

A Parent's Duty:

Government's Obligation to Youth
Transitioning into Adulthood



REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

December 2020

Cover art

By Star Martin

Star Martin is a young digital artist based in Vancouver, B.C.. Having spent 15 years in B.C.'s foster care system, Star is very passionate about improving the lives of youth in and from care. She was previously employed by the Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks as the Youth Coordinator, and loved that role very much before deciding to pursue her passions in art. She hopes that through her art and storytelling, she will be able to raise awareness and understanding about the realities of foster care, so that more positive change can be made. She is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to create this piece for the Representative's report.

Dec. 15, 2020

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

Dear Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour of submitting the report *A Parent's Duty: Government's Obligation to Youth Transitioning into Adulthood* to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

This special report is prepared in accordance with Section 20 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth

pc: Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Susan Sourial
Committee Clerk, Legislative Assembly

The Representative and staff, who do their work throughout the province, would like to acknowledge that we are living and working with gratitude and respect on the traditional territories of the First Nation peoples of British Columbia. We specifically acknowledge and express our gratitude to the keepers of the lands on the traditional territories of the Lheidli T'enneh peoples (Prince George), the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations (Victoria), and the Musqueam, Skwxwu'7mesh, Tsleil-Waututh and Kwikwetlem Nations (Burnaby) where our offices are located.

We would also like to acknowledge our Métis and Inuit partners and friends living in these beautiful territories.

Dedication

The Representative for Children and Youth dedicates this report to the late Katherine McParland. Her death Dec. 4 has been a tragic blow to so many who have had the great fortune to walk alongside this passionate young advocate for social justice.

A former youth in care who had “aged out” into homelessness herself, Katherine was a tireless advocate for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness. She put young people and their voices at the centre of all she did. Her February 2020 report done in collaboration with RCY, *From Marginalized to Magnified – Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise*, was a shining example of this. Young people felt valued, respected and heard by her.

Katherine often referred to foster care as a “*superhighway to homelessness*” to describe the impact of B.C.’s current approach when youth transition out of care. Her work on the *Marginalized to Magnified* report, as well as her leadership of the non-profit she founded in her home town, A Way Home Kamloops, stand as powerful reminders that youth homelessness is an issue of systems failures, not the failings of the young people experiencing it.

With tenacity, fierceness and grace, Katherine set about changing the world, first in Kamloops and then growing her reach and influence both provincially and nationally. She was determined to change the trajectory of youth homelessness, and to make life better for the youth who would come after her. As she wrote in her report, “*our most horrific life experiences that cause the deepest wounds can sometimes become our life purpose.*”

Her passing leaves a huge hole and a terrible pain in our hearts. We honour Katherine’s legacy by carrying on with this important work that she cared about so deeply. She often closed her presentations with the following: “*Together we must prevent and end youth homelessness in our communities and our province. There is no time to wait. I stand rooted in action. Please stand with me.*”

In her memory, we most certainly will.

– Katherine McParland –
May 8, 1988 – December 4, 2020



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The Representative would also like to acknowledge the participants who took part in focus groups and individual interviews conducted for this report, as well as the authors and sponsors of past reports on this topic including the Provincial Health Officer, Fostering Change, First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition and the Vancouver Foundation.

Finally, the Representative would like to thank the visual and literary artists who contributed their work to this report.

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	6
Scope and Methodology	9
Background	11
The British Columbia Child Welfare System	11
Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences	12
Over-involvement of the Child Welfare System in the Lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Youth	15
Outcomes for Youth Transitioning into Adulthood	17
Homelessness	17
Educational Achievement	19
Limited Earnings Potential	20
Health and Mental Health	22
Substance Use	23
Criminal Justice System Involvement	25
Shifting Understandings of the Transition to Adulthood	26
Research on the Adolescent Brain	26
Public Perceptions in British Columbia	27
Post-majority Supports in B.C.: Current State	30
After-care Supports in B.C.	30
What the Research Tells Us	47
Defining Readiness	47
Effective Interventions	49
Limitations of Programs and Services	50
Focus on Relationships	50
Multiple Dimensions of Permanency	51
The Need for a Range of Services	52
Consequences of Trauma	53
Impacts of Colonization	54
Government as a Parent	55
Economic Analysis	58
Recommendations	61
Conclusion	68
Appendix	69
Reference List	83

List of Figures

Figure 1. Count of injuries by age 2018/2019 and 2019/2020	13
Figure 2. Per cent of youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 who received AYA within the fiscal year they turned 19.	36
Figure 3. Variability in AYA access rates across service delivery areas in 2019/2020	36
Figure 4. Per cent of youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 who received AYA within the fiscal year they turned 19, by gender	37
Figure 5. Per cent of youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 who received AYA within the fiscal year they turned 19, by Indigenous status	38

List of Tables

Table 1. Key reports on youth transitioning into adulthood	30
Table 2. Number of young adults accessing AYA after turning 19 (by fiscal year).	34
Table 3. Youth transitioning to adulthood by AYA eligibility, and first AYA application in fiscal year of 19 th birthday (2012/13 through 2019/20).	35
Table 4. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 by education level.	38
Table 7. Summary of education supports for B.C. youth from care: support offered and eligibility	43
Table 8. Post-majority economic costs and benefits reports	59
Table A. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood 2012/2013 through 2019/20 by AYA eligibility and status	69
Table B. Variability in AYA access rates across Service Delivery Areas (2012/2013 through 2019/2020)	70
Table C. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by gender in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status	75
Table D. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by Indigenous status in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status	76
Table E. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by education level	81

Executive Summary

The transition to adulthood is a time of trial and error for any young person. Stepping away from your adolescent support system and into adulthood is hard work that takes many years and many helping hands to get right, and every young person can expect to stumble now and again while navigating through those years.

But for far too many of the 850 or so young people who transition out of government care or a youth agreement in B.C. every year, turning 19 can be the start of a frightening solo journey into the unknown – one that their experiences in government care have left them particularly poorly prepared for.

This report is about those youth. It's about good intentions gone unrealized, and systems that look much better on paper than in reality. It's about supports that are notoriously scarce, inequitable, rigid, and a poor fit for so many of the diverse young people who turn 19 while in government care. It's about practice and policy that are out of line with current research, and the ongoing legacy of colonization on new generations of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous youth, who are 17 times more likely to be in government care in B.C. than non-Indigenous youth.

And it's also about the incredible and resilient youth who make this difficult journey. So much of their life experiences and time in government care deny them the opportunities and connections that we know are essential to support children in reaching their potential, and yet many succeed anyway. Their stories have informed this work, as have those of the far too many youth lost along the way.

The compiled data and research here tell stories of higher rates of homelessness, less educational attainment, less attachment to the workforce, lower rates of income and poorer mental health among youth leaving care and transitioning to adulthood as compared to their non-care peers.

This is the 10th major report in six years done on this same issue in B.C., five of them by our Office.

Some expanded services have been introduced in that time – more tuition support for former youth in care attending post-secondary and expanded eligibility for the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program. But much more remains to be done.

We know that the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the B.C. government overall want to help these vulnerable young people to succeed.

But the gaps and gulfs in the government system of post-majority supports create profoundly inequitable and difficult access for youth who could benefit from these supports. The lack of data challenges anyone attempting to analyze what is or isn't working, or untangle the vastly disproportionate impact on the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous youth.

The transactional nature of B.C.'s primary post-majority support for youth in care, the AYA program, bears little resemblance to the kind of “wraparound support” that young people in families will receive from their loved ones as they transition into adulthood.

Research – and common sense – confirms the importance of a similar approach for youth who have been in care, in order to support better outcomes for these young people. Growing into adulthood can be daunting at the best of times, but all the more so for a young person who hasn't had a well-supported

childhood, is disconnected from family and community, and is struggling with a complex system of partial and even grudging supports that is hard to find, hard to access and even harder to maintain.

Research over decades has repeatedly confirmed that poverty is a major predictor for everything difficult that happens to a person in the course of a life. Yet our own system of care for B.C.'s most vulnerable children and youth virtually shapes a life of poverty for them. In our consultations with youth and youth-serving organizations for this report, we heard of the fear that grips young people at the idea of their 19th birthday – and impending homelessness – looming.

B.C. created the AYA program almost 25 years ago. In its most recent form, it provides up to \$15,000 a year for a total of four years for eligible youth ages 19 to 26, as long as they are attending school, taking a life skills program or attending a rehabilitation program.

But there are multiple problems with the AYA program, as is clearly evidenced by the fact that as of March 2020, fewer than 10 per cent of the total number of eligible young adults in B.C. were receiving it. This transactional program requires young people to prove their eligibility to qualify and claws back any money they earn, maintaining them in poverty. There are significant and unexplained differences in AYA access in B.C. based on gender, race, region, education level and type of previous ministry involvement.

The expansion of post-secondary tuition support for youth transitioning out of care has been a major benefit for the youth who are able to come straight out of care and into post-secondary. Administered by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, this program has helped more than 1,100 former youth in care attend post-secondary.

But for the many youth who need more support before they can think about post-secondary, there is no bridge between their reality and tuition support. They have aged out of the government care system, but aren't yet ready for post-secondary. What are the options for them? Only 17 per cent of B.C. youth with backgrounds in government care currently make this transition in the three years after high school, compared to 48 per cent for other youth. Those figures aren't surprising, given that B.C. youth who haven't been in care are almost twice as likely to graduate high school than youth in care.

Government intervention in a child's life can be understood as a commitment to a young person's well-being - one that requires a long-term relationship and ongoing support in line with a person's needs. Research – including hard science on brain development – along with the experiences of parents and youth everywhere underlines that the journey to self-sufficiency takes time and much support, well into a person's twenties. We need systems of support for youth in care that look much more like the diverse, long-lasting and highly individual supports that a parent provides as their own children grow into adulthood.

We make a number of recommendations, which include, in summary:

- Extend and improve transition planning, which should start at least by age 14 and extend beyond age 19.
- Develop a province-wide system of dedicated transition workers through community agencies to provide systems navigation and case management support, as well as adult guidance, for these young people up to the age of 27.
- Extend support past age 19, including the automatic enrollment of all young people across all types of care and youth agreements in Agreements with Young Adults, continuing to age 27.
- Consider an extension of voluntary residential care. MCFD should evaluate current emergency measures in place due to COVID-19 that allow young people to continue to stay in their placements past their 19th birthday, with a goal of making that flexibility a permanent change.

- Provide additional dedicated housing for youth and young adults leaving care. There is perhaps no greater challenge facing young people transitioning out of care than finding appropriate, affordable, and safe housing.
- Develop and implement a plan for mental health and substance use services for youth in care transitioning to adulthood.
- Collect longitudinal data on youth transitioning out of care and evaluate services, with results made public. Data collection and evaluation are essential to ensure high-quality and equitable services. That we know so little in these two critically important areas hinders efforts in B.C. to improve outcomes for children and youth in care.

Improving and expanding supports for youth and young adults in their transition out of government care is not just a moral imperative, but an economic one. Maintaining the status quo is the most expensive choice. A 2016 B.C. cost-benefit analysis estimated major savings to government – more than \$100 million annually – that would result from funding the kinds of changes we are recommending here.

This report builds on a foundation of research and advocacy campaigns that stretch back many years, and involve a long list of passionate people and organizations committed to improving outcomes for young people transitioning out of care in B.C.

We are particularly grateful for the ongoing work of Fostering Change on behalf of young people in care and under youth agreements, to the Vancouver Foundation for initiating Fostering Change, and to First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition for hosting the Fostering Change campaign. The work of the late Katherine McParland in partnership with RCY brought together the voices of youth in care to inform a new conversation on ending youth homelessness in the report *From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise*, released in February 2020.

We want to acknowledge leaders in First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous communities who have forcefully and repeatedly told us that “aging out” is not a concept that fits with their cultures. Indigenous organizations such as the First Nations Leadership Council, Métis Nation BC, the Delegated Aboriginal Agencies Directors’ Forum and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres have been strong advocates for more robust and more appropriate supports for their youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic response demonstrates that government can act quickly to make the kind of changes that advocates have long been asking for to prevent young people in government care from falling over the precipice at age 19.

As of March 2020, MCFD has implemented measures and tried to engage with youth to maintain support and services for those transitioning into adulthood, allowing youth to stay put in their current living arrangements until March 2021. Independent living and youth agreements have been extended, and youth in the AYA program will continue to receive funding until Sept. 30, 2021 even if their eligibility status changes.

We have an opportunity to take the temporary changes that are being implemented during the pandemic and build on them. We have the duty to reform a system that not only doesn’t function as intended, but in many cases causes great harm for the young people ostensibly being helped. Poorer outcomes experienced by young people transitioning out of care are not inherent in the young people themselves, but rather a product of their life experiences and a deeply flawed and inadequate system of care.

We can, and must, do better.

Introduction

Take a few minutes to think back to your 19th birthday. Perhaps it was a few years ago, perhaps it was 30 years ago, perhaps even longer. What were you looking forward to? What were you dreaming about? What kind of adulthood did you imagine for yourself?

Chances are you were only beginning to take the first steps to bring those dreams into reality when you were 19. Maybe you were going to school or working. Maybe you were doing both. If you were like the majority of young adults, you had a lot of support. You had adults around you to give you advice, help to pay for your education, and probably even provide you with a place to live. Even once you moved out of your house, you still most likely had a place to go to do your laundry on the weekends or have a meal or to return to live if you really had to. You had a person to help you think through decisions, big and small, if you needed and wanted that. You made a gradual transition to being more independent, while still being closely connected with family of all sorts, whether those you grew up with or those you choose to call family. For many of us, it's an age that we look back on fondly, because we were on the precipice of discovering who we were to become.

However, for many youth who are forced to leave the care of the child welfare system at age 19, a different kind of precipice awaits. They face having to leave the support of that system and learn, all too often by themselves, to navigate entirely new systems of support that will require them to find the right services, determine if they're eligible and traverse the bureaucratic barriers to access.

For more than 20 years, there has been a growing demand for change among these young people for a more just and equitable transition from care to interdependence and for the support they deserve. Indeed, ongoing research and advocacy efforts have brought about some tangible change. But change for youth transitioning into adulthood in B.C. has to date been one of incremental shifts and tinkering with programs and services. Government has yet to develop a cohesive and robust cross-ministry plan that ensures all youth who age out of care transition to the support they need – that any person needs – to successfully navigate young adulthood.

“I’m 49, and I’ve never ‘aged out’ from my parents. That’s the paradigm shift that is needed,” notes Gwen Cardinal, Director of Youth and Community Services at Prince George Native Friendship Centre. *“When I turned 19, it was such a celebration. But for kids in the system, it’s the trigger, it’s the threat, it’s the pressure. It’s a threat for them to think about turning 19 – ‘What are you going to do when you turn 19?’”*

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the vulnerabilities of young people transitioning into adulthood. *“COVID-19 is a truth-sayer,”* wrote Canadian writer Tessa McWatt in the *Globe and Mail*.¹ But so many of those cracks, fissures and deep gaps in our social safety nets that COVID has exposed have existed for years for youth transitioning into adulthood.

However, the pandemic has also demonstrated that government can act quickly to make the kind of changes that advocates have long been asking for to prevent young people in government care from falling over the precipice at age 19. Since March 2020, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has implemented measures and engaged with youth to try to maintain support and services

¹ Tessa McWatt, “As the COVID-19 lockdown ends, what world awaits people?” *The Globe and Mail*, Aug. 7, 2020.

for those transitioning into adulthood. Youth are able to stay put in their current living arrangements – whether that is in foster care, a contracted residential agency, court-ordered out-of-care living arrangements or with relatives through the extended family program – until March 31, 2021. Independent living and youth agreements have been extended, and youth in the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program are able to continue to receive funding until Sept. 30.

Additionally, government is maintaining emergency measures until Sept. 30, 2021 that broaden the options and reduce the required hours of participation per week for young adults receiving life skills and rehabilitation supports through the AYA program. These measures expand AYA program eligibility to a wider range of existing programs online and in communities, and include cultural programs. There is also more flexibility in accessing mental health supports, including cultural healing and wellness under the AYA rehabilitative program area.²

There is much to be learned from the experiences of young people on the cusp of transitioning into adulthood during this COVID-19 pandemic. The temporary emergency measures along with innovative and agile shifts by service providers working with this population of youth provide a glimpse of a different way of supporting B.C. youth transitioning into adulthood.

Sadly, these positive changes are only temporary. This report calls on government to enact comprehensive and lasting change for the young people in its care as they transition into adulthood.

“Don’t expect us to be adults at 19.”

– Youth participant

This report looks at what is known about outcomes for young people in care transitioning into adulthood, with particular focus on the over-involvement of the child welfare system in the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children and youth in care. The report also examines current policies and programs for young people transitioning into adulthood in B.C.

Our report highlights research on how best to support youth in this transition to adulthood. We look at how that support can align with research-based practices supporting youth in this transition and examine costs and cost benefits as well as how some other jurisdictions are addressing this issue. We conclude with recommendations on how to better support young people leaving care in British Columbia.

² Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Supports extended for youth aging out of care,” B.C. Government News, Sept. 20, 2020. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020CFD0097-001825>.

A Note on Terminology

The term “aging out of care” is commonly understood to describe the situation in which young adults who reach the age of majority (19 in B.C.) can no longer access the supports that were available to them in the child welfare system. While this term is widely used, and is descriptive of the situation youth in care find themselves on their 19th birthday, the term also has limitations. It connotes the termination of government obligation to these young people, and a mindset of no longer having care and concern for them. The term “aging out” is not aligned with the experience of young people who are not in care, and does not describe what we wish to be true for these young people. It is also not future-focused. Many advocates have promoted the use of different language to describe this situation – language that is more aspirational and helps to envisage the world we would like to see for these young people. These alternatives include “youth transitioning out of care,” “youth transitioning into adulthood” and “aging into community.” Additionally, First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous advocates have pointed out that “aging out” is a colonial concept, and that there is no such concept in Indigenous cultures. In this report, we have chosen to intentionally shift our language, and have used the term “youth transitioning to adulthood” to signal that we understand this to be a transitional time in the lives of young people, and we see an opportunity to prepare young people for successful adulthood and a different kind of future.



Photo Credit: Fostering Change

Scope and Methodology

This report is a review of existing research and previous work on the issue of young people transitioning into adulthood in British Columbia. The report specifically focuses on the more than 800 young people who age out of care or a Youth Agreement in B.C. every year. It does not address young people with neuro-developmental disabilities who will be transitioning into Community Living BC (CLBC) services because this relatively small group is eligible for alternative support services.

Because the B.C. government does not systematically capture longitudinal data on the experiences and outcomes of young people transitioning into adulthood, this report relies on other government data and research studies that have been completed in B.C. and other jurisdictions that paint a picture of the experience of transitioning into adulthood. Several studies dating back a decade or more have had significant input directly from young people with lived experience. Despite the absence of rigorous, systematic, longitudinal data collection by government on the experiences of young people transitioning into adulthood in B.C., the Representative believes there is more than enough evidence from other work to understand the experiences of young people transitioning into adulthood as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, and to make recommendations for improvement.

Available data collected by government on the experiences of transitioning to adulthood in B.C. have been included in this report, including high school completion rates, rates of accessing income assistance, and participation in programs such as Agreements with Young Adults or the Provincial Tuition Waiver program. Our review of available provincial supports to young people transitioning into adulthood has been drawn from government websites and other government documentation.

This report includes case examples from the work of two RCY teams: Advocacy and Reviews and Investigations. It features a review of literature on topics such as promising practices for youth transitioning into adulthood, emerging adulthood, cost-benefit analysis and policy and practice in other jurisdictions. Pseudonyms are used for the youth in our case examples to protect their identities, and one case (Jack) is presented as a composite.

Additionally, focus group consultations and one-on-one conversations were held with key stakeholders including youth from care, front-line service providers, foster parents, community service agency representatives and staff representatives from the First Nations Leadership Council, Métis Nation BC and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies.

Happy 19th Birthday

By Zae



Hi my name is Zae (Zee)

I am a 22-year-old non-binary individual who has been an advocate for youth for over four years. I myself have had experience in and out of care. I am an artist and I am in the CYC program at Douglas. I aspire to become an artist and create powerful pieces that can hopefully inspire others.

When thinking about the realities of youth leaving care, all I can think of is the social worker handing the youth their final cheque and some garbage bags to pack their things and head out into the world. This is the true reality for most of our youth leaving care. I painted some garbage bags that say happy 19th birthday to represent how it feels to leave care without any guidance or help on what youth should do or how they can support themselves in the real world. Sadly, most of the youth like myself who have experienced aging out of care feel lost and let down. Let down by the workers who are our "parents." I am hoping this piece can really inspire workers and government to change some of their ways on how we put our youth out into the world. The end goal is to see our youth succeed and follow their goals and dreams. But we can't do that if we continue to hand them last cheques and garbage bags and assume they're fine on their own.

