



Youth Transitions from Care to Adulthood

Report Overview and Draft Directions for Systemic Improvement

Introduction:

One of the priorities of the Representative for Children and Youth this year is to work with government to improve services and supports for young people transitioning out of care. There has been so much good work done in this province over the past several years on this issue, and we seek to build on the knowledge, advocacy and research that has already been done, much of it with young people leading the way. We have completed a draft report to be released publicly this fall, and are now asking people like you, who know the most about what improvements are needed, to give us your input. This document provides a very brief high level overview of the report, and then shares the Draft Directions for Systemic Improvement. Please review the document and then answer the survey questions. **We kindly ask that you do not share this document.**

Report Overview

- Advocacy and demand for change has been steadily growing in B.C.
- Supports for youth who have aged out exist, but they are insufficient and not cohesive.
- While the AYA program has been improved incrementally, very few young people access it, and they report inequitable access and insufficient funding.
- Even with the lack of systematic data collection, we know that outcomes for youth who have aged out of care are generally poorer than their parented peers. These poor outcomes are a result of inadequate systems.
- Data collected by RCY on critical injuries and deaths show that as youth progress through adolescence, their vulnerability and risk increase, exactly at the time when these youth are preparing to age out of the system and transition to adulthood.

We know a lot about what is needed to do better:

- Flexible and accessible services which prioritize youth agency and remain available for many years after the age of majority.
- A range of supports to address several domains including mental health, housing, education and identity formation.
- Listen to youth voices and incorporate their goals and vision into individual and systemic service delivery and policy design.
- Studies have shown the economic benefit to increasing support.

- Studies have also shown that 90% of British Columbians agree that young people in their 20s need the support of their family.
- There are other jurisdictions we can look to for models of success.

General rationale and approach for the directions for systemic improvement:

- Emphasize and amplify what has already been recommended by others.
- Highlight some things that perhaps haven't been highlighted as much in other reports, emphasizing what young people from care have said is critical for their success, and is backed up by research.
- Where possible, align with current priorities of RCY.
- Make recommendations specific and "monitorable." Be clear about the change the government needs to make. Where policies may already be in place, focus on the changes that need to be made to practice, and think about how we will know that these changes have been made.
- Align with best practice from research and what has been proven to work.
- We no longer want to see incremental change to what already exists, but rather a systemic approach that holistically addresses the needs of young people aging out of care.

Direction #1 - Extend Post-Majority Support.

Youth in care must have the same gradual and extended transition to adulthood that most young people enjoy. This recommendation has been made repeatedly by Fostering Change and echoed by at least five other major reports on the issue in the past five years. It has also been made in jurisdictions across Canada and internationally. Legal frameworks must clarify the continuing role of the province as a parent and provide a framework for practice to ensure the rights and needs of young people leaving care.

1. The Ministry of Children and Family Development should implement universal and comprehensive financial and social supports for young people aging out of all types of care and out of Youth Agreements. Eligibility should be universal and young people should be automatically enrolled on their 19th birthday, and continue thereafter until their 27th birthday (unless the young person expressly chooses to opt out). Implementation and access should be equitable across the province.

Support should include the following:

- a. **Basic Living costs.** An annual support amount aligned with other income support programs in B.C. and intended to support housing costs, food, phone/internet, transportation, health care, personal care, clothing, and recreation.

- b. **Social supports and community connections.** This funding would be delivered to existing and new or expanded organizations that successfully provide youth aging out of care social support and community connection services.
- c. **Continuation of voluntary care.** For a small subset of highly vulnerable young people, include an option to extend voluntary care, thereby allowing, for example, the extension of foster or staffed residential placements for these young people.

Direction #2 - Extend and Improve Transition Planning.

Research on emerging adulthood and adolescent brain development provides ample instruction on best practice for transition planning and ways to align that planning with the non-linear and complex process of transitioning to adulthood. Additionally, too many young people do not have access to quality assessments that give them a full understanding of their own health issues. Current transition planning is focused on services and is transactional in nature. “Young people in foster care need more than cognitive skill attainment; to become effective decision makers, they need to be given the opportunity to practice making personally meaningful choices with the support of caring adults.”¹

- 2. The Ministry of Children and Family Development should fully implement and proactively monitor effective transition planning beginning at age 15 and extending beyond age 19. Transition planning should extend beyond information about services to focus on “normalcy.” Additionally, transition planning should incorporate what is known from research about the transition to adulthood as a developmental phase, moving from dependence to interdependence.
 - a. The Ministry of Family Development should ensure that every young person has had access to quality assessments to ensure an understanding of any cognitive, physical, developmental or mental health issues that might require follow up care in adulthood.

