



Child Welfare League of Canada
Ligue pour le bien-être de l'enfance du Canada



EQUITABLE STANDARDS FOR TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD FOR YOUTH IN CARE

October 2021 report

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUTH IN CARE ADVOCATES



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Max Bell
Foundation



BACKGROUND

Across Canada, youth who have reached the age of majority (18 or 19, depending on province/territory of residence) during their time in the child protection system are no longer eligible for government care due to legislated age cut-offs. While most jurisdictions offer various post-majority supports and services, they are not obliged to do so by law and are often accompanied by restrictive eligibility criteria; this results in the majority of youth not accessing the transition supports they need. Two jurisdictions – Quebec and the Federal government as it concerns on-reserve First Nations youth in care – are not currently providing any guaranteed financial or social services to youth who exit the child protection system.

In a 2017 B.C. estimate, the Tye found that only one third of youth exiting care accessed some form of extended government supports¹.

An overwhelming amount of research illustrates the many ways that the status quo for transitions to adulthood for youth in care is leading to devastating outcomes. Youth exiting the child protection system in Canada are at a much higher risk of facing multiple challenges than their peers who are not in care, including homelessness; under-education; unemployment or under-employment; poverty; mental health issues; post-traumatic stress; and substance misuse². A recent pan-Canadian study³ analyzing data from the National Youth Homelessness Survey found that youth in care are nearly 200 times more likely to experience homelessness after exiting the system, with 2SLGBTQ+ youth in care at even greater risk compared to their peers in care (63% vs 56%). These legislative and systemic inequities are causing harm to youth and propel them into these negative outcomes, with First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth, Black and racialized youth, youth with disabilities and 2SLGBTQ+ youth ‘aging out’ of care in Canada at an even higher risk of experiencing multiple challenges post-care. These findings are alarming and a clear indication that the conditions under which youth in care transition to adulthood must change.

1. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2017/02/06/Foster-Youth-Exiting-Care/>

2. Sources: Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2012). [25 is the new 21: The cost and benefits of providing care & maintenance to Ontario youth until the age of 25](#). Ottawa: Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., & Feduniw, A., & Brown, E. (2007). [When Youth Age out of care where to from there. Final report based on a three-year longitudinal study](#). Victoria: University of Victoria.

Tessier, N.G., Flynn, R.J., & Beaupré, J. (2014). A pilot 12-month follow-up study of Crown Ward transitions: Comparison with young people in the general population. Unpublished manuscript. University of Ottawa.

Trocmé, N., Doucet, M., Fallon, B., Nutton, J., & Esposito, T. (in press). Child protection in Canada. Chapter in press in J. Duer Berrick, N. Gilbert & M. Skivenes (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Child Protection Systems*. New York: Oxford University Press.

3. Source: Gaetz, S., O’Grady, B., Kidd, S., & Schwan, K. (2016). [Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey](#). Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

The National Council of Youth in Care Advocates

The National Council of Youth in Care Advocates is comprised of provincial and territorial advocates, Youth in Care Networks, youth in care alumni and key allies. We first convened as a national group in March 2020 to collectively call upon provinces and territories to issue moratoriums on ‘aging out’ of care during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Council was successful in securing temporary moratoriums or interim emergency measures in most jurisdictions, we do not want a return to what existed pre-COVID-19 (and what still exists in some jurisdictions) once the pandemic crisis has passed — youth in care also need and deserve a ‘new normal’.

This document represents a shift in our focus to longer-term solutions by identifying equitable standards to which governments and service providers should be held to ensure transitions to adulthood are healthy and supported for youth in care across the country. Our overarching goal is to ensure that youth in care are afforded equitable supports and conditions for success, so they may thrive and not only struggle to survive. Youth in care deserve ongoing and unconditional love, support and encouragement, just as their peers who are not in the child protection system receive from their parents, friends and communities throughout their entire lives.

“In Canada, child protection governance and administration is under the sole jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, except for on-reserve First Nations services, which are under federal jurisdiction. Consequently, transition supports and services for youth ‘aging out’ of care vary widely across jurisdictions. There is currently no federal or jurisdictional legislative framework for the provision of transition supports and services, and data collection and reporting within and across jurisdictions is lacking. Canada is one of the very few western countries that does not have national legislation and/or standards supporting the transition to adulthood for youth in care.”

