal, provincial and territorial governments. Most provinces and territories offset the NCBS by reducing social assistance payments to low-income families equal to the amount of the supplement.

The federal government also provides a Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) to families. The UCCB is a taxable benefit paid to all families for each child under age six to help cover the cost of child care. Eligible families can also apply for the Child Disability Benefit (CDB). This is a tax-free payment to families who care for a disabled child under age 18. For a family to receive the CDB, the child must have a severe and prolonged impairment in mental or physical function.

All CCTB benefits are indexed annually. The basic monthly benefit for 2013-2014 is \$119.41. The NCBS monthly benefit is \$185.08. These two amounts are directed to families on a decreasing scale for subsequent children. The 2013-2014 UCCB rate is \$100 per month per child under age six. The current monthly CDB benefit is up to \$218.83, depending upon parental income.

Under the *Children's Special Allowances Act*, the federal government pays provincial and territorial child welfare authorities the Children's Special Allowance (CSA) for each child who comes into care. The amount is equivalent to the maximum CCTB payments, including the base benefit and NCBS. The CSA also includes the UCCB for children under age six.

In most jurisdictions, when a child comes into care, the provincial or territorial government applies for CSA. In B.C., these benefits are paid into the government's general revenue fund. The allowance is not directed to foster families or young people. This contrasts with Ontario where, since 2008, Children's Aid Societies have been required to deposit the payments into an RESP if the child has been in care for at least six consecutive months.

In addition to these benefit programs, the federal government provides grants to families to pay for the future care or education of their children. The Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) helps families save money for the future of their children who have disabilities. Earnings accumulate tax-free within the plan until money is taken out. The federal government contributes to the RDSP through the Canada Disability Savings Grant (CDSG) and Canada Disability Savings Bond (CDSB). Through the CDSG, the federal government provides matching grants of up to 300 per cent, depending on the amount contributed to an RDSP and the beneficiary's family income. There is a \$200,000 lifetime contribution limit. The maximum grant is \$3,500 each year, with a lifetime limit of \$70,000. In addition, the government contributes up to \$1,000 a year to the CDSB, depending upon family income, to a lifetime maximum of \$20,000.

There is no policy in B.C. requiring child welfare authorities to open RDSPs for eligible children in their permanent care and custody, and these children often don't benefit from this important future financial support.

The federal government has also established an RESP program to help families save for their children's post-secondary education. Every child under the age of 17 in Canada who has a social insurance number is eligible to have an RESP set up in his or her name. The contribution ceiling is \$50,000. The federal government has established a Canada Education Savings Grant (CESG) to help families save by adding to the amount of money accumulated in a child's RESP. The CESG matches parental contributions to a maximum lifetime grant of \$7,200. The Canada Learning Bond program contributes up to \$2,000 to RESPs opened by families who receive the NCBS under the CCTB program. These programs were intended to help low-income families save towards their children's post-secondary education by adding federal contributions to existing RESPs. There have been no clear policy or practice efforts to ensure that youth aging out of care receive support from federal social programs.



Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the Ministry of Children and Family Development immediately take steps to establish a Youth Secretariat to provide a defined youth focus across all of the ministry's service areas and to coordinate cross-ministerial efforts to ensure successful transitions to adulthood for youth leaving care and out-of-home placements. The Secretariat should work to ensure that youth are provided the same or better access to supports and services as their non-care peers. It should include strong Aboriginal participation and leadership and work to ensure effective coordination and leadership on transition issues affecting young people in care and those in out-of-care placements.

Details:

The Secretariat should:

- Lead collaboration among MCFD and the ministries of Health, Education, Advanced Education, Social Development and Social Innovation and Justice, co-ordinating a cross-ministry effort to examine how to best anchor transition services for youth in care and out-of-home placements to make them more accessible and effective.
- Form an effective partnership with the B.C. Federation of Youth in Care to establish local youth committees in each of the MCFD service areas. Youth in care should serve on these committees, which would act as advisory bodies to MCFD and associated service providers.
- Ensure that program evaluations are completed on transitional support services to measure impacts and outcomes and contribute to evidence-based program development and work to ensure greater accountability for ministry contracts and engagement with service providers and the public.
- Oversee the gathering and analyzing of baseline and longitudinal data of education, health and employment outcomes for former youth in care up to age 25.
- Ensure that MCFD reports annually on the transition of youth in care, as well as those on Youth Agreements, Independent Living Arrangements and out-of-home placements, beginning at age 18 until the expiration of such agreements and services.
- Work with the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation to establish minimum income support levels for extended care and maintenance programs to ensure young people leaving care receive a reasonable standard of living that exceeds the Low Income Cut-Off for B.C.
- Work to ensure access to health, dental and vision care assistance for former youth in care up to age 25.
- Provide preferential access for former youth in care to ongoing counselling or other emotional support services up to age 25.
- Work with and support the ministry and the Provincial Guardian and Trustee to conduct financial literacy training for youth in care.
- Promote civic engagement of youth in care and out-of-home placements so they can be supported to be active and engaged members of their communities.

continued

Recommendation 1

continued

- Provide youth in care, their caregivers and the staff working with them with easy to access, centralized information on transition through web-based advice as well as other supports on financial, educational, employment, housing, health and mental health issues.
- Encourage the development, adoption and implementation of a robust social media and engagement policy so that young people can make and maintain relationships with ministry staff and contracted agencies in a manner that is relevant to them, therefore increasing the capacity of the ministry and its agencies to work effectively with these youth.
- Develop recommendations on the potential introduction of specialized transition navigators, youth workers with expertise in the various aspects and processes of transition who would be available to young people, care providers and staff for consultation, information and mentoring on the necessary steps and tasks in the transition process.

Secretariat should be in place by Sept. 1, 2014.

Preliminary work plan should be shared with the Representative by Nov. 1, 2014.

First progress report to the Representative by March 31, 2015.

First public report on transition outcomes for youth by March 31, 2016.

Recommendation 2

That the Ministry of Education begin a targeted initiative in all B.C. school districts to ensure that every youth in care or in an out-of-care placement has a clear education plan and skills training pathway to guide them as they progress in school and transition out of government care and high school.

Details:

- Minister of Education to issue a special order under the *School Act*, requiring implementation in all school districts in B.C., and assign accountability for implementing the recommendation to Superintendents with a stand-alone annual report required on the work undertaken.
- Requirements for these plans for every youth in care in B.C. should be built in to the annual accountability contract with school districts, and meaningfully addressed by Superintendent's Reports on an annual or more regular basis.
- Minister of Education to take steps to ensure that independent schools also participate in this dedicated planning and reporting for children in care and direct the Inspector of Independent Schools to use the authority in the *Independent School Act* to report on an annual basis.
- Minister of Education to identify planning steps taken for children in care who are not in school for any extended period of more than 20 school days in a given year.
- Planning should begin for each child in Grade 6 and escalate through each middle and high school year through to high school graduation.
- Plans should identify remedial needs, and how they will be addressed and reassessed.
- MCFD to take these requirements into account, and ensure that these plans are incorporated into plans of care for youth in care, and that school personnel are actively involved in care planning and coordinate out-of-school supports with in-school efforts.

First report on strategy to achieve this recommendation to the Representative by Sept. 1, 2014.

First report of progress and outcomes to the Representative by May 31, 2015.

Recommendation 3

That MCFD build a durable policy foundation for youth programs and services in British Columbia to ensure that vulnerable youth, such as those in care and out-of-home placements, are provided guaranteed access to training, skills and other programs as well as adequate social supports, and are not transitioning to dependence with poor opportunities.

Details:

- In the short-term, MCFD to consider amending the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* to permit, on a case-by-case basis, the extension of foster care up to age 25 for young people who are attending post-secondary institutions or apprenticeship programs.
- MCFD to prepare a discussion paper on legislative options for a more durable, stable policy framework to close the gap for transitioning vulnerable youth.
- MCFD to promote discussion and consideration of a *Youth Leaving Care Act*, similar to that in force in the U.K., to provide a stable, long-term commitment to helping youth in care and out-of-home placements make the transition to adulthood and to anchor programs, services and a systemic approach to accountability.

Progress report and plan to Representative by March 31, 2015.