Background

The British Columbia Child Welfare System

In order to fully understand the child welfare system today and the experience of transitioning into adulthood, it is necessary to understand the historical context in which it was created. This means understanding both the moral “child-saving” movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries along with the colonization of Indigenous peoples.³ Over time, the child welfare system has evolved from being primarily concerned with the prevention of cruelty to children to one that seeks to support families before removing children from their homes, and at the same time is still reconciling with its colonial past.⁴

Child welfare services in British Columbia are the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. As of Oct. 31, 2020 there were 5,437 children and youth in care in B.C.⁵ Of these, 3,602 (66 per cent) were Indigenous (56 per cent First Nations, 0.6 per cent Inuit, 8 per cent Métis and 0.9 per cent Nisga’a).⁶ Child welfare services in B.C. are governed by the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act)*. Services are provided either by service delivery offices or one of 24 Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) that have signed agreements with the ministry. These agreements delegate authority from the Provincial Director of Child Welfare to the DAAs to undertake child welfare responsibilities, which can vary from family support and guardianship services to full child protection authority, including removals.⁷

Children in care in B.C. range in age from newborn up to age 19. The majority of those children (89 per cent) are in care because the ministry has determined that there is abuse or neglect in the family home, and the children are placed in care by court order. Neglect accounts for almost three-quarters of these cases.⁸ Other children (11 per cent) enter care through voluntary care or special needs agreements with parents or guardians who ask for government help, whether because of illness, family issues or parent/child conflicts. Some families need help providing specialized care to a child who has physical or developmental delays, medical needs or mental health, emotional or behavioural needs.

On the day they turn 19, youth are considered to have “aged out” of care. According to ministry data, in fiscal year 2019/2020, there were 406 youth who aged out of care (approximately half Indigenous) and 414 youth who aged out of a Youth Agreement (40 per cent Indigenous).⁹

³ Nico Trocmé, et al., “Child Welfare Services in Canada,” in *National Systems of Child Protection: Understanding the International Variability and Context for Developing Policy and Practice*, eds. Richard D. Krugman, Lisa A. Merkel-Holguin, John D. Fluke (Switzerland: Springer, 2019), 27-50.

⁴ Nico Trocmé, Della Knoll and Cindy Blackstock, “Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada’s Child Welfare System,” *Social Services Review* 78, no. 4 (2004): 577-600, <https://doi.org/10.1086/424545>.

⁵ Data extracted from the Corporate Data Warehouse on Nov. 13, 2020.

⁶ Data extracted from the Corporate Data Warehouse on Nov. 13, 2020.

⁷ Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Delegated Aboriginal Agencies in BC,” Government of B.C., accessed Sept. 9, 2020, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/reporting-monitoring/accountability/delegated-aboriginal-agencies>.

⁸ Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Permanency for Children and Youth in Care,” accessed Sept. 9, 2020, <https://mcfcd.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/child-protection/permanency-for-children-and-youth/case-data-and-trends>.

⁹ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

A Youth Agreement is a legal agreement made between MCFD or a DAA and a young person between the ages of 16 and 18 in, for example, cases involving a “significant adverse condition, such as severe substance use, a significant behavioural or mental disorder, or sexual exploitation”.^{10,11} A thorough assessment of the youth’s circumstances is made by their local MCFD office or DAA, and the youth may receive help with housing, life skills, managing mental health and substance use issues and education. Youth must remain in compliance with their agreement or it can be terminated. As of Oct. 31, 2020, there were 643 youth on Youth Agreements, 271 (42 per cent) of whom were Indigenous.¹²

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

A growing body of literature demonstrates that exposure to trauma during childhood has long-term consequences, and that adults who experienced trauma as children are at higher risk of physical and psychological problems.¹³ As one scholar said:

*“The exposure to trauma during childhood can interrupt the developmental processes and cause life-long physical, mental, and emotional deficiencies. Research shows that trauma survivors can suffer from depression, anxiety, abandonment issues, unstable relationships, and other mental illnesses.”*¹⁴

Studies have estimated that up to 90 per cent of youth in care have some exposure to trauma.¹⁵ In fact, “many of the emotional and behavioral problems manifested by children and youth in care are well recognized to be the result of early trauma.”¹⁶

Article 39 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* – the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world – says that governments shall: “... take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse...”¹⁷ However, trauma-informed care is not always provided, and often youth transitioning into adulthood have not had the appropriate services and supports to recover from their trauma. As we recently reported, while MCFD recognizes the importance of a system-wide trauma-informed approach to delivering services and supports to children and families, this has yet to be integrated into child welfare practice. Full implementation of MCFD’s Trauma-Informed Practice Guide would require considerable resources, but if implemented, it would increase the capacity among service providers to deliver robust, appropriate and accessible services to children with complex needs.¹⁸

¹⁰ Revised Statutes of British Columbia, *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, 8.1 § (1996).

¹¹ A youth under 16 can also be placed on a Youth Agreement if they are married, a parent or an expectant parent.

¹² Data extracted from the Corporate Data Warehouse on Nov. 13, 2020.

¹³ Heather Dye, “The impact and long-term effects of childhood trauma,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 28:3 (2018): 381-392, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2018.1435328>.

¹⁴ Dye, “The impact and long-term effects of childhood trauma,” 389.

¹⁵ Shannon Dorsey et al., “Prior trauma exposure for youth in treatment foster care,” *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 21, (2012): 816-824, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9542-4>.

¹⁶ Harriet Ward, “Continuities and discontinuities: Issues concerning the establishment of a persistent sense of self amongst care leavers,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(12) (2011): 2512–2518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.08.028>.

¹⁷ “Convention on the Rights of the Child,” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, accessed Nov. 13, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

¹⁸ Representative for Children and Youth, “*A Way to Cope: Exploring non-suicidal self-injury in B.C. youth*,” September 2020, Victoria, B.C..

Data collected by RCY on deaths and critical injuries (which includes suicide attempt/ideation, sexualized violence and substance-related harm) show that as youth progress through adolescence, their vulnerability and risk increase in the two years prior to transitioning into adulthood, and remain heightened as they hit the precipice at their 19th birthday. Figure 1 below shows the number of injuries reported at each age from 12 through 18 for those in care in fiscal years (FY) 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. Data collected for those on Youth Agreements shows a similar increase year-over-year from age 16 to age 18.¹⁹

Figure 1. Count of injuries by age 2018/2019 and 2019/2020*



While children and youth often enter care already having experienced trauma in their lives, experiences while in care can cause further trauma, leading to “*accumulative and chronic*” experiences of trauma over an individual’s life.²⁰ Applying a systems lens to this issue is helpful, as policy expert and former youth in care Jane Kovarikova did in her 2017 report on youth outcomes after aging out of care. She wrote:

“It is tempting to suggest that traumatic backgrounds and personal characteristics of youth are the “cause” of these poor outcomes; however, the findings from this study suggest structural factors and professional practices inherent in the child protection system may contribute significantly to poor outcomes for youth aging-out of care.”²¹

¹⁹ Representative for Children and Youth, critical injury data for youth in care, 2018/19 and 2019/20, Accessed Sept. 4, 2020.

²⁰ Heather C. Forkey et al, “Outpatient clinical identification of trauma symptoms in children in foster care,” *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 25(5) (2016):1480-1487, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0331-3>.

²¹ Jane Kovarikova, *Exploring Youth Outcomes After Aging-Out of Care*, (Ontario: Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth), 2017, 4, <https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/report-exploring-youth-outcomes.pdf>.

Practices that can cause trauma during a child or youth's care experience include placement instability or moving frequently while in care, concurrent changes in schools and social workers, and continual experiences of loss.²² When youth age out of care without having had sufficient support to recover from their trauma, and experience "*compressed and accelerated transitions*," they are more likely to experience issues with mental health and other associated challenges throughout their lives.²³

CASE STUDY – Shawn

Shawn is a youth with an amazing sense of humour who loves to connect with people and take care of them. He was involved in the care system for virtually his entire young life, removed for the first time from his parents when he was 16 months old and moved around more than 50 times before he transitioned out of care at age 19.

His mother was a child in care who experienced severe abuse by her biological family before coming into the care of MCFD, where she lived in more than 20 different homes before turning 19. His father had a long history of involvement with the criminal justice system, including several convictions for violent assaults.

Shawn spent the first 11 years of his life in and out of foster care, living either with his parents or with other relatives in between times in care. At age 11 he came into the full-time care of MCFD, where he remained until 19.

Shawn was using substances and had considerable involvement with youth justice. In the year before he aged out of care, Shawn was staying mainly in safe houses and youth custody centres.

His MCFD social worker secured Shawn an independent living suite in youth housing, but he was evicted three months later. Although he was in care, MCFD could not find another placement for him, and instead he stayed in a "tent city." His main connections were his youth outreach worker through a local safe house and his youth probation officer.

When Shawn turned 19, he moved from government care into homelessness with very few services supporting him. He is still trying to gain post-majority supports from MCFD.

²² Ward, "Continuities and discontinuities: Issues concerning the establishment of a persistent sense of self amongst care leavers."

²³ Ward, "Continuities and discontinuities: Issues concerning the establishment of a persistent sense of self amongst care leavers."

Over-involvement of the Child Welfare System in the Lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Youth

Due to the history of colonization in Canada as well as ongoing systemic racism, the B.C. child welfare system is over-involved in the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children and youth. Indigenous children account for less than 10 per cent of B.C. children, but represent 66 per cent of those in care.²⁴ They are about 17 times more likely to be in care than non-Indigenous children and youth.²⁵

Among experts in child welfare, neglect is commonly understood as another way to describe poverty.²⁶ Dr. Nico Trocmé – a professor at McGill University and the principal investigator for a leading Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – has stated that “*most Indigenous children end up in care because their parents are poor.*” Trocmé goes on to say:

*“I’ve certainly never seen any evidence from any of the research to indicate that there is something endemic to First Nations families that would explain a higher rate of placement. It has much more to do with the high rates of poverty and the difficult social and economic circumstances they’re living in.”*²⁷

While the over-involvement of the child welfare system in the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children and youth in care is a well-known issue in B.C. and Canada, more focused attention must be paid to the unique issues young Indigenous people face when transitioning into adulthood. The *Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence*, released by the BC Coroner in 2018 “*found a disproportionate representation of deaths among Indigenous young persons compared to the number of Indigenous young people in the general population.*” (Indigenous youth and young adults accounted for 34 per cent of the 200 deaths investigated in the report.)

The report goes on to discuss the role of culture and its integral role in health and wellness for Indigenous people.²⁸ Indigenous children and youth have not only been removed from their families, but often from their Indigenous communities as well. This practice inhibits connections with their culture, which in turn leaves them more vulnerable to mental health concerns, substance misuse and death by suicide.²⁹

²⁴ Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Permanency for Children and Youth in Care,” accessed Sept. 9, 2020, <https://mcfcd.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/child-protection/permanency-for-children-and-youth/case-data-and-trends>.

²⁵ The Ministry of Children and Family Development’s Annual Service Plan Report states that the rate of Indigenous children and youth in care for fiscal year 2019/2020 was 40.4 per 1,000 (0 to 18 population), whereas the rate for non-Indigenous children was 2.4 per 1,000 (0 to 18), meaning that Indigenous children are 16.8 times more likely to be in care than non-Indigenous children. Ministry of Children and Family Development, “2019/20 Annual Service Plan Report” (Victoria, B.C.: Ministry of Children and Family Development), 2020, https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual_Reports/2019_2020/pdf/ministry/cfd.pdf.

²⁶ Katherine Schumaker, “An Exploration of the Relationship Between Poverty and Child Neglect in Canadian Child Welfare” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012).

²⁷ Katie Hyslop, “How Poverty and Underfunding Land Indigenous Kids in Care,” *The Tyee*, May 14, 2018, <https://thetyee.ca/News/2018/05/14/Indigenous-Kids-Poverty-Care/>.

²⁸ BC Coroners Service, “BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence” (Victoria, BC.: Office of the Chief Coroner of British Columbia), 2018.

²⁹ Robert Mahikwa, “The Next Chapter: A Practical Guide for Individuals, Families, Communities, Social Workers, and Organizations Supporting Indigenous Youth Aging-Out of Care” (MSW Thesis, University of Victoria, 2018), <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/10396>.

RCY heard in our consultations that MCFD workers need different skills for working with Indigenous youth.

“There’s so much more to supporting Indigenous youth in or from care than what most social work university education programs are typically offering,” says Rob Mahikwa, sessional instructor at the University of Victoria and Indigenous Education Navigator at Vancouver Island University. *That’s not to say that it cannot be done, it’s just that there’s often a need for social workers to approach their practice in a culturally-informed way that isn’t always taught in post-secondary alone.”*

As Fast et al. write in *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood*, *“The process of reclamation of culture and identity are particularly critical for emerging adults.”*³⁰ Any attempts to improve policy and practice for youth leaving care must centre on the experiences and needs of Indigenous youth.

“It’s quite challenging to Indigenousize a system that is colonial in design. I want the legacy to be different. I want our kids to have the chance to flourish, there’s so much more they can give,” says Gwen Cardinal, Director of Youth and Community Services, Prince George Native Friendship Centre.



BRIGHT SPOT – Lii Michif Otipemisiwak

Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging: Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services

Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services is the first Métis child welfare agency in B.C. to develop and operate its own housing. Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging is a culturally safe, fully supported, 31-unit apartment development that houses Indigenous Elders and Indigenous youth between the ages of 16 and 27, who are receiving child welfare services. Co-housing fosters traditional intergenerational relationships, which strengthen the community and cultivate a sense of belonging to residents. The building is alcohol, drug and violence-free. There are single and one-bedroom suites, accessible suites, a kekulí common space, a common kitchen, coin laundry facilities, green space, basketball court, community garden, fire pit, resident Elders, cultural mentors and programming, in-house support workers, a 16-week Indigenous life skills program and a food services training program that provides daily nutritious meals to tenants.

Executive Director Colleen Lucier says, *“The idea for Kikékyelc: A Place of Belonging came from a desperate need to improve outcomes for Indigenous youth receiving services from the child welfare system. Our local Métis Elders challenged us by asking what, as a Métis service provider, we were doing differently to break the cycle of lost generations. Kikékyelc is an example of one of our many efforts to do something different. It is our hope that Kikékyelc will contribute to a youth’s ability to conceive of a brighter future and ultimately break the cycle that has perpetuated the over-representation of Indigenous children in care for far too long. The support received for this project is a reflection of reconciliation in action and demonstrates what can happen when Indigenous communities are supported to develop and lead services for our People.”*

“New Housing for Indigenous Youth and Elders Opens In Kamloops,” Canada Mortgage and Housing Cooperation, Nov. 16, 2020, <https://lmofcs.ca/kikekyelc/>.

³⁰ Elizabeth Fast et al., in *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood*, eds. Varda Mann-Feder and Martin Goyette (Oxford University Press, 2019), 11.

Outcomes for Youth Transitioning into Adulthood

Although there is a lack of systematic data collection about the experiences of young people transitioning into adulthood in British Columbia and Canada as a whole, much is known about what happens when young people leave care in B.C. Many reports have highlighted the poor outcomes of a system that leaves young people with insufficient support or no support at all as of age 19.

Data shared here is drawn from multiple sources, and wherever it is available, we have used data from B.C. and Canada. We present highlights from the outcomes data and research that is available and acknowledge that more detailed information is available in the referenced reports.

This data and research tell stories of higher rates of homelessness, less attachment to the workforce, lower rates of income and poorer mental health among youth leaving care, as compared to their non-care peers who have transitioned to adulthood. These stories are told so often that in the early days of Fostering Change, a Vancouver-based initiative seeking to change policy and practice for youth transitioning into adulthood in B.C., the Youth Advisory Circle set out to create a new narrative about this transition – one that honours lived experiences while examining weaknesses in the system, rather than focusing on individuals.³¹ RCY shares this data and research while recognizing that the poor outcomes faced by so many young people transitioning into adulthood are the result of systemic and structural problems.

Homelessness

Aging out of care has been called a “*super highway to homelessness*.”³² It is widely reported that young people from care are more likely to become homeless than young people who are not in care. The *Opportunities in Transition* report found that, “*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.*”³³ Several U.S. studies have found that up to 30 per cent of young people who age out of care experience homelessness and/or housing instability.

Multiple studies have also shown that a significant proportion of young people experiencing homelessness have come from the child welfare system. The *National Youth Homelessness Survey*, conducted in Canada in 2016, found that 57.8 per cent of homeless youth reported involvement with the child welfare system

“I definitely was afraid that I was going to have to live out of my car when I turned 19, because my lease was ending, I had nowhere to go, and I had a cat. I thought about going through B.C. Housing for a subsidized place, but they prioritize people with children, with no priority for youth aging out of care. I finally reached out to my former foster mom for help, and now I rent her basement suite.”

– A former youth in care

³¹ Fostering Change, “Save the Sob Story,” accessed Sept. 10, 2020, https://www.fosteringchange.ca/save_the_sob_story_vancouver_foundation_s_youth_advisory_circle_conceives_a_new_ending_to_an_age_out_tale, N.D.

³² Bill Metcalfe, “Foster-care is ‘superhighway to homelessness’ youth advocate tells Nelson audience,” *Nelson Star*, Oct. 18, 2018, <https://www.nelsonstar.com/community/foster-care-is-superhighway-to-homelessness-youth-advocate-tells-nelson-audience/>.

³³ Marvin Shaffer and Lynell Anderson, *Opportunities in Transition: An Economic Analysis of Investing in Youth Aging out of Foster Care in their 20s, Report 1* (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, Vancouver Foundation, Fostering Change, 2016), p. 22, <https://assets.nationbuilder.com/vancouverfoundation/pages/227/attachments/original/1552419273/Fostering-Change-Opportunities-in-Transition-Report-1.pdf?1552419273>.

at some point in their lives.³⁴ Studies conducted across jurisdictions over the past two decades have found that at least 40 per cent of young people who are homeless or “street-involved” have experience in the child welfare system. These studies generally show a correlation between time spent in the child welfare system and a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness.³⁵

Kovarikova’s 2017 report on youth transitioning out of care in Ontario reviews outcomes for these young people and attempts to better understand the lasting impact of growing up in the child protection system. Her analysis synthesizes data from the literature and supplements it with informal interviews with staff at Ontario organizations serving youth in care. In the report, she identifies the following key findings:

- Rates of homelessness are elevated for youth who have aged out.
- Youth are most vulnerable to homelessness in the first six months of aging out.
- Placement instability prior to aging out may project into adulthood; youth move frequently after care.
- Couch-surfing is common even into the mid-20s.
- One close contact or merely the perception of having social support available decreases risk of homelessness significantly.
- Running away, group care, physical abuse and delinquency while in care increase the risk of homelessness after care.
- Housing options may also be limited for youth with special needs, mental health or behavioural disorders or substance abuse.
- Rural youth may also be more vulnerable to homelessness and required to move to access services.³⁶



BRIGHT SPOT – United Kingdom – The Housing First for Youth project by Rock Trust

The Housing First for Youth project by Rock Trust operates in West Lothian, Scotland and serves young people leaving care. Participants in Housing First for Youth are offered immediate and permanent accommodation on an unconditional basis. In addition, youth are provided with holistic support across education, employment and health and well-being needs. An evaluation of the program found that participants noted improvements in physical health, life satisfaction and independent living skills. In addition, half of participants were engaged in some form of education or training.

Samantha Shewchuk, Transition Supports to Prevent Homelessness for Youth Leaving Out-of-Home Care, (Ontario: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home, Canada), 2020, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/TransitionSupportReport-31082020.pdf>.

³⁴ Stephen Gaetz, Bill O’Grady, Sean Kidd and Kaitlin Schwan, *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey* (Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press), 2016, <https://homelesshub.ca/YouthWithoutHome>.

³⁵ Amy Dworsky et al., *Missed opportunities: Pathways from foster care to youth homelessness in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago), 2019, https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Chapin-Hall_VoYC_Child-Welfare-One-Page_2019-FINAL.pdf.

Katherine McParland, *From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise*, (Victoria, B.C.: Representative for Children and Youth), February 2020, <https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/reports/general-reports/from-marginalized-to-magnified/>.

³⁶ Kovarikova, “Exploring Youth Outcomes After Aging-Out of Care,” 18.



BRIGHT SPOT – Aunt Leah's Place

Aunt Leah's Place is dedicated to creating an environment where all children connected to the child welfare system have as much opportunity as parented children. Aunt Leah's Place was one of the first organizations in B.C. to develop Youth Housing First and to adapt the model to support young people in or from care. Aunt Leah's Place has multiple programs focused on housing for youth from care, including:

The Friendly Landlord Network – network of homeowners and property managers who rent suites to youth transitioning out of government care. The landlords receive market rent and tenancy support.