In *A Long Road Paved With Solutions* (2020), p.9

As illustrated in our report [A Long Road Paved With Solutions: ‘Aging out’ of care reports in Canada](#), multiple reports since the late 80s have called upon governments to work together, in collaboration with local stakeholders and youth with care experience, to develop and implement national standards for transitions to adulthood for youth in care. In addition, the

recent Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) call to justice called upon all levels of government and child protection services to reform laws and obligations with respect to youth 'aging out' of the system. Their call includes ensuring lifelong support networks for youth in care, and providing opportunities for education, housing and related supports.

Too many young people leaving government care have lost their lives due to falling through the cracks⁴. **Youth in care can no longer wait and can no longer be left behind – they need comprehensive and holistic supports now.** As a Council comprised of people with lived experience and key allies, we release these standards with this sense of urgency in mind.

What do we mean by “standards”?

We acknowledge and recognize the sovereignty of First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations and peoples, their inherent jurisdiction over child and family services, and their approach to raising and caring for children in community, which has existed since time immemorial. We are committed to equity for all youth who are in care and we welcome the knowledge and guidance of Indigenous youth and Elders, for whom 'aging out' is a foreign, imposed and harmful colonial concept. As we seek to hold Provinces, Territories, and the Federal government to the highest standards of care for children and youth, we recognize that Canada has a distinct obligation to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth as enshrined in both Treaty and modern laws. The laws and knowledge that existed pre-colonization, and that survived through genocide, have a lot to teach us about how to raise children to be capable people, living meaningful and purposeful lives. First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations and communities are best placed to safeguard and advance the rights and well-being of their children.

As such, the standards proposed in this document are squarely focused on Provincial, Territorial, and Federal governments' obligations, and on mainstream child protection agencies. These standards represent the **minimum** key elements that need to be in place before a young person exits the child protection system and transitions to adulthood, regardless of age, place of residence, and legal and/or placement status; this also pertains to all types of placements within the child protection system (e.g., residential/group home units, foster homes, kinship placements, etc.).

4. According to the BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel, youth leaving care in BC died at 5 times the rate of the general population of young people. In addition, the BC Representative for Children and Youth found that youth who have been in government care are significantly more likely to have either considered or attempted suicide compared to youth who have never been in care.

Sources: BC Coroners Service Death Review Panel (2018). [Review of MCFD-Involved Youth Transitioning to Independence, January 1, 2011-December 31, 2016](#). Report to the Chief Coroner of BC.

BC Representative for Children and Youth & BC Office of the Provincial Health Officer (2015). [Growing Up in B.C.](#)

These standards are based on previous Canadian reports and best practice research outlining standards for care leavers⁵. We have also incorporated our own lived experience expertise into the development of these standards and have vetted them with youth in and from care in our respective jurisdictions.

Our overarching goal is to ensure that youth in care are afforded the same standard of support and opportunities for success as they transition to adulthood as their peers who are not in the child protection system, while also recognizing the inherent traumatic impact⁶ of child removals and separation from families of origin. We also want to ensure that every youth in care receives equitable level of supports and services no matter where they live in Canada. While each jurisdiction differs in their determination of who is considered a 'youth in care' due to varying legal definitions, our definition of youth in care is all encompassing, non-discriminatory and includes youth who are under voluntary agreements, temporary care, customary care and kinship care. All youth with out-of-home placement experience deserve to be equitably supported and invested in as they transition to adulthood.

We want to emphasize, however, that these standards are not currently bound by a national legislative framework nor jurisdictional law. In this sense, they are voluntary standards that we ask Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments to adhere to and child protection agencies to pro-actively implement. We also ask that Provincial and Territorial governments collaborate with local Child and Youth Advocates (or Office of the Ombudsman in jurisdictions where there are no such positions) to ensure accountability and fidelity to the standards through yearly evaluations. The Federal government should also collaborate with an oversight body, such as a National Child & Youth Advocate, to ensure fidelity to the standards.

5. See: B.C. Representative for Children and Youth (2014, April). [On their own: Examining the needs of B.C. youth as they leave government care](#). Victoria: B.C. Representative for Children and Youth.

Domshy, D., Lovrod, M., Bustamante, S., & Fairley, C. (2015, March). [Youth in transit: Growing out of care](#). Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network.

Fallis, J. (2012, January). [Literature Review. The Needs of Youth Transitioning From Protective Care, and Best Practices Approaches to Improve Outcomes](#). Report for the General Child and Family Services Authority. Winnipeg, MB.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2006, April). [Youth leaving care: An OACAS survey of youth and CAS staff](#). Toronto, ON: OACAS.

Goodman, D., Vena, A.-M., Waldmann, A., Marajh, L., Karunanathan, R., Nghavi, F., Green, R., Gregory, D., & Chan, W. (2018, March). [Post-Secondary Education Program Review](#). Toronto: Children's Aid Foundation of Canada.