Recommendation 4

That the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth consider holding public hearings on youth leaving care and out-of-home placements to better inform legislators and the public of the need for a solid, durable program of services and supports for these youth.

Conclusion

While there have been some improvements in recent years in the supports available to transition young people out of care and into independence, there is still much to be done to help young people who have been in care become full, contributing members of society. The failure to provide the necessary supports carries a high collective price. The manner in which young people leave care has a significant influence on how well they move into independence. Those who leave prematurely, or who simply age out, are likely to experience immediate and longer-term difficulties in their lives. They are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, more likely to come in contact with the criminal justice, mental health and substance use systems, more likely to have poor health outcomes, more likely to experience homelessness, and less likely to attend post-secondary institutions.

These outcomes carry steep economic and social costs. The costs of not helping young people in care successfully transition into adulthood are significantly higher than the costs of providing adequate support. The loss to society of the positive contributions these young people could make if they had the needed supports for a successful transition is equally important.

In order to make a successful transition to adulthood, all young people need to receive support in the areas of relationships, education, housing, life skills, identity, engagement and emotional healing. There needs to be an adequate level of financial support for these areas to be properly attended. Young people who receive support past the age of majority have a higher likelihood of educational achievement, which is closely associated with other positive personal outcomes. Young people who have been in care and receive financial support to go to school are more likely to be stable and successful in other parts of their lives. There is a need to increase the levels and types of support available to ensure that more young people can attend post-secondary education or find stable employment.

It is as if magically somehow they've developed into a whole different person overnight on their birthday and the things they weren't able to do a week before are now expectations that they have to do in order to either stay in care or continue to receive funding, so there's still a whole realm of problems there associated with – it's like staying in care is not a right. It's perceived as something you have to earn. Children that live at home don't have to earn the right to live with their families.

Care provider

It is important to remember young people in care are not a homogeneous group. In order to provide the best possible supports for young people, their unique needs must be considered. Generic supports will not have the same positive influence as those that target a young person's specific needs, however, the ability to target specific needs is handicapped by a general lack of knowledge about the young people in care. Much is still unknown about these youth and the effectiveness of the current transitional programming. One of the difficulties in Canada, as with many other countries, is a lack of longitudinal research about what happens to young people once they leave care. A stronger research base is needed in B.C. and Canada on all aspects of transitioning young people out of care.

A number of assumptions must be challenged to develop a truly effective transitional process. The first, and perhaps the biggest, is the assumption that young people in care are the same as their peers who have not been in care. Young people in care are different from their peers because of their experiences prior to coming into care and their experiences in care. The response to their transitional needs must take these differences into account. It cannot be assumed that they will take the same transitional paths as their non-care peers, nor that the timelines for transition will be the same. As well, the assumption that young people in care match their peers in every developmental aspect based simply upon chronological age is incorrect.

Holding youth in care to a higher standard than those who have not been in care, and approaching policy and program planning from this belief, is not acceptable. It is a false assumption that young people who have been in care will automatically return to their families of origin and be able to draw on a built-in support system. The reasons why young people come into care in the first place can still be there when they leave care. Many young people do not want to re-establish contact with their families and, even if they do, there is no guarantee that their families can provide support.

My mother wants to have a relationship with me, but too much happened in the past. I can't do it.

Former youth in care

Successful transition requires that plans be developed that acknowledge the individual needs and dreams of the young person. This process needs to begin in early adolescence and be flexible enough to change as needs and desires of the youth change. It means actively ensuring that they are experiencing educational success while in care, in addition to the development of the types of living and job skills all young people need to be successful in life. It means meeting their basic permanency, belonging, health and social needs while they are in care and that the provision of support continues until they have successfully transitioned into adulthood.

If we want productive citizens, if we want citizens that are going to give back to the country and be part of the country they are not going to do it if they are turfed at 18... Some are ready at 18 but the majority aren't, so if all we are doing is moving them from one system to another because they are not able to support themselves, then it doesn't make any sense to me.

Care provider

If it is believed that once young people come into care the state becomes their parent, then the state as a prudent parent must be willing to take on longer-term responsibility for these young people, just as a family would do. Right now, some youth have access to supports past the age of majority while those with higher needs – who arguably need greater support – are left with little or no help. Their new parent becomes the criminal justice, mental health or substance use systems. Do well and you can stay. Fail and you have to leave. This has to change. If parents treated

their children the way many of the young people who have been in care have been treated, there would be serious questions about their competency and commitment.

Glossary

Agreements with Young Adults – Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) is a program offered by the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) that supports young people aged 19 to 24 who are transitioning out of government care and into adulthood. The program provides financial assistance and support services to young adults, helping them to finish high school, learn job and life skills, attend college or university or complete a rehabilitation program. Financial assistance may include living expenses, child care expenses, health care expenses or tuition fees.

Canada Child Tax Benefit – The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) is a non-taxable monthly payment made to families to help them with the cost of raising children under age 18. The amount of the CCTB is based on the family's net income. The CCTB may include the National Child Benefit Supplement and Child disability benefit.

Child Disability Benefit – The Child Disability Benefit (CDB) is a monthly non-taxable benefit providing financial assistance for qualified families caring for children under 18 with severe and prolonged mental or physical impairments.

Canada Disability Savings Grant – The Canada Disability Savings Grant is a grant program offered by the Government of Canada that matches parental contributions to a Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP). The government provides matching grants of up to 300 per cent, depending on the amount contributed and the beneficiary's family income. The maximum grant is \$3,500 each year, with a limit of \$70,000 over a lifetime.

Canada Education Savings Grant – The Canada Education Savings Grant (CESG) is a Government of Canada program that pays a contribution to a child's RESP, acting as an incentive for parents, family and friends to save for a child's post-secondary education. The basic grant amount is 20 per cent of the annual contribution to each RESP beneficiary, to a maximum annual amount of \$500 and a maximum lifetime amount of \$7,200.

Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act) – Legislation enacted in 1996 that governs child protection in British Columbia.

Canada Learning Bond – The Canada Learning Bond (CLB) is a Government of Canada program that helps modest-income families start saving early for their child's post-secondary education. The CLB is available to families that qualify for the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) and is capped at a lifetime maximum amount of \$2,000.

Children's Special Allowance Act – Legislation enacted in 1992 by the Government of Canada that provides for the payment of special allowances for the care and maintenance of children and youth in the custody of provincial child welfare authorities.

Children's Special Allowance – The Children's Special Allowances (CSA) program provides payments to federal and provincial agencies and institutions (e.g., children's aid societies) that care for children. The monthly CSA payment is equal to the maximum CCTB payment plus the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) plus the Disability Benefit (CDB) plus the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) if applicable.

Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) – Through delegation agreements, the Provincial Director of Child Protection (the Director) gives authority to Aboriginal agencies, and their employees, to undertake administration of all or parts of the *CFCS Act*. The amount of responsibility undertaken by each agency is the result of negotiations between the ministry and the Aboriginal community served by the agency, and the level of delegation provided by the Director.

Director of Child Protection – A person designated by the Minister of Children and Family Development under the *CFCS Act*. The Director may delegate any or all of his or her powers, duties and responsibilities under the Act.

Former youth-in-care – A young person who is no longer living under the care of the ministry.

National Child Benefit Supplement – The National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) is the Government of Canada's contribution to the national child benefit. It is a joint initiative of federal, provincial, and territorial governments, and First Nations that provides a monthly financial benefit for low-income families with children.

Registered Disability Savings Plan – A Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) is a savings plan to help parents and others save for the long-term financial security of a person who is eligible for the disability tax credit. Contributions to an RDSP are not tax deductible and can be made until the end of the year in which the beneficiary turns 59.

Registered Education Savings Plan – A Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) is a special savings account for parents who want to save for their child's education after high school. Under an RESP, parents set aside contributions towards their children's education. Contributions are invested by a third party and paid to the children in the form of Educational Assistance Payments (EAPs) when they enter a post-secondary education program.

Universal Child Care Benefit – The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) supports Canadian families by providing direct financial assistance for child care. The UCCB is for children under the age of six years and is paid in installments of \$100 per month per child.

Youth Agreement – A Youth Agreement is a legal agreement between the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and youth aged 16 to 18. The purpose of the agreement is to help youth gain independence, return to school, or gain work experience and life skills.