Housing and Education Link Program Subsidy (HELPS) – housing subsidies for former youth in care so they can continue to pursue their education in a supportive space.

The Link: Housing First program – provides at-risk or homeless participants immediate access to housing and regular support services. The Housing First program ensures that youth in great need can enter difficult rental markets, avoid homelessness and develop essential life skills. This program includes rent subsidies for former youth in care.

Thresholds program – supported housing and services for new moms at risk of losing custody of their child. Moms live in a safe, caring home environment where they can learn how to care for their baby with the guidance of Aunt Leah's staff and a family support worker.

Link Supportive Housing – supportive housing program for youth who have aged out of government care. Using a scattered-site model, this program has basement suites throughout Metro Vancouver dedicated to housing young people transitioning from care into adulthood. Supports range from emergency housing and supportive housing to a straight rental agreement.

Evaluations of these programs have found that participants experience increased housing stability, both while they are in the programs and also after they leave.

Aunt Leah's Place, 2020, <https://www.auntleahs.org/>.

Educational Achievement

Research has established that educational attainment is a key determinant of future employment, income, health status, housing and many other amenities.³⁷ The most significant impact of low educational achievement is lifetime limited earnings potential, discussed further in the next section. There are also well-researched links between low educational attainment and poor health, increased likelihood of involvement in criminal activity and early pregnancy.³⁸

³⁷ Levin et al., cited in *Opportunities in Transition*, Report 2.

³⁸ Olena Hankivsky, *Cost Estimates of Dropping Out of High School in Canada: Technical Report*. (Vancouver: Canadian Council on Learning), 2008, <http://200.6.99.248/~bru487cl/files/Costofdroppingout.pdf>.

The large gaps in school achievement between children and youth in care and other children have been noted in two reports from the Representative and the Provincial Health Officer – *Growing up in B.C.*, and the follow-up, *Growing Up in B.C. – 2015* – and the 2017 RCY report, *Room for Improvement: Toward Better Educational Outcomes for Children in Care*.³⁹ While there have been some improvements, gaps persist: according to recent data reported by the Ministry of Education, the six-year high school completion rate

“Starting post-secondary is a hard transition for youth who have been in care. You're coping with your traumas, trying to figure out what you want to do with your life, trying to learn how to budget because nobody's ever taught you that – and all with no parent to help you.”

– A former youth in care

for students in care in B.C. was 47.5 per cent in 2019 as compared to an 85.9 per cent completion rate for their non-care peers.⁴⁰ The figure for youth in care includes some youth who received only a School Completion certificate, typically not adequate for admission to post-secondary institutions.⁴¹

Even if a young person in care graduates high school, their chances of proceeding on to post-secondary education are far less than their non-care peers. In an effort to track post-secondary education participation, the provincial government has embarked on the *The Student Transitions*

Project, a cross-ministry initiative to track B.C. students across K to 12 and into the B.C. public post-secondary system. Looking at the transition rate from high school graduation to post-secondary within three years, only 17 per cent of children and youth in care or those on youth agreements made this transition, far lower than the 48 per cent of those not in care or on a youth agreement.⁴²

Limited Earnings Potential

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between educational attainment and lifetime earning potential has been clearly demonstrated through research. MCFD tracks the number of youth leaving care and those on youth agreements who access income assistance within six months of leaving care, and the most recent available figures confirm that 48 per cent of youth leaving care access Persons with Disabilities or Income Assistance support.⁴³ For those aging out of a Youth Agreement in the same time period, 23 per cent accessed Persons with Disabilities or Income Assistance support.⁴⁴

³⁹ Representative for Children and Youth, *Growing Up in B.C.* (Victoria, B.C.: Representative for Children and Youth), 2010.

Representative for Children and Youth, *Growing Up in B.C. - 2015* (Victoria, B.C.: Representative for Children and Youth), 2015.

Representative for Children and Youth, *Room for Improvement: Toward Better Educational Outcomes for Children in Care* (Victoria, B.C.: Representative for Children and Youth), 2017.

⁴⁰ Correspondence from Ministry of Education, Dec. 8, 2020.

⁴¹ Deborah Rutman and Carol Hubberstey, *Fostering Success: Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in/from Care* (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria), 2016, https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/FOSTERING-_0.pdf.

⁴² Ministry of Education, *How are we doing? Children and Youth in Government Care and Youth on Youth Agreements*, (Victoria, B.C.: Ministry of Children and Family Development), 2018, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/reports/cyic/cyic-report.pdf>.

⁴³ Data are for those who aged out of care between April and September 2019.

Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM) with income assistance information provided by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR), provided by MCFD Dec. 2, 2020.

⁴⁴ Data are for those who aged out of care between April and September 2019.

Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM) with income assistance information provided by SDPR, provided by MCFD Dec. 2, 2020.

While there is limited data on employment and income levels for youth who have transitioned out of care, research shows that employment rates are generally low and those who are working are primarily working in low-paying jobs.⁴⁵ As noted, there is a high degree of dependence on government assistance in B.C., and income from all sources is low, most commonly below the poverty line:

“With low employment rates and earnings, and heavy dependence on government income assistancethe total income for many youth aging out of care is below designated poverty lines.”⁴⁶



BRIGHT SPOT – Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services

Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services (SCCFS) is a Delegated Aboriginal Agency located in Victoria, B.C., that provides child and family services rooted in Indigenous cultural values and world views while ensuring that Urban Indigenous children and youth grow up connected to family, community and culture.

Culturally Appropriate Coming of Age and Urban Indigenous Youth in Care

SCCFS is partnering on a research project – *Culturally Appropriate Coming of Age and Urban Indigenous Youth in Care* – with the University of Victoria and Island Health, funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Reconciliation Connection Grant and an Island Health Collaborative Grant. This project is part of SCCFS’ mission to connect youth to spirit and identity through familial, hereditary and cultural linkages because these are protective factors that promote safety and well-being among Indigenous people. Coming-of-age teachings are grounded in wisdom held by knowledge keepers, and are shared through songs, stories, ceremonies and traditional rites of passage. (Re)connecting with these teachings supports community healing, wellness and resilience, and helps to prepare young people for their roles in carrying this wisdom forward in a good way.

An Indigenist research paradigm and a community-based participatory research framework guide the research. Early findings suggest that there are opportunities for coming of age to be a culturally appropriate positive action initiative or intervention for Indigenous youth. Five themes have emerged: self-continuity, self-awareness, empowerment, being part of something bigger and support networks. These themes provide evidence that engaging with coming of age teachings and activities protect youth wellness and help youth to build strong foundations from which they can learn about their Indigenous ancestry and history in their own time.

Nest to Wings

SCCFS holds an annual Nest to Wings ceremony to honour young people leaving care on their 19th birthday. Held in various locations such as the Esquimalt Big House and Wawaditla in Thunderbird Park, this ceremony ensures that the young people know they are not alone and the community is there to support them in whatever way they may need. SCCFS begins transition planning with young people at approximately age 16, and this includes youth transition conferences where

⁴⁵ Peter J. Pecora et al., “Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28 (12), (2006): 1,459–1,481.

⁴⁶ Shaffer and Anderson, *Opportunities in Transition*, Report 1, p. 20.

the young person can invite their natural supports, such as their family, best friends and other important people in their lives. In addition, youth workers, social workers and caregivers participate. Acknowledging that most young people will return to their families once they leave care, SCCFS includes family members in this transition planning.

As youth prepare to turn 19, they also prepare to participate in the Nest to Wings ceremony. The ceremony follows local cultural protocols. Each youth is blanketed, and through the blanketing ceremony, the intention is that they will be wrapped in protection and support with their community and ancestors around them. Along with family, members of each young person's Nation or community are invited to attend and witness the transition of these young people. There is drumming, singing and feasting. In addition to words from Elders, others are invited to speak and emphasize the lifelong support available to the young people. Youth are also gifted something of meaning from their individual culture; sometimes it's beaded regalia, a ribbon skirt or a cedar basket. No young person is turned away from participating in this ceremony, no matter what is going on in their lives at that time. The message clearly delivered through this ceremony is that these young people have a community, a connection to their culture, spirit and identity, and a safe place to return to at SCCFS.

Andrea Melor and Denise Cloutier, "Becoming Self-in-Relation: Coming of Age as a Pathway towards Wellness for Urban Indigenous Youth in Care," *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 15, no.1 (2020).
Alysha Brown, Phone conversation, Nov. 30, 2020.

Health and Mental Health

While major differences have not been consistently found between the physical health of youth in care and the general population, it is well documented that there is a higher prevalence of mental health conditions among children and youth in care than there is in the general population. For example, the

"Access to mental health needs to be top of the list for what has to change for youth coming out of care. People are silent with what they're struggling with, but there really needs to be more support to help them manage that."

– A former youth in care

BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence in 2018 found that 82 per cent of the young people included in the review had a reported mental health issue.⁴⁷ Additionally, a 2019 report by the Canadian Mental Health Association reviewed the literature and found that approximately 40 to 60 per cent of young people in care have at least one psychiatric disorder, and that the prevalence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder is about twice the rate of non-care youth.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ BC Coroners Service, *BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence*.

⁴⁸ MJ Zieman, *We Don't Know What to Do With You: Changing the Way We Support the Mental Health of Youth In and From Care* (Vancouver, B.C.: Canadian Mental Health Association B.C. Division), 2019.

Mental health issues for Indigenous youth in care are compounded by the history of colonialism in Canada and B.C.:

“The emotional and mental health issues that stem from Canada’s legacy of institutionalized discrimination and the social determinants of health in First Nations communities continue to worsen...meeting with Indigenous leaders, parents, and families reinforced the troubling reality that many Indigenous parents and families remain trapped in a vicious cycle of trauma leading to neglect.”⁴⁹

CASE STUDY – Anna

Anna is a youth who has been in care since childhood on a Continuing Custody Order (CCO). She is a strong advocate, determined and passionate. Anna first came into contact with the Representative for Children and Youth when she was 17 and requested support to have her name legally changed to better represent the gender she identifies with. Anna is living with significant mental health issues and wanting a name change was deeply personal and important to her. Anna’s anxiety impacted her ability to connect with her care team, making it challenging for her to be involved in her transition planning as she prepared to age out of care. The RCY advocate worked collaboratively with her care team to ensure that Anna was eligible for post-majority support. As her 19th birthday neared, Anna’s anxiety mounted, and she tried to push everyone away. With persistence and compassion, her team continued to collaborate and Anna eventually agreed to meet with a support worker and made strides towards gaining independent living skills and preparing for adulthood.

Substance Use

Studies have consistently found that youth in and from care experience earlier and elevated rates of substance use and substance use disorders when compared with their peers who have not been in the care system.⁵⁰ The adverse experiences associated with child welfare system involvement are also well-documented risk factors for subsequent substance use, with studies confirming that rates of substance use are particularly high among those who transition into adulthood from the care system.⁵¹

Barker et al. conducted a study in Vancouver in 2020 to assess the relationship between transitional service utilization and health and social outcomes among young people who use drugs and have histories

⁴⁹ Grand Chief Ed John, *Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness, and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions: A Report on Indigenous Child Welfare in British Columbia*, 2016, <http://fns.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Jeanne S. Ringel et al., *Improving Child Welfare Outcomes: Balancing Investments in Prevention and Treatment*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation), 2017, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1775-1.html. Thomas P. McDonald, E. Susana Mariscal, Yueqi Yan & Jody Brook, “Substance Use and Abuse for Youths in Foster Care: Results From the Communities That Care Normative Database,” *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 23:4, (2014): 262-268, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1067828X.2014.912093>. MJ Zieman, *We Don’t Know What to Do With You: Changing the Way We Support the Mental Health of Youth In and From Care*.

⁵¹ Sarah Carter Narendorf and J. Curtis McMillen, “Substance use and substance use disorders as foster youth transition to adulthood,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(1), (2010): 113–119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.07.021>.

in the child welfare system. The study included 217 participants, and found that young people who have been in government care are vastly more likely to be experiencing homelessness and substance use than those who have not been in government care. The study looked at the extent to which young people who were no longer in care used transitional services, and whether or not they would have used additional services and supports had they been available. It found long-term benefit for youth who engaged with services but significant gaps in service delivery, and the need for additional harm reduction and substance-use supports for youth transitioning into adulthood.⁵²

CASE STUDY – Emma

Both of Emma's parents grew up in care. MCFD removed Emma from her parents' care when she was five, following concerns of substance misuse and neglect. The following year, Emma was placed under a Continuing Custody Order (CCO). Her mother stayed in contact with her throughout her time in care and they had a close relationship. Emma was described as being a loyal and caring youth who had a genuine concern for others. She was observed as being nurturing and supportive to young children and those with special needs.

When Emma was 14, she was asked to leave the placement she had been in since age five due to challenges coping with Emma's substance use, mental health concerns and deliberate self-harm. Over the next year, Emma lived in seven different foster homes.

At age 15, Emma went to a residential substance use treatment program. She received multiple diagnoses and remained at the program for almost a year. The next year, Emma experienced nine more placements, which all broke down due to conflicts, behavioural challenges and substance misuse. By the age of 16, she was in her 17th placement, a contracted residential resource. She had experienced multiple reported critical injuries while in care and was reluctant to accept the services that were offered to her given her negative experiences in care.

Emma lost her placement in the residential resource at age 18 when the program was closed. She moved 21 times the following year, including in and out of jail and detox centres.

Before turning 19, Emma chose to move into her own apartment. Her youth probation officer was concerned that this choice was not safe, but her social worker said they had no other placements for her. She was evicted a week later and admitted to detox, where she was discharged within a few days. She was using heroin and methamphetamines daily at this point. MCFD placements were offered to her, but because they were far from her family, she slept outside and in camps or shelters instead.

Emma's social worker was not able to meet with her in the months leading up to her leaving care. There is no indication of post-majority supports being in place for Emma, who had no home when she turned 19. She died from an overdose shortly after her 19th birthday.

⁵² Brittany Barker et al., "Long-term benefits of providing transitional services to youth aging-out of the child welfare system: Evidence from a cohort of young people who use drugs in Vancouver, Canada," *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 85 (November 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102912>.

Criminal Justice System Involvement

Studies have found that youth in care have higher rates of involvement with the criminal justice system than the general population. The 2009 RCY report, *Kids, Crime and Care: Youth Justice Experiences and Outcomes*, found that youth in care were involved with the youth criminal justice system at approximately eight times the rate of young people in the general population.⁵³

Additionally, American research has found that child welfare system experience may also increase risk for later criminal justice system involvement.⁵⁴ Young adults with Child Protective Services involvement during childhood were two-to-three times more likely to have been incarcerated or have a criminal conviction than those with no CPS involvement.⁵⁵

While a 2016 report appropriately cautions against applying the results of American studies to Canada due to differences in policing practices and laws between the two countries, it nonetheless concludes:

“However, the clear fact remains that in Canada as well as the United States, the incidence of criminal activity, involvement with the criminal justice system, conviction and incarceration are much higher for youth aging out of care than other youth their age.”⁵⁶

Taken together, the data in this section shows clearly that outcomes for young people who are transitioning out of the child welfare system are substantially poorer than those who have not had this experience. It is critical to understand that these poorer life and developmental outcomes are not inherent in the young people themselves, but rather a product of their life experiences, including the systems they interact with and the colonial history of those systems. These outcomes are not inevitable; they are preventable by changing approaches to child welfare and the process of youth transitioning into adulthood.

In recent years, there has been a shift in how we understand the transition to adulthood from a developmental and societal perspective. Research has illuminated important findings that can inform how child welfare systems structure supports and services in order to achieve better outcomes for young people as they transition to adulthood. In the next section, we share a summary of this research, in addition to results from public opinion polling revealing how British Columbia’s families support their own young adult children.

⁵³ The report found that 35.5 per cent of youth in care had some involvement with the youth criminal justice system by age 17, which is the maximum age jurisdiction under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* in Canada (44 per cent for males and 27.2 per cent for females). This compares to 4.4 per cent of the general population in that same age group (5.8 per cent for males; 2.9 per cent for females).

Representative for Children and Youth, *Kids, Crime and Care: Youth Justice Experiences and Outcomes*, (Victoria, B.C.: Representative for Children and Youth), 2009.

⁵⁴ Mark E. Courtney, Amy Dworsky, Adam Brown and Colleen Cary Katz, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago), 2011, <https://www.chapinhall.org/research/midwest-evaluation-of-the-adult-functioning-of-former-foster-youth/>.

⁵⁵ Joshua Mersky and Colleen Janczewski, “Adult well-being of foster care alumni: Comparisons to other child welfare recipients and a non-child welfare sample in a high-risk, urban setting,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 35 (March 2013): 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilcyouth.2012.11.016>.

⁵⁶ Shaffer and Anderson, *Opportunities in Transition*, 2016.

Shifting Understandings of the Transition to Adulthood

Research on the Adolescent Brain

Over the past several years, there has been a growing understanding of the developmental progression from teenager into young adulthood. Previously understood to be a more abrupt change from “child” to “adult” at age 18 or 19, research now shows a more prolonged and gradual transition extending into a young person’s twenties. In 2011, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative published “*The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning From Foster Care*,” which shared critical neuroscientific data showing “*that in adolescence the brain experiences a period of major development comparable to that of early childhood.*”⁵⁷

Following up on this in 2017, the Annie E. Casey Foundation published “*The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice With Adolescent Brain Development.*”⁵⁸ This paper offers recommendations to individuals working to support young people transitioning out of care on how to effectively use adolescent brain development research. The paper also offers five recommendations for systems that support young people in their transition out of care:

- Train and equip practitioners to understand the role of trauma and racism, and employ effective practices to help young people understand their experiences and develop effective strategies for healing and growth.
- Prioritize legal permanency for all youth.⁵⁹ Use disaggregated data and racial impact analysis tools to hold the system accountable and develop strategies for improvement.
- Understand that foster care carries a level of stigma, effecting successful educational outcomes and opportunities for employment. Provide a range of career pathways.
- Build connections with local housing providers to ensure adequate and safe housing for youth while encouraging youth choice and voice.
- Understand that young parents and their children are both in important stages of their brain development. Support practitioners to help young parents continue to make progress toward their educational and employment goals, build self-sufficiency, maintain healthy relationships and support them as the primary nurturers of their children.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, *The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care*, (Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation), 2011, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-adolescent-brain-foster-care/>.

⁵⁸ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice With Adolescent Brain Development*, (Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation), 2017, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/>.

⁵⁹ Our Office holds a cautious view about legal permanency; while it may be very important to and significant for some youth, there are some limitations and concerns, especially regarding the role of adoption under colonial systems for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children. Additionally, for many young people, other dimensions of permanency are of equal or greater importance.

⁶⁰ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice With Adolescent Brain Development*.

Research such as the above, combined with earlier work done by Dr. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and others on the developmental phase Jensen calls “emerging adulthood,” has generally served to make society aware of the fact that young adults need more support during their transition from adolescents to young adults.⁶¹ Emerging adulthood is now a defined field of study, complete with a journal of its own and an annual conference.

“Emerging adulthood describes the gradual transition young people make to adulthood from about age 18 through 25. This process is marked by gradual independence from family in the areas of residence, employment, education, finances, romance and parenting.”⁶²

Public Perceptions in British Columbia

In 2016, Fostering Change followed up its 2013 Youth Transitions Survey with another one measuring public attitudes, values and perceptions related to young people in and from care in British Columbia. That work included surveying B.C. parents of adult children between ages 19 and 28, providing a baseline for the kinds of informal supports that young adults who do not come out of care receive during their own transition.

Importantly, this survey found that,

“...becoming independent is recognized as a gradual process, and B.C. parents provide exceptional support for their own children aged 19–28. This includes providing financial support, as well as important social and emotional support.”⁶³

“It’s like MCFD thinks you go to sleep one night just before your 19th birthday and wake up the next day knowing everything – what you want to study in school, where to live, how to budget, how to navigate all the stuff of your life.”

– A former youth in care

In fact, the survey found that 92 per cent of British Columbians who are parents of adult children ages 19 to 28 are providing them with a range of financial, social and emotional supports. The same survey found that 90 per cent of British Columbians agree that young people in their 20s need the support of their family, while 86 per cent of British Columbians do not believe that the majority of 19-year-olds have the necessary skills and resources to live away from home and support themselves independently. These trends are echoed in 2016 Canadian census data, which found that nearly two thirds (62.6 per cent) of young adults ages 20 to 24 were living with at least one parent, a figure that has been steadily increasing since 2001.⁶⁴ Taken together, this data demonstrates that parents overall presume their own children will need support during this phase of emerging adulthood.

