

Building a Future Together: Issues and Outcomes for Transition-Aged Youth

Carrie Reid and Peter Dudding



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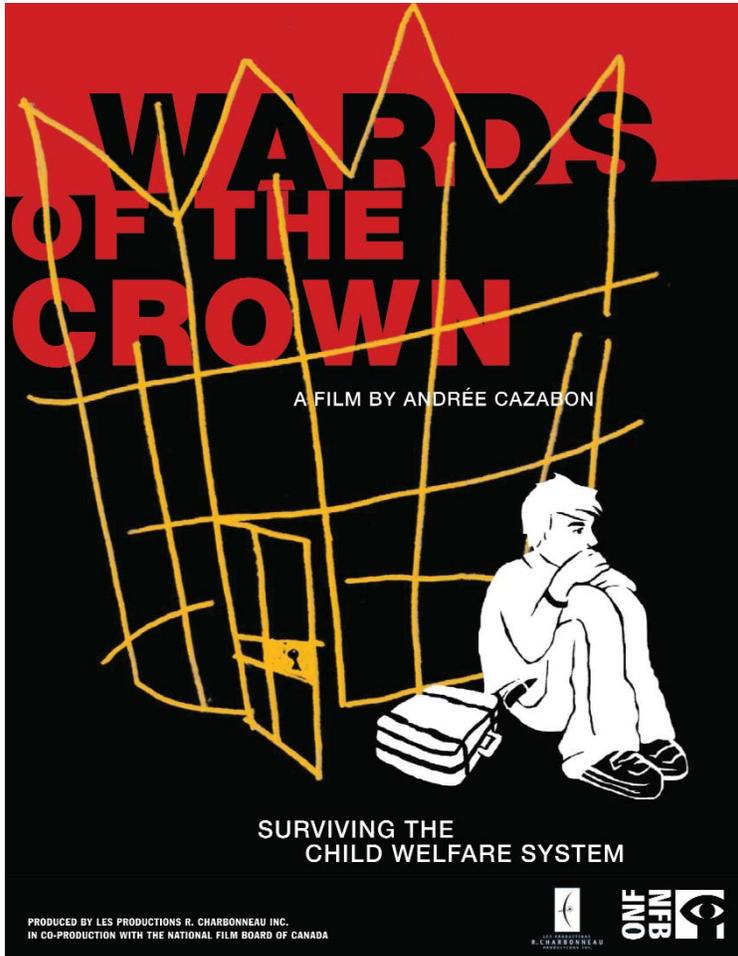
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This report started out in response to a documentary entitled *Wards of the Crown* (the French version is *Les enfants de la Couronne*) by Canadian filmmaker

Andrée Cazabon. This film follows five youth as they prepare to leave the child welfare system and face life “after care.” The reaction to the film was overwhelming and the filmmaker teamed up with Peter Dudding, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of Canada, to provide professional education workshops across the country. The workshops brought the issues directly to those who have a daily impact on the lives of youth preparing for adulthood. The film helped guide the development of this paper and made sure that the voices of youth are heard as we adults continue to write about what is best for them. Many thanks are owed to Andrée Cazabon and the National Youth in Care Network for their dedication to these youth and helping to guide the dialogue forward.

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Executive Summary

Today, Canadian youth and their counterparts around the world, are supported a lot longer by their families than in the past. It is now not uncommon for youth to remain living in the family home until their mid-twenties, or returning to this home at some point as they transition to adulthood. Youth in the care of the child welfare system who reach the age of majority in Canada face a difficult transition. They are expected to be responsible adults making it on their own in the world without being given the proper resources and supports to do so. They don't have a family home to return to or the comfort of a strong support network to help them make their way. While little Canadian research exists on the topic of youth transitioning out of care, what does exist points very clearly to significant problems with the systems currently in place.

This paper outlines the eight areas where youth need support to ensure a smoother transition to adulthood: relationships, education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing and financial support. The first seven areas are referred to as pillars while the final area, financial support, is considered to be the foundation on which all of those pillars are built. Each of these areas are interrelated and work together to create the necessary supports for a successful transition to adulthood. National and international examples are used to illustrate innovative programs and policies that are making the difference for youth. A national survey was conducted of each province and territory's youth transitions programs, with the findings included throughout.

Independent living is the term most often associated with the transition for youth out of care into adulthood. An American foundation, Casey Family Programs, uses the term interdependency instead of independence. They view the goal of living successfully on one's own not as independence, but as a result of interdependent relationships. While the term independence is often used by child welfare professionals to denote the ability to care for oneself as an adult, Casey prefers the term interdependency to represent the ability to meet one's physical, cultural, social, emotional, economic, and spiritual needs within the context of relationships with families, friends, employers and community. This reflects the belief that relationships cultivated throughout life are not independent of one another but are connected or interdependent. This paper adopts this definition as it reflects the belief that people are not independent. While we are all individuals, we rely on others as they rely on us. This system of interconnectedness is the ideal state to be achieved.

The goal of this paper is to raise awareness amongst government officials, caregivers, frontline staff, managers and community members about the needs of youth transitioning out of the child welfare system. The issues cannot be solved by fixing one policy or implementing a new program or two. It will take a coordinated effort through partnerships between community organizations and government to build a system of supports that will help launch youth leaving care into adulthood with the optimism and skills to succeed.

Introduction

Teenagers all across the country get excited about their 18th birthday. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child follows in the footsteps of laws around the world recognizing the age of 18 as the legal demarcation of adulthood. In some places, it means youth are legally allowed to enter into contract and consume alcohol, while in others they are only old enough to buy cigarettes and lottery tickets; in Canada, everyone at the age of 18 is allowed to vote. For youth who are raised in the child welfare system, 18 years old is also usually the cutoff age for receiving services.¹ No longer are they a “child in care” but an adult with all the associated responsibilities. Many 18 year olds can’t wait until they can live on their own and one day be free from their parents’ home but for those who call the child welfare system a parent and who may not have a supportive family, the departure from state care isn’t always filled with excitement about what the future holds.

Youth exiting the child welfare system, also commonly referred to as “aging out,” face a plethora of problems and issues associated with the transition to adulthood. Research from countries all over the world say the same thing about youth leaving the child welfare system. Compared to their peers youth aging out of care are more likely to leave school before completing their secondary education; become a parent at a young age; be dependent on social assistance; be unemployed or underemployed; be incarcerated/involved with the criminal justice system; experience homelessness; have mental health problems; and be at higher risk for substance abuse problems (Courtney & Dworsky, 2005; Munroe, Stein, & Ward, 2005; Tweedle, 2005; Massinga & Pecora, 2004; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004; Casey Family Programs, 2003a; Leslie & Hare, 2000). The similarities across regions and countries raises the question – what will help youth more successfully transition to adulthood?

For the majority of youth, the transition to adulthood represents a process that takes place over a period of time with the support of family and friends. In Canada, and around the world, it is becoming commonplace for youth to depend on their parents for economic and emotional support well into their twenties. Research shows that the age of leaving home has steadily increased over the past decade (Rutman, Hubberstey, Feduniw, & Brown, 2005; Beaujot, 2004). Intergenerational interdependence is the norm in most societies (Beaujot, 2004). This isn’t to say that a youth hasn’t moved out, but when the going gets tough, the tough move back in with Mom. This is an accepted occurrence for many young people today. Currently across Canada youth are required to leave the child welfare system between the ages of 18 and 21 (Reid, 2006). Some provinces/territories have provisions in legislation for support beyond this age but it is often discretionary and can come with a series of responsibilities and requirements attached (Reid, 2006). Youth in the child welfare system are often considered at high risk, yet they are the ones least likely to be receiving support from family or the state. Youth leaving care don’t have a sturdy safety net to catch them as they waiver on the brink of adulthood. If they’re lucky they have a former social worker or foster parent to call on for advice or money. For the unlucky, they must solve their problems with their own resources or enter into an adult service system which is difficult to navigate and for which they are not prepared.

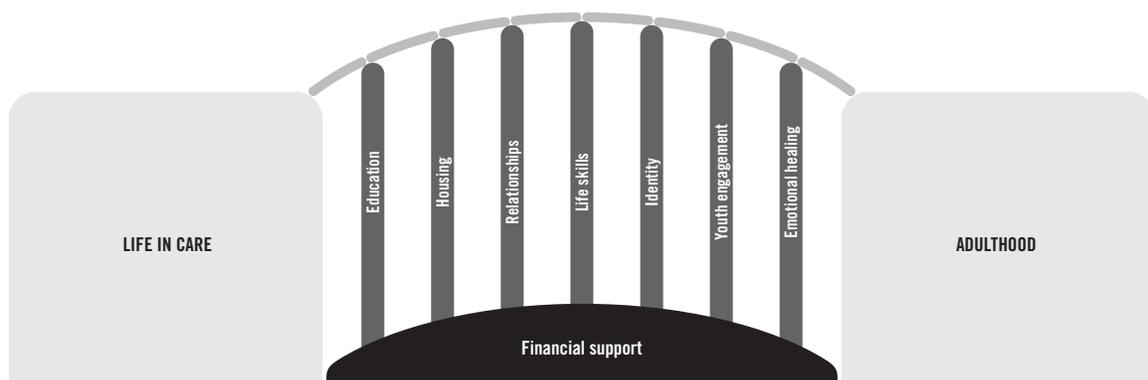
¹ See Appendix B for a breakdown of the age of majority and definition of child in each province/territory

Expulsion, rather than transition, more accurately describes the experience of many youth exiting the system (Rutman et al., 2005). Regardless of needs and desires, once a youth hits the arbitrary age, they are required to become independent and self-sufficient, whatever their developmental state of readiness. This process can be impersonal and irreversible, representing the termination of the parent-child relationship at a time when instability and insecurities reign (Leslie & Hare, 2000). When parents wave goodbye to their child on the steps of the dormitory on the first day of university, it isn't a permanent farewell implying "good luck and have a nice life," rather, it is a temporary parting that sounds more like "have fun and we'll see you at Thanksgiving. Oh, and call us to let us know how you're settling in." Such relationships foster ongoing growth for the youth because while they are striking it out on their own, there is room for failure, mistakes and support. Unfortunately youth in care aren't given the same leeway to make mistakes and occasionally fail. While they are now considered adults, they aren't provided with the support necessary to learn this role the way most other youth do. They have lost their parent (again), even if this parent is an institution, while they are expected to make it on their own.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore why youth aging out of the Canadian child welfare system do not fare as well as their peers. The answer isn't simple. There is no one formula that determines which children will excel and which ones will fall short. A multitude of factors impact youth and combine to shape their life, for better or worse. These factors are often identified independently, occasionally together, but rarely is more discussed than the current dismal outcomes for youth. There is a move towards identifying how the various areas in which a youth can succeed or fail are interrelated, but little more than that is done. In an effort to not only identify what a youth needs to be successful but also why, this paper brings together the current research, experience of the authors and the voices of youth themselves, to provide a solid knowledge base that can help build stronger policies and practices for youth exiting child welfare systems across Canada and the world. Appendix A contains recommendations aimed at policy-makers to consider when developing policies and programs. Appendix B outlines the age of majority and age of child as defined by each jurisdiction. Finally, a national survey was conducted of each province and territory's youth transitions programs. Every Director of Child Welfare was sent a survey and the responses were analyzed with findings throughout. Appendix C contains a summary of the survey responses.

Current research has identified the following interrelated factors: education, housing, relationships, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing and financial support as key areas that help determine how successful a youth is likely to be in life after care (Merdinger, Hines, Lemon Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005; National Youth in Care Network, 2005; Rutman et al., 2005; Tweedle, 2005; Kessler, 2004; Casey Family Programs, 2003a; Casey Family Programs, 2001). This success can be viewed in terms of educational attainment, employment, positive relationships and other factors that can lead to happiness in adult life. This paper uses these eight key areas as pillars and a foundation to create the bridge from life in care to adulthood. Education, housing, relationships, life skills, identity, youth engagement and emotional healing are the seven pillars of necessary support, with financial support as the foundation to enable the recommended supports to be predictable and sustainable. The concept of pillars and a foundation is particularly apt because none of these areas are autonomous and each contributes to the success in other areas. Without each pillar working together to create a solid structure, cracks can form and a youth can very easily fall through them.



The framework of pillars is not unique to this paper. The Casey Family Programs² document, entitled *It's My Life* (Casey Family Programs, 2001), outlines seven practice domains that provided the basis for our structure. However, the domains are not all the same and reflect the unique realities in Canada. We chose to refer to these areas as pillars and a foundation, instead of domains, to reflect the importance of each of these areas on their own and to demonstrate how they work together to build something bigger and stronger – a child's future.

While American research on youth in care is becoming more readily available, there is limited research on Canadian youth and their success in our child welfare systems. New longitudinal research projects are underway across Canada and the results are eagerly anticipated. University of Victoria's Dr. Deborah Rutman, along with project team members Carol Hubberstey, April Feduniw and Erinn Brown, have been conducting research relating to youth leaving government care. This research has included a project which identified and implemented ways to improve young people's preparation for, and experiences of, leaving government care; and a three year prospective study examining what happens to youth following their exit from care and what helps lead to their successful transitions. Dr. Varda Mann-Feder of Concordia University is writing up results of her last study on the impact of organizational factors on youth exiting the care system and she is also part of a new research team that is seeking funding to explore the impact of therapeutic group interventions in preparing youth for the transition to independent living. Dr. Robert Flynn of University of Ottawa is conducting research on the *Looking After Children* project in Canada. This paper aims to further contribute to this body of knowledge and provide sound recommendations that can be implemented across Canada and adapted to address the similarly poor outcomes in other jurisdictions.

The stated goal of the child welfare system is for youth to exit care and live "independently." However, the term "independence" is misleading. *It's My Life* chooses to use the term "interdependency" instead of "independence." It views the goal of living successfully on one's own not as "independence," but as a result of "interdependent" relationships. While the term "independence" is often used by child welfare professionals to denote the ability to care for oneself as an adult, Casey prefers to use the term "interdependency" to represent the ability to meet one's physical, cultural, social, emotional, economic, and spiritual needs within the context of relationships with families, friends, employers and community. This reflects the belief that relationships cultivated throughout life are not independent of one another but are connected or interdependent (Casey Family Programs, 2001). This paper adopts this definition as it reflects our view that people are not independent. While we are all individuals, we rely on others and they rely on us. This system of interconnectedness is the ideal state to be achieved.

Much of the literature refers to independence rather than the above mentioned interdependence. Programs and policies from across Canada make explicit mention of independent living (Reid, 2006). For ease of understanding, this paper will use the term independence but incorporate the understanding of interconnectedness between the youth and his or her supports meant by interdependence.

2 Casey Family Programs is an American foundation focused on children in the child welfare system. More information about the Casey Family Programs can be found on their website at www.casey.org. This website also contains a wealth of research on youth and the foster care system, along with other relevant child welfare topics. Also see the section of this paper on international examples where the Casey Family Programs are outlined in further detail.

Seven Pillars and the Foundation

When thinking about the seven pillars and the foundation for a successful youth aging out of care, it is difficult to know where to start. No one area can be discussed without touching on the importance of the others. It is imperative that each of these areas be seen as only a part of the explanation and as a whole they create a complete picture. The areas of relationships, education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing and financial support comprise the major issues facing youth transitioning out of care. Without understanding the importance of these seven pillars and foundation to each other, any initiatives undertaken to address shortcomings in one area will only highlight a weakness in another. Only when all areas are examined and addressed with equal vigour and determination will the outcomes for youth improve.

Relationships

“Sometimes when you’re separated from your family you can’t really expect love from others...or you can expect it, but you must realize that it may not come. The burden rests on the foster child to adapt to the situation.”

(Youth quoted in Festinger, 1978)

The importance of relationships to human development can’t be stressed enough. No one needs to read academic research to understand that people need love and affection, support and people they can count on in good times and bad. Unfortunately for children and youth in the child welfare system, long-term and meaningful relationships are hard to come by (Collins, 2001; Hay, 1996). Imagine first being removed from your family home and not being allowed to see them anymore. You live in a foster home with loving foster parents, two foster sisters and a family dog. One morning you wake up to your bags packed and you learn that you can’t live there anymore. You’re upset and confused and when your social worker tries to console you, you feel even more alone because this worker hardly knows you because you’ve only been her client for a couple of months. After moving to your new foster home, you start at a new school where you don’t know anyone and even though you’re in the same grade, the lessons are entirely different. Your life today is completely different than it was yesterday and it could change again tomorrow. Now imagine that this has happened several times in several years. Now you’re a teenager who wants a part-time job to earn a little bit of spending money to buy yourself the same things that you see your classmates with. Where will you get a job when you know that you might not be living nearby for much longer? A part-time job at the local fast food restaurant may not seem like a big issue in the grand scheme of a youth’s life, but the money and sense of accomplishment is a big deal to a teenager. It just demonstrates how uncertain and unstable life in care can be. The people you’ve come to count on have all disappeared from your life in one way or another and the only consistency in your life is inconsistency.

Sadly, the set of circumstances outlined above are very real for many youth in care. They have no one they can call at 3 a.m. after breaking up with their boyfriend or girlfriend, no one to invite to watch them in the school play and no one to celebrate birthdays or Christmas with. Not surprisingly, Canadian and international research on outcomes for youth in care show that youth have better outcomes when they have strong social supports and feel connected to their family, school and community (Rutman et al., 2005; Casey Family Programs, 2003a; Casey Family Programs, 2001; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). Even more compelling is that youth themselves are saying that they need to have at least one supportive adult relationship as they make the transition to independence (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, 2006). Even though youth in care have been removed from their birth homes, research shows

that many youth who continue to have relationships with their birth parents and extended birth families have better outcomes. Further, many youth who age out of the child welfare system end up returning to the home of the birth parent(s) (Casey Family Programs, 2001; Collins, 2001). Ensuring this relationship exists, when possible and in the best interests of the child, can help youth both in the present and in the future.

When youth in care are asked about the most meaningful relationships in their life, boyfriends or girlfriends were most frequently mentioned, followed by siblings and then foster parents. Parents, either mother or father, were fourth on the list in terms of most important relationship. So while family rated lower in importance as a social support, it is still considered important. This is consistent with other studies that show youth find ways to remain in contact with their families (Courtney & Dworsky, 2005; Rutman et al., 2005). A glaring absence from this list is the youth's own worker, the person who the youth ought to be able to count on for support and encouragement.

Foster parents, either current or past, are a significant source of support for some youth (Rutman, Hubberstey, Feduniw, & Brown, 2006). Maintaining this relationship, even when a youth is no longer in the home, is of benefit to the youth in the long term. Unfortunately, many of these relationships end when the youth ages out of the system and is no longer able to stay in the foster home. Even worse, those youth who spend a considerable amount of their life in group homes never have the opportunity to forge such strong and committed relationships. However, not all youth require a "parent figure," rather a person or people to whom they can turn to in times of need and in times of joy. A positive and trusting relationship with an adult or an external support system plays an important role in helping youth overcome challenges (Casey Family Programs, 2001). Children need to be encouraged by peers and adults in order to feel a sense of accomplishment and belonging (Van Bockern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, 2000). Without these feelings, children become disengaged and lack the resources necessary for success.

What makes forming relationships so difficult? As the example above illustrates, children and youth in the child welfare system can experience significant upheaval in their home life and education. These are the two places where most youth spend their time. It is no surprise that youth who change schools frequently and have no continuous primary caregiver have difficulty forming meaningful and long-term relationships (Casey Family Programs, 2001). So how can the child welfare system help youth form these crucial relationships? Stability in placement is one way that will impact across all other areas. With a stable place to live and no fear that they will be moved, school is easier to focus on, activities outside the home can be undertaken and relationships can be built (Casey Family Programs, 2003b). Attachment to individuals won't carry the same risks because the eventuality of loss will be diminished. Many youth can't or won't form relationships if they fear the adult will vanish from their life as quickly as they appeared.

The effects of abuse on a child's ability to trust and form relationships in the future is also important to note. Adult survivors, particularly of sexual abuse, often describe feelings of social isolation, distrust of others and a history of unstable relationships (Hay, 1996). Children develop knowledge about themselves, others and relationships through interactions with others. Thus, if these interactions are hurtful and/or unhealthy, this has long lasting implications on how these children will form relationships in the future. People who fail to develop secure emotional attachments in childhood are more likely to experience relationship problems in later life (Unrau & Krysik, 1996). Further, parent-child relations appear to have a strong influence on the types of relationships children establish as they transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Unrau & Krysik, 1996). The implications for children and youth in the child welfare

system who are placed away from their parents can be profound. Knowing that the children and youth are already likely to have difficulty forming relationships, the effects of instability and frequent placement changes are all the more detrimental. While this sort of instability is unhealthy for anyone, those children and youth who come into the child welfare system with a turbulent history are faced with an even greater challenge. Efforts need to be made to ensure that these young people are placed in situations where they are able to trust others and look forward to long-lasting relationships with them.

An excellent source of relationships for youth are extra-curricular activities. Participation in community-based or other extra-curricular activities can be a protective factor and an indicator of well-being (Rutman et al., 2005). Scout leaders, religious leaders and hobby instructors all represent positive role models for youth in general and the benefits of these relationships is well documented (Gilbertson, Richardson, & Barber, 2005; Merdinger et al., 2005; Casey Family Programs, 2003a; Casey Family Programs, 2001). For youth in care, the benefit of community involvement is also well established (Rutman et al, 2005; Casey Family Programs, 2001); unfortunately, these sorts of activities cost money and not all youth are able to participate. For those that do, outcomes measures are higher and they are also more likely to form significant relationships with others and complete high school (Casey Family Programs, 2003b). While the research supports involvement in extra-curricular activities, often times funding formulas and the child welfare system do not (Reid, 2006).

A relatively new initiative for youth in care is mentoring programs. Studies on mentoring programs and peer groups for foster youth are limited, but there is compelling evidence supporting the overall benefits of mentoring for the general population of at-risk youth (Casey Family Programs, 2001). Learning how to build meaningful relationships and interacting with others in similar situations are very valuable for youth in care. While many youth cannot relate to their peers in school, mentoring and peer programs provide opportunities to share experiences and build friendships amongst other youth and adults who can relate (National Youth in Care Network, 1996). In fact, the National Youth in Care Network³ advocates for mentoring programs across the country. Youth with experience in the child welfare system believe that other youth in care are the most effective tool that can be used to help them heal from their own past. They found that talking to someone with similar experiences or similar feelings to be helpful to understanding their own experiences and feelings, as well as forming a much needed network of peer relationships (National Youth in Care Network, 1996).

The Province of Alberta is at the forefront in implementing mentoring programs for youth in the child welfare system. While it is in its initial stages, Alberta is currently working with approximately 300 youth bursary recipients. These youth are being mentored in a variety of areas including employment, education and life skills. The mentoring needs of each youth differ and the program is designed to respond to this. Alberta has partnered with outside agencies to develop appropriate programming in the prescribed areas to meet the needs of individual youth in the areas they require or request mentoring (Nobrega, 2006).

Supportive relationships are important for everyone to grow and develop into successful and contributing adults. Youth in the child welfare system are no different. They need adults who support and care about them unconditionally, throughout their journey to adulthood. These youth have often suffered rejection, either real or perceived, and have come to expect it from everyone. It is up to the child welfare system to ensure that the life they have in care is better than the one they were removed from.

3 For more information about the National Youth in Care Network, visit their website at www.youthincare.ca.

Education

“...the first thing that they do when they are dealing with behaviour problems is they want to suspend, and especially for a kid who is disconnected to school, that really does not do very much for them.”

(Education Liaison quoted in Smithgall, Gladden, Yang & Goerge, 2005)

High school graduation is an expectation for the majority of youth across Canada. It's well known that without a high school diploma the likelihood of finding employment lessens and the employment that can be found is often low-skilled and even lower paying (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). We live in a knowledge-based society where education, literacy and numeracy are essential. For youth in care, completing high school can be both a dream and a nightmare. How do youth focus on school when they have to spend time looking for a place to live or working to make ends meet? Education attainment for youth in care is not simply completing high school. Reaching that milestone for many is a huge accomplishment but many obstacles stand in the way. Roadblocks are present throughout the education process, not simply at the point of graduation (Kufeldt, 2003). Graduates are what youth leaving the child welfare system are often referred to, and as graduates they become alumni. But when the only graduation many can discuss is their graduation from the child welfare system and not high school, this creates a vulnerability with potentially lifelong consequences.

Level of education is one of the best indicators for future success (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). It can be measured in any number of ways, from employment status and income to lifestyle. Regardless of what is being measured and how, education is an important step to achieving goals. With the importance of education to a successful future, why do youth in care graduate from high school at significantly lower rates than their peers (Courtney, 2005; Rutman et al., 2005; Tweedle, 2005)? There are many factors that combine together to work against youth. Children taken into care lack stability in all aspects of their lives (National Youth in Care Network, 2005). With each placement change comes the likelihood of a new school, new teachers, new curriculum and new uncertainty (National Youth in Care Network, 2001). One can also hope that a new school will bring new friends, but that is often not the case. It's pretty difficult for a child to engage in the educational process when it can't engage them. The system isn't designed for children to bounce between schools at any time during the school year and still be able to fit in with both the students and the lesson plans.

A Private Member's Bill, Bill 133, *An Act to amend the Education Act to provide stability for students in transition housing*, has been introduced into the Ontario Legislature. This bill gives children the right and ability to stay in their home school while they are in transition housing, such as temporary foster care or an emergency shelter (Ontario Bill 133; Matthews, 2006). This bill was introduced in recognition of the educational impacts a change in schools can have on a child. While it has only currently passed second

reading, it did pass unanimously and shows the commitment of the Ontario government to help maintain stability in the lives of those children who are going through a period of transition.