Direction #3 - Nurture Cultural Connection, particularly for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Youth.

Multiple reports call for reform related to Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry recommendations, the Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness, and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions Report, the implementation of Jordan’s Principle in B.C., federal and provincial Indigenous child welfare legislation, and provincial and federal commitments to the *United Nations Declaration*

¹ “What Young People Need to Thrive.” Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2015. <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-whatyoungpeopleneedtothrive-2015.pdf> p.13

on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. All of these documents reassert a child's right to their cultural identity. Further, it is understood that "aging out" is not a concept that fits into Indigenous ways of considering communities, relationships and caring.

3. The Ministry of Children and Family Development should nurture cultural connections for all children and youth in care before the age of 19, and in particular, First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous youth in care. Per the recommendation made in the Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness, and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions Report: "An aging out plan should be a required component of each care plan for youth, and as with other aspects of the care plan, this plan should be developed with the support and direct involvement of an Indigenous youth's community."
 - a. The Ministry of Children and Family Development should contextualize the experience of Indigenous youth aging out of care within the experience of colonization and support the reclamation of culture and identity as critically important elements of the lives of emerging First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous adults.

Direction #4 - Prioritize Youth Agency in Planning and Services.

Youth and young adults have the right to be active participants in their own lives (*UNCRC* Article 12), and the principle of "nothing about us without us" should be supported throughout a youth's transition from care.

4. In their approach to youth transitions, the Ministry of Children and Family Development must prioritize youth agency in designing a plan and accessing services.
 - a. Case planning should exist as a reciprocal process, where youth are responsible and empowered to design a case plan representative of their goals, interests, and support networks. The case planning initiative should be expanded and emboldened.
 - b. Service access must move from a contractual relationship where caseworkers issue agreements and administer regulations to meaningful relationships with young people. Transition supports, such as AYA, should be available through a youth's last contact in the care system and service should be developmentally appropriate and invited as required and where it presents value in a youth's life.

Direction #5 - Focus on the system, not the Individual.

A shift to focus on systemic problems, rather than individual issues - "fix the systems, not the youth" - is a high priority for the Representative, and numerous other reports have called for a similar focus.

5. Government, led by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, should approach support for young people leaving care as a government-wide systemic issue. The need for post-majority youth to navigate multiple systems should be mitigated wherever possible, and the government should embrace its role as parent in intention (behave as a parent), not just policy. The burden to navigate should be shifted from individual young people to professionals in systems navigator roles who can support the young people through their transitions and into post-majority supports.

Direction #6 – Provide Additional Dedicated Housing for Youth Aging out of Care

“The differing housing circumstances for youth aging out of care and the general population is perhaps the most basic disadvantage youth aging out of care face.” At this time, in this province, there is perhaps no greater challenge facing young people aging out of care than finding appropriate, affordable, and safe housing.

6. Additional dedicated housing units should be provided through BC Housing for young people aging out of care. Units on a continuum of support should be available and eligibility requirements should be reduced.

Direction #7 – Provide emerging adulthood-specific Mental Health and Substance Use Services

With the presence of a global pandemic, and the ongoing public health emergency of drug toxicity deaths in British Columbia, the need for mental health and substance use services is rising across the board. Due to the higher prevalence of mental health issues for youth in and aging out of care, as well as elevated rates of substance use and substance use disorders, additional services are needed to meet the specific needs of youth aging out of care.

7. The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions should continue their work on developing comprehensive, continuous (uninterrupted), and developmentally appropriate services and supports for young people, giving particular attention and priority to the needs of young people – especially Indigenous young people - in their transition out of care.

Direction #8 - Collect Longitudinal Data and Evaluate Services.

One of the current challenges in delivering post-majority services in British Columbia is the lack of mandated data collection on these services. In order to ensure high quality and equitable services, there must be ongoing data collection and evaluation.

8. Government, led by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, should enable legislation (aligned with Direction #1) that supports:
 - a. Longitudinal data collection from young people who have aged out of foster care in British Columbia.
 - b. Evaluation of post-majority services and supports and the public sharing of the evaluation results.
 - c. Agreements with Young Adults (and complementary support services such as those for mental health and addictions) becoming fully reviewable services by the Representative for Children and Youth for all eligible young adults through the age of 27, so that services can be independently monitored and assessed, and advocacy services provided.