It is clear that child welfare practice regarding transitions of youth in care into adulthood has not kept pace with brain science, public attitudes or the parenting practices of the vast majority of Canadians.

⁶¹ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road From the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶² Rosemary J. Avery, “An examination of theory and promising practice for achieving permanency for teens before they age out of foster care,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(3) (2009) 399–408, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.10.011>.

⁶³ Fostering Change, *Youth Transitions Survey: Early Results*, 2016, https://www.fosteringchange.ca/2016_youth_transitions_survey_early_results.

⁶⁴ Statistics Canada, “Young adults living with their parents in Canada in 2016,” Aug. 2, 2017, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016008/98-200-x2016008-eng.cfm>.



BRIGHT SPOT – United Kingdom – Staying Put/Staying Close

The “Staying Put” legislation came into effect in 2014. It allows young people in foster care who meet certain conditions to choose to remain with their former foster carers until they reach the age of 21 (presuming this is what they and their carers want), unless the local authority considers that the arrangement is not consistent with the welfare of the young person. In turn, their carers continue to receive financial support. Approximately half (55 per cent) of 18-year-olds remain with their foster carers, and approximately one-quarter (23 per cent) of 19- and 20-year-olds remain living with their carers.

Evaluations of the program have found positive benefits, and that those who “stay put” were significantly more likely to be in full-time education at 19 than their peers who did not stay put. Those who did not stay put were more likely to experience complex transition pathways and housing instability. There are challenges with the Staying Put program, however. It impacts the foster care system by causing foster carers to become unavailable for younger children and evaluations have identified challenges with equitable implementation across the country as well as insufficient financial resources.

In 2016, the “Staying Close” program was developed for those leaving residential care. Pilot programs launched in 2018 provided an enhanced support offering for those leaving residential care. The support includes accommodation close to a youth’s residential care home alongside practical and emotional support from a trusted member of staff from their former children’s home. An evaluation of this pilot is currently underway.

Nerys Roberts et al., Support for Care Leavers, October 2019, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number CBP08429.

Emily R. Munro et al., *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme: Final Report*, (Loughborough, UK: Loughborough University, Centre for Child and Family Research), 2012.

Harsh Reality

By Trent Jack

Walking through the snow, sleeping in the rain, with a heart full of pain, slit veins & this loneliness and shame. Struggling with adolescence as we miss our parents presence. Addiction can cause Pain and Affliction, irresponsible & toxic behaviour can cause eviction. The way I had to grow up is Ugly, Smile on my face even though society has to judge me, I had to box my way out of detox, no more crushing meth rocks, I'm stuck at the gym training and complaining, I guess a normal life is lame, No financial gain. No 15 seconds of fame, Just an alter ego to tame. Walking these cracked Side walks with Suicide thoughts. Deforestation and Child Molestation happens on every Cold Canadian Reservation, I have dreams bigger than constellations. Why do we all Grow up with Substance use and Sexual abuse. Why do we all have the same Fake disguise, When the pain is visible in our eyes. No money for lunch, just enough change for the bus, yeah foster kids! This is us. I am no rapper or entrepreneur, I'm just an Old Soul, residential school kid that climbed out of the sewers. Night life, street lights and fist fights, We can't live right, to some people this life isn't real, Having to steal or make a quick drug deal for the Last Meal. This is a Foster kids mentality, This is the tragedy of a broken family, This is a Harsh Reality.

My name is Trent Jack, a former youth in care. I'm a poet and a boxer, I'm First Nation, I write poetry to vent and let out emotions, I've never been too serious about it, but I definitely see myself in the studio in the future, making music about what it's like to be in foster care.

Post-majority Supports in B.C.: Current State

After-care Supports in B.C.

B.C. youth may be eligible for various services after they leave care. For most of these young people, the transition out of care means access to either the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program or a Persons with a Disability (PWD) designation that enables long-term disability income support. At first glance, young people appear to have an array of resources such as AYA and the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program after 19 to support educational development and successful transition into adulthood. Accordingly, B.C. is often held up as a leader in Canada for its progressive approach to post-majority supports. However, upon closer investigation, this network of services and supports is mired by complicated and restrictive eligibility criteria, inequitable access across the province, disproportionately negative outcomes for Indigenous peoples and insufficient resources to support the young people in most need.

The Representative and several advocacy bodies have reported on these issues and made recommendations for improvement over the past several years. Table 1 below highlights a few of these key reports issued in the past six years.

Table 1. Key reports on youth transitioning into adulthood

Name of report	Author	Year
On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth as They Leave Government Care	Representative for Children and Youth	2014
Paige's Story: Abuse, Indifference and a Young Life Discarded	Representative for Children and Youth	2015
Room for Improvement: Toward Better Education Outcomes for Children in Care	Representative for Children and Youth	2017
Broken Promises: Alex's Story	Representative for Children and Youth	2017
Relationships Matter for Youth 'Aging Out' of Care	Melanie Doucet	2018
BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence	BC Coroners Service	2018
"We Don't Know What to do With You": Changing the Way we Support the Mental Health of Youth In and From Care	Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division	2019
Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside	Downtown Eastside Women's Centre	2019
From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions From Those with Lived Expertise	Katherine McParland/Representative for Children and Youth	2020

Agreements with Young Adults

The Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program was first introduced in 1996 under the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act*, and has been revised since its inception.⁶⁵ Agreements with Young Adults is a needs-based program set up as a contractual and transactional relationship between youth formerly from care or on a youth agreement and the ministry. These youth are expected to meet certain criteria and outcomes in order to be eligible and if these are not realized, they are removed from the program. Our Office has been told that in some cases this occurs with little or no consultation – experiences that were also shared by some of those who were consulted in the ministry’s 2019 report, “*What We Heard About Youth Transitions*.”⁶⁶

Agreements with Young Adults are available to young people who leave care with certain legal statuses, such as a Continuing Custody Order, or much smaller numbers of those who turn 19 while in the

“Something I always like to ask of every MCFD worker when I get the chance: Would you treat your own kid the way you’re treating us?”

– A former youth in care

custody of the Director as per the *Adoptions Act*. AYAs are also available to those transitioning out of a Youth Agreement. The eligibility criteria for AYA exclude youth in other types of care under the *CFCS Act*, such as temporary care orders, voluntary care agreements and special needs agreements.⁶⁷ Using the current age eligibility of 19 to 26 years inclusive, data from MCFD shows that as of March 31, 2020, there are 7,298

young people who have aged out of all types of care in the past eight years. Of these, 6,491 (89 per cent) aged out with legal statuses that make them eligible for AYA benefits.^{68, 69} This leaves 807 young people completely ineligible for AYA benefits when they transition out of care, due to their care status at time of aging out.⁷⁰

Youth can enter into an agreement if they are enrolled in either a vocational or educational program, or by taking part in a rehabilitative or life skills program. Originally, the AYA program provided a maximum total of 24 months of support for youth enrolled in an educational or vocational program. Since 2018, AYAs have been expanded to provide a total 48 months of support that a youth can access sometime between their 19th and 27th birthdays. AYAs can be paused, restarted or extended as needed.

⁶⁵ Revised Statutes of British Columbia, *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, 72 § (1996).

⁶⁶ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions and the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia* (Victoria: B.C.: Ministry of Children and Family Development), February, 2019, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/services-supports-for-parents-with-young-children/reporting-monitoring/00-public-ministry-reports/what_we_heard_feb_2019.pdf?bcgovtm=Cowichan%20Valley%20Newsletter

⁶⁷ Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Agreements with Young adults.”

⁶⁸ Of these 6,491, 3,466 aged out of care as a CCO (Continuing Custody Order) and 2,983 aged out of a Youth Agreement.

Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

⁶⁹ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

⁷⁰ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

Currently, AYA support can be up to \$1,250 per month, equivalent to \$15,000 annual income. The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction recognizes the poverty line for a single person in B.C. to be approximately \$20,000 annual income.⁷¹ Given this, a young person who is receiving the full amount of AYA support for a 12-month period is living well below the poverty line established by government.

AYA is a needs-based program; recipients receive funding to cover their basic costs such as housing, utilities and food. Youth receive an amount that covers their specific expenses, so rates vary. The ministry's 2019 *What We Heard about Youth Transitions* report noted, “many young adults noted feeling discouraged and deterred to be employed while on AYA, as their AYA funding is ‘clawed back’ when their employment income reaches a certain amount.”⁷² In contrast, another provincial government program – Persons with Disabilities benefits administered by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction – expressly encourages work as well as enabling participants to achieve an income that approaches or even exceeds the poverty line by allowing single recipients to retain up to \$12,000 per year additional income without clawback.⁷³

Other supports offered by MCFD within the AYA program at the discretion of MCFD offices include post-secondary tuition and housing start-up costs, such as security deposits.⁷⁴

“I’m on AYA right now, and it doesn’t even cover your basic needs, and I’m at the max. I’m working three jobs, going to school full-time.”

– Youth consultation participant

Agreements with Young Adults: Education / Vocational training

For young people accessing AYA on an education program, the required course load varies depending on whether a youth is designated as a Person with a Disability (PWD). Youth with a PWD designation are required to take a 40 per cent course load to qualify for AYA, while other youth must take a 60 per cent course load to be eligible.⁷⁵ Youth accessing AYAs are expected to supplement their income with loans, external scholarships and bursaries, jobs and savings. Prior to 2018, AYAs terminated during summer months; however, young people are now able to stay on AYA during the summer school break.

While some young people transitioning into adulthood are ready to go to school, AYAs provide little to no assistance for those who need transitional support or other resources to get to a position where school is possible. For many young people, AYAs are available as a solution only if a youth is ready to attend

⁷¹ Government of British Columbia, “B.C. Poverty Reduction,” accessed Nov. 20, 2020. <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction/poverty-reduction-101/>.

⁷² The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions*.

⁷³ Government of British Columbia. “Disability Assistance: Annual earnings exemptions”, accessed Nov. 20, 2020, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/disability-assistance/on-disability-assistance/annual-earnings-exemption>.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Youth and Young Adults Cost Estimate Guide,” Sept. 2019, https://assets.nationbuilder.com/vancouverfoundation/pages/245/attachments/original/1551228698/AYA_Cost_Estimate_Guide-MCFD_2018.pdf?1551228698.

⁷⁵ Ministry of Children and Family Development. “Agreements with Young Adults.” Accessed Nov. 10, 2020. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/teens-in-foster-care/agreements-with-young-adults>. A Director of Operations or equivalent position in a DAA can approve a course load falling outside of these requirements since Oct. 2020.

Note that the requirements set out in these sections reflect the regular policies, not the temporary provisions in place during the pandemic.

school, with few to no provincial resources offered to help build skills and develop a support system needed to succeed academically.⁷⁶

Agreements with Young Adults: Life Skills Programs

Life skills programs were added as a way to access AYAs in early 2017.⁷⁷ This change addressed a gap in the program's eligibility requirements, which previously provided support for those ready to attend post-secondary but missed those who needed different kinds of support. Life skills programs offer support for skills such as money management, time management, decision-making and problem-solving. Additionally, many such programs focus on employment readiness and housing support.

However, the limited availability of support for these community-based life skills programs remains a major barrier. MCFD screens existing life skills programs and may then give approved-program status that enables eligible youth to access AYA for as long as they are in the program.⁷⁸ But to date, only 15 providers in 11 communities have life skills programs that have been approved by MCFD to accept AYA participants. None of these pre-existing programs receive funding to facilitate acceptance of AYA participants, who are required to attend at least five hours a week.⁷⁹ Youth receive AYA funding only for the duration of the program they are in, which ranges from one to six months.⁸⁰

Agreements with Young Adults: Access and Utilization

Almost two-thirds of youth who have been eligible for AYA have not accessed the program. An analysis of MCFD data shows that only 36 per cent of the young people eligible for AYA benefits between the

"I feel like I will get through the challenges of all of this, but there are a lot of youth who are slipping through the cracks, and nobody's paying attention to them."

– A former youth in care

fiscal years 2012/2013 and 2019/2020 have received them at least one time during their several years of age eligibility.⁸¹ Since AYA agreements are limited to periods of a few months each, subject to renewal, and may also be terminated due to non-compliance with program requirements and other issues, these are admissions data which do not capture the actual number and proportion of eligible youth on an AYA at any given time (i.e., caseload). The caseload for AYA on March 31, 2020 is estimated at 600 young people or less than 10 per cent (9.2 per cent) of the estimated total number of young people eligible for AYA on that date.

⁷⁶ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions and the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia*.

⁷⁷ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, "B.C. Leads Canada, Extends Support for Youth Aging out of Care," *B.C. Gov News*, Oct. 17, 2016, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2016CFD0047-002023>.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Children and Family Development. "Agreements with Young Adults." Accessed Nov. 10, 2020. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/teens-in-foster-care/agreements-with-young-adults>.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Children and Family Development. "Agreements with Young Adults." Accessed Nov. 10, 2020. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/teens-in-foster-care/agreements-with-young-adults>.

⁸⁰ AYA policy, effective Oct. 1, 2020, provides that the agreement should be for a period that is based on the young adult's program, covering the next interval, semester or scheduled program break, as the case may be. This policy change was not part of the pandemic response.

⁸¹ Of the 6,491 young people who aged out of care from FY 2012/13 to FY 2019/2020 with care statuses that make them eligible for AYA, 2,366 have received AYA benefits.

Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

Data is not currently available on whether or not a young person has completed the program for which they were receiving AYA support.

MCFD data shows that the majority of young people who have accessed AYA benefits access them within the same fiscal year that they age out of care. As shown in Table 2 below, far fewer youth access the program after their first post-majority year even though they remain eligible for the program.⁸² This not only underlines the critical need for effective transitional planning well before a youth ages out in order to maximize that initial first post-majority year of eligibility, but also the need for outreach services to engage eligible youth in later years who did not initially access the program. Currently, there are no dedicated outreach services for this purpose.

“Support can’t be a one-way door,” says a Métis Nation BC staff member. “There are pathways away [from care], but we also need pathways back into supports. When a young adult is saying ‘I need support, but I don’t know where to get it, who to ask, what I’m eligible for’ – in that continuum, there needs to be a place that these young people can come back to.”

Table 2. Number of young adults accessing AYA after turning 19 (by fiscal year)

Fiscal year of 19 th birthday	AYA 2012/2013	AYA 2013/2014	AYA 2014/2015	AYA 2015/2016	AYA 2016/2017	AYA 2017/2018	AYA 2018/2019	AYA 2019/2020	Total with AYA	Total youth eligible for AYA with CCO and YAG who turned 19
2012/2013	107	25	25	20	24	20	26	18	265	861
2013/2014		95	30	25	35	21	29	25	260	814
2014/2015			128	28	24	39	34	39	292	860
2015/2016				128	32	36	50	42	288	815
2016/2017					158	42	48	37	285	797
2017/2018						212	67	60	339	811
2018/2019							260	75	335	770
2019/2020								302	302	763
Total	107	120	183	201	273	370	514	598	2366	6491

Data notes: some youth in the dataset had application dates prior to their 19th birthday; however, closer analysis confirmed that youth did not receive funds through the AYA program until after their 19th birthday. These youth are counted in the fiscal year they received funding, rather than the year they applied for AYA.

The last column on the right of this table includes the number of eligible youth by the fiscal year in which they turned 19.

The ministry has worked to increase the number of AYA applications, with some success. Table 3 shows that access in the first year of eligibility has increased from 12 per cent in 2012/2013 to 40 per cent in 2019/2020. However, the access pattern to date indicates that the remaining 60 per cent are less likely to access AYA as they move beyond their first year out of care.⁸³ Moreover, this data does not account for the duration of support and if one looks at the actual proportion of the total number of eligible young people between 19 and 26 being supported at a particular point in time (March 2020) then, as stated earlier, the proportion is far smaller – less than 10 per cent.

⁸² Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

⁸³ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

Table 3. Youth transitioning to adulthood by AYA eligibility, and first AYA application in fiscal year of 19th birthday (2012/13 through 2019/20)

Fiscal year	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year	Per cent of eligible who received AYA within fiscal year of 19 th birthday	Total eligible
2012/13	754	107	12%	861
2013/14	719	95	12%	814
2014/15	732	128	15%	860
2015/16	687	128	16%	815
2016/17	639	158	20%	797
2017/18	599	212	26%	811
2018/19	510	260	34%	770
2019/20	461	302	40%	763
Total	5101	1390	21%	6491

Access and Utilization: Variability Among Subgroups

MCFD data demonstrates that access to AYA is inequitable among certain sub-groups and across regions of the province. The data shows some important differences in access by gender and by First Nations, Métis and Inuit status compared with non-Indigenous young people, as well as by education level.

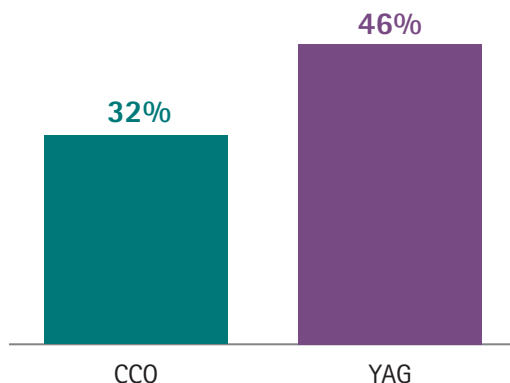
Those Who Aged Out from Youth Agreements Compared with Those Who Aged Out from a Continuing Custody Order

MCFD data shows that young people who were on a Youth Agreement at age 19 accessed AYA benefits at a higher rate than those who had Continuing Custody Order status. As shown in Figure 2, 46 per cent of those with Youth Agreements in the most recent fiscal year (2019/20) accessed AYA benefits in the same fiscal year that they aged out, while only 32 per cent of those with CCO status accessed AYA benefits.⁸⁴ Similar patterns are seen in data from previous years, and this data can be found in the Appendix.

One possible explanation for this difference is that young people on a Youth Agreement are already living independently, so it may be less of a transition for them to continue that independence in the form of an AYA. These differences underscore the critical need for life skills and independent living skills for young people before they transition to adulthood.

⁸⁴ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

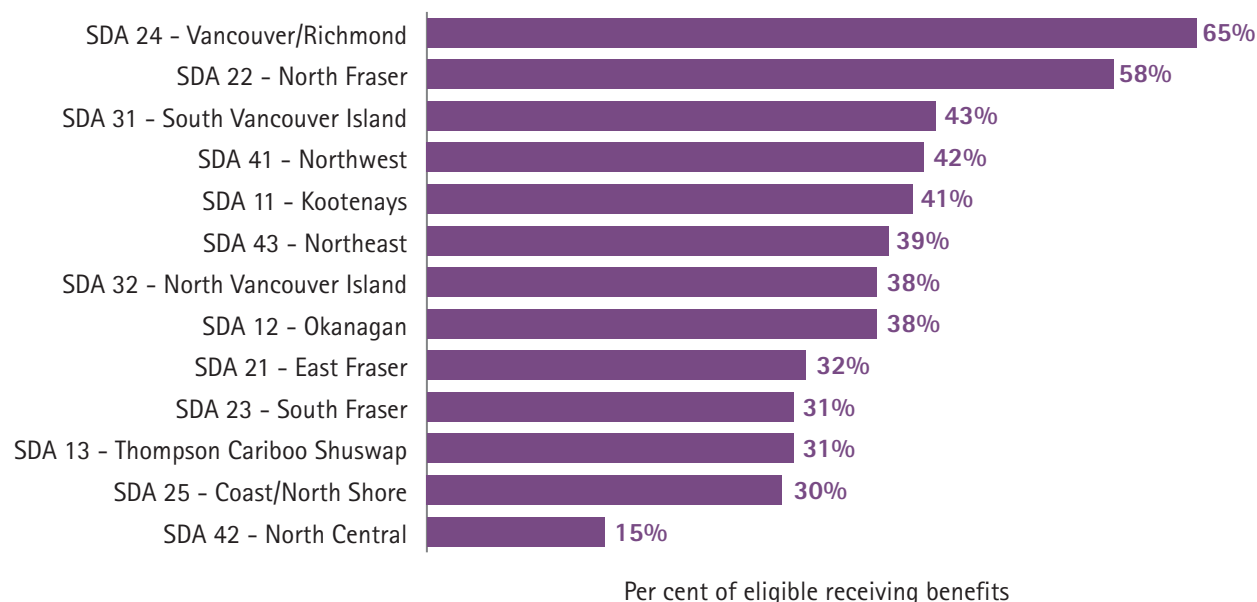
Figure 2. Per cent of youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 who received AYA within the fiscal year they turned 19



Regional Variation

As shown in Figure 3 below, there is significant variability in AYA access among eligible youth in the various Service Delivery Areas. The highest rate of access was in the Vancouver/Richmond SDA, where 65 per cent of eligible youth received benefits in 2019/20. The lowest rate of access was in the North Central SDA (includes Quesnel, Nechako Lakes and Prince George), with an uptake of just 15 per cent.⁸⁵ Data from previous years shows similar regional variations, and can be found in the Appendix, Table B. Further efforts to understand this regional variation are warranted and may be related to differences in how the program is communicated or administered across the province.