Children need consistency in their lives. Many times young people are removed from chaotic homes only to be placed in a system that provides little more stability (Mech, 1994). Children who frequently move between placements don't form attachments to caregivers, impacting on their ability to do this in school. The educational needs of youth cannot be separated from their personal and social needs (National Youth in Care Network, 2005). School is not only a building that houses children between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. It helps build the personal and social aspects of children using the assets children bring with them into the classroom. If children arrive without these tools it is difficult to engage them. A child who is not engaged in their home life will bring this with them to school every morning and vice versa. The cycle of disengagement breeds a child who feels isolated from education and the longer this goes on the harder it can be to bring them back into the fold.

A variety of research studies point to the implications life in care has on the educational attainment of children and youth (Courtney & Dworsky, 2005; Merdinger et al, 2005; Casey Family Programs, 2003b; Kufeldt, 2003; Casey Family Programs, 2001; National Youth in Care Network, 2001). The consensus is that the outside factors affecting the life of a youth in care are also felt in the classroom. Stressors including maltreatment, placement and placement changes with the associated changes in schools, inconsistent social supports and the low educational expectations of these youth (Merdinger et al, 2005) impact on educational outcomes. It is difficult to truly improve the potential educational attainment of youth from the child welfare system without also addressing the other factors that have negative impacts on the likelihood of success.

The education system is often blamed as failing these vulnerable students. Teachers can't teach children if they aren't in a position to learn. Those children and youth who suffer from emotional issues that aren't adequately addressed are not able to learn while in school, despite the best efforts of educators (Smithgall et al., 2005). Teachers are being asked to do much more than educate children; they are required to be a disciplinarian and counselor on top of the time they are required to dedicate to teaching these young minds. Teachers have called for more psychological services for the children in their charge and services that fully meet the individual needs of each child (Kirby & Keon, 2006). Emotional healing will be addressed in greater detail below, but suffice it to say that a child or youth who is traumatized from years of abuse and neglect will not be able to explore their full potential in the classroom without having their emotional needs met as well (National Youth in Care Network, 2001).

Another important aspect to education attainment for children in care is the fact that these children often start school lacking the necessary tools for success. In recent years there has been a focus on the importance of early childhood learning (White, 2004). A home full of abuse, including neglect, often doesn't give children the initial tools they need to succeed in the classroom (Jones Harden, 2004). A litany of research has been done on the role of the family as an institution for socialization prior to a child attending school (Stettersten & Owens, 2002; Collins, 2001). Abuse can have a negative impact on self-esteem and the ability to learn. Couple this with the lack of skills expected of children in the school system and a child is behind in school before the first day of kindergarten and before entering the child welfare system (Jones Harden, 2004). The child welfare and education systems need to work more closely in partnership to address these problems. In doing so, life in the child welfare system, for whatever length of time, can help lead to better educational outcomes through individual learning plans and services that are appropriate to each child's circumstances. For those children and youth who stay in the system for extended periods of time, it is crucial that education

be seen as a process. The deficits children arrive with in the school system need to be addressed in order to make the children feel accepted and that they are capable of succeeding. Ensuring children feel this way can't be done just in the education system but needs to be fostered in the home environment as well. Feeling comfortable at home will help a child or youth feel the same at school. With this comfort and sense of belonging comes a desire to succeed along with his or her peers and strive to achieve. Graduating from high school is one such achievement to be encouraged and supported throughout the education process. The impact of school on home, and vice versa, is very important and should not be overlooked.

For older youths facing the end of their time with the child welfare system, many stressors exist. Numerous youth in the system take longer to complete high school than their peers (Casey Family Programs, 2001). Absence from classes and lack of skills necessary to complete grades (possibly as a result of frequent placement changes) contribute to the delayed and often resulting poor outcomes for youth (Casey Family Programs, 2001). As they approach graduation, youth are likely also facing the end of support from the system. Instead of going home to a secure place to live with someone who makes dinner, pays the rent and provides emotional support, often these youth are going home to their own place where they have to cook, clean and pay the rent. Imagine being an 18 year old trying to study for a calculus final exam while juggling grocery shopping, cooking all your own meals, working to pay the rent, and hoping that your toothache goes away because you don't have any insurance to cover the cost of a visit to the dentist. If something on this "to do" list were to go, it's probably school. If you're unemployed with no home or food, calculus seems pretty trivial in comparison. For those youth who have overcome the educational obstacles to high school graduation, practical ones can pop up in their place.

A significant finding in the Midwestern United States proves the value of keeping youth in the child welfare system longer. When high school graduation rates for youth in care in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin were compared, the youth from Illinois had significantly higher high school graduation rates than their peers in Iowa and Wisconsin. The most fundamental difference between the child welfare systems in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin is that Illinois courts allow wards to remain under the supervision of the child welfare agency through their twenty-first birthday. Courts in Iowa and Wisconsin generally discharge youth on their eighteenth birthday and almost never later than their nineteenth birthday. Findings from these studies demonstrated that those who stay in care longer experience better educational outcomes. Further, those still in care were more likely to be enrolled in a school or training program as those who had been discharged. Also, youth still in care who had a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) were much more likely than their counterparts no longer in care to be enrolled in a two or four year college (37.2% vs. 11.7%) (Courtney & Dworsky, 2005). This suggests that allowing young adults to remain in care after the age of majority may give them the opportunity to make up for some educational deficits associated with their maltreatment history and the school mobility that many of them experienced while in care. Clearly, the support of the child welfare system assisted these youth in taking the necessary time to transition to adulthood and overcome some of the hurdles that had been erected over time.

Of those who do graduate from high school, either with a diploma or GED, very few go on to post-secondary education. These youth have demonstrated a resilience and have graduated from high school so why aren't they continuing to college or university? Money is almost universally cited as the main reason (Casey Family Programs, 2003a; National Youth in Care Network, 2001). Any form of post-secondary education or training costs money and financial resources are almost unanimously scarce for youth leaving care. With no

parent to help off-set the costs, students must rely on loans and/or employment earnings to pay for tuition, books and other auxiliary fees alongside a place to live, food and other day-to-day expenses. The stress and dedication it takes to complete post-secondary education or training is so strong that for many the long-term benefits of education don't outweigh the impossibility of the short-term costs.

The Province of Alberta is a leader in the area of post-secondary education for youth involved with the child welfare system. The *Advancing Futures* bursary program is offered by Children's Services and supports youth between the ages of 16 and 22 years old attending post-secondary education. Tuition, education costs such as books and supplies, as well as accommodation, are paid for by the bursary. Another important feature of the program is that bursaries are not limited only to those youth involved with the child welfare system at the time of post-secondary education. The criteria specify that to be eligible for a bursary a youth has to have been in care for at least 18 months between the ages of 13 and 18 years old (Reid, 2006). This recognizes that those youth who have come into contact with the child welfare system for extended periods of time are at-risk youth, regardless of their current status within the system.

Housing

“Instead of dealing with problems, they ship us from group home to group home.”

(Youth quoted in National Youth in Care Network, 2003)

Having a place to call home is a distant dream for many youth in care. For some in the child welfare system, the transient lifestyle of moving from placement to placement is a reality that impacts on all aspects of their life (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). From education disruptions and loss of significant relationships to a sense of not belonging anywhere, this lack of stability forms the basis for life in care (Jones Harden, 2004). It is not uncommon for youth to change placements once a year, more if the youth is deemed to be “trouble” (Knott & Barber, 2005; Smithgall et al., 2005). These placements can be foster homes, group homes, or other facilities designed to serve the complex needs of children and youth in the child welfare system. What many people don’t realize is that with each change of home comes a loss of relationships and often a disruption to education. With the scarcity of resources in which to place youth, location and minimal disruption to the youth are secondary to having a place to tell the youth is “home.”

The impacts of changing residences on education and relationships aside, the detrimental effects of never knowing where to call home and for how long you’ll be welcome is emotionally damaging to youth (Smithgall et al., 2005). One study done found that children and youth felt insecure in their placement, even amongst those who had been living in the same foster home for over three years (Kools, 1997). Youth are constantly living in homes in which they have no real stake, possibly with families that they feel may reject them at any time or in group homes where misbehaviour can result in eviction (National Youth in Care Network, 2006). The fragility of a placement is reinforced when those in authority respond to problem behaviours with a caution about a potential placement change. It may seem to have a positive impact in the short-term, in that the problem behaviours may stop, but there are long-term potential consequences for the youth’s sense of stability that inflict further trauma (Smithgall et al., 2005). The unfairness of reassigning placement for adolescent misbehaviour is clear; youth living with their families do not face a future of housing instability if they break rules.

Placement decisions are an area where youth feel they ought to be given more input. These decisions are typically made by social workers and other professionals with the best of intentions. However, by excluding youth in the decision-making process they are further excluding these youth from their own life. These decisions are also made more difficult by the “lack of choice” resulting from the shortage of suitable foster or group care, and the lack of places equipped to deal with more difficult and challenging behavioural and psychological problems. Evidence shows that when children and youth are included in the decision about placement, it tends to be more stable (Cashmore, 2002). Children, like adults, do not like having decisions imposed upon them. A child or youth may become so resistant about a placement that it could break down. How are youth going to learn to make responsible decisions about their living arrangements

when they're 18 years old if they have been denied exposure to the process before-hand?

An astounding number of youth who leave care continue to lack stability in housing (Rutman et al., 2006). One study found 22% of former foster care youth were homeless for one or more nights within a year after being officially discharged (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). The Child Welfare League of America recommends that youth should not be released from the foster care system before they secure housing (Child Welfare League of America, 2005). The current systems in Canada do not adequately ensure youth will have a home of their own once their case is closed and the youth is “independent.” In Cuba, where housing is a crisis, the child welfare system arranges for housing prior to youth leaving care (Dudding, 2006). Although the Canadian system isn't perfect, some provinces/territories are recognizing the problem of housing for youth and taking strides to address it. Ranch Ehrlo Society⁴ in Regina, Saskatchewan is a residential treatment centre which works with youth who have been through the provincial system but can't be served in traditional settings. Ranch Ehrlo Society has created a culture where they take a strengths-based approach to working with youth, understanding that challenging behaviour in one context may be adaptive in another. The program serves all the youth's needs. Ranch Ehrlo has its own school program with individualized education plans, employment training and services wrapped around the youth to promote stability and success (Finucane, 2006).

When youth are asked what they want to see changed about the child welfare system, there is agreement that stability is key (National Youth in Care Network, 2006; Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2006; National Youth in Care Network, 2005). Stability in placements early on help children and youth form the relationships necessary for future success (National Youth in Care Network, 2001). It also provides a sense of belonging and continuity. As youth get older and age out of the system, housing takes on a whole new importance. They are expected to maintain their own home and make ends meet, while the values of education are espoused. To refer back to the example given in the section on education, when a youth needs to pay rent and financially support themselves in whole or in part, they are often forced to choose between the short-term goals of keeping their home and the long-term goals of higher education. Having a place to sleep at night and food to eat will likely be the priority.

⁴ For more information about Ranch Ehrlo Society, visit their website at www.ehrlo.com.

Life Skills

“I did not feel prepared...the Ministry should have taught me how to cook more, someone to actually teach you.”

(Youth quoted in Rutman et al., 2005)

Where did you learn how to budget your money and cook for yourself? Was it the woman who worked Tuesday nights at your group home or was it less deliberate than that? Life skills aren't meant to be taught in a classroom; they need to be developed over time with gradual steps towards mastery. Youth not only need the support and encouragement from those around them, they also need to have practical skills to make it on their own. Studies show that youth who left care wished they were given more practical skills for living on their own, such as cooking, budgeting and time management (Rutman et al., 2005; Casey Family Programs 2001). These skills take practice and someone to dedicate the time to teaching and leading by example. A child doesn't learn to ride a bike without being shown how to balance and pedal, and they certainly don't learn without a few skinned knees. What they need is someone to help them up, put the bandage on their knee and encourage them to get back on and try again. The transition to adulthood is the same kind process and youth need both the skills and the encouragement to continue on.

What becomes apparent about youth leaving care is that their placement and relationship histories shape the life skills they have as they transition out of care (Merdinger et al, 2005; Rutman et al, 2005; Casey Family Programs, 2003a; Casey Family Programs, 2001). A stable home and educational experiences offer opportunities for life skills to be learned by any youth through observation and practice. This is also true of youth in care who have a consistent home environment and effective role models. Those people with whom a youth in care has significant relationships with can teach skills and encourage the development of others. This gives youth the opportunity to learn, ask questions and have someone to help develop these skills. Just as transitioning out of care is a process that takes time, so is the process of learning the skills necessary to succeed. There are many examples of life skills programs being offered to young people across Canada (Reid, 2006). These programs need to be expanded, provided for longer periods of time and have better integration with the current living situation in order to be more useful. When compared, rates of high school graduation, employment and self-sufficiency were higher for youth who participated in an independent living group than those youth who did not receive those services (Scannapieco, Schagrin, & Scannapieco, 1995). These same youth who received independent living training were more likely to live independently or pay all their housing expenses and they had a higher level of educational attainment than the non-participants (Collins, 2001).

