



Statement

Child and Youth in Care Week Statement – 2016

During the course of my nearly 10 years as Representative for Children and Youth in British Columbia and, in fact, throughout my career, I have had the privilege of getting to know hundreds of youth in care. These young people are diverse and talented individuals of all ages, backgrounds and cultures and, time and again, I've been inspired by their strength, adaptability and creativity under less than ideal conditions.

Each and every child has a unique story to tell, and a right to be heard. And we need to hear those stories. It is equally important this year to recognize that the majority of youth in care are Indigenous. They have come from families who have experienced enormous upheaval and trauma through many generations. We need to listen to these young people to understand how their family histories have impacted their lives. And we need to be sure we do not stop supporting them and learning from them as they reach the age of 19.

Youth in care are unique because they face challenges that other children and youth don't. The fact is that being in care is not easy. It is frightening enough for youth of any age to have to move out of the family home – usually the only home they have ever known – often with little or no warning, and take up residence with strangers. Even scarier is having to move around from foster home to foster home and change schools, sometimes over and over, only to “age out” of care and be expected to face the world as an adult at the extremely young age of 19. Many of these children have been traumatized through abuse or neglect. Worst of all is to be stigmatized because of it. It's not fair, and it's not okay.

I join with youth in care in believing that no youth should ever feel singled out or stigmatized for being a foster child. On the contrary, we should be celebrating these kids and their incredible resilience. This recognition, by youth in care themselves, was the impetus for the first B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week in 2011 and serves as a testament to the strength and will of youth in care.

During B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week, I encourage you take a moment to reflect on youth in care in this province. By doing this, you will gain a new respect for this group of youth – who number more than 7,000 in B.C. Then, join me in standing behind our youth, celebrating who they are and creating the expectation that they will be supported the same as other children. In particular, I encourage you to take part in the Fostering Change “Write the Future” petition, calling on government to extend the age of care

beyond 19. This is one Youth in Care Week in which you can really make a difference, just by signing your name. Find the petition here:

<http://www.fosteringchange.ca/petition>

Wherever you are, I hope you will celebrate and keep advocating for children and youth in care. And if you are a child or youth, stay strong. We celebrate you, and we're here for you.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond