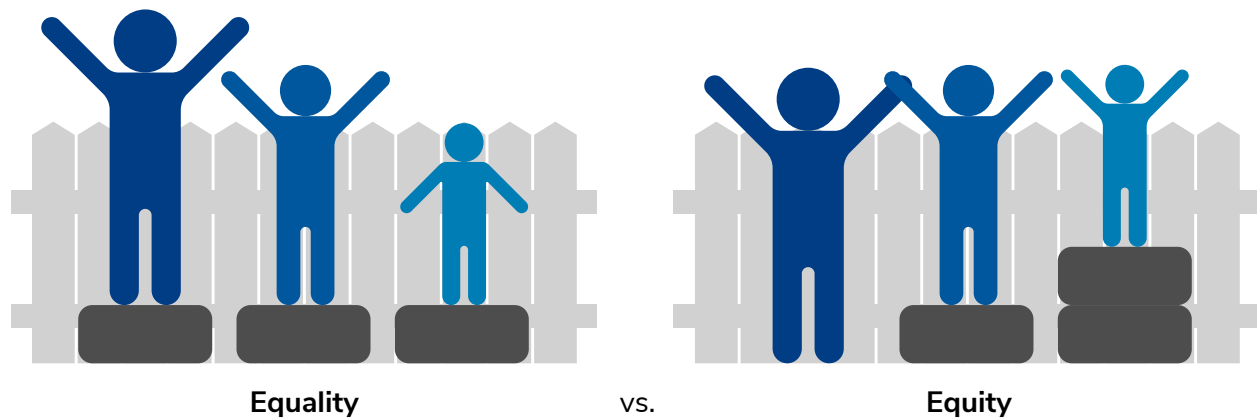
Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2012, January). My real life book: [Report from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings](#). Toronto, ON: Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

Reid, C., & Dudding, P. (2006, January). [Building a Future Together: Issues and Outcomes for Transition-Aged Youth](#). Ottawa: Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being.

6. <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/trauma-caused-by-separation-of-children-from-parents/>

What do we mean by “equitable”?

We chose the term “equitable” to define the standards, rather than a qualifier focused on equality. While youth in care share common experiences, they are not all one and the same and come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. As such, one-size-fits-all approaches (i.e., treating everyone ‘equally’) are not appropriate for youth in care as they have unique needs, strengths and life goals. Adopting an approach anchored in equity recognizes that each youth has different circumstances and allocates the exact supports, resources and opportunities that are needed for them to reach outcomes that are equal to those of youth in the general population⁷. In addition, the implementation of the standards must be done within a trauma-informed approach, as youth in care live with various forms of trauma which can manifest in different ways, including the inability to seek out and/or accept help⁸. Caregivers, workers and policy decision-makers need to recognize that these behaviours are symptoms of trauma, and must work with youth in ways that meet them where they are at, recognize their need for agency and self-determination, and that support their healing journeys. While some youth may decide to leave care at an earlier age, the door should always be open for them to return should they require additional supports – just as youth who are not in care can depend on their parents for extra supports when needed.



“I really don’t think if I was a case worker I would be able to say, ‘I tried, this youth really isn’t interested’ and just consider my job done.”

Youth in Care Canada Board of Directors Member

7. For a more detailed explanation on the difference between equity and equality, see: <https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/>

8. <https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/the-toxic-legacy-of-self-denial>



OUR VISION

We dream of a world where ‘aging out’ no longer exists in our vocabulary, nor in child protection legislation and mandates. We dream of a society where youth in care are interdependently⁹ supported throughout their entire lives, just as their peers who are not in care who can rely on their family, friends and communities well beyond the age of majority.

“Increased supports to youth in care are not a financial ‘expense’ but rather an investment with infinite lifelong returns for our whole society. (i.e., decreased long-term expenses in social, health, and justice systems and increased contributions in taxes, economy, academia, innovation, and more). [...] And so, the decision to deny them anything that they need to succeed is not just lacking in compassion but lacking in logic as well [...] and is simply antithetical to the idea of child protection services.”