The National Youth in Care Network recommends that those making decisions about a youth exit care “be vigilant of the skills and competencies of each individual youth and support them on whatever path they choose; demand excellence from the skills they possess and ensure opportunities to develop the skills necessary for independence” (National Youth in Care Network, 2005). Youth have expressed their desire to have

more hands on training in the skill-building workshops (Mann-Feder & White, 2003). Budgeting without actual money and lessons on grocery shopping without going to the local supermarket are not helpful enough to really give these youth the skills they long for. In addition, for many young people who have been traumatized and have experienced difficult family relationships, there is a strong desire to learn about personal relationships, child rearing and development because role models in these areas have been lacking (National Youth in Care Network, 2006). These skills are difficult to teach in a scheduled workshop.

The Province of Quebec introduced a new program called *Programme Qualification des jeunes (PQJ)*. It began as a pilot program in 2002 and is currently in a limited number of local agencies (Centre jeunesse) with the ultimate goal of expanding it to reach 500 youth by 2009. This program focuses on life skills and working with the youth to develop the skills necessary to transition into adulthood. Case workers carry a small caseload, approximately 10 youth, and these workers help the youth develop the skills to make appropriate decisions. Support is provided to the youth an appropriate level based on the stage of independence the youth has reached. This program is based on the Casey Life Skills Assessment from the Casey Family Programs. A variety of skill areas are addressed, including: cooking, grocery shopping, budgeting, job searching, career planning/communication in the workplace, finding a home, how to access community services, parenting skills, interpersonal relationship skills, self-care, general communication skills, work and study skills, social skills and daily tasks. Also of importance is the evaluation process of this program. L'Université de Sherbrooke developed an evaluation tool and the youth involved are evaluated every six months using the Casey Life Skills Assessment. This program and its successes demonstrate the value of working with youth to develop their life skills.

Identity

“When my sister and I were young, our adoptive father, who was extremely religious, had us ‘exorcised’ thinking that we were ‘cursed’ from our Native relations.”

(Youth quoted in National Youth in Care Network, 2006)

Every person has a fundamental right to know who they are and where they come from. Children grow up asking questions about their families, culture and background. This is normal and to be expected, especially from children and youth in the child welfare system who often lack knowledge about their histories or have distorted perceptions about their past. The answers may not be as easy to come by, but that doesn't mean that the questions should be ignored. Identity can mean knowing yourself, your history, your culture, amongst others things. Too often youth leaving care wish they had more exposure to their culture and history (National Youth in Care Network, 2006). Cultural identity is important to maintain and learn about so that these youth can feel proud of who they are and be able to pass along their knowledge to future generations. While it's hard to replicate the cultural teachings that take place between family members and generations, steps can be taken by out-of-home carers to encourage and share knowledge. Being able to appreciate their own culture, and having a sense of belonging to their cultural community, gives youth not living with their families a larger connection to the world and their place in it.

Children and youth growing up in foster homes or group homes deserve to have their identities accepted and encouraged. The teenage years are a time filled with anxiety and change. Identity formation is a key component of that time and youth need an environment that fosters this development. This doesn't mean that the home must fall completely in line with the youth's identity (e.g., cultural or language heritage), but it must be willing to accept the youth for who he or she is. A youth will not be able to properly form their own identity if they feel ashamed or belittled about it.

Identity formation goes beyond understanding one's own background and cultural history. The personal development of identity is done primarily during adolescence and the experience of out of home care can negatively impact this development. Youth often feel devalued by others because of being in foster care. They receive both explicit and implicit messages based on assumptions of delinquency or psychological problems. The stigma of foster care as understood by others is projected back to the youth with negative consequences. These youth both feel devalued because of their own experiences and from their interpretation of how others see them. At this age, if peers or another important person stigmatizes or stereotypes a youth, these perceptions are likely to be incorporated into their own self-identity (Kools, 1997).

As youth develop their own self-identity, their future independence is an integral part of it. The development of independence is negatively affected by a stigmatized self-identity, which can result in low self-confidence and a lack of future orientation (Kools, 1997). The idea of a future career or goals is an extension of

self-identity as the youth thinks about what he or she wants to become. With a stigmatized self-identity, the focus is on what they cannot do and not what they can do. With this lack of self confidence and modest ability to see positively into the future, the range of abilities and future options for these youth are seen as limited (Kools, 1997). The “here and now” orientation is what guides thinking and this does not help lay out a future course for independence and success once outside of the foster care system.

These youth are entitled to this same fundamental human right as all other youths – learning who they are and where they come from. By encouraging these youth to understand who they are, where they came from and not to be ashamed of their status as “in care,” these youth have a better chance as a positive identity formation. Fostering this positive aspect of themselves will help youth to view themselves more positively and hopefully encourage them to strive for great things in the future.

Youth Engagement

“Listen to us and don’t use our age against us, we are people with real ideas and opinions.”

(Youth quoted in National Youth in Care Network, 2003)

Child welfare systems across Canada, and in many other countries, have gone from a paternalistic approach where youth were not consulted at all to one where youth are seen as stakeholders with a right to have input (Cashmore, 2002). Many people still don’t believe that the level of youth engagement in the decision-making process is sufficient, however there has been progress and an awareness of much more to do. Youth themselves continuously lobby for the right to speak up and be heard in decisions related to their placements, education and other needs. They don’t necessarily want to make every decision for themselves or get their own way every time, but they do want to be involved in the process and have their wants and needs heard and respected.

The implementation of programs such as *Looking After Children (LAC)* gives agency to children and youth to help guide their own future and outline what they think they want and need. Through these discussions with care providers, staff and others, youth can learn to prioritize and plan for their future when they won’t have the same supports (Flynn & Bryne, 2005). LAC promotes setting positive goals and outcomes for youth and it helps youth and their service providers to focus on positive instead of negative events and outcomes (Masten, 2006). It is important to include youth in the decision-making process because the number and type of decisions being made are very different for youth in care than for most other youth. Whereas decisions for youth living at home are generally made in consultation with one or two adults with whom the youth is in daily contact, for youth in the child welfare system, decisions are often made by a number of adults who may or may not have even met the youth or understand what is important to them (Cashmore, 2002).

What youth want is the ability to work towards their own future instead of having it imposed upon them (National Youth in Care Network, 2005). Parents of teenagers will attest to the fact that you can’t tell a teenager what to do or how to do it, so it is unreasonable for social workers to assume it will be different for youth in care. When a youth is able to feel a sense of ownership of the plan for his or her life, the likelihood of the youth following through and working towards agreed upon goals is remarkably higher than when a youth is simply told what is best and how to do it (Casey Family Programs, 2001). Prince Edward Island uses this knowledge and directly involves its youth in the process by requiring them to write and present their own plan for their transition out of care (Reid, 2006).

Teenagers want to be causal agents in their own lives but to be supported when they make mistakes. Sometimes parents have to let go and let their child do what the child is going to do. Youth learn as much from their failures as they do from their successes and the child welfare system has to allow for that. Helping youth learn how to make important decisions is as important as ensuring that the right deci-

sions are made. A major challenge for child welfare organizations is the amount of risk and liability that organization is prepared to accept regarding the behaviour and living circumstances. For example, a youth living on the street, not attending school and involved with drugs is not easy for a responsible child welfare agency to reconcile. However, the agency must find ways to continue to work with these youth in a supportive and caring manner while sustaining a relationship that can be helpful over time. These youth are often the ones most in need of the services the child welfare system has to offer.

There are many examples of programs being developed across Canada that are focused on ensuring that the voices of youth are heard. The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton, in Hamilton, Ontario recently partnered with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton to address the issues currently facing youth as they transition out of care. A community consultation was held on February 22, 2006 where approximately 120 people representing over 30 agencies broke into small discussion groups to identify ways that the transition to adulthood could be made more successful. The input was used to create *Transition to Adulthood: Summary of the Consultation Session*.⁵ Youth were just as involved in this consultation process as adults and community strategies were discussed so that service integration and gaps could be addressed (Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, 2006).

The Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (PARC) program in Toronto, Ontario is another excellent example of youth engagement.⁶ PARC is a joint project of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Jewish Family and Child Service of Toronto. This program is specifically for children and youth who are currently involved with, and alumni of, the child welfare system. PARC offers support in three key areas: practical resources, a place to feel a sense of community and an opportunity to have a voice. In terms of practical resources, PARC operates four houses and has 25 geared to income apartments; it has connections with local Youth Employment Centres; offers its own employment programs and opportunities; and operates a school for youth who've left the traditional education system. In addition, PARC has partnerships with local universities and colleges to assist the youth in gaining admittance, counselors and partnerships with volunteer therapists and other professionals to assist with personal development and healing. PARC provides a sense of community for youth who often feel isolated from their peers. Here, common experiences and life stories help build the basis for peer relationships and mentorship. The program provides an opportunity for older youth to mentor and get involved with programming for younger youth. PARC encompasses the approach that working with all aspects of youth is important to ensure that their transition to adulthood is supported and meets all their needs, whatever they happen to be (Pape Adolescent Resource Centre, 2006).

5 For more information about this project and others by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, visit their website at www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca.

6 For more information about the Pape Adolescent Resource Centre, visit their website at www.parcyouth.com.

Emotional Healing

“The pain does ease you know, but it must be recognized and dealt with appropriately.”

(Youth quoted in National Youth in Care Network, 2006)

Despite efforts by adults to form relationships with them, youth in care can sometimes be very resistant to taking the emotional risk of trusting an adult for reasons that can, in part, be associated with their past relationships and interactions with adults. Their behaviours can be erratic and destructive. In response, adults get angry and inflict punishments. While it often makes sense to discipline a child or youth for behaviours that are anti-social, for youth in the child welfare system, their behaviours are often the result of their past. Dr. James Anglin at the University of Victoria dedicates a chapter in his book *Pain, Normality and the Struggle for Congruence* to the issue of “pain-based behaviours.” He notes that the behaviours youth exhibit are not for the sake of acting out, but rather a result of past unhealed trauma. He believes that if more time was spent addressing what causes the behaviours instead of the punitive responses to the behaviours, youth would be much better off (Anglin, 2003a). This idea isn’t new. In 1935, Aichorn made a very similar point in his book *Wayward Youth* – compassion rather than punishment must be shown to youth who exhibit difficult behaviour because that is their primary unmet need (Van Bockern et al., 2000).

Mental health problems are particularly prevalent amongst children and youth involved in the child welfare system. An American study found that over 50% of youth who had left the system had been professionally diagnosed with a psychological disorder at some point in their childhood (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). A Canadian study indicated that 24% of youth who had recently exited the child welfare system had concerns about their own mental health (Rutman et al., 2006). These youth required mental health services while in care and continued to require them after aging out. For some children and youth who are taken into care, they are not provided with treatment services or the services available are inadequate, lacking or non-existent (Raychaba, 1993). This indicates that the youths’ healing needs have gone unmet in their previous stay in the system.

The National Youth in Care Network believes that youth need appropriate access to healing resources so they can deal with issues such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse (National Youth in Care Network, 2005). Removal from the abusive home doesn’t mean the trauma of the events has disappeared. It often resurfaces through behaviours often considered undesirable, particularly in a foster home or group home. When youth display these behaviours, they can suffer punitive sanctions. They can also result in placement disruption or change, a destabilizing factor (National Youth in Care Network, 2005). The behaviours often spring from feelings such as anger, grief, fear, frustration, loneliness and low self-esteem, yet youth are often punished for their actions without any investigation into the cause of the behaviours (National Youth in Care Network, 2005; Anglin, 2003a; Raychaba, 1988). Seeing past the behaviours and engaging in meaningful relationships that have long-term potential will help heal youth and foster their success (Anglin, 2003a; Anglin, 2003b). Further, it will give youth the tools to trust and rely on responsible adults, which can

help eliminate at least one obstacle to education attainment and contribute to a more stable placement. While the term “outcomes” has become increasingly popular, what relationships do for youth in care is what they do for everyone – provide a sense of security, acceptance and belonging. For youth who’ve had their lives disrupted and suffered from circumstances that warrant care in the child welfare system, nothing could be more helpful than someone who cares and listens. That is the best outcome you can hope for.

It’s very easy to say that youth need emotional healing to move on from their past and develop a promising future. Ideally, all children and youth taken into care are provided with treatment services but many aren’t. For some that have services offered to them, they aren’t yet ready to address their issues so either face forced treatment, which leaves them with a negative feeling about such things, or they miss out on their one chance to heal (National Youth in Care Network, 2003). Sometimes services would be offered to youth if there were any available. This is identified as a particularly important issue in need of immediate attention in the recent Senate Committee report *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada* (Kirby & Keon, 2006). When there are services available, they aren’t always effectively coordinated so youth may not be able to address all their mental health issues. The biggest gap in children’s mental health services are for adolescents (Raychaba, 1993). At a time when identity formation is at its prime, the emotional issues that may be triggered are least likely to be addressed.