Figure 3. Variability in AYA access rates across service delivery areas in 2019/2020



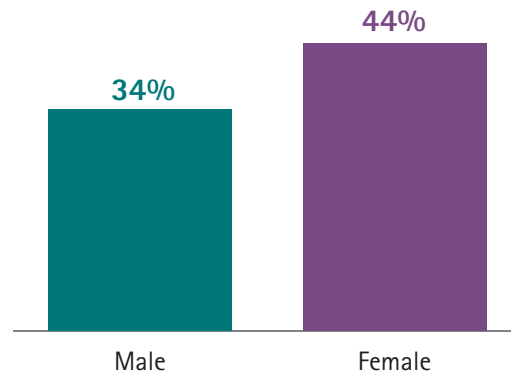
Data Note: Does not include: Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, one case not assigned to an SDA, and one case “not applicable”.

⁸⁵ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

Gender Differences

MCFD data shows that females access AYA at an appreciably higher rate than males. Figure 4 below shows that in fiscal year 2019/2020, 44 per cent of females accessed AYA benefits within the year that they turned 19, whereas only 34 per cent of males accessed benefits in this same time period.⁸⁶ These access rates are similar to patterns in the data from previous years, and the data can be found in the Appendix, Table C.

Figure 4. Per cent of youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 who received AYA within the fiscal year they turned 19, by gender



Access to Benefits: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Youth Compared with Non-Indigenous Youth

Young people served by Delegated Aboriginal Agencies accessed AYA benefits in the 2019/20 fiscal year at a lower rate (36 per cent) than young people served through MCFD Service Delivery Areas (41 per cent).⁸⁷ Advocates working with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous young people have said that the AYA program does not work well for many Indigenous young people:

“The AYA program, a lot of our [Métis] youth don’t qualify. It’s too rigid. I think they need to really look at this program or develop another program for youth who don’t fit this. A lot of the kids aren’t ready to head into school ... We limit those kids and don’t get them the support they need because of the way the program is designed.”

– Métis Nation staff member

Figure 5 below shows that non-Indigenous young people access AYA at an appreciably higher rate than First Nations, Métis and Inuit young people. In fiscal year 2019/2020, 46 per cent of non-Indigenous young people accessed AYA within the year they turned 19, as compared with 33 per cent of Indigenous young people.⁸⁸ Data from previous years shows similar patterns in access rates for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-Indigenous young people, and can be found in the Appendix, Table B.

⁸⁶ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

⁸⁷ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

⁸⁸ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

Figure 5. Per cent of youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 who received AYA within the fiscal year they turned 19, by Indigenous status



Level of Education

MCFD data clearly demonstrates that the higher the level of education a young person has achieved prior to their 19th birthday, the more likely they are to receive AYA benefits, as described in Table 4. In fiscal year 2019/2020, half of the young people who graduated from secondary school went on to receive AYA benefits within the year of their 19th birthday, while of those who have some secondary school but have not completed it, only 35 per cent received benefits.⁸⁹ Similar patterns are seen in data from previous years, as described in the Appendix, Table E.

Table 4. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2019/20 by education level

Education level	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (per cent of total)	Total
No secondary school	8	2 (20%)	10
Some secondary school	227	123 (35%)	350
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen Certificate)	25	2 (7%)	27
Secondary school graduation	116	118 (50%)	234
B.C. adult graduation diploma	55	34 (38%)	89
Total	431	279	710

Note: No education data was available for 53 individuals.

The data above reinforces what young people have often said about the AYA program: it is not equitably accessible to all young people who are eligible. Male youth, First Nations and Métis youth and youth with lower education levels are all less likely to access AYA support than female youth, non-Indigenous youth and youth who have graduated from high school. In addition, the variability of access rates in different regions of the province indicates issues with equitable access. Generally speaking, those young people who are more likely to access AYA support are those who likely experience fewer barriers in their transition to adulthood and are more likely to have the skills and supports necessary to access and make use of the program.

⁸⁹ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

“Many young people have said that they see this more as a financial support, and they don’t necessarily see it as social support,” says Bart Knudsgaard, Policy Lead, Directors Forum Secretariat. “Many of the Indigenous youth who are transitioning need that social support to help them. Connections to cultural and land-based services are really critical.”

The ministry has sought to increase access and awareness of the Agreements with Young Adults program.⁹⁰ Access is difficult for some young people due to barriers such as the opt-in nature of the program, meaning young people not only need to know about the program but how to complete the application for it. Inconsistent service delivery within the province is also a barrier.⁹¹ The needs-based nature of the program requires youth to pursue other funding sources first, a challenge that can disproportionately impact First Nations youth. For example, the Representative has been informed that some First Nations youth have been required to seek a letter from their band denying funding for post-secondary education before being considered for an AYA.

As mentioned above, since the AYA program is transactional in nature, it feels impersonal for many youth. This dynamic can lead many young people to disengage with services after care, especially those who may have had historically difficult and untrustworthy experiences with the child welfare system. Some disillusioned youth may leave care and not wish to return to their workers and the system that was present and participatory in much of their trauma. Additionally, research has found that the choice to refuse further assistance or extended care is one of the first decisions that young people transitioning to adulthood are free to make. This choice is, in fact, an expression of their personal agency.⁹²

In the ministry’s own 2019 report on AYA consultations, the report authors write:

“The process for accessing AYA is too complex and onerous. The current application process for the AYA program is a challenge for young adults, as the application form itself requires a lot of information and many young adults do not have the necessary information or technology to complete the application process. Many young adults must then seek out someone to support them with the application, which can be difficult for them to find, and if they do find someone, they must then re-tell their care history to someone new. For many youth, especially those who have previous relationships with a DAA, attending or returning to an MCFD office for support is not something they want to do.”⁹³

Low access rates of AYA may be at least partially explained through the AYA program’s opt-in approach. Young people must access AYA intentionally and on their own volition to receive income support. “It should be mandatory that social workers tell youth about AYAs and how to access them,” stressed one youth consultation participant.

⁹⁰ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions and the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia*.

⁹¹ Different SDAs administer the AYA program differently. For example, in some SDAs there are AYA workers that oversee the program, and in other SDAs guardianship workers oversee the program.

⁹² Chris Lee and Jill Duerr Berrick, “Experiences of youth who transition to adulthood out of care: Developing a theoretical framework,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 46(C), 2014,78-84, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.08.005>.

⁹³ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions and the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia*.

AYAs are administered differently across the province. In some Service Delivery Areas (SDAs), youth who seek AYAs are referred to specific social workers to manage their application and ensure compliance with educational and other requirements. Other SDAs take a different approach. In some areas of the Lower Mainland area for example, dedicated AYA workers solely administer AYAs and are a central point of contact for service providers and youth. These AYA workers generally hold significantly higher caseloads than protection or guardianship workers and are new workers in a youth's life after care.⁹⁴ In addition, variability in interpretation and application of rules further compounds differences in administration of AYA across the province.⁹⁵ These differences in administration may in part be explained by current funding arrangements; while the ministry is funded for AYA payments, it is not funded for the field operations staffing required to administer and support the program.

After a series of consultations in 2019 for *What We Heard*, the report identified common concerns with the AYA program:⁹⁶

- eligibility and access, discussed as “too restrictive and complex and not available to all youth and young adults aging out of care”
- the lack of holistic or wraparound supports creating what the ministry describes as its “current transactional approach”
- insufficient funding levels for individual youth to cover basic costs, and a lack of any funding toward mental health or other resources.

Life skills programs are sometimes utilized as a way to access AYA funding. For example, the *Branches AYA Life Skills Program* at Aunt Leah's Place states on its website that the “project removes barriers to eligible youth to receive AYA funding.”⁹⁷ However, it is important to note that time spent with AYA funding in life skills programming counts against the total amount of time allowable in the AYA program (48 months). If a youth spends time on AYA in a life skills program, this reduces the number of months available to participate in post-secondary education, for example, with AYA support.

“[As] former foster youth, we aren't advocating for AYA because it wasn't used well to begin with. I'm looking for better and new things now, because when we're advocating for change, it's like AYA is too broken to fix.”

– Youth consultation participant

While there certainly have been improvements, AYA to date has served as an ineffective placeholder for adequate and sufficient supports for youth transitioning to adulthood from care after 19. The program has been mired in access problems from its beginning, and it has never served more than 40 per cent of eligible youth in their first year of leaving care.⁹⁸ Premier John Horgan stated in his 2020 mandate letter to Minister Mitzi Dean and in several media conferences that services must be amended “to

⁹⁴ Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, “Minutes,” Thursday, June 20, 2019. AYA caseloads quoted by Sarah Chown at 9:55am. <https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/HansardCommittee/41st4th/fgs/20190620am-Finance-Abbotsford-n85.html>.

⁹⁵ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions and the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia*.

⁹⁶ The Ministry of Children and Family Development, *What We Heard About Youth Transitions and the Family Based Caregiver Payment Model in British Columbia*.

⁹⁷ Aunt Leah's Place, “Branches AYA Life Skills Program,” accessed Nov. 16, 2020, <https://auntleahs.org/services/education-training/branches-aya-life-skills-program/>.

⁹⁸ Source: Integrated Case Management System (ICM), provided by MCFD Oct. 2, 2020.

offer supports to all youth aging out of care who need it, not just a few.”⁹⁹ Despite some progress, this admirable aspiration remains just that – an aspiration.

Post-Secondary Education Funding

Support for post-secondary education access for former B.C. youth in care has grown among post-secondary institutions themselves. Challenged by the Representative in 2013, colleges and universities across B.C. began to offer tuition waivers and other supports to former youth in care.¹⁰⁰ A number of public post secondary-institutions now offer tuition waiver programs, and many employ full-time support staff to provide assistance to students on tuition waivers.

The 2017 introduction of the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program (PTWP) formalized supports available for young people and rapidly expanded access to post-secondary bursaries for youth with care experience. This marked the first time that former youth in care were guaranteed tuition, though funding in previous years was made available through a variety of ad-hoc scholarships and bursary programs, such as the Learning Fund for Young Adults and the Youth Education Assistance Fund, described further in this section.

The expansion of post-secondary supports signals the importance that government places on post-secondary education for former youth in care. However, while more supports have become available over time, it continues to be difficult for some young people to navigate the system and find the appropriate supports.

The Provincial Tuition Waiver Program

This provincially administered and funded program under the Advanced Education and Skills Training expanded eligibility criteria for youth coming out of care and ensured a public financial commitment to supporting access to post-secondary education. Attending post-secondary became a more realistic option

“You get some health benefits through AYA, but you need to ask and ask to get the approvals, and then the coverage isn't enough. You also have to pay for everything up front, and wait for maybe three months to get reimbursed. For eyeglasses, you get \$200 maximum. I didn't even bother trying when I needed glasses.”

– A former youth in care

for former children and youth in care, provided that they had spent at least two continuous or cumulative years in care and were between ages 19 to 26. A noteworthy difference between the PTWP and AYA programs, administered by Advanced Education and Skills Training and MCFD, respectively, is eligibility in relation to a young person's care status. The PTWP is much more expansive in its eligibility, including all forms of care as well as support through the former Child in the Home of a Relative program. In contrast, the AYA program is limited to youth on a Continuing Custody Order and in other guardianship situations, or on Youth Agreements. To be eligible for AYA, a young

person must have left care or a Youth Agreement at age 19, whereas the PTWP is available as long as the youth has a history of being in care for at least two years at some point in their life.

⁹⁹ Vancouver Island University, “Premier Horgan Expands Tuition Waiver for Former Youth in Care | News | VIU,” *VIU News*, Sept. 6, 2017, <https://news.viu.ca/premier-horgan-expands-tuition-waiver-former-youth-care>.

Office of the Premier, *Mandate Letter to Minister Dean*, Victoria: Government of British Columbia, November 2020, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/MCFD-Dean-mandate.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Tamara Cunningham, “VIU Tuition Waiver Program Targets Youth in Care,” *Nanaimo News Bulletin*, Aug. 22, 2013, <https://www.nanaimobulletin.com/news/viu-tuition-waiver-program-targets-youth-in-care/>.

The tuition waiver program has seen significant success. The most recent available data from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training shows that 1,185 students have accessed the program.¹⁰¹ Of these students, significantly more are female (70 per cent) than male (29 per cent).¹⁰² Additionally, students who have received tuition waivers are more likely to be non-Indigenous (60 per cent) than Indigenous (39 per cent).¹⁰³ These variations in utilization reflect the variability seen in access rates for the Agreement with Young Adults program.

The Provincial Tuition Waiver program has been praised for creating new opportunities for young people and signaling a more promising future for them after care. While there is a great deal to celebrate, the program does not work for everyone, as the government has acknowledged. The PTWP is invaluable for those who are ready to attend post-secondary, but lacks the wraparound services and supports needed to ensure the success of youth who need more time to be ready for that step. The provincial government has talked about a more comprehensive program with wraparound supports, being developed in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Development as part of the 2018/19 budget process.¹⁰⁴ This program has yet to be developed and implemented.

Provincially Funded and Administered Scholarships and Bursaries

Many efforts have been made over the years in B.C. to support post-secondary education for former youth in care, including several scholarship and bursary funds in addition to the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program. These funds include The Learning Fund for Young Adults, Youth Futures Education Fund and the Youth Education Assistance Fund. The PGT Educational Assistance Fund is a privately funded and publicly administered scholarship held by the Public Guardian and Trustee for former youth in care attending post-secondary education.

As described in Table 7 below, each of the funds are independently managed and set out different outcomes for applicants. For example, the Youth Futures Education Fund (YFEF) and Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAF) are both bursary programs, but YFEF provides funding to tuition waiver recipients, while YEAF seeks scholarship applications from youth ages 19 to 24 with certain care statuses on their 19th birthday.¹⁰⁵ They are financed with different pools of money, have separate governance models and are administered independently by various charities.

While efforts to support post-secondary education for former youth in care have certainly been made, there is a lack of coherence and comprehensiveness to the current supports. The landscape of post-secondary funding options and available bursaries can be challenging for some youth to understand and navigate.

¹⁰¹ Source: Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, provided Nov. 13, 2020.

¹⁰² Gender data was unavailable for 5 (1 per cent) of students.

Source: Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, provided Nov. 13, 2020.

¹⁰³ Data on whether a student is Indigenous or non-Indigenous was unavailable for 6 (1 per cent) of students.

Source: Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, provided Nov. 13, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Office of the Premier, “Premier Horgan Expands Tuition Waiver for Former Youth in Care,” *B.C. Gov News*, Sept. 1, 2017, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017PREM0076-001509>.

¹⁰⁵ “Youth Educational Assistance Fund for Former Youth in Care,” *StudentAid BC*, June 2020, https://studentaidbc.ca/sites/all/files/form-library/yeaf_application.pdf.

Table 7. Summary of education supports for B.C. youth from care: support offered and eligibility

Program name	Where does the money come from?	Eligibility criteria	Brief description
Provincial Tuition Waiver	Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 19-26 inclusive • 24 cumulative months in care including Child in the Home of a Relative • First program only • Must apply 	Provides unlimited tuition fees for a first post-secondary program
Agreements with Young Adults	Ministry of Children and Family Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19-26 inclusive • Turned 19 with either a Youth Agreement or Continuing Custody Order care status • Maximum 48 months • Must apply 	Income support up to \$1,250 per month available to eligible youth, for up to 48 months
Youth Education Assistance Fund	Ministry of Children and Family Development and private foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19-24 inclusive • Had either a Continuing Custody Order care status, or were under Guardianship of the Director as per the <i>Adoptions Act</i> • Had to turn 19 under either status or have been in care for 5 years before being adopted • Independent applications which are administered by Student Aid BC 	Bursaries of up to \$5,500
Youth Futures Education Fund	Ministry of Children and Family Development, Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, private foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students accessing a tuition waiver at a B.C. post-secondary institution are eligible for funding • Funds are administered by United Way of the Lower Mainland 	Provides funds for books and supplies, living expenses, and other costs. Funds per student range from \$50 – \$4500
Learning Fund for Young Adults	Ministry of Children and Family Development matches federal program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born after Jan. 1 2007, in care for at least one year. Can access after turning 17 • First disbursements in 2024 	Administered by the Victoria Foundation, MCFD contributes to match the British Columbia Training and Education Savings Grant which provides \$1,200 for every B.C. child born after 2006
PGT Educational Assistance Fund	Administered by Public Guardian and Trustee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have had a Continuing Custody Order care status and be at least 19 at time of application • Applicants must demonstrate financial need 	Two private donors created the fund which is held and administered by the Public Guardian and Trustee Eligible youth may receive bursaries from the fund
Post-secondary institution-specific tuition waiver programs	University Student Aid budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each university has varying policies that provide for youth in care. Some are B.C.-specific, and some provide bursaries in addition to tuition 	Many B.C. post-secondary institutions offer waivers to former youth in care

Youth Not Yet Ready for Post-Secondary Education

The growth in post-secondary funding sources for youth in care after 19 has resulted in an expansion of post-secondary access for former youth in care. Unfortunately, these programs can exclude those who need support before they can begin to think about attending post-secondary. As noted earlier, the high school graduation rates for children in care, while improving to some extent in recent years, are poor in comparison to their non-care peers.¹⁰⁶ Scholarships and bursaries are not sufficient to support these young people in addressing the factors in their lives that put them at a disadvantage in terms of readiness for post-secondary education.¹⁰⁷

Mental Health and Substance Use Supports

“The regular mental health system does not fit for our kids. It just doesn’t work. One of the things that I have seen work really well is when we bring the Elders in; they have the wisdom to help the kids. A lot of what we see when we talk “mental health” is trauma, plain and simple trauma. Those kids finding and feeling like they have someone who cares about them, who has the ability to work with them from that trauma place, but not in the regular sense of the way the regular mental health system is set up, that just perpetuates the trauma in my opinion. We’ve got to go back and look at the ways things were in the old days. Some of the things that were developed by the Nations a long time ago still work really well today. We’ve thrown away all of that history and we’re trying to look at how do we fix this problem. We actually have a lot of the answers in front of us if we just look.”

– Métis Nation BC staff member

Mental health has remained a long-standing issue for youth with experience in care as young people and other stakeholders continue to raise the need for increased focus. In June 2019, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA) released its 10-year vision, and accompanying three-year plan of actions, for mental health and addictions services for the province. That report, echoing previous reports from the Representative and others, acknowledged that the current system of mental health services for children and youth is a fragmented patchwork of services *“defined by waitlists and crises.”*¹⁰⁹

“I think the worst part of my life was the first year and a half after I got put on independent living at age 18. That’s an age when you don’t want to look like you need any help. I’m 24 now and have no problem asking for help, but at 18, you want to look like, “I got this!” Except you don’t.”

– A former youth in care

¹⁰⁶ Representative for Children and Youth, *“Room for Improvement: Toward Better Education Outcomes for Children in Care”* (Victoria, B.C.: Representative for Children and Youth), October 2017.

¹⁰⁷ “PGT Educational Assistance Fund,” Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia, July 15, 2020, <https://www.trustee.bc.ca/services/estate-and-personal-trust-services/Pages/pgt-educational-assistance-fund.aspx>.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Children and Family Development, “Education Savings Fund Established for Youth in Care,” *B.C. Gov News*, June 9, 2015), https://archive.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/news_releases_2013-2017/2015CFD0025-000826.htm.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, *A Pathway to Hope: A roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia* (Victoria, B.C.: Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions), June 2019, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/initiatives-plans-strategies/mental-health-and-addictions-strategy/bcmentalhealthroadmap_2019web-5.pdf.

CASE STUDY – Jack

This is the story of 20-year-old Jack, a former youth in care. He's one of many young people who have shared stories with RCY of long and fruitless searches for the supports they needed after transitioning out of care. In Jack's case, he came close to finding what he needed after months of knocking on one closed door after another, only to have that final door close on him, too. His situation is not unique.

Jack needed and wanted mental health support. In high school, he struggled to maintain his mental wellness, which was affecting his ability to keep up with his academic workload. He was only able to see a counsellor through his school every couple of weeks – not enough to meet his needs, plus the counselling was geared toward school and not overall mental health. Jack went looking in his community for mental health support. But the first agency that he called did not offer the service that he wanted and referred him elsewhere. He connected with that next agency only to end up referred to a third one. Like the others, that organization did not offer what he was looking for either.