Youth in Care Canada Board of Directors Member

9. *Interdependence* incorporates values of connection, collaboration and empowerment, rather than complete independence and self-sufficiency. An approach based on interdependence aims to normalize the reliance of marginalized populations - such as youth 'aging out' of care - on relationships and support networks during the transition to adulthood, rather than holding them to standards of self-sufficiency that their peers outside of the child protection system are not held to. A focus on interdependence also emphasizes the importance of both formal and informal support networks for youth exiting care. By providing a safety net in times of crisis, interdependent networks can help youth surmount challenges for which they may not possess sufficient skills, confidence or time to handle on their own (Propp et al., 2003). This approach is supported by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in the U.S., which recommended in a 2011 report that young people in care need to experience interdependent living "so that they gain the knowledge, practical skills, and social capital that will support them into adulthood" (p.34).

Sources: Propp, J., Ortega, D.M., & NewHeart, F. (2003). [Independence or interdependence: Rethinking the transition from “ward of the court” to adulthood](#). *Families in Society*, 84(2), 259-266.

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiatives (2011). [The Adolescent Brain: New research and its implications for young people transitioning from foster care](#). Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative: St. Louis, MO.

Youth in care deserve a just, ethical and equitable pathway to a full and fulfilling life. When youth in and from care were asked what they should have the right to, they responded with a wide range of considerations and aspirations. **Ultimately, all youth in care, regardless of where they live, must have the right to:**

Hope

Look forward to their age of majority birthday

Have increased opportunities for adoption - including older youth - with increased adoption subsidies and no restrictions for continued system support

Foundational Needs

Be provided with wraparound housing first for youth programs upon exiting care

Have stability and connection in areas of housing, employment, education, mental health and wellbeing

Receive adequate financial support

Identity

Obtain relevant Indigenous identity status (i.e., Indian Status, membership with First Nation, Inuit or Métis heritage groups)

Not be stigmatized by service providers and society for having been in care

Obtain citizenship status

Be recognized, appreciated and celebrated for their complexities, including youth with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, Black, Indigenous & People of Colour (BIPOC) youth, immigrant and refugee youth, and those involved in the criminal justice system

Be provided with culturally appropriate services and supports that meet their needs and the standards of substantive equality

Connection

Be connected to local peer support networks

Have meaningful connections with their community of origin, including rural and remote communities

Have a strong support system

Experience greater evidence-based interventions and prevention programs with their birth parents that reduce the likelihood that they will be separated from their family and that increase the likelihood that they will remain connected with their families and communities of origin

Continuity and Accountability

Have increased contact with their case workers

Take part in regular reviews of transition to adulthood processes

Be protected by a National Legislative Framework that guarantees their right to access adequate supports and services for their transition to adulthood

Be asked for their consent prior to collecting and storing data

Be represented through specialized advisory tables and groups at the ministerial level

Be guaranteed a child protection reporting and accountability data reporting structure at the provincial, territorial and national levels

Have transparent access to their case files and documents

Have a National Advocate for Children and Youth that represents their right to equitable standards of care and keeps jurisdictions accountable

Be guaranteed a cohesive and transparent collaboration within and between jurisdictions, systems and communities who work with youth in and from care

Take part in mandatory evaluations of extended care and post-care programs and supports

Have a continuum of support, regardless of permanency status, age or disability diagnosis, that is maintained post-care

Be guaranteed safety in disclosures to practitioners – youth should not have their vulnerability and honesty used against them

Be guaranteed equitable standards of care

Be guaranteed fidelity to the equitable standards for the transition to adulthood for youth in care

Customized care

Receive youth-centered services and supports that meets youth where they are at rather than youth having to fit into child protection system expectations

Be considered as youth needing timely supports no matter their age, including those who are young parents

Have the right to receive supports and services in their preferred language

Have access to the supports and services they need, including those in rural communities

Receive supports and services that are anchored in harm reduction approaches

Receive trauma-informed interventions and assessments over clinical approach

Receive emotional and mental health supports when going through their case files and documents

Being Informed and Equipped

Know how to navigate the various health and social service systems and how to effectively advocate for their needs and aspirations

Be aware of supports and services available in their communities

Have adequate information to manage their health needs and medications

Have foster parents and group home staff who are specifically trained to work with adolescents in care and who can help prepare them for the transition to adulthood in a holistic and developmentally appropriate way

EIGHT TRANSITION PILLARS

The following eight transition pillars are inspired by previous Canadian reports defining the areas in which youth need support to ensure a successful transition to adulthood¹⁰. These pillars are the foundation of equitable standards for transitions to adulthood for youth in care, and are a first step in our vision for a better world for all youth in care in Canada. The pillars and associated key supports were developed by the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates starting in the fall of 2020, and have been vetted and refined by young people in and from care from across the country via their Council representatives. It is important to note that while the Financial pillar is foundational to the remaining pillars, they are not listed in order of priority but rather should be implemented in a wraparound, holistic manner.