Youth Education Assistance Fund – The Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAF) is administered by British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), in partnership with the Victoria Foundation and the Ministry of Advanced Education. YEAF provides bursaries for former youth in permanent care between 19 and 23 years of age who are attending university, college, a university-college, an institute, or designated private school. The maximum annual YEAF bursary amount is \$5,500, to primarily assist with the costs for tuition, books and fees.

Youth – A person who is 16 years of age or over, but under 19 years of age.

Youth-in-care – A young person who is under the care of the ministry.

Appendix 1: Financial Supports Available to Youth Leaving Care in Ontario

The following is a chart outlining the financial supports available for youth in and leaving the care of Ontario's child welfare system.¹³⁴ In addition to the financial supports outlined below, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and its partner ministries fund programs to support youth as they transition to adulthood, such as the Youth-in-Transition Worker Program and Crown Ward Education Championship Teams.

Name of Support	Who is Eligible	Program Description	How it supports youth leaving care
Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent (OCBE)	For all youth in care up to and inclusive of age 17.	The Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent (OCBE) provides increased access to educational, social, cultural and recreational opportunities for all youth up to and inclusive of age 17. In addition, youth ages 15, 16 and 17 who have been in the care of a children's aid society (CAS) or a Formal Customary Care agreement for 12 consecutive months or more are eligible to participate in a savings program.	At age 18, eligible youth can access OCBE savings, which can support their transition to adulthood (e.g., funds can be used for post-secondary education). As part of accessing OCBE savings, youth must participate in a Financial Literacy Program, which supports them to acquire financial skills and develop financial competency. The OCBE program currently contributes \$100.83 a month to each savings account.
Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) Program	Children in care ages 0-6.	Launched in 2008, the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) Program supports increased educational attainment for youth who have been in the care of the Children Aid Society (CAS). Through the program, CASs are required to establish RESPs for eligible children in care using funds from the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). When a youth in or leaving care enrolls in an eligible post-secondary education or vocational training program, he or she can access the RESP funds to support education-related expenses.	The first redemptions of UCCB-funded RESPs are expected to occur beginning in 2020, when the eldest youth who were eligible for UCCB funds when the policy came into effect will be able to enter post-secondary education or training. Youth eligible to receive the maximum amount are expected to begin enrolling in post-secondary education in 2025.
Renewed Youth Supports (RYS)	Youth whose court-ordered society care or Formal Customary Care was terminated at age 16 or 17.	The Renewed Youth Supports (RYS) Program allows eligible youth to voluntarily enter into an agreement with a CAS to receive supports up to age 18. Through the RYS program, youth become eligible for further supports once they turn 18, including Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY).	Eligible youth can return to a CAS and access financial and case support until age 21, through CCSY.

Name of Support	Who is Eligible	Program Description	How it supports youth leaving care
Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY)	<p>A youth who is 18 to 20 years old and;</p> <p>a. Was subject to a Crown wardship or legal custody order (s. 65.2) immediately prior to the youth's 18th birthday;</p> <p>b. Was subject to a Crown wardship or legal custody order (s. 65.2) immediately before the youth's marriage if the marriage occurred before the youth's 18th birthday;</p> <p>c. Was the subject of a customary care agreement for which the society paid a subsidy immediately prior to the youth's 18th birthday; or</p> <p>d. Was eligible to receive Renewed Youth Supports (RYS) at ages 16 and/or 17, whether or not the youth actually received RYS.</p>	<p>The Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) policy came into effect in May, 2013 and replaced the former Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) policy, for youth 18 to 20 (inclusive).</p> <p>It provides eligible youth with financial (\$850/month) and other supports based on their individual needs and aspirations to enable them to transition smoothly to adulthood. CCSY sets out a youth-centred, strength-based program that empowers youth to be more actively involved in decisions that impact them.</p>	<p>Eligible youth receive financial support of \$850/month, as well as non-financial supports, to help them meet their goals during their transition into adulthood.</p>
Ontario Access Grants for Crown Wards	<p>Youth who are Crown wards or were previously Crown wards (at any age), or who are receiving or were eligible to receive <i>Continued Care and Support for Youth</i>.</p>	<p>Youth in OSAP eligible programs that are two or more years in length may receive Ontario Access Grants for Crown Wards for 50% of tuition fees to a maximum of \$3,000/year for up to four years.</p> <p>Students in a one year program may receive an Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards for 100% of tuition costs to a maximum of \$3,000.</p>	<p>Eligible youth receive up to \$3,000 a year to cover the costs of 50% of their tuition fees.</p>