Some children and youth appear to travel through the child welfare system unscathed from their experiences. Substantial research has been conducted to understand what makes them so resilient. The term “resilient” is used to refer to how the young people successfully adapt in the face of adversity (Masten et al., 1999). Resiliency frameworks emphasize the ability to cope with stressors and accessing social supports as a key coping mechanism (Masten, 2006). Resilience is a subjective term and generally refers to children and youth who have success (however it is defined) in the areas of school, relationships, employment and/or other developmental milestones appropriate for their age and ability. It is generally thought that resilience is a result of both internal and external factors (Merdinger et al., 2005). Internal factors such as intelligence, faith in one’s abilities, internal expectations and positive temperament give the strength necessary to benefit from external factors such as role models and mentors, relationships with caring adults and participation in organizations and groups (Merdinger et al., 2005).

Researchers who have studied the timing of transitioning to adulthood believe that premature transitions to adult roles can have negative long-term consequences for young people who are thrust into them (Collins, 2001). The time from late adolescence to early adulthood is considered to be a critical period in human development (Mech, 1994). Thus, young people leaving care are generally thought to be at some developmental risk; they are on their own earlier than other people their age and before completing other key transitions such as finishing high school or finding stable employment (Collins, 2001). For those youth who suffer developmentally because of their past and/or their transition out of care, it is crucial that they receive the appropriate support – both social and emotional – to navigate this time in their lives with care. In line with this thinking is research that found age is not as important in developmental success as the reason for leaving home. Youth who age out of the system are far more likely to suffer detrimentally because they are establishing independence as a result of their state support ending, not for more positive, opportunity-oriented reasons such as leaving home to attend post-secondary education or training (Collins, 2001). The transition is not one of choice but one that more closely resembles abandonment, something that can cause emotional pain and further trauma in a life already too full of such pain.

Because stressful events in childhood and adolescence can negatively affect the development process

itself (Collins, 2001), the role of resilience is key in understanding why some youth are more successful in their transition to adulthood than others. These young people transitioning out of care are likely dealing with multiple and qualitatively different stressors than most others at the same age. The intersection of historical stressors such as the pain of loss or maltreatment in addition to the system-induced stressors such as multiple placements and school changes, the transition out of care and the individually unique stressors of the average teenager, all combine together to create adversity for youth (Collins, 2001). The ability to overcome this and work towards independence is remarkable. It is no wonder that research into resiliency is so prevalent in recent times. Identifying the factors that help youth succeed can shape the services and care children and youth receive in the future.

The Foundation: Financial Support

“I was given information about the nearest welfare office.
That’s about it.”

(Youth quoted in Rutman, Barlow, Alusik, Hubberstey and Brown, 2003)

How to properly support youth as they transition out of state care has not been subjected to full and substantive dialogue in policy and program development. As a result, it has not received the careful attention and thoughtful analysis this complex area of social policy deserves in order to ensure successful outcomes for this vulnerable population. The government has an obligation to support these young adults, but to what extent? It is far more complicated than, for example, increasing monthly cheques, and the whole concept of financially supporting these youth gets lost in a much larger debate about what sort of public financial assistance is appropriate for various groups in society. The current basis for determining the rates of support for youth leaving care tends to be linked to the social assistance rates in each province (Reid, 2006). Fundamentally, there is a difference between the support provided by the state to adults who are without financial support or employment and the support of the state as legal guardian to youth who are leaving the child welfare system and preparing for their future. It is important to understand the philosophy underpinning the approach on social assistance before differentiating the assistance given to youth in transition and that which is given to other groups in society.

There has been a shift in government policy from support for all those in need (universal programs), to one where individuals are required to more heavily rely on their own resources and personal support networks to support themselves (targeted programs). Social assistance is provided to “persons in need” based upon needs testing,⁷ and it is neither financially sufficient nor comprehensive to meet all of their requirements. The basis of the current Canadian policy approaches towards social assistance, minimum wage, and employment insurance eligibility requirements is that of the “moral underclass” theory (MUD).⁸ The approach accepts that living conditions will be limited for those who must rely on such benefits. Those who require the assistance of income support programs (particularly employable persons) are considered to be only partially reliant upon government support and able to access other resources through the use of personal resources and assets, or other community supports (Raphael, in press).

On a number of levels, the financial support provided to youth transitioning from the child welfare system should be different than the support offered through traditional income support programs for adults. These youth require financial support to ensure their future success, and most importantly, the state has a

7 Needs testing is term used by income security programs in Canada. The term “means test” is sometimes used in the literature on poverty and income support programs and it is intended to refer to the same process.

8 For more information about the moral underclass theory and other theories attempting to explain the existence of poverty and policies designed to lessen it, see Ruth Levitas’ *The Inclusive Society?: Social Exclusion and New Labour*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 1998.

parental responsibility to these youth: to assist with their transition to adulthood and full citizenship. They require the resources and support necessary to manage the transition in their personal, social and educational development to achieve adulthood.

Currently, the state most often puts the young people exiting state care into the same category as those who require income security programs. Those receiving social assistance are supported only minimally to ensure that they are encouraged to seek other sources of financial support (Raphael, 2006; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005; Guest, 1997). The financial support these youth are given is to help them establish their footing in the world as adults and foster their future development. These youth are, in most instances, the survivors of turbulent childhood histories and have faced this challenge head-on. They are overcoming the obstacles associated with their experience in substitute care and the challenge for the state is to support these youths' continuing resilience into the future. According to the state's own philosophical approach to income support programs, these youth should not be in the same category.

Youth poverty is emerging as a major issue in Canada (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2005) with youth in care or formerly in care amongst the most vulnerable groups to be in poverty (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2006). Even for those youth who are not exiting the child welfare system, fewer full-time jobs and lower paying jobs, high youth unemployment rate, increasing costs of post-secondary education and restricted access to income support programs leave many youth at risk of poverty (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2006; National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2005). Youth who become poor have a lesser chance of escaping their poverty than adults (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2005) and are thus at a greater risk for long-term negative outcomes.

The rising cost of post-secondary education can be prohibitively expensive for many youth. The level of student debt has risen significantly over the past decade (Statistics Canada, 2004), which reflects the increasing cost and the increasing responsibility individual youth are being asked to take on to pursue their education. Assuming this sort of debt can dissuade even the most promising student from continuing with their education beyond high school. The cost of skills and vocational training, college and/or university can pose a considerable obstacle to applying, attending and graduating when the only guarantee at the end of the program is a decade or two worth of debt. While many of their peers are saving money for a car or a down payment on a home, the youth who carry considerable debt loads can rarely dream of such rites of passage. So for those youth who decide to take on such a heavy burden of debt, the long-term rewards of an education may leave them with little more money than if they had forgone the education and attempted to find employment with their high school diploma.

Youth who have left care have been very clear about their need for financial support that lasts the duration of their education (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2006). For those youth who are lucky enough to receive some sort of financial support as they pursue post-secondary education, many see that money come to an end during the course of their studies as they reach an arbitrary cut-off, usually based on age and not need. While this system of cut-offs may benefit the government by being bureaucratically efficient and ease the implementation and application of policies, those it is designed for do not experience any such benefits. A point often neglected when considering at what age youth should no longer be eligible for financial support is that these youth who are going on to post-secondary education often have to overcome educational set-backs (Casey Family Programs, 2001). These set-backs can cause delays, prolonging the age at which youth may enter their post-secondary careers and therefore, the age at

which they finish. Further, this age cut-off does not account for those youth who leave high school and return after an absence. For those youth who finish high school at a later age or enter post-secondary education a little older than most, their ambition and aspirations are penalized by cut-offs.

Contributing to the lack of financial stability for these youth in post-secondary education is the lack of investment in RESPs for them. Many families contribute varying degrees of money to these investment programs, but this is not true for those youth who are no longer legally tied to their families. Youth who have family that contribute to their RESPs also have contributions made by the government, thus providing an increased investment to the education of these youth. Youth who grow up in state care are not provided for in this way by their state parents and lack the monetary investment many other youth receive from their parents and extended families. If the government is willing to financially contribute to the education of youth whose families have already invested in them, why do they not contribute to the education of those youth who have no one else to help them?

The financial support offered to these youth by the state should be viewed from the perspective of how the “reasonable and judicious” parent is expected to support the emancipation and development of their offspring (community standard) and what additional resources are required to support the special needs or circumstances of youth in care. Although this is a more unique and specialized requirement, it is also an accepted community standard for parents and families to be flexible and responsive to the unique needs of each child according to their resources and ability. Further, it is generally accepted within Canadian social policy that families will receive additional public support for the special needs of their children. The government is financially investing to ensure that these youth, who have faced significant challenges, can achieve their full potential in the future. The time limited and appropriate investment in these youth will help ensure they are in a stable position as they grow into adulthood so they will not need to rely on social assistance in the future (Massinga & Pecora, 2004). These youth require an investment that will ensure they are not further disadvantaged and able to establish positive and attainable goals for adulthood.

It is important to differentiate youth leaving care from the recipients of social assistance in adulthood. Unfortunately, there is strong evidence that points to intergenerational dependency on income support programs (Beaulieu, Duclos, Fortin, & Rouleau, 2005). Many of the youth leaving the child welfare system lived with families that relied on social assistance at the time of child welfare intervention. Issues facing many of these adults such as mental health, addictions and lack of skills training are all problems that the youth leaving care confront or at high risk of confronting (National Council of Welfare, 1998). The majority of adults who use income support programs are entirely dependent on the government for all of their income and stay in the system for longer than two years (Kerstetter, 2006; National Council on Welfare, 1998) even though the system was generally designed for much shorter stays. These adults are considered to have a low likelihood of employability and require assistance for much of their adult life. By providing a solid foundation for youth as they prepare to depart the child welfare system, they will have their needs met and be prepared to enter adulthood with the same vigour as their peers. The long term prospects for these youth are significantly better if fully supported than if they are left to begin adulthood in poverty, with few skills and little hope of escaping out of it. Ensuring that young people are well prepared to pursue a pathway of self-reliance and full participation in society through education, employment and civic participation is a very important public policy objective. Providing support and direction at a key transition point in the lives of young people is well documented by the research on human devel-

opment in preventing significant problems in health, mental health, social relations and financial dependency (Leathers & Testa, 2006; Collins, 2001; Masten et al., 1999; Unrau & Krysik, 1996).

The question often asked about the role of the state in child welfare decisions is “what would a responsible parent do?” This parent isn’t necessarily the richest parent or the parent who gives their child everything he or she demands. But a responsible parent is one who provides all that is necessary to ensure the positive development and future growth of their offspring. For those youth who have been in government care, the state is the parent and ought to make decisions with respect to these youth accordingly. The state has a duty as the parent to ensure each youth leaving government care is well positioned to do so. The needs of each youth vary, so the system in place must be flexible and responsive to this and it must be able to react just as a responsible parent would. For the average young adult, they are able to rely on their parents even when they no longer live in the family home. Some continue to receive health coverage through their parents’ insurance (usually until age 25 if still a student) while others call every once in a while when a financial emergency arises. For a youth who is leaving care, such contingencies are not guaranteed and put undue stress and burden onto a young adult who has already been expected to carry more than his or her fair share.

Youth themselves are calling for increased financial support. It is a significant concern for them as they struggle to successfully exit the system. The ability to live on the social assistance amount they are provided is very problematic, especially if financial restrictions threaten to prevent their finishing secondary or post secondary schooling (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies, 2006). Inadequate financial support can limit a youth’s ability to excel in other areas such as school or obtain and maintain adequate housing and nutrition. The detrimental effects to these youth go far beyond a dollar value and impact the future for many years.

As it currently stands, in many instances the financial support provided to youth is below the poverty line and will not provide for basic needs including adequate nutrition, safe housing, transportation, and extended health, dental and vision care (Reid, 2006). Some youth are lucky enough to be provided with additional funds and/or have some expenses covered, but there is no consistency or broader access across the country, nor is there a well-developed policy approach to the financial needs of youth exiting the system. Certainly many child welfare organizations, foundations and businesses have been actively establishing scholarship and bursary programs during the past decade. They recognize the importance and value of providing greater levels of support to youth in care. However, these programs are still seen as supplementary and limited in their application. The need for more widely accessible, broadly based and publicly funded financial programs to support youth is critical. Without adequately preparing these youth for the future, they risk becoming the next generation of social assistance recipients. The goal ought to be to break the cycle of dependence so that this generation of youth have greater opportunities for the future. The long-term costs to society of this alternative are far higher than the short-term investment these youth need.

Previously, the futures of youth exiting state care were considered bleak with little hope for a life better than the one from which they were removed and expectations were generally low. Times have changed and there is a growing awareness that these youth can have similar outcomes to their peers with the right interventions and supports (Flynn & Bryne, 2005). These interventions cost money but their long-term benefits are shown through increased high-school graduation rates, more stable housing, healthier relationship skills and a myriad of others (Casey Family Programs, 2003a; Casey Family Programs, 2001). With Canada’s decreasing birth rate (Statistics Canada, 2006) there is not only a moral imperative to help

these youth become more productive adults, but also an economic and social necessity as well. Our society requires a well-educated, well-trained, productive and engaged population. Our future success as a nation requires that all those who are able to contribute do so. For youth who have left the child welfare system, they can contribute and desperately desire to do so. Some may require additional support along the way, but this modest help will prove itself invaluable to Canada's future in the long-term.