We recognize that there are a multitude of existing supports and programs in place across government, community and private sectors to address the needs of youth in and from care. While a compilation of existing resources is outside the scope of this document, we encourage jurisdictions to undertake this task in collaboration with their local youth in care networks (or youth-in-care-centered community-based organizations in jurisdictions where youth in care networks do not yet exist). It is also important to emphasize that programs and supports that are created to fill gaps in resources, fulfill the equitable standards and meet the needs of youth in care ought to be youth-centered at all stages, including the development, implementation and evaluation. Youth in and from care should be involved as key stakeholders and experts on their own lives and compensated for their time and valuable expertise.

10. [See Footnote 5.](#)

THE EIGHT TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD PILLARS

- 1**  **Financial**
- 2**  **Educational & Professional Development**
- 3**  **Housing**
- 4**  **Relationships**
- 5**  **Culture and Spirituality**
- 6**  **Health & Wellbeing**
- 7**  **Advocacy & Rights**
- 8**  **Emerging Adulthood Development**

1



Financial

Every young person should have the financial resources required to meet their needs. Youth in care deserve to have a financial starting point that is above the poverty line¹¹, and allows them to pursue their career interests and dreams. This pillar is foundational, as youth cannot thrive in other areas of their lives if their basic needs are not met in a secure and consistent manner. All key supports listed under each pillar must be accompanied by financial support.

“Youth in care should not be considered as disposable by the systems who are responsible for their care [...] but rather they must be recognized as worthy of the social and financial investments¹² that will help them grow into thriving adults.”

National Council of Youth in Care Advocates & Youth in Care Canada Board Member

“I needed more financial support than what was given to me. Life is expensive, and not have the skills to know how to properly budget did not help. There were days where I wouldn’t be able to eat because I had no money left and the food bank only allows you to go once a month. It became a rough cycle for a few years until I was able to get a proper job with a decent pay.”

New Brunswick Youth in Care Network Leader

11. Former youth in care tend to have higher unemployment rates than their peers who are not in care, and rely more heavily on social assistance due to living in poverty. In a B.C. study, researchers found that a high percentage of youth 'aging out' of care in their study (40%, ages 19-24) were on social assistance compared to 2.5% B.C. youth in the general population. All youth in their study were living below the poverty line.

Source: Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., & Feduniw, A., & Brown, E. (2007). [When Youth Age out of care where to from there. Final report based on a three-year longitudinal study](#). Victoria: University of Victoria.

12. The Conference Board of Canada (2014). [Success for All: Investing in the future of Canadian children in care](#).



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key financial supports:

- Equitable financial supports in all need areas/pillars, including cultural and spiritual
- Timely, realistic and equitable funding allocation to meet ongoing needs
- Free and up to date technology (computer, tablet, cell phone, internet, etc.)
- Guaranteed (and liveable) basic income upon leaving the system, based on local realities and inflation
- Medical/insurance coverage for animal companions
- Bank account with savings set up as soon as a young person enters care, with regular contributions to savings
- Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) and Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) set up as soon as a young person enters care
- Financial and investment literacy acquired via accessible and youth-friendly workshops and professionals who understand youth in care realities (e.g., how to do your taxes (tax clinics); how to build your credit score; how to access disability assistance, EI, COVID-19 relief; investments training and mentorship; having a financial advisor)
- Personalized financial plans
- Ongoing financial management training and mentorship (e.g., keeping track of finances, budgeting, yearly taxes)
- Meaningful source of income, to practice and implement financial skills
- Entrepreneurship skills acquired via accessible and youth-friendly workshops and professionals
- Guaranteed supports for young parents & more information about supports that are available to them
- Life insurance
- Driving course and lessons
- All necessary ID (provincial ID, Medicare card, driver's license, passport)
- Funds allocated for former youth in care to access in times of crisis (e.g., financial assistance to pay for rent, bills, necessities)
- Debt assistance
- CERB repayment amnesty
- Extra funding for birthdays and holidays
- Guaranteed permanent funding to provincial, territorial and national youth in care networks

2



Educational & Professional Development

Every young person should experience an environment where they can learn and grow in ways that are meaningful to them and at their own pace¹³. This pillar needs to be accompanied by financial and health and wellness supports, to allow youth in care to succeed in schooling and training opportunities.

“[We need] conscious and dedicated educational support in secondary school to help young people pave their way to postsecondary education and employment.”

Alumni from care, Project Outsiders (Ontario)

“Having access to school after [age] 27 [is important], we don’t all grow at the same pace, and take longer to heal.”

