



Supporting youth 'aging out' of care in British Columbia: Recommendations for change and extended support

To the attention of the following Ministries:

Children and Family Development
Advanced Education, Skills and Training
Municipal Affairs and Housing
Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Health Mental Health and Addictions

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

#810 – 815 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 1B4

Phone: 604-709-6970/1-800-307-1212

info@firstcallbc.org

www.firstcallbc.org

October 2017

Memorandum to Ministers, MLAs

PREPARED BY

Youth from care in BC; Melanie Doucet, PhD Candidate, McGill School of Social Work and former youth in care; Dylan Cohen, Policy Solutions Day Organizer, First Call BC: Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition and former youth in care; with support of the Vancouver Foundation's Fostering Change Initiative and First Call.

PURPOSE

To call for action and decision-making by the Ministries responsible for youth in care on extending supports.

BACKGROUND

- Currently, youth in government care must 'age out' of the system at the age of majority. 'Aging out' often represents getting cut-off from much needed supports and services. Research to date paints a tough picture for youth 'aging out': high rates of homelessness, substance abuse, under-education, mental health problems, unemployment or under-employment, early pregnancy or parenthood. **Youth in care graduate high school at less than half the rate of their peers (32 per cent), and only two per cent complete a bachelor's degree.** Once they leave care, they live in poverty, with **nearly half (40 per cent) relying on income assistance to survive.** Unstable housing makes them **seven times more likely to become homeless** after leaving care, and they are **up to five times more likely to suffer from PTSD**—rates comparable to Vietnam war veterans. **Indigenous youth are 17 times more likely to be in care** than non-Indigenous youth due to chronic and discriminatory under-funding, under-staffing and the on-going legacy of colonialism. Often times, Indigenous youth are **placed in non-Indigenous homes, outside of their communities and culture.**
- The 2016 report released by the Vancouver Foundation's Fostering Change Initiative titled *Opportunities for Transition* demonstrated that **extending supports for youth in care up to age 25 would save the BC government over \$200 million for each annual cohort** that exits the child welfare system. Similar figures were highlighted in the Ontario Child and Youth Advocate's 2011 report, *25 Is the New 21*.

- Recent Statistics Canada census data shows that nearly half (42%) of young people between the ages of 20 and 29 still live with their parents. Yet, the 1,000 youth that 'age out' of care in BC every year are held to a different standard, living without supports in their young adult years.
- When presented with information about the realities of 'aging out' of care, British Columbians are largely supportive of extended supports. The 2016 Youth Transitions Survey by the Vancouver Foundation's Fostering Change initiative found that 71% of surveyed British Columbians agree that young people from care should receive a stipend to support their costs of living until age 25.
- In spring of 2016, the Vancouver Foundation's Fostering Change initiative launched the *Write the Future* petition, calling for supports for youth 'aging out' of care until age 25. The petition demonstrated clear public support for enhanced services for youth exiting care, with over 17,500 signatories to date, including the support endorsement of Vancouver City Council.
- In spring of 2017, the Vancouver Foundation's Fostering Change initiative launched the #SUPPORTTHE700 campaign, to raise awareness and encourage all candidates in the 2017 BC provincial election to show their support for youth 'aging out' of foster care in BC; 41 elected MLAs signed the pledge.

CURRENT STATUS

Every year, approximately 1,000 youth 'age out' of care in BC at the age of majority, with little to no supports to help them become successful young adults. While the 2017 post-secondary tuition waiver announcement is a positive step forward, **more needs to be done to ensure all youth exiting the system are given the supports they need.** Currently, only a small number of youth from care can benefit from this waiver. Youth exiting care need to be provided an array of services to meet their multiple needs, and must be given opportunities to succeed and thrive instead of struggling to survive.

CONSIDERATIONS

Youth in and from care have little to no political voice. Yet, youth in and from care know how to improve the policies and programs to make the biggest difference in their lives. **It is important to consider youth with care experience as valuable experts and contributors to social policy, so that we can produce policies that work and are cost-efficient.** The concerned ministries should commit to engaging and collaborating with youth in and from care to develop policies and programs that are reflective of their current realities and array of needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed by youth in and from care.

Youth 'aging out' of any form of government care should be able to count on three things until age 25:

1. **Consistent financial support** with basic living costs like housing, transit and food while they attend school, learn skills, and find work.
2. **Long-term relationships with caring dependable adults** for support, advice and references, so that they always have somewhere to turn.
3. **A chance to connect and contribute to their communities** through creative, cultural and volunteer activities, so that they feel like they belong.

Complementary to these recommendations, the Government of the Province of British Columbia should ensure that **the following programs and services are reformed** to better meet the needs of youth 'aging out' of care:

Agreements with Youth Adults (AYA)

- i. Ensure AYAs meet the needs of all youth, including youth facing multiple barriers to services;
- ii. Increase AYAs to \$1,375 per month and index annually to meet the needs of youth;
- iii. Ensure all youth in care, regardless of care status, have access to the program;
- iv. Eliminate any clawbacks and breaks in support while students attend school.

Post-Secondary Tuition Waivers

- i. There should be no age limit to be eligible for the waiver;
- ii. Lower eligibility to a 30% course load to increase likelihood of success;
- iii. The number of months in care to be eligible should be eliminated.

Housing

- i. Ensure all youth 'aging out' of care have housing and financial support until their 26th birthday;
- ii. Base financial support on current market rates for housing.

Mental Health

- i. Increase mental health supports for youth in care;
- ii. Ensure continuous supports are available to youth during and after their transition out of care;
- iii. Reduce wait lists for mental health services;
- iv. Invest and fund community-based programs aimed at supporting youth 'aging out' of care.

Cultural Identity

- i. Invest in cultural competency training, including Indigenous cultural competency training for local agencies and front line workers;
- ii. Adopt a community HUB model to connect youth 'aging out' of care to services and opportunities for cultural development and identity formation.

NEXT STEPS

- **Establish an inter-ministerial committee or task force** dedicated to developing a response to the recommendations in this memorandum and an action plan;
- **Work in collaboration with youth in and from care** to develop the action plan;
- **Release a formal statement** in response to this memorandum with a commitment to change;
- **Invite young people in and from care**, outside of the MCFD youth advisory council, to present to the **Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth**.

CONTACT

Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator
First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
604-877-4932 adrienne@firstcallbc.org