The solution to the question of what is a reasonable level of support to ensure the full participation of these young people is not as simple as merely increasing the monthly stipend. A full study of what constitutes adequate financial support needs to be undertaken to ensure that each youth has his or her needs fully met. This study must include income security experts, as they have extensive knowledge of programs, policies, research and possible solutions for this issue. Because many of the provincial support rates for youth are currently, or have been, based on the income security rates, it is important to look for policy alternatives to the traditional income security approach. It is not the most effective, nor appropriate, option to financially support youth, but there are vast amounts of knowledge in the field which can contribute to creating a better alternative. It is imperative that youth also be included in this process of studying the future of financial support. They are the ones most directly affected by the decisions being taken and they have the kind of expertise that no other group can bring to the study. Their practical knowledge, and having their views heard and respected, also contributes to the long-term success of these youth. Finally, each level of government must commit to addressing this issue. Providing adequate financial support to youth leaving care isn't just a provincial/territorial issue. It has implications for everyone across the country now and in the future.

International Examples

United States

Casey Family Programs

The Casey Family Programs (Casey) are foster care and advocacy programs that demonstrate foster care done well! Based in Seattle, Washington the foundation was established by UPS founder Jim Casey and has served children, youth and families in the child welfare system since 1966. As a private foster care provider in the United States, their mission is to provide and improve, and ultimately, to prevent the need for foster care. This foundation provides direct services and it promotes advances in child welfare practice and policy. Research is conducted and the findings from both this research, and the work of other organizations, are used by Casey to create innovative programs. Through this work it has produced remarkable outcomes for children and youth in foster care and helped provide them with the necessary skills and supports to flourish as adults. The Casey National Alumni Study found that life skills preparation, completing high school diploma or GED before leaving care, scholarships for college or job training, participation in clubs and organizations for youth while in foster care, not being homeless within a year of leaving care, minimized academic programs and minimized use of alcohol or drugs are all characteristics that predicted the level of success for a foster care alumni (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). Using this knowledge, Casey has created programs to address as many of these critical areas as possible to level the playing field between the youth who grow up in foster care and those who don't.

This program demonstrates that adequate resources, both financial and human, do make a difference in the outcomes for youth. Casey devotes more financial resources than other state agencies with outcomes to prove the value. The high school graduation rates for youth leaving Casey care are comparable, if not higher, than the national average high school graduation rate and it is significantly higher than the rate of graduation amongst foster care alumni. A national study found that 54% of foster care alumni had completed high school while 72.5% of Casey alumni had received a high school diploma or GED by the time their case closed, with a total of 86% obtaining a diploma or GED at some point in their lives. The general population has a high school/GED completion rate of 80.4%. It should be noted however, that a higher proportion of alumni completed high school via GED than the general population (Casey Family Programs, 2003a), thus demonstrating that there are still barriers to completing high school through the traditional means.

In addition to the successful high school completion rate, over 85% of all youth in this program participate in an extra-curricular activity such as sports, the arts, religious organization or other hobbies. Casey financially supports this involvement and makes it possible for these youth when it would otherwise be unavailable (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). Because this program understands the value of participation in extra-curricular activities, it is willing to invest money to support the best outcomes possible. Simply graduating from high school for many of these youth is an accomplishment of epic proportions but the ability to participate in other activities allows them to show their value both personally and academically.

While many of the outcomes for Casey alumni are very promising, more work is needed. Despite the

advantages of receiving services from Casey over other agencies, fewer of the alumni who did graduate high school go onto post-secondary education. Even fewer of those complete their education (Casey Family Programs, 2003a). So while strides have been made to help these youth graduate from high school, obstacles still exist to completing post-secondary education. Despite the areas for improvement in outcomes, Casey Family Programs demonstrate that when youth are supported in all areas of their life, they can more successfully transition out of state care. The value of additional funding to transition programs is clear, but progress still needs to be made to ensure all aspects of the transition are supported in all ways, not just financially.

Foster Care Independence Act

The United States Congress passed the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) in November of 1999 and it went into effect in 2000, thereby creating the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The FCIA considerably increased the opportunities available to youth aging out of care and specifically recognized the need for permanency planning for older adolescents, while also preparing these same youth for independent living. FCIA doubled the amount of federal money available to assist states in providing independent living services and it focuses on education, employment and life skills training (Kessler, 2004).

States are required to use at least some portion of their funds to provide follow-up services to foster youth who have already aged out of care. States are allowed to use up to 30% of their funds to pay for the room and board of 18–20 year old former foster youth. This ensures that youth at risk of homelessness have supports in place to lessen the likelihood of becoming or remaining homeless. FCIA also stipulates that states can give post-secondary education and training vouchers up to \$5000 for youth likely to experience difficulty during the transition to adulthood. States may allow youth participating in the voucher program on their 21st birthday to remain eligible until they reach 23 years old, with the stipulation that they are enrolled in a post-secondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program (National Foster Care Coalition, 2005). While the current rate of youth continuing on to post-secondary education is relatively low, the financial burden of such an endeavour is lessened with this voucher and can serve as an incentive to complete high school.

United Kingdom

Since 1997 there has been great political support for youth leaving care and recent legislative and policy changes reflect this. Local authorities have responsibility for social services, including children in care and “care leavers.” The central government in London has overall responsibility for overseeing the well-being of all its citizens in partnership with the local authorities. The central government, through the Department of Health, determines the overall direction of policy and that the policy is passed down to the local authorities for implementation and interpretation. The local authorities have some limited room for discretion in the implementation of the policies but must still maintain a level of consistency (Goddard, 2003).

Children's Act 1989 was what previously governed youth leaving care. It stipulated that youth were to leave care between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. Local authorities had a duty to advise and befriend, as well as a power to assist, youth between 16 and 21 who had left care. This assistance could stretch to age 24 for education or training that had begun before the age of 21. The Department of Health recognized that the legislation wasn't effective and that practices weren't sufficient. It conducted research and found that

post-care contact was often left to young people to initiate or maintain; most young people were ill informed about available post-care support; few young people had formal care plans; and most local authorities found it difficult to keep track of 18–21 year olds (Goddard, 2003).

As a result of these identified problems, the *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000* was created. It ensures that local authorities remain directly responsible for the welfare of their post-16 care leavers until at least age 18. There are three major areas of change: benefits; assessment and planning; and the role of Personal Advisors. Previously, youth aged 16 and 17 were entitled to a social security benefit from the central government so local authorities would encourage youth to leave care and thus, lessen their financial burden and shift it onto the central government. Changes to the legislation disallowed 16 and 17 year olds to be eligible for this benefit to ensure that local authorities maintain financial and moral responsibility for these youth (Goddard, 2003).

The new legislation requires that adequate planning be done for all youth. A needs assessment must be completed when a future care leaver reaches their 16th birthday, with the goal of using this plan to aid the leaving care planning process. These plans must be reviewed at least every six months, which forces the local authorities to make fixed efforts to keep in touch, and meet regularly, with youth to discuss their ongoing needs. In addition, a Pathway Plan is created and is used until youth are at least 21 years old and it identifies the local authority role in meeting the needs of the youth up to that age. However, the local authority is only to have a role where appropriate and necessary in an effort to build self-sufficiency and independence. The role of the local authority is to ensure all gaps in care are filled and support needs are met. This support is provided beyond 21 years old and up to age 24 years for agreed upon education or training. A notable form of required support is the provision of, or support for, vacation accommodation while a youth is in post-secondary education (Goddard, 2003).

All care leavers between 16 and 21 years of age have a Personal Advisor who is an identifiable contact point at the local authority for interaction with social services departments and others who have looked after the youth. In addition, all youth aged 13–19 in England have a Connexions Advisor to provide support on careers and other transitional issues for young people. These advisors are part of a wider agenda for tackling social exclusion amongst all young people. For youth in care, their Connexions Advisor and leaving care advisor may be the same person from age 16 onwards (Goddard, 2003).

This legislation is effective because it targets core concerns for youth leaving care such as housing, education and employment, finances and social support with flexible approaches to engage youth in the decision-making processes. The legislation also requires agencies to work cooperatively with each other to meet the needs of youth. However, education and employment outcomes are still poor and that's likely because the post-16 year old education and training programs are unable to make up for an earlier lack of stability and support (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004).

Youth leaving care are not just addressed through the *Children (Leaving Care) Act*, but also through other legislation that can impact on relevant areas of a youth's life. A prime example is the *Homelessness Act of 2002*, which specifically stipulates that priority for services and supports be given to youth who have exited the child welfare system. This highlights an understanding of the reality of life for many youth as they transition out of state care (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004).

Permanency planning through adoption is a big issue in England and Wales. The *Adoption and Children Act* was passed in 2002 and for the first time stated that the best interests of the child are para-

mount. A driving force behind this legislation was to act as a solution to the problems with the child welfare system, including outcomes from residential care and lack of permanency. There have been significant increases in adoptions from the care system (7% in 1975 to 40% by mid-1990s), but this didn't do enough to address the issues of those children still left in care (Lewis, 2004). Beginning in October 2003, adoptive families were given the right to ask their local authority for adoption support services, which can include financial support. This is discretionary based on the needs of both the family and the child (British Association for Adoption & Fostering, 2006; United Kingdom Department of Health, 2006). Encouraging adoption and stable homes for youth help address many issues which lead to poor outcomes for British youth.

Australia

The government structure of Australia is very similar to Canada. Australia has a federal model of government where child protection is the responsibility of the community services department in each state and territory. Each department has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to child protection and there are no uniform in-care or leaving care standards (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004).

The bulk of children in care in Australia are placed in foster families and with relatives. With only 6% of children and youth living outside the traditional forms of alternative care, there have been calls for a broader range of placement options for youth who are not suited to home-based care. Because of this, the Lead Tenant program is being used extensively all across the country. The model incorporates features of treatment foster care such as specially recruited and trained caregivers, higher than standard caregiver remuneration, intensive placement support and wraparound services. The client group is youth with high-risk behaviours and complex needs where family-based or institutional care is inappropriate. Typically the program works with two unrelated Lead Tenants (caregivers) and two youth in the foster home. Most youth complete the program within 12 months. Advantages of the program are reported to be positive role modeling by Lead Tenants, the development of practical and interpersonal skills and some oversight of the youth's outside relationships (Gilbertson et al., 2005).

South Australia has developed a unique model called Special Youth Carer Program (SYC) that incorporates some of the features of treatment foster care and the Lead Tenant models, but differs in that:

- Placements are limited to one youth and one caregiver per home
- Home is not owned by the caregiver
- Breakdown in the youth-caregiver relationship which cannot be successfully mediated is resolved by replacing the caregiver
- Program is not time-limited
- On reaching age of 18, youth may have the option of remaining in the home and assuming legal responsibility for tenancy.

Youth referred to SYC have a history of placement instability, risk-taking or problem behaviour or are in crisis and other placement options have been exhausted. Youth who have participated in this program reported feeling a sense of belonging in the SYC home and that it didn't feel like a foster placement. This sense of belonging came from their understanding that the SYC home was theirs and not the caregiver's. Having a place to call "home" didn't depend on the goodwill of another. While this program is in its infancy, initial research is indicating it is a successful alternative to traditional foster care. Not only is the youth

supported with wraparound services, the caregiver is also given extensive support to help maintain the stability of the placement. The program appears to be a means of stability of accommodation and continuity of networks and may be effective in reducing high-risk behaviours (Gilbertson et al., 2005). These are two very important determinants of successful transition to adulthood. As an interesting aside, the adoption of children and youth in care is rare and not promoted in South Australia, nor is there a provision for the termination of parental rights, meaning there are a lot of youth in foster care and it may not be the best placement option for every one of them (Gilbertson et al., 2005). SYC is an excellent alternative model for the most difficult youth.

New South Wales is the only state in Australia to introduce both a legislative and program response for youth leaving care. New South Wales established a statewide After Care Resource Centre which acts as a resource and advocacy service for young people leaving care or who have left care. All care leavers aged 15–25 are able to access these services. However, as of 2004, no official evaluation of the efficacy of these services had been completed so it is difficult to know what impact, if any, this program is having on youth exiting care. As well, a number of other states in Australia have introduced transitional and after-care programs designed to assist care leavers with accommodation and other supports but they tend to be limited and discretionary in nature with no legislative guarantees (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004).

Conclusion

There is a strong desire to improve the opportunities and outcomes for young people leaving the child welfare system. Being a ward of the state brings with it its own challenges and hardships that can cause impediments to successful adulthood. Youth transitioning out of care and becoming adults face a variety of obstacles throughout the process. These obstacles start long before the transition phase of life in care and they must be addressed sooner rather than later. Starting to plan for life after care should start early on with the development of life skills and planning. Further, all possible measures should be taken to help a youth transition smoothly over the course of time, not with arbitrary expulsion dates.