Youth in care alumni, Fostering Change BC

13. There is a drastic difference between graduation rates of foster youth compared to the overall population. The BC Ministry of Education (2018) reported that 46% of youth in care completed high school, in comparison with 85% of students not in care. The report also emphasized evidence of intersectional complexities; for instance, Indigenous youth in care with special needs had lower educational outcomes (32% completed high school) than non-Indigenous youth in care with special needs (36% completed high school). The high school graduation rates were even more pronounced when contrasting with students with special needs who were not in care (68%). Regarding post-secondary education, OACAS (2012) found that the ability for former youth in care in Ontario to participate was impacted by their low high school graduation rates; they enrolled in post-secondary programs at half the rate of their peers.

Sources: B.C. Ministry of Education (2018). How are we doing? Children and youth in government care and youth on Youth Agreements. Victoria: Ministry of Education.

Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS, 2012). [Child welfare report 2012](#). Toronto: OACAS.



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key educational & professional development supports:

- High school graduation, including supports for youth who need more time to complete high school and holistically supporting those who have dropped out to go back to school
- Education mentorship and supports in secondary school to help youth navigate the path to post-secondary and/or employment
- Option to remain in the same school despite moving to another placement, to prevent gaps in education and support school/community belonging
- Supports for post-secondary application process, including application fees
- Full post-secondary supports at any time, at any level (college, trade, Undergrad, Master's, PhD), regardless of guardianship status, including out-of-province programs, financial supports for tuition, books and housing
- Awareness of all external scholarships and bursaries available to youth with care experience, with supports for application process
- Peer navigational support at all levels, regardless of care status (e.g., help with school, scholarship and grant applications, applications for housing, guidance on how to choose courses, campus visits, etc.)
- Bachelor's degree, trade certification or professional development to ensure secure career path prior to transition
- Re-assessment of special needs prior to transition
- Continued specialized supports (e.g., disability accommodations, tutoring, career counselling, etc.)
- Cultural learning opportunities (e.g., land-based learnings for Indigenous youth, courses)
- Alternative hands-on learning opportunities
- Free and up to date technology for schooling, including software
- Ongoing free access to professional development courses and trainings
- Support with obtaining certifications (e.g., First Aid, Food Safe, Serving it Right, Barista or similar programs, Babysitting)
- Employment training and support (e.g., resume and cover letter building, tools and techniques for job searching, interview skills, how to navigate wage negotiations, knowing your rights)
- Empowering and supporting youth who wish to pursue non-traditional or non-mainstream programs and employment (e.g., Arts & Music, Acting, Fashion Design, Photography, etc.)
- Opportunities for youth to use their lived experience to make an income (e.g., public speaking, consulting, etc.)
- Volunteer opportunities in the community

3



Housing

Every young person should have a place they can call home¹⁴, without strict rules and conditions to abide by. Housing supports should not be tied to further institutionalization of youth in care, as they have the right to live a normal life as they transition to adulthood.

“[Our youth] especially recognize the importance of choice and voice in housing options as many felt they were often coerced into places in less than desirable neighbourhoods.”

VOICES (Manitoba)

“There needs to be more housing for youth from care, especially ones that accept animals because they're family too.”

Youth in care, Batshaw Youth Empowerment Group (Quebec)

14. Many youth leave care unprepared for the socio-economic realities and responsibilities of adulthood, and without knowing where they will live. In a recent pan-Canadian study analyzing data from the National Youth Homelessness Survey, youth in care were found to be nearly 200 times more likely to experience homelessness compared to their peers who are not in care; LBGQTQ2+ youth in care were reported to experience an even higher rate of homelessness (63%) compared to their peers in care (56%) (Gaetz et al., 2016). Housing insecurity also impacts other key areas in the lives of youth from care through decreased connection to community and school, decreased likelihood to have an adult in their lives who cares about them and decreased connections to peers (Smith et al., 2015).