He had a social worker through the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program, who sent him information on where to find private counselling for free or at reduced cost. The worker advised Jack to speak with his family doctor and call the local Adult Mental Health team for an intake meeting. Jack did get a referral from his doctor to a therapist for specialized counselling. But the counsellor did not have the expertise needed to provide the therapeutic support that Jack needed. Clear on his mental health needs and the type of therapy that would support his mental wellness, Jack decided not to pursue sessions with this counsellor, or participate in the group therapy that Adult Mental Health was offering.

Meanwhile, Jack's RCY advocate had been researching supports in the community. But there were no publicly funded agencies providing the specialized counselling Jack needed. The advocate reviewed AYA policy and learned that supervisors have some funding discretion in extenuating circumstances, in cases where a mental health program is not covered by another ministry or service provider. On Jack's behalf, the advocate reached out to Jack's AYA social worker. They talked about what the advocate had learned about discretionary AYA supports, and why none of the publicly funded supports were going to work for Jack. The advocate asked that private counselling sessions be paid for as part of Jack's AYA plan. The request was denied. Appeals were unsuccessful. During this period, the advocate found out that in fact, MCFD had recently circulated a practice directive advising that AYA funds could not be spent on counselling therapy or "other direct-service costs."

Jack's long search for help with his mental health had dead-ended yet again. Jack's advocate never could find him financial support for specialized counselling. Jack has not maintained connection with his advocate. It's not known how he is doing currently.

The ministry's plans include some promising initiatives for young people aged 12 to 24, such as the expansion of Foundry centres – which include primary care, walk-in counselling, mental health and peer support check-ins and groups, and mental health substance use services all under one roof as well as a remote counselling session service for students called “Here2Talk.”¹¹⁰

Additionally, in August 2020, MMHA announced the doubling of B.C.'s beds for substance-use treatment and withdrawal management for youth ages 14 to 24.¹¹¹ The addition of 123 beds will take place over two years. These beds are not specifically targeted to former youth in care.

While promising for youth and young adults generally, none of the initiatives described above nor others outlined in the ministry's plans are specific to the unique circumstances of youth in care transitioning to adulthood.

RCY's advocacy work has identified that the lack of financial support for young people on AYAs to engage in individual trauma-informed counselling has been a significant barrier for some young adults. Accessing AYA requires a young person to navigate the application process, something that is not always possible for a young person struggling with their own mental health. They are expected to advocate for the mental health support they need through a fragmented and inadequate service delivery system. Our Office has also heard from young people, especially Indigenous youth, of their difficulty in identifying developmentally and culturally appropriate mental health services through the adult system.

“Having to choose between substance use healing and school shouldn't be a decision you have to make,” said one youth consultation participant. Another noted that AYA funding is *“not enough to live and cover counselling and therapy.”*

The data in this section on post-majority supports underlines that while supports are available, there is relatively low uptake and significant variability across many dimensions, ranging from gender, education level, type of care agreement, region of the province and whether or not a young person is Indigenous. The Provincial Tuition Waiver Program is a bright spot and a clear indication of government's belief in the potential of young people from care to succeed in post-secondary education. However, as a group, the supports that exist for young people transitioning to adulthood are insufficient and not structured in a way that allows for easy access. The next section of the report offers insight from research into how supports for young people should be structured and delivered.

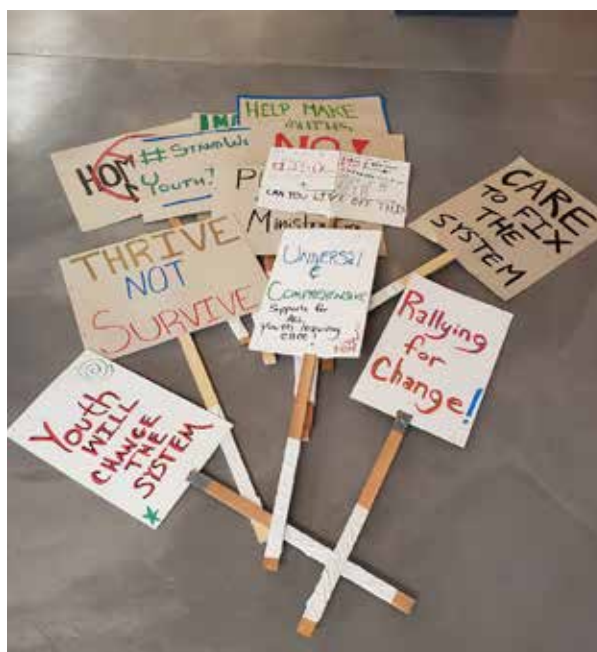


Photo: Fostering Change

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, “New Foundry Centres improve access to vital services for youth,” June 15, 2020, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020MMHA0028-001053>.

¹¹¹ Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, “Doubling youth treatment beds throughout B.C.,” *B.C. Gov News*, Aug. 13, 2020, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020MMHA0043-001514>.

What the Research Tells Us

Years of studies on youth leaving care consistently demonstrate that youth from care are forced to live independently much earlier on than their peers and experience significantly worse outcomes, especially in housing, education, well-being and social exclusion (see Outcomes for Youth Aging out of Care in this report).¹¹² Leaving care and transitioning into adulthood is a complex process. A growing evidence base supports the notion that age alone cannot define readiness in the transition toward interdependence. In any youth's life, socially defined markers of successful interdependence come with achievements and setbacks, and engagement and disengagement from supportive resources.

While poor outcomes and the consequent need for effective interventions for youth who have been in care are validated in the literature, that literature also demonstrates that successful transition outcomes are possible. As detailed below, academics note that flexible and accessible services which prioritize youth agency and remain available for many years after the age of majority see successful outcomes. Prioritizing the development and maintenance of natural relationships and expanding social connections serve as primary predictors of these successes.

“We need to have more ‘love’ words in these conversations,” says Gwen Cardinal. *“We have to bring that into any of the work we do. Because it’s people. It’s humanity.”*

When a range of supports is provided to address several domains – including mental health, housing, education and identity formation – young people fare better. It is also important to listen to youth voices and incorporate their goals and vision into individual and systemic service delivery and policy design. Below are the major themes emerging from the literature on youth leaving care, presented with an analysis of how these findings can inform approaches to better support young people in their transition to adulthood.

Defining Readiness

Despite defining a legislated limit to care at 19, research demonstrates that successful transitions are dependent on many factors other than age. The theory of emerging adulthood signaled a shift in youth independence literature and gave instructive focus to the need for programs and services for vulnerable individuals throughout their twenties.¹¹³ Emerging adulthood is a nonlinear process *“often characterized by shifts back and forth between independence and dependence.”*¹¹⁴ Young people in care typically face an abrupt and intense transition to independence after care ends, whereas young people without the trauma and challenges associated with the child welfare system benefit from a more gradual transition.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Annemiek T. Harder et al., “Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Care: Consensus Based Principles,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 116 (September 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105260>.

¹¹³ Varda R. Mann-Feder, “Introduction,” in *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood: International Contributions to Theory, Research and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2019), <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780190630485.001.0001/oso-9780190630485-chapter-1>.

¹¹⁴ Élodie Marion and Veronika Paulsen, “The Transition to Adulthood from Care: A Review of Current Research,” in *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood: International Contributions to Theory, Research and Practice*.

¹¹⁵ Marion and Paulsen, “The Transition to Adulthood from Care: A Review of Current Research.”

Transitions to adulthood can be defined as a progressive arrival to adult identity.¹¹⁶ Young people from care report feeling like adults earlier and more often during this developmental period.¹¹⁷ The way independence is defined is a function of expectations of young people and assumptions about what is possible at a certain age. Transitioning from care is not only about development toward independence, but also the “social construction of interdependence,”¹¹⁸ meaning that outcomes can be dependent on a young person’s social surroundings or external environment, and cannot be fully separated from an individual young person’s relationships, connections and community.

“I was lucky having a youth worker who walked alongside me as I bought my first car, got my first job, that kind of thing. That was a role that a family member usually plays.”

– Youth participant

Academic literature on youth leaving care presents several common domains of success: education, work, housing, healthy relationships with peers and adult mentors, and identity formation, among others.¹¹⁹ Those who transition out of care and do well – measured by engagement in education, secure attachment and “relatively few problem behaviours” – are those who have more gradual transitions from care than others and are able to move on psychologically after care.¹²⁰

CASE STUDY – Sarah

Sarah is a Métis youth who is outgoing, kind, confident, has a strong sense of humour and a strong connection with her culture. She lived with her mother until she was 12, at which time she came into care under a Voluntary Care Agreement while her mother was struggling with substance misuse and was unable to safely care for Sarah.

Sarah moved in with her grandparents, where she remained for two years before MCFD learned that her grandfather was physically abusing her. She was then moved into a foster home. When Sarah was 16, she moved back with her mother, as MCFD was attempting to help reunify the family. This lasted one month, at which point Sarah was placed in a staffed residential resource where she remained for the next two years.

She received mental health services and substance use services and was well-connected with cultural and community supports during this time. But there were ongoing and significant concerns with her staffed residential resource, including a lack of food and insufficient numbers of workers. The resource was shut down, and Sarah was moved into a foster home.

Six weeks before aging out of care, Sarah’s social worker moved her into a semi-independent living situation at an apartment where she could stay after turning 19. She had the continuous support of her social worker and a youth worker.

When Sarah turned 19, she continued to live in the apartment and a post-majority services file was opened for her. However, there was very little planning for Sarah’s independence, and no services or supports were provided for her beyond the apartment to help Sarah in her transition to adulthood.

¹¹⁶ Marion and Paulsen, “The Transition to Adulthood from Care: A Review of Current Research.”

¹¹⁷ Marion and Paulsen, “The Transition to Adulthood from Care: A Review of Current Research.”

¹¹⁸ John Pinkerton and Adrian Van Breda, “Policy as Social Ecological Resilience Scaffolding for Leaving Care,” in *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood*.

¹¹⁹ Pinkerton and Van Breda, “Policy as Social Ecological Resilience Scaffolding for Leaving Care.”

¹²⁰ Mann-Feder, “Introduction.”

Effective Interventions

"It's a very different experience to be a former youth in care at post-secondary compared to everybody else. We're our own parents, with full responsibility for our school and work, and left on our own to navigate whatever traumas and challenges we have. You miss out on normal connections with other young people, always having to say no because you don't have the money. AYA doesn't cover a spring-break trip to Mexico."

– A former youth in care

Different ways of supporting youth transitioning into adulthood are in place all over the world, all with varying degrees of success and depth of support. An extensive review of research suggests that there may be positive outcomes associated with most interventions, whether they are in housing, employment, education, cultural programming or other initiatives related to the needs of youth leaving care. However, while many services exist, researchers have noted a lack of thorough evaluation of the impact and outcomes of these interventions.¹²¹ While many services exist, researchers have noted a gap in thorough evaluation of these interventions.¹²²

Recent academic work has attempted to summarize the main principles from research to inform practice and

policy. A 2020 paper produced by members of the International Resource Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC) identified 10 consensus-based principles for care-leaving policy. The principles, derived from both literature and youth consultation, provide important direction for practice and policy:

1. Listen to young people and safeguard their rights
2. Support the autonomy of young people during and after care
3. Ensure access of care-leavers to education
4. Honor diversity, including cultural identity
5. Support care-leavers to connect and maintain connections with their biological families
6. Ensure relationship continuity by providing long-term supports and safety nets
7. Provide intervention for working through trauma
8. Ensure adequate preparation for leaving care
9. Create legal frameworks to ensure the rights and needs of care-leavers
10. Ensure access to services¹²³

These principles represent the academic consensus that youth from care need effective and meaningful interventions that prioritize their well-being, agency and long-term outlook through thoughtful policy and services.

¹²¹ Roberta L. Woodgate, Oluwatobiloba Morakinyo and Katrina M. Martin, "Interventions for Youth Aging out of Care: A Scoping Review," *Children and Youth Services Review* 82, no. C (November 2017): 296-298, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.09.031>.

¹²² Marion and Paulsen, "The Transition to Adulthood from Care: A Review of Current Research."

¹²³ Harder et al., "Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Care: Consensus Based Principles," 5-21.

Limitations of Programs and Services

Many services target the development of youth competencies as a way to achieve transition outcomes. Life skills programs, which target domains such as financial literacy or grocery shopping, aim to fix the missing elements in young people's lives that hinder their good outcomes. These types of interventions also tend to be focused on "fixing the youth" instead of "fixing the system."¹²⁴ Several studies have surfaced youth perspectives that these programs are inadequate in preparing them to live independently; as well, these programs are controversial in the literature.¹²⁵ An extensive review of evaluation research of U.S. life skills programs targeting hundreds of thousands of youth showed little evidence to suggest that the programs had a positive impact on outcomes.¹²⁶ Teaching skills is less important than practicing skills and supporting the development of identity.¹²⁷ However, some research shows positive outcomes in employment and education after accessing these programs.¹²⁸ There are many questions about the efficacy of these programs and their use as a primary intervention for youth leaving care. As Varda Mann-Feder, Concordia University Professor of Applied Human Sciences and co-editor of *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood*, writes, "*The fact that research tells us that young people who have aged out of care demonstrate difficulties in acknowledging dependency needs and engaging in close relationships also underscores the need to address something other than skill development and self-reliance.*"¹²⁹

"It's normal for people in their early 20s to change their minds about what they want to study in school, the kind of work they want to do. We should accept that, and understand that changing your mind is part of your development."

– A former youth in care

Focus on Relationships

Resilience – or the ability to overcome adversity – can be challenging to nurture in young people. Two major factors are confirmed by research to help in determining one's resilience: a natural resistance to adversity, and strong relationships with caring and dependable adults to manage healthy amounts of stress.¹³⁰ A central part of preparing young people to exit care is "the mobilization or establishment of a network of relationships, including immediate and extended family, the neighbourhood and a range of formal social and other services."¹³¹ This is achievable through robust social policy that creates "scaffolding" for the formal supports that create a foundation for growing the informal and personal networks vital for successful transitions.¹³²

"There needs to be more meaningful focus on connecting youth. That's not just taking someone to the friendship centre, or pointing them to a website," said one social service agency leader who took part in consultations. *"There's also an obligation on the part of MCFD to make sure there's some safety around the connecting to family."*

¹²⁴ Jane Kovarikova, "Exploring Youth Outcomes After Aging-Out of Care."

¹²⁵ Woodgate, Morakinyo and Martin, "Interventions for Youth Aging out of Care: A Scoping Review," 283-294.

¹²⁶ Heidi Sommer, "Independent Living Service Programs for Foster Youth: How Individual Factors and Program Features Affect Participation and Outcomes," (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

¹²⁷ Mann-Feder, "How Can I Be a Real Adult?"

¹²⁸ Woodgate, Morakinyo and Martin, "Interventions for Youth Aging out of Care: A Scoping Review," 283-294.

¹²⁹ Mann-Feder, "How Can I Be a Real Adult?"

¹³⁰ Center on the Developing Child, "In Brief - The Science of Resilience" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University), accessed Sept. 1, 2020, <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/InBrief-The-Science-of-Resilience.pdf>.

¹³¹ Pinkerton and Van Breda, "Policy as Social Ecological Resilience Scaffolding for Leaving Care," 3-4.

¹³² Pinkerton and Van Breda, "Policy as Social Ecological Resilience Scaffolding for Leaving Care," 1-15.



BRIGHT SPOT – Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre

The Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre provides education, cultural supports and services for Indigenous and homeless youth. The centre’s housing program, “Nuutsumuut Lelum,” features 25 units of affordable housing, including four units designated for youth transitioning out of care. The program is designed to support the integration of youth into community as they transition to independence, and to create connections and build a supportive community around the youth.

The centre’s Youth Advisory Council consists of 10 Indigenous youth in and from the care system. The council has three objectives: peer support, sustainability (permanency) and systems change. As one youth said, *“I hope for the next youth who goes through the system that it will be a better experience.”*

Additionally, the centre provides community-based alternative education programs to help youth complete Grade 12. There are currently 97 youth enrolled in Tsawalk Learning Centre. The school provides a “Land and Sea” program, in which youth are taught traditional harvesting, salmon fishing, gathering herbs and more.

Katherine McParland, *From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise*, 98.

Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre, <https://www.nanaimoaboriginalcentre.ca/>.

Multiple Dimensions of Permanency

The concept of permanency developed within the child welfare field, and in its simplest form, involves ensuring that children and youth in the child welfare system have meaningful and enduring connections to family or other adults. Over time, research has expanded the notion of permanency to incorporate multiple dimensions of belonging and connection – relational, physical, legal, identity and cultural.

“Permanency planning is really important,” one former youth in care told RCY in consultations. *“It could be the biological family or chosen family or a youth worker, like a mentor – just someone who’s going to stay with you. It’s not going to be the social worker, who doesn’t have the capacity with their caseloads.”*

There is also further unpacking of permanency that must be done for Indigenous children and youth in care:

*“Disconnection from family, kin, community, culture, ancestral relations and language necessitates that the goal of permanency include more than the pursuit of a stable ‘forever family.’ It must also aim to create lifelong healthy connections to community, culture and land that can bring Indigenous youth the experience of truly belonging – of being ‘claimed back’ as proud First Peoples.”*¹³³

¹³³ Sandrina de Finney and Lara di Tomasso, “Creating Places of Belonging: Expanding Notions of Permanency with Indigenous Youth in Care,” *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 10, no. 1 (2015): 63-65, <https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/246>.

There is a clear relationship between increased permanency and improved outcomes in a youth's physical and mental health. Increased permanency reduces psychological stress and uncertainty, while effective mental health treatment makes permanency goals more achievable. *"In practice, that means possibly working from both ends – supporting mental health to achieve permanency and supporting permanency to improve mental health."*¹³⁴

"After I get my bachelor's degree, my plan is to become a child protection worker with MCFD. I'm going to actually get to know the young people on my caseload. They're not going to be just names on folders."

– A former youth in care



BRIGHT SPOT – Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth

Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth – a non-profit organization based in Toronto – provides shelter, transitional housing and programming to help homeless and at-risk youth reach their potential to lead productive, self-sufficient and healthy lives. Eva's Initiatives offers housing in addition to multiple programs, including the Family Reconnect Program. This unique and award-winning program offers group and individual counselling to youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness and those that they define as family. Recognizing the critical importance of creating a circle of support for teens and young adults, the program attempts to establish, re-establish and maintain healthy, supportive relationships around the youth.

Eva's Initiatives for Youth Homelessness, <https://www.evas.ca/>.

The Need for a Range of Services

Successful outcomes for young people in transition rely on a multitude of resources. The 10 principles referenced earlier highlight the importance of the full range of supports, including support for relationships with biological families and trauma intervention. Youth agency – the ability to choose and direct your life – is an integral part of service design that improves outcomes and participation.

"It's empowering to have adults who listen to us and want to make a difference in our lives and the community around us, as we see how broken it is," says one youth.

¹³⁴ Amy M. Salazar et al., "Defining and achieving permanency among older youth in foster care," *Children and Youth Services Review* 87 (April 2018): 9-16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.006>.

Governments and service agencies that listen to young people lead to better outcomes and feelings of agency for youth.¹³⁵ Conversely, the failure to provide such opportunities for participation has negative outcomes related to self-esteem, emotions and behaviour.¹³⁶ Youth themselves have been saying for years what research now echoes: that “*young people should be involved in their own care plan and have a say into what’s being done.*”¹³⁷ Agency is possible with a broad range of services available to support young people in their transition.

There is also consistent evidence on continuation of services after the age of majority. A range of services with more open eligibility would serve youth in preparing to leave care, find work or identify other supports, as well as find a place to live, overcome trauma and process the negative experiences of childhood and the care system.¹³⁸ Current opportunities largely don’t exist for youth who need more support just to be able to access services. Youth who require multiple interventions and support in their transition to interdependence thus end up with the least services. This is in keeping with the principles of the Inverse Care Law, which established for the medical community that the availability of medical care is inversely proportionate to a population’s need for it.¹³⁹ Research underlines that young people need not only a range of services, but the ability to return to services even after initially rejecting them.¹⁴⁰

Consequences of Trauma

The adverse circumstances and experiences that result in a child or youth coming into care may be traumatic, and coming into care is inherently a traumatic experience. The act of placement and various care experiences can contribute to re-traumatization.¹⁴¹ The impacts of adverse childhood experiences and childhood trauma are well documented and are associated with behaviour and interpersonal challenges, unhealthy boundaries, high-risk behaviours such as substance misuse and attachment impairments.¹⁴² These consequences require significant and committed interventions available throughout a young person’s life.

¹³⁵ Harder et al., “Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Care: Consensus Based Principles,” 6.

¹³⁶ Harder et al., “Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Care: Consensus Based Principles,” 7.