The barriers to successful transition out of care are not problems with individual youth; they are systemic issues that impact on each and every youth in care to varying degrees of severity. The seven pillars of relationships, education, housing, life skills, youth engagement and emotional healing and the foundation of adequate financial support must be fully addressed and not on an ad hoc basis. Many child welfare organizations have recognized that it is essential to create a well designed and resourced program that is specifically for youth preparing to leave care. As discussed, these programs must be comprehensive and flexible to ensure that they meet the complex needs of the youth they are serving. Children are not a source for charity: they have the right to expect certain things. Children in care have the right to expect people who care about them, education, a stable home and being given a voice. All of these factors work together to create a well-adjusted and productive adult who can contribute to the society that made efforts to raise them.

It is instructive that all provinces and territories have instituted “graduated licensing” for motor vehicles. A system that recognizes that public health and safety are best served when new drivers are given incremental training and support to learn how to drive. Similarly, assisting youth leaving care in a graduated and incremental manner towards successful interdependence is an idea whose time has come.

Examples from across Canada and internationally show how innovative programs and ideas are being tried. There comes a time when the issues are identified and research project after research project have been undertaken and action is all that’s left. Youth leaving care need someone to act on their behalf and help them act for themselves. It’s time for governments to step up and raise their children the same way they expect other parents to. The needs are identified and solutions outlined; all that’s left is for Canadian governments at all levels to work together and implement the necessary changes and improvements to ensure that all children leaving the state home do so as prepared for the future as they can be.

It is an indication of their maturity and understanding that many young people recognize the need for ongoing assistance and support to make a successful transition. Many young people ask “why we would expect them to be any different from our own children in needing an ongoing and interdependent relationship?” It is a good question.

APPENDIX A: Recommendations

The following recommendations address what must be done to help children and youth in the child welfare system successfully transition to adulthood. Not all of these can be undertaken solely by the child welfare system, and will involve the participation of other systems and organizations. There is no simple way to immediately improve the outcomes for these youth, but addressing these recommendations will most certainly be a step in the right direction.

Relationships

1. Children and youth must be encouraged to maintain as many healthy relationships as possible with adults through their time in care and beyond.
2. Relationships with siblings and families, where in the best interests of the child, must be encouraged.
3. Mentorship programs must be developed and supported so every youth in care in Canada has access to a mentoring relationship when required.

Education

1. The child welfare and education systems must work together to meet the complex needs of these children and youth.
2. The education system must be able to accommodate the unique circumstances for each youth living in out of home care.
3. Youth wishing to pursue post-secondary education or training, including university, college, apprenticeships and skills-training programs, must have access to adequate financial resources so that they are not faced with further obstacles to success.

Housing

1. School stability must be considered when deciding on a placement change.
2. Youth who age out of care must have access to secure adequate and long-term housing.

Life Skills

1. Every youth in the care of a child welfare agency must be provided with extensive, hands-on and relevant life skills training.
2. Skills training programs must begin well in advance of a youth leaving care, ideally beginning no later than age 14.

Identity

1. Children and youth must have their personal, cultural, and social histories respected and encouraged.

Youth Engagement

1. All children and youth must be consulted about their opinions, perspectives, and needs as appropriate for their age and developmental abilities.
2. Programs for youth exiting the child welfare system must be developed in consultation with youth.
3. Program evaluations must include evaluations by the youth users of the program.

Emotional Healing

1. All children and youth must be offered the opportunity to receive adequate and appropriate healing treatment throughout their time in care and afterwards.

Financial Support

1. Youth must be provided with adequate financial support to ensure they can receive an education, emotional healing and secure housing.
2. Financial supports and opportunities must be designed to reflect their unique needs.

Other

1. Eliminate arbitrary age cut-offs for the provision of services.
2. Incorporate flexibility into programs and policies to ensure that all youth in the system can have unfettered access to the services they need, when they need them.

APPENDIX B

Child Protection Legislation in the Provinces/Territories		Age of Protection/Extended Care Provisions
British Columbia	<i>Child, Family and Community Service Act</i>	Age of protection – 19 years
Alberta	<i>Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act</i> (to be proclaimed in Fall 2004)	Age of protection – 18 years Extended care provisions – 22 years
Saskatchewan	<i>The Child and Family Services Act</i> (CFSA)	Age of protection – unmarried person under 16 years Extended care provisions – 21 years permanent wards or long term agreement
Manitoba	<i>The Child and Family Services Act</i>	Age of protection – 18 years Extended care provisions – 21 years
Ontario	<i>The Child and Family Services Act</i>	Age of protection – 16 years (If a court order is in place before the child's 18 th anniversary, a child can be in Society care until the age of 18.) Extended care provisions – 21 years crown wards only
Quebec	<i>Loi sur la protection de la jeunesse</i> (Youth Protection Act). R.S.Q. c. P-34.1	Age of protection – 18 years
Nova Scotia	<i>Children and Family Services Act</i> (CFSA) 1990	Age of protection – under 16 years Extended care provisions – 21 years
New Brunswick	<i>Family Services Act, S.N.B. 1980, c. F-2.2</i>	Age of protection – 16 years and included disabled persons under the age of 19 Extended care provisions – beyond 19 years
Prince Edward Island	<i>Child Protection Act, proclaimed April 2003, C-5.1</i>	Age of protection – 15 years Extended care provisions – 18 years
Newfoundland and Labrador	<i>Child, Youth and Family Services Act</i> (CYFSA)	Age of protection – under 16 years Extended care provisions – 21 years
Yukon	<i>Children's Act</i>	Age of protection – 18 years Extended care provisions – 19 years
Northwest Territories	<i>Child and Family Services Act</i>	Age of protection – 16 years Extended care provisions – 19 years
Nunavut	<i>Child and Family Services Act</i> (CFSA)	Age of protection – 16 years Extended care provisions – 19 years

Based on data from the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information, 2002 (as cited in *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2003*) and the federal-provincial-territorial Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights.

Source: Canada's Response to the UN Questionnaire on Violence Against Children. September 10, 2004. (www.unicef.ca/portal/Secure/Community/502/WCM/WHATWEDO/ChildProtection/assets/canada.pdf)

APPENDIX C: Transition to Adulthood Survey Summary

The Transition to Adulthood Survey was sent to each Director of Child Welfare in each jurisdiction in Canada. We received the full co-operation of each Director in having the survey completed using the resources available to each. The survey asked a variety of questions categorized according to the eight areas outlined in this paper. A brief description of each area was provided in order to shape the context in which the questions were being asked. Interpretations could still occur based on jurisdictional definitions contained within legislation, individual understanding of the programs and policies available in a given area, various governance structures or other differences between jurisdictions. In an attempt to maintain consistency, wherever questions arose, the authors contacted the relevant Director of Child Welfare or their designate to seek for further clarification. Not all jurisdictions were able to respond to these follow-up questions in the timeframe provided. It should be noted that often times the responses captured in concrete terms (e.g., yes or no; specific age cut-offs) are not as concrete in their application as the survey may make them appear. Unfortunately time and analysis constraints do not allow for a survey summary that fully overcomes all these obstacles.

Below is a compilation of the responses of each jurisdiction to a variety of questions about their programs and policies.

A) General

1. Do you have a specific program/programs or services to support youth who are leaving the child welfare system due to age?
Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon
No – Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island*, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
* Prince Edward Island does not have a formal program for transitioning youth to independence but a process which may be done differently from office to office as there are no provincial guidelines.

B) Eligibility

1. At what age can youth become eligible for services and supports assisting in preparation for adulthood?
15 – British Columbia, Saskatchewan
16 – Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, Newfoundland
18 – Ontario
No set age – Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

2. At what age do services and supports for youth in care end (excluding extension services/agreements)?
 16 – Newfoundland
 18 – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Nunavut
 19 – British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories
3. At what age do services and supports for youth in care end (including extension services/agreements)?
 19 – Quebec, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 21 – Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland
 22 – Alberta
 24 – British Columbia (Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEOF) only), New Brunswick, (Nova Scotia – will be extended)
4. Are there other eligibility criteria associated with this program?

	Yes	No		Yes	No
British Columbia (YEOF)			Ontario		
Current wardship		✓	Current wardship	✓	
Type of wardship	✓		Type of wardship	✓	
Length of time in care	✓		Length of time in care		✓
Alberta			<i>Participation in an educational or vocational program</i>		
Current wardship		✓	Quebec*		
Type of wardship		✓	Current wardship		✓
Length of time in care	✓		Type of wardship	✓	
<i>For the bursary program, youth have to have had involvement with Children's Service for a cumulative period of 18 months between 13–18 years old. The 18 month requirement doesn't apply to youth who are in permanent care.</i>			Length of time in care	✓	
Saskatchewan			<i>For youth with a long placement history with no or little hope of returning home; academically behind peers; youth who are at risk of marginalization</i>		
Current wardship	✓		Nova Scotia		
Type of wardship	✓		Current wardship		✓
Length of time in care		✓	Type of wardship		✓
<i>Includes voluntary services to 16 and 17 year olds who cannot reside/be reunified at home.</i>			Length of time in care		✓
Manitoba			<i>Youth must be pursuing an educational program or have a disability to be extended to age 21.</i>		
Current wardship	✓		New Brunswick		
Type of wardship	✓		Current wardship		✓
Length of time in care		✓	Type of wardship	✓	
<i>Youth must be a permanent ward of a Child and Family Service Agency to qualify for extension of services past 18 years</i>			Length of time in care		✓

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Prince Edward Island			Northwest Territories		
Current wardship	✓		Current wardship	✓	
Type of wardship	✓		Type of wardship		✓
Length of time in care		✓	Length of time in care		✓
Newfoundland			Other (please specify):		
Current wardship	✓		<i>Current involvement with Child and Family Services</i>		
Type of wardship		✓	Nunavut		
Length of time in care	✓		Current wardship		
<i>Youth in care at 16 may enter Youth Services until age 21. Youth at 15 who have never been in care may enter Youth Services at age 16 until age 18 if assessed to be at risk.</i>			Type of wardship		
Yukon			Length of time in care		
Current wardship	✓		<i>No program</i>		
Type of wardship		✓	* Quebec's response translated from French		
Length of time in care		✓			

5. Does the program or service allow people to leave and return? (e.g., can a youth opt out of an extension of services agreement but later return and receive services?)
 Yes – British Columbia (YEAF), Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories
 No – Nova Scotia, Nunavut
6. Is participation in this program voluntary?
 Yes – All jurisdictions
7. Are programs available to youth in the following placement settings?
- Foster Home**
 British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories
- Group Home**
 British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
- Residential care**
 British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
- Independent living**
 British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
- Kinship/customary care**
 British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, (Ontario – with implementation of new legislation)
- * In BC, for youth in care only, not those on Youth Agreement or YEAF

8. What expectations are placed upon the young person to participate?[†]

Financial contribution

Yes – Ontario*, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario,* Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Newfoundland

Employment (part-time or full-time)

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario*, Quebec, New Brunswick, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland

Attendance in educational program (part-time or full-time)

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Newfoundland

Participation in community programs (e.g., volunteer work, independence preparation)

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Nova Scotia*, New Brunswick, Newfoundland

Participation in counseling or support program (mentor, counsellor, peer counsellor)

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario*, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario*, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Newfoundland

Reporting to a case worker

Yes – All jurisdictions

[†] Nunavut responded N/A to this question; BC responses refer to Youth Agreements and Independent Living Services only

* Local agency specific decision

C) Education/Training

1. Does the program support participation in:

Secondary school

Yes – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – British Columbia*, Nunavut

Post-secondary school

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Nunavut

Vocational training

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Nunavut

Apprenticeship training

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – British Columbia*, Nunavut

Alternative school programs

Yes – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – British Columbia*, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Nunavut

Individual tutor programs

Yes – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – British Columbia*, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nunavut

Non-formal education (e.g., personal interest courses, preparation courses)

Yes – Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario[†], Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – British Columbia*, Alberta, Ontario[†], Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Nunavut

* British Columbia answered this question in relation to only their Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAFF)

[†] Local agency specific decision

2. Does the program provide financial support for education/training?

Full tuition – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Partial tuition – Manitoba, Prince Edward Island

Bursary – British Columbia (YEAFF), Alberta

No funding for education – Ontario, Quebec

3. Does the program provide for education/training needs?[†]**Books**

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

No – Ontario, Quebec

Tutors

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nunavut

Computer

Yes – British Columbia*, Nova Scotia, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nunavut

Transportation

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario, Quebec, Nunavut

Child care

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Nunavut

Extra-curriculars (e.g., clubs, sports, special events)

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Nunavut

Special clothing, equipment

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario, Quebec, Nunavut

† Manitoba did not respond to this question

* British Columbia funding through the YEAF allows student to spend bursary money on tuition, supplies, supports and/or living costs

4. Does the program provide support for educational planning, preparation and placement?*

Educational assessments

Yes – British Columbia**, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon

No – Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Career planning

Yes – British Columbia**, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon

No – Ontario, Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Placement planning

Yes – British Columbia**, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon

No – Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Advocacy and support

Yes – British Columbia**, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

No – Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Nunavut

Other (please specify):

** British Columbia – for in care, independent living services and youth agreements only (not YEAF)

* Manitoba did not respond

5. Does the program have incentives to support participation, attainment and achievements?*

Awards program

Yes – Quebec

No – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Bursary/scholarships

Yes – British Columbia (YEA), Alberta, Nova Scotia

No – Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

* Manitoba did not respond

D) Housing

1. Does your program provide housing?

Semi-independent living program

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario**, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