Sources: Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Kidd, S., & Schwan, K. (2016). [Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey](#). Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Smith, A., Peled, M., Poon, C., Stewart, D., Saewyc, E. & the McCreary Centre Society. (2015). [We all have a role: Building social capital among youth in care](#). Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key housing supports:

- Housing First for Youth in Care program (e.g., aligned with HF4Y¹⁵ best practice)
- Accessible, safe, legal and affordable housing reflecting local realities
- Non-discriminatory subsidized housing options, including non-single room occupancy (SRO) options
- Option to live with and/or visit parents who live in subsidized housing
- Option to continue to live with and/or visit foster parents
- Animal-friendly housing
- Choice and voice in housing options, including which neighbourhood to live in
- Supports in apartment viewings (i.e., having someone accompany youth to view housing options, getting transportation to viewings)
- Storage space
- Housing-related skills training (e.g., cleaning, laundry, child-proofing)
- New furniture and kitchen essentials (e.g., cutlery, plates, glasses, pots, pans)
- New appliances in cases where they are not provided by the landlord
- Tenant rights and appeals process training
- Eviction prevention (e.g., eviction/homeless prevention program with wraparound services, targeted to youth in care)
- Access to a housing advocate and legal representative who understand youth in care realities and can advocate on their behalf
- All housing set up costs covered (deposits, utilities, internet, phone, etc.)
- Assistance with learning how to set-up and pay monthly bills, which provider and plans to choose
- Agency acting as co-signer on lease or housing reference as necessary
- Luggage set
- Moving costs and fees covered (e.g., packing supplies, moving vehicle rental, movers, etc.)
- Ongoing funding for basic necessities (e.g., toilet paper, hygiene items, laundry detergent, towels)
- Emergency kit provided (e.g., candles, flashlight, water, clothes, canned food, bandages, emergency blanket, fire extinguisher)
- Training on healthy living skills and creating a safe space at home (e.g., boundary-setting with guests, how to communicate with landlord)

15. [Housing First for Youth \(HF4Y\)](#) is a program developed by A Way Home Canada, and includes a Program Model Guide, Operations Manual and Tools & Templates.

4



Relationships

Every young person should have people in their life that they can count on unconditionally and interdependently¹⁶. Youth in care need to feel that they belong, have worth and are valuable members of their communities.

“It is alienating to not know anyone who has been through what we have. Adults and professionals give advice that simply do not apply to our lives. We need people who have been in our shoes to know how we can progress.”

Alumni from care, C.A.R.E. Jeunesse (Quebec)

“For me its grieving the loss of someone I thought would continue to be there as a support. [...] My foster mom promised to keep in touch after I aged out and she didn't. I'm 24 now and still not over it.”

Alumni from care, Project Outsiders (Ontario)

16. For youth 'aging out' of care, a focus on investing and nurturing in the relationships that matter to them is of outmost importance (Doucet et al. 2018). Decision-makers need to center youth needs and desires for connection, and involve them in every step of case planning and decision-making. Youth in and from care also express the need for emotional and relational stability over the legal recognition/status of a relationship (Sanchez, 2004). Youth from care have also expressed concerns and challenges associated with the 'conditional permanence' in their relationships during their time in the child protection system, in that their connections with most of the adults in their lives are on a conditional basis due to professional barriers and boundaries (ibid.).

Sources: Doucet, M., Al-aibi, T., Dzhenganin, M., Emmanuel, K., Jules, R., Merrill-Parkin, R., Pratt, H., Read, J., & Vanderwal, S. (2018). [Relationships Matter for Youth 'Aging Out' of Care Research Report](#). Victoria, BC: BC Representative for Children and Youth.

Sanchez, R. M. (2004). [Youth perspectives on permanency](#). San Francisco, CA: California Permanency for Youth Project.



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key relationships supports:

- Support in developing lifelong connections and supportive networks that are free from expiry dates and 'end of mandates'
- Humane, dignified, authentic and youth-centered relations with workers and caregivers
- Youth-centered permanency planning process
- Relational support networks for life milestones and achievements (e.g., having a baby, marriage, graduation, promotion, award, etc.)
- Help in establishing natural mentors and support networks determined by youth
- Reconnection with birth family when appropriate and desired by the youth
- Family mediation and counselling services (for both foster families and families of origin)
- Maintaining connections with siblings and placing them together as much as possible
- Mentors (including 2SLGBTQ+ , BIPOC, Elders, lived experience)
- Community and peer supports for young parents
- Peer mentors from care with lived experience similarities
- Professional sponsors in the community who have lived experience (i.e., paid internships)
- Service providers with lived experience
- Animal companions for those who wish to have one
- Supporting the development of friendships
- Supporting connections in the community where the youth resides
- Nurturing and supporting ongoing relationship with Indigenous youth's Nation, Band or home community
- Trauma-informed training and peer support on building and nurturing healthy relationships (e.g., with friends, romantic partners, family members)
- Workshops on how to navigate online dating (e.g., identifying red flags, which apps are best, how to practice online safety)
- Workshops on how to navigate professional relationships (e.g., coworkers, boss, service providers)
- Peer support groups for youth who have family members dealing with mental health and addictions issues (e.g., how to establish healthy boundaries)
- Connections during the holidays for those who are not connected to family (e.g., holiday dinners via Youth in Care Networks and peer/community groups)
- Guaranteed internet coverage to build and maintain virtual and online connections
- Option to remain in placement until youth is ready to live on their own



Culture & Spirituality

Every young person should be connected to their culture and spirituality, in ways that are meaningful to them, safe, and at their own pace¹⁷. It is important to recognize that not all youth have the privilege of knowing where they come from due to colonial assimilation practices and genocidal policies, and thus it is important to provide opportunities for youth of all identities to be connected to their natural environments, their communities and themselves.