¹³⁷ FICE International, “Be the Change: 10 Standards for Care Leavers,” *Global Social Services Workforce Alliance* (Vienna, Austria: FICE International, 2016), <http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Be-the-Change.pdf>. 1-10.

¹³⁸ Harder et al., “Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Care: Consensus Based Principles,” 18.

¹³⁹ Julian Tudor Hart, “The Inverse Care Law,” *The Lancet* 297 no. 7696 (February 1971): 405-412, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(71\)92410-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(71)92410-X).

¹⁴⁰ Ruth Rogers, “I Remember Thinking, Why Isn’t There Someone to Help Me? Why Isn’t There Someone Who Can Help Me Make Sense of What I’m Going through?,” *Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 4 (Nov. 29, 2011): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1440783311420793>.

¹⁴¹ Harder et al., “Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Youth Leaving Care: Consensus Based Principles,” 14.

¹⁴² Dye, “The Impact and Long-Term Effects of Childhood Trauma,” 382.

CASE STUDY – Benjamin

Just three months before he was scheduled to transition out of government care, Benjamin was ill-equipped for his approaching independence. He had been in government care since the age of two, and lived in four separate placements. In his short life, the teenager faced many challenges, including developmental delays tied to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, trauma, loss of permanency, struggles with peer relationship and substance misuse. Benjamin's care team attempted to support him in these challenges, but he developed overwhelming anxiety and suicidal ideation. He increasingly struggled to complete simple tasks and interact with adults, even the ones he used to trust. At age 18, he died of an overdose.

In the months preceding his death, Benjamin expressed panic about leaving government care, specifically about the possibility of ending up “*dead or homeless*.” At the time of his death, Benjamin's file showed no meaningful transition planning. His Care Plan contained broad goals such as learning to use transit, complete household tasks and save money. The plan laid out the bare minimum required for independence, but there was little evidence of progress in these areas.

Benjamin's care team appeared to be exclusively focused on Community Living BC (CLBC) supports, fixing on CLBC's Services to Transition Adults with Developmental Disabilities as a means to manage his progression toward independence. But weeks before his 18th birthday, the team learned that Benjamin would not be eligible for these services. He had a year left before having to leave care, and there was no alternative plan in place. His care team tried to get him financial assistance with a Persons With Disabilities designation, though that support did not include other kinds of support that Benjamin required. Scared, Benjamin texted his foster mother: “*Man, what happens if I don't get nothing n do I even qualify for a pwd abhh I ain't living that long if I don't get nothing, life is scary rather die then be homeless.*”

No supportive adults were identified in Benjamin's Care Plan beyond those involved in the care system – his foster mother and social worker. Benjamin's attempts to re-establish relationships with his biological family resulted in little more than occasional meals and transportation. He did not receive support in navigating these complex and likely traumatic relationships in a healthy way. Benjamin found that attempts to re-establish relationships only seemed to cause rifts with other family members and caregivers, leaving him further isolated. Benjamin disclosed sexual assault to his support team multiple times, yet there is no evidence of him ever having been connected with a sexual assault centre or with counselling specifically intended to process the trauma of these experiences.

Impacts of Colonization

A great deal of Canadian research has analyzed and reflected on the experiences of Indigenous youth in care. As stated throughout this report, and many others, the child welfare system is significantly over-involved in the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children, youth and families.

It is important to note that the notion of “aging out” of care does not fit into Indigenous ways of considering communities, relationships and caring.¹⁴³ Most young people do not “age out” of natural

¹⁴³ Fast et al., “Indigenous Youth Leaving Care in Canada,” 4.

care with their biological families and continue to be supported in the nonlinear fashion described elsewhere in this report. Indigenous perspectives on honouring children and the family structure have begun to permeate into mainstream approaches in child welfare, but the disproportionately negative outcomes borne by Indigenous youth are disturbing and persistent.

Addressing the impacts of care for Indigenous young people requires an attuned focus on Indigenous identity and relationships. Researchers continue to cite the need for cultural connections and adequate identity formation facilitated while in care.¹⁴⁴

“The vicious circle of a continued colonial legacy will be unbreakable unless a resurgence of Indigenous ways of caring for children is incorporated as integral to the right of Indigenous peoples to sovereignty and self-determination.”¹⁴⁵

Government as a Parent

Provincial and territorial child welfare legislation in Canada, as well as the Federal legislation *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, are guided by the principle that all actions and decisions be made in the best interests of the child.¹⁴⁶ While there is no question that best interests should be a guiding principle in child welfare practice and decision-making, application of the concept has been criticized by some for its subjectivity, short-sightedness and a lack of cultural recognition of the wholeness of a family in a child’s life.^{147, 148} While legislation identifies the factors that should be taken into account in the determination of best interests, there may be competing perspectives.

“My social worker, I maybe talked to her every two months, and it was always me who had to call. I know I wasn’t seen as high-risk, but those of us who look like lower risk are still high-risk, we just hide it better.”

– A former youth in care

Government intervention in a child’s life can be understood as a commitment to a young person’s well-being – one that requires a long-term relationship and ongoing support in line with a person’s needs. Research shows that the “*journey to self-sufficiency depends on the availability of long-term emotional and financial support*” well into a person’s twenties, so that identity can be explored before the young person is thrust into independence.¹⁴⁹ Best interests and their related legal arrangements currently expire at 19, but youth needs do

not. A growing number of jurisdictions are recognizing young people’s long-term needs and have made commitments to their well-being after care.

¹⁴⁴ Fast et al., “Indigenous Youth Leaving Care in Canada,” 8.

¹⁴⁵ Fast et al., “Indigenous Youth Leaving Care in Canada,” 11.

¹⁴⁶ *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, Statutes of Canada 2019, c.24. <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-11.73/index.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Vivek Sankaran, “Let’s Be Honest: ‘Best Interests’ Is in The Eye of the Beholder,” *The Imprint*, Sept. 25, 2019, <https://imprintnews.org/opinion/lets-be-honest-best-interest-is-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder/37784>.

¹⁴⁸ Fast et al., “Indigenous Youth Leaving Care in Canada,” 4.

¹⁴⁹ Mann-Feder, “Introduction,” in *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood*, 3.



BRIGHT SPOT – California Fostering Connections to Success Act

The U.S. *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* of 2008 extended the age of eligibility from 18 to 21 for youth in foster care. Under provisions of the law, states now have the option to extend care, but are not required to do so. A number of states have adopted legislation to extend care and others are considering doing so. California enacted the *California Fostering Connections to Success Act* in 2010 and began extending care on Jan. 1, 2012. With the largest state foster care population in the U.S., it is arguably the most important early adopter of the new policy.

In order to be eligible for Extended Foster Care in California, young people must meet one of the following criteria:

- working toward completion of high school or equivalent program (e.g., GED)
- enrolled in college, community college or a vocational education program
- employed at least 80 hours a month
- participating in a program designed to assist in gaining employment
- unable to do one of the above requirements because of a documented medical condition.

CalYOUTH, an eight-year evaluation of the impact of this Act in California, will be completed in 2020. Findings to date suggest that most young adults who are eligible choose to take advantage of the opportunity to remain in extended foster care (85 per cent). While most youth are satisfied with the services received, the study also found that the diversity of the California foster youth population makes a one-size-fits-all approach inappropriate.

At age 21, young people are still faring poorly compared to their age peers across many measures of well-being. The 2018 interim report found that:

“while many of these youths are on track to complete a college degree they have long desired, are connected to multiple supportive adults, and have no serious health problems to challenge their progress, others are isolated, face multiple challenges to a successful transition to adulthood, and will likely require intensive and ongoing support to avoid future hardship. Our findings add to the growing body of evidence that extended care should provide young adults with developmentally appropriate living arrangements and connect them to formal and informal supports that recognize the wide variety of their aspirations and needs.”

Mark E. Courtney et al., “Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 21,” (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago), 2018, https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/CY_YT_RE0517_1.pdf.

Our Communities

By Jess Boon



Jess Boon is a former youth in care and child welfare activist who lives in East Vancouver on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam Peoples. Jess mostly draws cartoons and children's illustrations for her friends.

“Our communities” is a four panelled gouache painting signifying the diversity of communities in which youth in/from care live all throughout the province.

Economic Analysis

During efforts to shift policy, arguments are often made about the affordability of expanding supports, services and jurisdictions to more people. Importantly, much work has been done to investigate the economic implications of expanding support to young people transitioning out of care.

“When I was 17, I needed a root canal, and it took almost four months to get it approved by MCFD. I got an infection in the tooth and was so sick, I lost 40 pounds. When I finally got to a dentist, the tooth was so bad it couldn’t be saved and had to be extracted. I got yelled at by my worker because they hadn’t approved an extraction.”

– A former youth in care

In 2016, Fostering Change published *Opportunities in Transition*, the first and only analysis to date to attach a cost of adverse outcomes for young people transitioning into adulthood in B.C., as well as to cost out increased supports in comparison to potential savings and benefits.¹⁵⁰ This report presented a clear economic argument for increasing support to young people transitioning into adulthood in B.C., adding to the social and moral arguments that society has the same obligation to assist these young people as do individual families for their own children as they transition to adulthood.

The report found that costs are driven by three inter-related factors: low educational attainment, poverty and poor mental health. The authors estimated an average annual cost due to adverse outcomes experienced by youth transitioning into adulthood at between \$222,000 and \$268,000 per youth. They also identified an economic impact from the short- and long-term costs of insufficient support of youth transitioning into adulthood, from poorer health over a lifetime to the immediate and intergenerational costs of higher early pregnancy and parenting, homelessness and homelessness compounded by substance use.

In 2006, the Washington State Legislature began to enable youth who turned 18 to remain in foster care until age 21 while enrolled in a post-secondary education program. Since that time, eligibility for extended foster care (EFC) has expanded to include youth who are working, in programs to reduce barriers to employment or have certain medical conditions. A 2017 study of this policy found that between 2006 and 2018, the percentage of youth receiving EFC services increased from 5% to 80%. Compared to non-participants, the average youth participating in EFC was more likely to be employed and have greater earnings. EFC also significantly reduced homelessness, receipt of public assistance, use of medical emergency departments, reduced diagnosis of substance use and treatment and criminal convictions. Additionally, the study found that EFC reduced involvement of offspring in the child welfare system. Finally, the benefit-cost analysis found that the EFC program produces \$3.95 of lifetime benefits for each \$1 invested.

M. Miller, D. Bales and M. Hirsch, *Extended foster care in Washington State: Final Report* (Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy), 2020, https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1721/Wsipp_Extended-Foster-Care-in-Washington-State-Final-Report_Report.pdf.

¹⁵⁰ Shaffer and Anderson, “*Opportunities in Transition*.”

“A youth needs to be looked at overall, not piece by piece,” one community youth advocate told us. *“How is this young person actually functioning?”*

The report recommends a basic package of increased supports that continue to age 25. It recommends support similar to what Agreements with Young Adults provide, but with continuous availability from ages 19 to 24; broadened eligibility criteria and increased funding levels designed to eliminate the need for youth transitioning into adulthood to go on income assistance. The total incremental funding requirement for the support package at the time of the 2016 report was estimated to be \$57 million for the cohort of youth transitioning into adulthood each year.

The report argued that this level of support would close the existing gap in educational attainment and earnings by up to 40 per cent, effectively saving the province as much as \$180 million even while expenditures for the extra supports would increase government spending by only \$57 million. The authors concluded that continued inaction on this issue was denying youth basic supports they need to transition into adulthood while costing the province unnecessarily. The Fostering Change cost-benefit analysis was conducted a few years ago and while stated costs and benefits may have changed to some degree since that time, the fundamental conclusion holds: the ongoing scarcity of accessible, flexible supports for youth in transition is by far the most expensive option for government. Findings in this report echo those from a number of similar studies.

Table 8. Post-majority economic costs and benefits reports

Name of report	Author	Year
Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Weighing the Costs to Government against the Benefits to Youth	Clark Peters, Mark Courtney, Harold Pollack and Amy Dworsky	2009
25 is the New 21: The Costs and Benefits of Providing Extended Care and Maintenance to Ontario Youth in Care until Age 25	John Stapleton et al.	2012
Success For All: Investing in the Future of Canadian Children in Care	Conference Board of Canada	2014
Cost Avoidance: The Business Case for Investing in Youth Aging Out of Foster Care	Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	2013



Photo: Fostering Change

Toothless and The Orca

By SEMA'TSE Jordan



This one is called “Toothless” because it is inspired from the movie *How to Train Your Dragon*. Mixed media is my favourite thing to do so this is a lino block design and water colours.



The Orca is something I did when I first started learning water colours. I loved it too much to sell it or give it away so I've had it for awhile.

SEMA'TSE Jordan is a former youth in care. She is Nuu-chah-nulth from Ahousat B.C, Snuneymuxw from Nanaimo B.C., and Nisga'a from Terrace, B.C. She works for RCY on the Social Media Youth Team and enjoys working with water colours and mixed media.

Recommendations

The time has come in B.C. to remove the precipice for 19-year-olds transitioning into adulthood from the child welfare system. Young people have repeatedly told us what they need, and researchers and the public agree. Extended and universal support that is similar to what most people in B.C. provide for their own families is the necessary and morally right thing to do, and it will save government money in the long run.

The outcomes for young people who leave the care system at 19 are unacceptable. The current system does not afford these young people access to the same kind of opportunities that their non-care peers typically enjoy.

The recommendations that follow are set out according to domain and primary ministerial responsibility. To achieve better outcomes, however, they must be considered and implemented as a whole, as they are inter-related and inter-dependent. For example, simply improving income security for youth transitioning into adulthood would not be sufficient without the complementary steps of ensuring better planning, the consistent availability of culturally appropriate adult guidance and support and better access to housing and mental health services. The full range of needs of these young adults must be addressed, not just a single dimension. To that end, it is hoped that those assigned to lead implementation of the recommendations from relevant ministries and public bodies will collectively collaborate and coordinate their responses.

Currently, eligibility for MCFD's AYA program is limited to young people on Continuing Custody Orders and on Youth Agreements as well as a small number of other legal guardianship situations. That leaves out a number of youth such as those on temporary custody orders, voluntary care agreements and special needs agreements. The recommendations being made here are intended to be inclusive of that group of youth who are currently ineligible, across all recommendations.

Recommendation #1 – Extend and improve transition planning

The Ministry of Children and Family Development should fully implement and proactively support and monitor effective practice in planning for transition into adulthood, beginning at least by age 14 for youth in continuing care and extending beyond age 19. Principles of this transition planning process should include:

- a. Developmentally appropriate processes, aligned with the non-linear and complex process of transitioning to adulthood, and supporting the shift from dependence to interdependence, with relationships at the centre.
- b. Contextualization of the experience of Indigenous youth transitioning to adulthood within the experience of colonization and supporting the reclamation of culture and identity as critically important elements of the lives of emerging First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous young adults.
- c. Reciprocal processes, where youth agency is prioritized and youth are responsible and empowered to design a case plan representative of their goals, interests and support networks.

MCFD is to have developed a comprehensive plan by April 1, 2022 that addresses policy and practice guidelines, staff training and processes and mechanisms for support and monitoring of practice, with full implementation of that plan in the ensuing 18 months.

Of note:

A smoother transition into adult services and supports requires effective, dynamic planning that addresses the full range of a youth's needs, including cultural needs, and fully engages the young person as a partner in that planning. Staff, however, need to have the time, training, proper tools and supports and expert practice guidance to ensure better transition planning. Implementation of this recommendation will therefore have staffing and resource implications. Further, enabling the continuation of planning involvement for at least the initial stages past a young person's 19th birthday may require changes to legislation/regulation.

RCY has been undertaking a comprehensive review of the care planning process and practices of MCFD staff that addresses three key domains: permanency planning, cultural planning and youth transitions planning. All are directly relevant to young people aging into adulthood and will be addressed in three separate public reports that RCY will release in the first months of 2021. They will further inform the above recommendation, which signals the need for the ministry to begin a comprehensive process of reviewing, refreshing and appropriately resourcing care planning, with particular focus on youth transitioning into adulthood.

Practice Observation

Young people have told the Representative that they often leave care without having access to quality assessments that ensure they clearly understand their own cognitive, physical, developmental or mental health issues. These issues may require follow up support in adulthood or workplace accommodations, for example. Young people are not defined by these issues, but assessments certainly provide important information and insight as young people move forward into adulthood. Having the assessments provides language young people can use with friends, families, employers and others. It is critical that young people from care have access to these assessments, and that they are culturally and developmentally appropriate.

- continued on next page

Recommendation #1 – continued from previous page

The three individual reports won't contain recommendations but will be followed by an omnibus public report on care planning in mid-2021 that will have recommendations.

Beginning planning at least by age 14 is limited to youth in continuing care in this recommendation. We recognize this benchmark cannot or may not be able to be applied to other types of care or ministry involvement, such as youth agreements, voluntary care, special needs agreements and temporary custody orders. Nonetheless, transition planning for youth in other care agreements should apply the same principles and begin as early as possible as a matter of good practice.

Recommendation #2 – Provide ongoing adult guidance and support by implementing dedicated youth transition workers through community agencies

In partnership with community agencies, MCFD should develop and implement a plan to establish dedicated youth transition workers to assist and support youth transitioning from care into adulthood. This plan should result in the province-wide (including rural and remote communities) implementation of dedicated transition workers who engage with young people before they turn 19 and provide systems navigation support, case management and adult guidance up to the age of 27 years. These professionals should work alongside a young person's natural systems of support and assist in providing mentorship and developmentally appropriate support. Supports should include a focus on skills development with the goal of education and employment. Particular attention should be paid to engaging transitional support workers who are First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous, as well as non-Indigenous workers who have received cultural safety and trauma awareness training to work respectfully with these young people.

MCFD is to have completed policy and planning by April 1, 2022 and have completed full implementation of that plan in the ensuing 18 months.

Of note:

Given the current absence of dedicated transition workers for youth transitioning into adulthood, this recommendation will have resource implications and may require legislation/regulation change to establish a clear statutory mandate.

Currently, the principal post-majority supports available to youth transitioning into adulthood – AYA and the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program – are transactional in nature. These youth need far more than just impersonal transactions and money. They need available, caring adults who can, for example, steer them to the right services and supports, help them with forms and appointments, offer guidance, or just listen and help them problem solve. These functions do not need to be carried out by ministry staff who have statutory duties, but rather, are better provided in the more informal, flexible and welcoming circumstances typically offered through community-based service agencies – including, notably, First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous agencies and entities.

Although this recommendation assumes that the principal responsibility for this adult guidance will be carried out by community agencies, we recognize that some youth have established close relationships over time with their guardianship social workers and may wish to maintain contact with them. As a matter of good practice, this concurrent and continuing contact and transition planning support should be encouraged where appropriate, especially in the early stages of transition as per Recommendation 1.

Recommendation #3 – Ensure continuing post-majority financial support

In order to support the same gradual and extended transition to adulthood that most young people enjoy, MCFD should implement universal and comprehensive financial support for young people aging out of all types of care and out of Youth Agreements by automatically enrolling them on their 19th birthday in Agreements with Young Adults, unless the young person chooses to opt out. Universal support should continue until the young person's 27th birthday without restriction, subject to reasonable constraints such as consideration of other income.

MCFD is to have developed a comprehensive plan by April 1, 2022 and fully implement that plan over the ensuing 18 months.

Of note:

Implementation of this recommendation will require legislation/regulation reform to address and remove current program eligibility requirements and AYA time limitations (currently 48 months), as well as a budget enhancement to support both the costs of increased enrollment and the operational (staffing) infrastructure to administer much larger numbers on the program.

Despite earnest efforts by MCFD to improve eligibility and enrollment in the AYA program, the continuing low uptake as well as the variable and inequitable access to the program documented in this report demands extensive reform. The current program requires youth to jump through eligibility hoops; if they are not able to, their benefits are terminated. Too many youth are not well enough prepared to even take the initial step of enrolling in the program, as evidenced by the fact that almost two-thirds of these young people do not enroll in their first year of eligibility.

A typical parent in the community would not simply cut off their child altogether for being unable to enroll in or complete a program, but rather would encourage and support them to move forward as best they can in the circumstances. Removing AYA eligibility requirements does not mean removing expectations about educational and skill enhancement, labour attachment or engagement in rehabilitation measures. The Representative envisages that helping young people identify and meet such requirements would be one of the roles of the dedicated transition support workers outlined in Recommendation 2. These transition workers would work alongside the young person's natural support systems to engage, prompt and support the young person to move forward. The key difference in the approach recommended here is that if a young person is initially unable to take those positive steps or to follow through to completion, they would be supported to figure out those challenges rather than abandoned to fall into poverty and homelessness, as is too often the case now.