No – Ontario**, Quebec, New Brunswick, Yukon

Supported or supervised housing

Yes – British Columbia*, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario**, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

No – Saskatchewan, Ontario**, Quebec, New Brunswick, Yukon

Subsidized housing

Yes – British Columbia*, Manitoba, Ontario**, Nova Scotia

No – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario**, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Community resources only

Yes – Ontario**, Yukon

No – British Columbia*, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario**, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

* Independent Living Services and Youth Agreements only

** Local agency specific decision

2. Does your program pay rent for community based housing?

Full – Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon

Partial – British Columbia, Ontario*, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Province does not contribute to cost of housing – Saskatchewan, Quebec

* Local agency specific decision

3. Does your program provide support for locating and securing housing?
 Yes – British Columbia (Independent Living Services and Youth Agreements), Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Yukon
 No – New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

E) Relationships

1. Is contact with the prior placement(s) encouraged? (e.g., past foster parents/siblings, group home worker)
 Yes – All
2. Is contact with family members encouraged (e.g., immediate and extended family)?
 Yes – All
3. Is contact with other significant persons encouraged (e.g., teacher, mentor, volunteer)?
 Yes – All
4. Is there a formal process to determine what (if any) significant relationships exist for youth leaving care?
 Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon
 No – Northwest Territories, Nunavut
5. Do you have a “mentorship” program (e.g., a formal program where an approved volunteer is assigned to a youth)?
 Yes – Alberta (done through community agency), Saskatchewan (pilot project in some areas), Manitoba, Nova Scotia
 No – British Columbia (British Columbia Youth in Care Network developing one; some programs may exist locally through community contracted agencies), Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick (will assign a support worker), Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon (will assign a support worker), Northwest Territories, Nunavut

F) Life Skills/Preparation for Independent Living

1. Does your program provide a life skills training course?
 Yes – British Columbia (not YEAF), Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island
 No – Saskatchewan (doing pilot projects), Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland (regional policies but no provincial program), Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 * Local agency specific decision
2. Is participation in this program mandatory for youth leaving care?[†]
 No – All*
[†] Responses only from agencies with a life skills program
 * Ontario – local agency specific decision

3. At what age can youth become involved in this program?
 - 12 years old – British Columbia (in foster care)
 - 14 years old – Prince Edward Island
 - 16 years old – British Columbia (Independent Living Services, Youth Agreements), Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec
 - No set age – Nova Scotia
 - No program – Manitoba, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

4. How long is the life skills program?†
 - 1–3 months – Prince Edward Island
 - 12 or more months – Ontario*, Quebec
 - Individualized – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia*
 - † Responses only from agencies with a life skills program
 - * Local agency specific decision

5. Is there provision for ongoing contact/support with the youth and the life skills program/coach?
 - Yes – British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec
 - No – Alberta, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island

6. What skill(s) are included in the life skills training program?
 - Cooking**
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon
 - No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 - Grocery shopping**
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon
 - No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 - Budgeting**
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon
 - No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 - How to find a job**
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon
 - No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 - How to find a home**
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon
 - No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

How to access community services

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon

No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Parenting skills

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Yukon

No – Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Interpersonal relationship skills

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon

No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Self-care (e.g., hygiene)

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia*, Prince Edward Island, Yukon

No – Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Other (please specify)

Quebec: • Career planning, communication in the workplace

- General communication skills
- Daily tasks
- Understanding home life
- Housing and budgeting
- Personal hygiene/care
- Social skills
- Work and study skills
- Work life

* Local agency specific decision

G) Identity

1. Do you require each child taken into care have a life book to help maintain a connection to their identity?

Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon

No – Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

2. Are youth regularly given an opportunity to learn about their culture?

Yes – All

3. Are youth encouraged to participate in cultural events?

Yes – All

H) Emotional Healing

1. Do youth leaving care have access to therapy/counseling services?
Before leaving care – All
After leaving care – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories
 2. What types of services are available?
 - British Columbia** – A broad range of counseling services can be provided by agencies contracted by the Ministry or through Health Authorities.
 - Alberta** – Individual or group counseling depending on the needs of the youth.
 - Saskatchewan** – Child and Youth Services (public funding) and private counseling (child welfare provision, on case-by-case basis) before leaving care. Child and Youth Services and Adult Mental Health Services (public funding) after care.
 - Manitoba** – No response given.
 - Ontario** – Societies can provide direct contract for counseling services or refer to youth to community programs.
 - Quebec*** – While in care, the Centre jeunesse provides the services, after they leave, the services are found through the local health services agency.
 - Nova Scotia** – Services identified in the plan of care.
 - New Brunswick** – This would depend on the needs of the youth and the availability of resources in the youth's community.
 - Prince Edward Island** – Community mental health counselor, private counseling, addictions counseling.
 - Newfoundland** – They would be the same access as any young person. There are no specialized programs.
 - Yukon** – Psychologists – Family & Children's Services contractors, after age 19 private therapists.
Child Abuse Treatment Services – provided to youth in care
Mental Health Services – free
First Nation Healing Programs – free
Northwest Territories
Before leaving care – whatever is required for youth.
After care – what is available in community.
Nunavut – General counseling.
- * Quebec's response translated from French

3. How is therapy/counseling paid for (check all that apply)?
 - Public funding – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
 - Provided by child welfare agency – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories
 - Paid by youth – No jurisdiction requires this while youth is in care.

I) Youth Engagement

1. Are youth leaving care involved in the design and development of this program?
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan (individual case plan), Quebec, Nova Scotia (individual case plan), New Brunswick (individual case plan), Prince Edward Island (individual case plan – present their own written plan), Yukon (individual case plan)
 - No – Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
2. Do you have a youth in care group/network?
 - Yes – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia (regional)
 - No – Ontario (but individual agencies may have groups), Quebec, New Brunswick (no provincial network but one region has a network), Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
3. Are there specific provisions to solicit and obtain youth evaluation of this program?
 - Yes – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec
 - No – British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
4. How are youth leaving care involved in making decisions about their future? Please briefly describe.
 - British Columbia** – Youth are involved in developing their plans of care which include transition planning and can request participation in Youth Transition Planning conference.
 - Alberta** – Direct involvement in transitions to independence planning.
 - Saskatchewan** – Involved in case planning; advised of appeal options and resources such as Office of the Children’s Advocate.
 - Manitoba** – Through case planning conferences which include significant individuals in the youth’s life; through individual input to social workers.
 - Ontario** – Through their individual plan of care; Youth in Care groups; Youth Connections – provincial group.
 - Quebec** – Throughout the program, the case workers work with the youth to help him/her develop the skills to make appropriate decisions throughout the length of stay in care. Support is provided to the youth at an appropriate level based on the stage of independence of the youth.
 - Nova Scotia** – In developing and reviewing the comprehensive plan of care and in residential services plan.
 - New Brunswick** – The social worker must meet with the youth prior to being discharged from care. The possibility of participating in the Post Guardianship Program is explained and offered.

For youths who have been living in long term foster care, it is the expectation that the foster parent and the child's social worker will work in cooperation to ensure that the youth be adequately prepared for Independent Living and issues such budgeting, preparing meals, etc be discussed.

Prince Edward Island – Case planning inclusion and active participation; exit interviews; LAC info; direct meetings about preparing for independence; written plan by youth.

Newfoundland – As part of the case management process. In Newfoundland we use the Integrated Support Services Plan to ensure co-ordination of services for the youth. This plan would take into consideration the decisions that would assist the youth in transitioning from the youth services system.

Yukon – One to one planning with individual Social Workers and through participation in case conferences. At age 17 all youth must participate in the development of a plan to prepare them to leave care. If Adult Services will be needed, they will participate.

Northwest Territories – Informal conversations with social worker.

Nunavut – Referred to Income Support.

J) Financial Support

1. Does your program provide a monthly living allowance?

British Columbia – individualized supports average approximate \$850.00 per month across communities for Independent Living Services and Youth Agreements only

Alberta – depends on program

Saskatchewan – no absolute rate but maximum amounts but can be changed on an individual basis; rate depends on status

Manitoba – This rate is usually based on Income Assistance rates and some agencies fund as high as the Basic Maintenance rate which is decided by the Province annually. The current per diem rate for children 11 to 17 years old is \$22.13 in the South and \$23.60. (This does not include the agency allowance portion of the rate).

Ontario – \$663.00 per month but individual agencies can increase this amount from their own funds

Quebec – no amount given

Nova Scotia – \$639.00 per month if youth in foster care, otherwise based on comprehensive plan of care

New Brunswick – \$319.00 per month; costs will be assessed and rate increase based on assessment

Prince Edward Island – \$1050.00 per month plus transportation and other expenses

Newfoundland – \$522.30 per month plus special requests

Yukon – amount varies with no maximum

Northwest Territories – depends on the needs of youth

Nunavut – no financial support of this kind

2. How is the monthly rate determined?*
- Social assistance rates – Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Yukon
 Statistics Canada (cost of living) – None
 Other (please specify)
- British Columbia** – combination of social assistance rates, cost of living and Ministry analysis
Alberta – student loan rates
Saskatchewan – Children’s Services determines rate
Nova Scotia – rates determined based on Child in Care Maintenance Rates
New Brunswick – rates determined based on the Provincial Financial rates and benefits for Children-in-Care as well as our Independent Living rates.
Prince Edward Island – Children in Care aged based category and policy
Newfoundland
Northwest Territories – new rate will be a combination of social assistance rates, cost of living with additional funding
- * Ontario and Quebec did not respond; Nunavut – not applicable
3. How often is the rate reviewed?*
- Annually – Saskatchewan (individual agreement review), Prince Edward Island (individual rate review; no formal review times for overall program rates), Newfoundland, Yukon
 Bi-annually – None
 Other:
- British Columbia** – no formal review time; reviewed when necessary
Alberta – every 6 months for individual agreements
Ontario – no specified time, local agency specific decision
Nova Scotia – reviewed when necessary
New Brunswick – Child-in-Care rates are not reviewed on a regular basis. The rates were last reviewed in 2005.
Northwest Territories – no set time
- * Manitoba, Quebec did not respond; Nunavut – not applicable
4. Does the program require a contribution from the youth/their family?*
- Mandatory contribution**
 Yes – Quebec (while youth is a minor)
 No – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories
- Based upon youth’s income**
 Yes – Alberta, Yukon
 No – British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories

Based upon fixed contribution

Yes – None

No – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories

* Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick did not respond; Nunavut – not applicable

K) Other

1. In what year was your program/service developed?

British Columbia

Youth Education Assistance Fund – 2002

Youth Agreements – 1999

Independent Living Services – 1980's or earlier

Alberta

2004 – With the change in legislation more programming specifically designed for youth

Saskatchewan

1980s

2006 – Building Youth Futures in pilot

Manitoba

No response given

Ontario

No response given

Quebec

Program was conceived in 2001, became a pilot project in 2002 in 4 Centre jeunesse for 3 years to create the program as it currently exists.

Nova Scotia

No response given.

New Brunswick

In 1999

Prince Edward Island

Approximately 1981

Newfoundland

2000 with the proclamation of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.

Yukon

Services for youth in care have always been a significant part of Yukon child welfare services.

Northwest Territories

1998

Nunavut

Not applicable

2. Has this program/service been evaluated?*
 - Yes – British Columbia (Youth Agreements only), Quebec, Northwest Territories
 - No – Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Yukon
 - * Manitoba and Ontario did not respond; Nunavut – not applicable

 3. Does this program/service maintain data on participation and outcomes?*
 - Yes – British Columbia (Independent Living Services, Youth Agreements and YEAF – participation only), Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories
 - No – Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon
 - * Manitoba did not respond; Nunavut – not applicable

 4. Does this program/service conduct follow-up contact with youth who have completed or left the program?*
 - Yes – Alberta, Quebec, Prince Edward Island (informally)
 - No – British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon, Northwest Territories
 - * Manitoba and Ontario did not respond; Nunavut – not applicable

 5. Is there a plan to change this program in the next 12–24 months?*
- Yes**
- British Columbia – pilot supported employment initiative at this time, no other funded formalized plans
 - Saskatchewan – Examine different approaches to support youth existing care (Building Youth Futures expansion)
 - New Brunswick
 - Prince Edward Island
 - Newfoundland – Currently we are conducting an internal review of the Youth Services Program that involves provincial and regional stakeholders. The current program/policy review includes representatives from each health authority and will involve consultations with youth as the work progresses.
 - Yukon – We are in the process of hiring a coordinator for an independent living program, who will oversee the design and development of this program. Over the next year an assessment of life skills needed by youth leaving care will be undertaken and a curriculum will be developed, delivered and evaluated. This program will be available to all youth within F&CS branch, which will include youth involved in the Youth Justice system.
 - Northwest Territories – Unsure but likely
- No**
- Alberta
 - Quebec – This is a new program with hopes to implement in all the Centres jeunesse within 3 years
 - Nova Scotia
 - * Manitoba, Ontario and Nunavut did not respond

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