

July 18, 2019

Honourable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Children and Family Development
E-mail: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Conroy,

The Fostering Change Campaign's vision is that youth in care look forward to their 19th birthday with excitement instead of trepidation. This includes a universal system of support, available to all youth who leave care, with the resources they need to thrive.

We know your government shares this goal with us and has made commitments to improving transition supports for youth from care. When Premier Horgan responded to the First Call and Fostering Change policy memorandum of October 2017, he stated, "MCFD is re-imagining the AYA program with the goal of offering supports to all youth aging out of care who need it, and not just a few." Shortly after this commitment from the Premier, in May of 2018 your government accepted all of the recommendations in the *BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel: Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2016*, including these two:

Recommendation #1: Expand Agreements with Young Adults (AYAs) to Address Self-identified Transition Needs

- By October 2019, the MCFD will amend the qualifying criteria for AYAs so that all young people transitioning from care or Youth Agreements are universally eligible for the program. Services and financial support provided will address unique circumstances and transition needs of the young person.

Recommendation #2: Ensure Collaboration to Support Effective Planning and Service Provision

- By December 2019 the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions will collaborate with MCFD, Health and First Nations Health Authority to ensure access to youth mental health and addictions services for youth transitioning from care or on Youth Agreements.

While the deadlines in the above recommendations are still in the future, and we know ministry staff are still in the process of developing proposals for government consideration, we write now to urge your ministry to address the inequitable AYA program access issues affecting youth from care in this interim period.

Youth from care are currently experiencing differential access to the AYA program and the types of services provided under agreements, depending on their service delivery area or their ministry workers. While we assume this inequity is not the intent of government, it is unfair and having serious impacts on young people's lives.

Current AYA program policy is not very flexible. However, we have been encouraged by the ways many front-line staff have found to provide AYA funding to youth who may not fit into the exact criteria. The flexible interpretation of the policy has resulted in many more youth receiving services, as explained to us by MCFD workers in the Lower Mainland and this is having very positive results. For example, we

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understand AYAs are being flexibly granted regardless of AYA life-skills program enrollment.

We see youth in our networks receiving AYA support while working on individual goals through independent counselling services. In the Lower Mainland, where there are more youth programs and service agencies, it is easier to cobble together some sort of service plan that makes sense with the idea of a more flexibly administered AYA program.

We've recently heard an urgent concern that in some jurisdictions, social workers are being directed to tighten restrictions on AYA applications or discontinue funding mental health supports paid for with discretionary funds. AYA life skills programs are not available to all youth who've left care in every community, are typically not funded by MCFD and may not be available when youth need them. As a result, some youth cannot access AYA because of where they live. In addition, the rigid implementation of the program eligibility rules and restricted use of the \$550 in discretionary funds, is denying youth the supports they need, including mental health counselling.

As the ministry continues its work toward fulfilling government's commitment to amending qualifying criteria for AYAs so that all young people transitioning from care or Youth Agreements are universally eligible for the program and will have their unique circumstances and transition needs addressed, we urge you to make sure the above-outlined inequities are eliminated in practice now.

Specifically, in the current interim period:

- 1) Will your ministry create a formal set of equally-applied criteria across the province that empowers front-line workers in all service delivery areas to administer the current AYA program with flexibility and creativity, thereby meeting the specific needs of individual youth through available services?
- 2) How will your ministry ensure that youth can access the AYA program without enrollment in an accredited life skills program?

To reiterate, we appreciate that government is currently working on the commitment to making sure all youth from care are eligible to receive the services and supports they need during their transition into adulthood. We understand that redesigning programs and governing legislation and policy takes time and significant technical work within government.

We are asking that current decision-making in the ministry on AYA administration and eligibility be allowed to prioritize the well-being of the youth who need help now and use existing examples of flexible, responsive practice to guide implementation.

Sincerely,



Dylan Cohen and Susan Russell
Campaign Organizers

Fostering Change, a campaign hosted by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

Copies: Honourable Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Allison Bond, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children and Family Development
Carolyn Kamper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children and Family Development

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