Although this recommendation respects the right of a young person to opt out of automatic enrollment in the AYA program at age 19 (or later), a young person who opts out should also have the right to opt back in.

The total costs to government of implementing this measure is best considered by looking at current costs of not only the AYA program but also for people receiving Persons With Disabilities (PWD) benefits, as well as social assistance payments for youth transitioning into adulthood. The section of this report detailing cost benefits establishes that considerable savings over the long term will result from implementing the recommendations we are putting forward.

It should also be noted that this recommendation is obviously congruent with government's intention to reduce poverty.

Recommendation #4 – Consider an extension of voluntary residential care

MCFD should evaluate the current emergency measures in place due to COVID-19 that allow young people to continue to stay in their foster home or staffed residential placements past their 19th birthday. Our Office anticipates that such an evaluation would reveal benefits and feasibility on an ongoing basis. If that is the case, the ministry should implement changes that would allow for continuing foster home or staffed residential care on a voluntary basis, with the length of extension based on the young person's readiness to transition out of care. Priority consideration should be given to youth and young adults who have disabilities and other physical and mental health needs who are not ready for independence at 19, and not eligible for Community Living BC services.

MCFD is to complete the evaluation by December 31, 2021 and develop and implement an approved plan of next steps by April 1, 2022.

Of note:

The Representative is mindful that well-intentioned recommendations may have unintended consequences, and that it may not be feasible for all youth transitioning from care to be eligible for continued voluntary residential placement past their 19th birthday. For example, continuing foster home or staffed residential care for a large number of youth past their 19th birthdays may strain the capacity of an already challenged residential care system and further compromise the ability to appropriately place younger children.

This recommendation will need to be approached with caution by evaluating the current emergency measures and targeting extended voluntary care placements as needed to the most vulnerable youth. As well, there is an obvious intersection between this recommendation and Recommendation 5 regarding housing. That recommendation, when implemented, could provide an effective alternative transitional support for many young people.

Recommendation #5 – Provide additional dedicated housing for youth aging out of care

There is perhaps no greater challenge currently facing young people in B.C. transitioning into adulthood than finding appropriate, affordable and safe housing. We echo the recommendation made in the late Katherine McParland's report, *From Marginalized to Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from those with Lived Expertise* – that the Ministry of Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing should work with BC Housing to develop and implement an aggressive plan to work toward ending youth homelessness in B.C., with particular attention to young adults who have transitioned from care.

As part of this plan, additional dedicated housing units should be provided for young people aging out of care. Units on a continuum of support – including with mental health and addictions supports where needed – should be available and eligibility requirements reduced.

BC Housing is to develop a comprehensive plan by April 1, 2022 and begin full implementation of that plan thereafter.

Recommendation #6 – Provide an enhanced range of trauma-informed and culturally appropriate mental health and substance use services for young people transitioning from care into adulthood

The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and MCFD, should develop and implement a plan for mental health and substance use services for youth in care who are transitioning to adulthood. The plan should be developed in consultation with appropriate First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous representatives as well as young people with lived experience.

This plan should be integrated into *A Pathway to Hope*.¹⁵¹ It should specifically address the needs of the population of young people leaving care and the specialized services they need due to the inequities, adversities and trauma they have experienced in their lives before and while in care. The plan and all services should be trauma-informed and give particular attention and priority to First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous young people transitioning to adulthood.

The plan is to be developed by April 1, 2022, with full implementation being completed within the ensuing two years.

Of note:

There is the potential for considerable alignment between this recommendation and the first three-year priority actions already set out in *A Pathway to Hope* and other initiatives, including:

- the expansion of Foundry Centres for youth ages 12 to 24
- expanding Indigenous land-based cultural and healing services
- expanding access to affordable community counselling services through grants to non-profit organizations across the province
- a proposed doubling of the number of substance use treatment and withdrawal management beds for young people ages 14 to 24.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, *A Pathway to Hope*.

¹⁵² Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, “Doubling Youth Treatment Beds Throughout B.C.”

Recommendation #7 – Collect longitudinal data and evaluate services

In order to ensure high quality and equitable services, there must be ongoing data collection and evaluation. MCFD should engage the Ministry of Citizen Services and relevant ministries and public bodies to develop and implement a plan that enables:

- a. longitudinal data collection about young people who have aged out of care in British Columbia¹⁵³
- b. evaluation of post-majority services and supports and the public sharing of the evaluation results
- c. standardized data across the province that is reported regularly, including (but not limited to) the following disaggregated data: identity factors such as ethnicity and gender identity as well as indigeneity – First Nations, Métis and Inuit identity.¹⁵⁴

A cross-ministry plan is to be developed by April 1, 2022 with full implementation of that plan to begin thereafter.

¹⁵³ The National Youth in Transition Database (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/nytd>) provides one possible model.

¹⁵⁴ Data collection and reporting should be disaggregated per the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner 2020 Report, *Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective* (Vancouver, BC: British Columbia Office of the Human Rights Commissioner), 2020, https://bchumanrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/BCOHRC_Sept2020_Disaggregated-Data-Report_FINAL.pdf.

Conclusion

We know what needs to be done to improve the lives of young people transitioning out of care, and we know a great deal about how to do it. Young people need an extended transition into adulthood. They need connections to their culture, their families and their communities. They need relationship-based supports and they need to be able to stumble, stand up again and develop their identity and skills, just like any other youth making their way into adulthood.

The current system does not support this process, as has been evident for many years in the ongoing poor outcomes for youth with histories in care. The recommendations in this report call on government to make changes that will ensure developmentally and culturally appropriate services, supports and connections are as available for youth transitioning out of care as they need to be for all young people beginning the important journey from youth to adult.

Appendix

Table A. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood 2012/2013 through 2019/20 by AYA eligibility and status*

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
FY2012/13	754	107	12%	861
CCO	459	43	9%	502
YAG	295	64	18%	359
FY2013/14	719	95	12%	814
CCO	456	36	7%	492
YAG	263	59	18%	322
FY2014/15	732	128	15%	860
CCO	466	42	8%	508
YAG	266	86	24%	352
FY2015/16	687	128	16%	815
CCO	409	46	10%	455
YAG	278	82	23%	360
FY2016/17	639	158	20%	797
CCO	357	49	12%	406
YAG	282	109	28%	391
FY2017/18	599	212	26%	811
CCO	338	80	19%	418
YAG	261	132	34%	393
FY2018/19	510	260	34%	770
CCO	277	99	26%	376
YAG	233	161	41%	394
FY2019/20	461	302	40%	763
CCO	236	113	32%	349
YAG	225	189	46%	414
Total	5101	1390	21%	6491

*by fiscal year

Table B. Variability in AYA access rates across Service Delivery Areas (2012/2013 through 2019/2020)*

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
SDA 11 – Kootenays	153	40	21%	193
2012/13	28	3	10%	31
2013/14	19	3	14%	22
2014/15	19	1	5%	20
2015/16	26	3	10%	29
2016/17	17	7	29%	24
2017/18	19	8	30%	27
2018/19	12	6	33%	18
2019/20	13	9	41%	22
SDA 12 – Okanagan	449	100	18%	549
2012/13	50	7	12%	57
2013/14	69	9	12%	78
2014/15	54	10	16%	64
2015/16	64	8	11%	72
2016/17	66	4	6%	70
2017/18	56	25	31%	81
2018/19	53	14	21%	67
2019/20	37	23	38%	60
SDA 13 – Thompson Cariboo Shuswap	316	61	16%	377
2012/13	45	9	17%	54
2013/14	48	6	11%	54
2014/15	46	6	12%	52
2015/16	39	5	11%	44
2016/17	44	6	12%	50
2017/18	36	5	12%	41
2018/19	27	10	27%	37
2019/20	31	14	31%	45
SDA 21 – East Fraser	428	81	16%	509
2012/13	59	9	13%	68
2013/14	63	6	9%	69
2014/15	59	7	11%	66
2015/16	59	13	18%	72
2016/17	58	7	11%	65

*by fiscal year

Table B. Variability in AYA access rates across Service Delivery Areas (2012/2013 through 2019/2020)*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2017/18	49	12	20%	61
2018/19	49	12	20%	61
2019/20	32	15	32%	47
SDA 22 – North Fraser	348	124	26%	472
2012/13	57	7	11%	64
2013/14	52	12	19%	64
2014/15	47	10	18%	57
2015/16	61	13	18%	74
2016/17	42	14	25%	56
2017/18	45	9	17%	54
2018/19	22	29	57%	51
2019/20	22	30	58%	52
SDA 23 – South Fraser	524	129	20%	653
2012/13	81	10	11%	91
2013/14	71	8	10%	79
2014/15	63	17	21%	80
2015/16	61	11	15%	72
2016/17	71	19	21%	90
2017/18	73	22	23%	95
2018/19	61	23	27%	84
2019/20	43	19	31%	62
SDA 24 – Vancouver/ Richmond	384	260	40%	644
2012/13	58	17	23%	75
2013/14	59	20	25%	79
2014/15	66	26	28%	92
2015/16	53	30	36%	83
2016/17	49	44	47%	93
2017/18	45	35	44%	80
2018/19	25	35	58%	60
2019/20	29	53	65%	82

*by fiscal year

Table B. Variability in AYA access rates across Service Delivery Areas (2012/2013 through 2019/2020)*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
SDA 25 – Coast/North Shore	175	64	27%	239
2012/13	26	6	19%	32
2013/14	22	4	15%	26
2014/15	29	8	22%	37
2015/16	20	7	26%	27
2016/17	22	9	29%	31
2017/18	22	7	24%	29
2018/19	15	15	50%	30
2019/20	19	8	30%	27
SDA 31 – South Vancouver Island	471	177	27%	648
2012/13	81	18	18%	99
2013/14	74	13	15%	87
2014/15	64	14	18%	78
2015/16	59	10	14%	69
2016/17	53	15	22%	68
2017/18	55	28	34%	83
2018/19	43	47	52%	90
2019/20	42	32	43%	74
SDA 32 – North Vancouver Island	366	112	23%	478
2012/13	47	2	4%	49
2013/14	48	4	8%	52
2014/15	49	7	13%	56
2015/16	46	8	15%	54
2016/17	52	11	17%	63
2017/18	36	22	38%	58
2018/19	43	31	42%	74
2019/20	45	27	38%	72
SDA 41 – Northwest	106	38	26%	144
2012/13	25	1	4%	26
2013/14	14	4	22%	18

*by fiscal year

Table B. Variability in AYA access rates across Service Delivery Areas (2012/2013 through 2019/2020)*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2014/15	8	6	43%	14
2015/16	10	3	23%	13
2016/17	15	6	29%	21
2017/18	10	4	29%	14
2018/19	13	6	32%	19
2019/20	11	8	42%	19
SDA 42 – North Central	232	39	14%	271
2012/13	34	5	13%	39
2013/14	39	3	7%	42
2014/15	38	4	10%	42
2015/16	29	4	12%	33
2016/17	25	6	19%	31
2017/18	30	7	19%	37
2018/19	14	6	30%	20
2019/20	23	4	15%	27
SDA 43 – Northeast	74	16	18%	90
2012/13	10	1	9%	11
2013/14	13	2	13%	15
2014/15	11	2	15%	13
2015/16	7		0%	7
2016/17	7	1	13%	8
2017/18	7	4	36%	11
2018/19	11	1	8%	12
2019/20	8	5	38%	13
SDA 99 – Delegated Aboriginal Agencies	1058	147	12%	1205
2012/13	146	10	6%	156
2013/14	128	1	1%	129
2014/15	178	10	5%	188
2015/16	150	13	8%	163
2016/17	115	9	7%	124
2017/18	115	24	17%	139

*by fiscal year

Table B. Variability in AYA access rates across Service Delivery Areas (2012/2013 through 2019/2020)*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2018/19	122	25	17%	147
2019/20	104	55	35%	159
#N/A	10		0%	10
2012/13	1		0%	1
2014/15	1		0%	1
2015/16	3		0%	3
2016/17	3		0%	3
2017/18	1		0%	1
2019/20	1		0%	1
Office not assigned to an SDA	7	2	22%	9
2012/13	6	2	25%	8
2019/20	1		0%	1
Total	5101	1390	21%	6491

*by fiscal year

Table C. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by gender in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status*

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2012/13	754	107	12%	861
Female	387	74	16%	461
Male	367	33	8%	400
2013/14	719	95	12%	814
Female	367	59	14%	426
Male	352	36	9%	388
2014/15	732	128	15%	860
Female	377	82	18%	459
Male	355	46	11%	401
2015/16	687	128	16%	815
Female	348	74	18%	422
Male	339	54	14%	393
2016/17	639	158	20%	797
Female	349	102	23%	451
Male	290	55	16%	345
Unknown		1	100%	1
2017/18	599	212	26%	811
Female	321	135	30%	456
Male	278	77	22%	355
2018/19	510	260	34%	770
Female	260	170	40%	430
Male	250	90	26%	340
2019/20	461	302	40%	763
Female	232	186	44%	418
Male	229	116	34%	345
Total	5101	1391	21%	6491

*by fiscal year

Table D. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by Indigenous status in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status*

Data caveat: Data entered prior to November, 2014 in the field in ICM that identifies individuals as First Nation, Inuit, Métis, Nisga'a or no (not First Nation, Inuit, Métis, or Nisga'a) may have been compromised during a system upgrade. This accounts for the higher level of statuses of TBD (To Be Determined) or Unknown.

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2012/13	754	107	12%	861
Inuit		1	100%	1
YAG		1	100%	1
Nisga'a	4		0%	4
CCO	1		0%	1
YAG	3		0%	3
Métis	63	12	16%	75
CCO	49	8	14%	57
YAG	14	4	22%	18
First Nation	281	19	6%	300
CCO	202	12	6%	214
YAG	79	7	8%	86
Non-Indigenous	215	30	12%	245
CCO	109	13	11%	122
YAG	106	17	14%	123
TBD	1		0%	1
YAG	1		0%	1
Unknown	190	45	19%	235
CCO	98	10	9%	108
YAG	92	35	28%	127
2013/14	719	95	12%	814
Inuit	2		0%	2
CCO	2		0%	2
Nisga'a	5		0%	5
CCO	2		0%	2
YAG	3		0%	3
Métis	65	5	7%	70
CCO	47	3	6%	50
YAG	18	2	10%	20
First Nation	248	25	9%	273
CCO	186	14	7%	200

*by fiscal year

Table D. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by Indigenous status in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
YAG	62	11	15%	73
Non-Indigenous	239	46	16%	285
CCO	129	15	10%	144
YAG	110	31	22%	141
TBD	1		0%	1
YAG	1		0%	1
Unknown	159	19	11%	178
CCO	90	4	4%	94
YAG	69	15	18%	84
2014/15	732	128	15%	860
Inuit	2	1	33%	3
CCO	1	1	50%	2
YAG	1		0%	1
Nisga'a	3	1	25%	4
CCO	3		0%	3
YAG		1	100%	1
Métis	57	10	15%	67
CCO	45	4	8%	49
YAG	12	6	33%	18
First Nation	305	28	8%	333
CCO	232	12	5%	244
YAG	73	16	18%	89
Non-Indigenous	289	82	22%	371
CCO	136	24	15%	160
YAG	153	58	27%	211
TBD		1	100%	1
YAG		1	100%	1
Unknown	76	5	6%	81
CCO	49	1	2%	50
YAG	27	4	13%	31
2015/16	687	128	16%	815
Inuit	1		0%	1
CCO	1		0%	1
Nisga'a	3		0%	3
CCO	3		0%	3

*by fiscal year

Table D. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by Indigenous status in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
Métis	67	8	11%	75
CCO	47	4	8%	51
YAG	20	4	17%	24
First Nation	263	39	13%	302
CCO	175	21	11%	196
YAG	88	18	17%	106
Non-Indigenous	352	81	19%	433
CCO	182	21	10%	203
YAG	170	60	26%	230
TBD	1		0%	1
CCO	1		0%	1
2016/17	639	158	20%	797
Inuit	3	1	25%	4
CCO	3	1	25%	4
Nisga'a	8	2	20%	10
CCO	2		0%	2
YAG	6	2	25%	8
Métis	54	16	23%	70
CCO	34	10	23%	44
YAG	20	6	23%	26
First Nation	250	37	13%	287
CCO	159	5	3%	164
YAG	91	32	26%	123
Non-Indigenous	323	102	24%	425
CCO	158	33	17%	191
YAG	165	69	29%	234
Unknown	1		0%	1
CCO	1		0%	1
2017/18	599	212	26%	811
Inuit	1	1	50%	2
CCO	1		0%	1
YAG		1	100%	1
Nisga'a	4		0%	4
CCO	3		0%	3
YAG	1		0%	1

*by fiscal year

Table D. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by Indigenous status in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
Métis	61	13	18%	74
CCO	35	7	17%	42
YAG	26	6	19%	32
First Nation	217	68	24%	285
CCO	152	32	17%	184
YAG	65	36	36%	101
Non-Indigenous	314	130	29%	444
CCO	147	41	22%	188
YAG	167	89	35%	256
TBD	2		0%	2
YAG	2		0%	2
2018/19	510	260	34%	770
Inuit	2		0%	2
YAG	2		0%	2
Nisga'a	5	2	29%	7
CCO	5		0%	5
YAG		2	100%	2
Métis	47	21	31%	68
CCO	27	10	27%	37
YAG	20	11	35%	31
First Nation	214	66	24%	280
CCO	136	28	17%	164
YAG	78	38	33%	116
Non-Indigenous	241	171	42%	412
CCO	109	61	36%	170
YAG	132	110	45%	242
Unknown	1		0%	1
YAG	1		0%	1

*by fiscal year

Table D. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by Indigenous status in ICM and by AYA eligibility and status*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2019/20	461	302	40%	763
Inuit	4		0%	4
CCO	1		0%	1
YAG	3		0%	3
Nisga'a	3	3	50%	6
CCO	1	2	67%	3
YAG	2	1	33%	3
Métis	40	23	37%	63
CCO	23	11	32%	34
YAG	17	12	41%	29
First Nation	205	100	33%	305
CCO	132	43	25%	175
YAG	73	57	44%	130
Non-Indigenous	209	176	46%	385
CCO	79	57	42%	136
YAG	130	119	48%	249
Total	5101	1390	21%	6491

*by fiscal year

Table E. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by education level*

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2012/13	754	107	12%	861
No secondary school	6		0%	6
Some secondary school	355	25	7%	380
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	69	4	5%	73
Secondary school graduation	226	57	20%	283
B.C. adult graduation diploma	54	16	23%	70
no data provided	44	5	10%	49
2013/14	719	95	12%	814
No secondary school	14	1	7%	15
Some secondary school	307	25	8%	332
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	65	1	2%	66
Secondary school graduation	234	45	16%	279
B.C. adult graduation diploma	68	20	23%	88
no data provided	31	3	9%	34
2014/15	732	128	15%	860
No secondary school	13	1	7%	14
Some secondary school	287	41	13%	328
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	69	2	3%	71
Secondary school graduation	236	63	21%	299
B.C. adult graduation diploma	90	17	16%	107
no data provided	37	4	10%	41
2015/16	687	128	16%	815
No secondary school	15	2	12%	17
Some secondary school	265	32	11%	297
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	60	1	2%	61
Secondary school graduation	218	68	24%	286
B.C. adult graduation diploma	89	20	18%	109
no data provided	40	5	11%	45

*by fiscal year

Table E. Youth with a YAG or CCO transitioning to adulthood in 2012/13 through 2019/20 by education level*, continued

	Eligible, no benefit in fiscal year	Receiving AYA within fiscal year (Per cent of eligible receiving benefits)		Total
2016/17	639	158	20%	797
No secondary school	9		0%	9
Some secondary school	244	37	13%	281
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	63	3	5%	66
Secondary school graduation	187	83	31%	270
B.C. adult graduation diploma	89	27	23%	116
no data provided	47	8	15%	55
2017/18	599	212	26%	811
No secondary school	17		0%	17
Some secondary school	228	53	19%	281
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	57	3	5%	60
Secondary school graduation	190	99	34%	289
B.C. adult graduation diploma	82	52	39%	134
no data provided	25	5	17%	30
2018/19	510	260	34%	770
No secondary school	6	1	14%	7
Some secondary school	192	70	27%	262
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	42	5	11%	47
Secondary school graduation	124	119	49%	243
B.C. adult graduation diploma	80	48	38%	128
no data provided	66	17	20%	83
2019/20	461	302	40%	763
No secondary school	8	2	20%	10
Some secondary school	227	123	35%	350
B.C. school completion certificate (Evergreen certificate)	25	2	7%	27
Secondary school graduation	116	118	50%	234
B.C. adult graduation diploma	55	34	38%	89
no data provided	30	23	43%	53
Total	5101	1390	21%	6491

*by fiscal year

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