Name of Support	Who is Eligible	Program Description	How it supports youth leaving care
100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care	Youth who are eligible to receive the <i>Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards</i> .	Participating colleges and universities in Ontario provide funding to cover the remaining 50% of tuition fees up to \$3,000 (for a total of \$6,000) for students who are eligible for the Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tuition aid provided by the school does not reduce the amount of OSAP full-time funding that a student is eligible to receive. 	Eligible youth receive up to \$3,000 a year to cover the remaining 50% of their tuition fees, from participating colleges and universities.
Ontario Crown Ward Postsecondary Application Fee Reimbursement Program	Current and former Crown wards.	This program covers the cost of college and university application fees for Crown wards and former Crown wards applying for their first college or university program.	Eligible youth receive reimbursements up to the maximums listed below and only in up to two of the following institutional categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC): All application fees for up to five first entry university/program choices* Ontario Colleges Application Service (OCAS): All application fees for up to five college/program choices OSAP approved programs offered by Ontario private postsecondary institutions: Up to \$100 in application fees OSAP approved programs offered by out-of-province postsecondary institutions: Up to \$100 in application fees*
Living and Learning Grant (LLG)	Youth ages 21 to 24 (inclusive) who received, or were eligible to receive CCSY, and who are enrolled full-time in OSAP-eligible post-secondary education and training programs.	The Living and Learning Grant (LLG), provides \$500 a month during the school year to eligible youth.	Eligible youth receive \$500 a month/ \$2,000 a semester (up to \$4,000 a year), to use towards their living expenses. This grant does not reduce the amount of OSAP loan and grant funding a student is eligible to receive (i.e., a youth may receive the LLG in addition to the 100% Tuition Aid).

Name of Support	Who is Eligible	Program Description	How it supports youth leaving care
Aftercare Benefits Initiative (ABI)	<p>Youth ages 21 to 24 (inclusive) who had Crown ward status that expired at the age of 18; who were subject to a formal Customary Care agreement or a protection custody order at age 18; or who were eligible for the Renewed Youth Support program.</p> <p>Youth who are eligible to participate in another benefits program, for example with their post-secondary institution, through social assistance or through their employer, are not eligible to participate in this program.</p>	Beginning the summer of 2014, the ABI will be administered by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and will provide prescription drug, dental and extended health benefits to eligible youth.	The ABI will help eligible youth to transition to adulthood, increase their resiliency and improve their self-care.

* Participating Colleges: Collège Boréal; Cambrian College; Canadore College; Humber College; La Cité Collégiale; Northern College; Sault College; Sheridan College. Participating Universities: Algoma University; Brock University; Carleton University; Lakehead University; Laurentian University; McMaster University; Nipissing University; OCAD University; University of Ontario Institute of Technology; University of Ottawa; Queen's University; Ryerson University; Saint Paul University; Trent University; University of Guelph; University of Toronto; University of Waterloo; University of Windsor; Western University; Wilfrid Laurier University; York University.

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Appendix 1: Financial Supports Available to Youth Leaving Care in Ontario

134. Information was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Contact Information

Representative for Children and Youth

Phone

In Victoria: 250-356-6710

Elsewhere in BC: 1-800-476-3933

E-mail

rcy@rcybc.ca

Fax

Victoria: 250-356-0837

Prince George: 250-561-4624

Burnaby: 604-775-3205

Mail

PO Box 9207 St. Prov Govt

Victoria, BC

V8W 9J1

Offices

Head office – Victoria

Suite 201, 546 Yates Street

Victoria, BC V8W 1K8

Northern office – Prince George

1475 10th Avenue

Prince George, BC V2L 2L2

Lower Mainland office

M12-4277 Kingsway

Burnaby, BC V5H 3Z2

Website

www.rcybc.ca