“These supports need to be guided by what the youth wants, [and] keeping the door open and support available for when the youth is ready.”

Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Society (VACFSS) Youth Advisory Committee (YAC)

17. “There is a well-known Indigenous phrase, “all my relations”, that emphasizes the interconnectedness of human beings to the universe (Kaminsky, 2016). This Indigenous philosophy can also be applied to the relational needs of all youth ‘aging out’ of care. Child welfare policies, decision-making and practices need to invest in all the relations of youth in care - including to the spiritual, cultural, earth and animal worlds - and ensure their continuity during the transition to adulthood. [...] By doing so, youth exiting care have a better chance at accumulating social capital and building a support network they can rely on during their transition to adulthood.” (Doucet, 2020, p.149)

Sources: Kaminsky, J. (2016). [First Nations Pedagogy - Theory: Interconnectedness](#).

Doucet, M. (2020). [All My Relations: Examining nonhuman relationships as sources of social capital for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth ‘aging out’ of care in Canada](#). International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience (IJCAR), 7(1), 139-153.



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key culture & spirituality supports:

- BIPOC youth are connected to their nation/community of origin
- Safe reintegration into community/culture of origin
- Access to genograms, genealogy and family history
- Culturally responsible and safe worker at the choice of youth
- Connection to cultural programs and ceremonies
- A list/map of cultural programs, resources and events in the community
- Support in getting safely to and from cultural events
- Land-based healing opportunities for Indigenous youth
- Local connection to the land regardless of ethnicity
- Connection to language, including funded access to courses, programs and workshops
- Funded reconnection and regular visits to community of origin or home community (nationally and internationally), including travel and accommodations
- Connections to healthy Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers for Indigenous youth, from their nation/community of origin
- BIPOC mentors who can guide BIPOC youth re: cultural practices, ceremonies and protocols
- Supports in navigating religious and spiritual identities and empowering youth to decide for themselves if/how they want to engage (i.e., not forcing youth to go to church with foster parents)
- Social workers and caregivers provide a safe space for open dialogue with youth on religious and spiritual choices and unconditionally support their decisions
- Protection of spiritual freedom and right to practice
- Connection to cultural youth groups



Health & Wellbeing

Every young person should be provided with timely ongoing services and benefits that support their lifelong health and well-being¹⁸. These supports need to be offered within a trauma-informed, non-judgemental harm reduction approach¹⁹, without significant wait times.

“The youth stated they felt neglected [during] a lot of [their] time in care. [...] Make it policy to ensure young people have an engaging lifestyle, [...] are] engaged in various activities and assigning action therapists, support workers and [...] specialized workers to help youth in care work and advocate against [the] stigma associated with being a kid in care.”

VOICES (Manitoba)

18. Youth in and from care disproportionately deal with ongoing mental health issues arising from traumatic events experienced during their childhood and time in care. They are up to 5 times more likely to be affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in their lifetime than the general population, with rates comparable to that of Vietnam war veterans (Pecora et al., 2009). In Ontario, the vast majority of youth in care (82%) have been diagnosed with special needs, and almost half (46%) rely on psychotropic medication to help them manage their daily lives (OACAS, 2011). This is particularly important, since former foster youth are cut off from most of the financial support and medical coverage they receive upon exiting care, leaving them to pay for their own prescription drugs in addition to other bare necessities.

Sources: Pecora, P.J., White, R.C., Jackson, L.J., & Wiggins, T. (2009). [Mental health of current and former recipients of foster care: a review of recent studies in the USA](#). *Child and Family Social Work*, 14, 132-146.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS, 2011). [Children's well-being: The Ontarian perspective. Child welfare report 2011](#). Toronto: OACAS.

19. Youth from care have expressed experiencing a lack of warmth and understanding from workers and caregivers, and are often left feeling dehumanized as a result (Doucet, 2020). Caregivers and workers need the tools and the skills to recognize the signs and impacts of trauma within their interactions with youth in and from care. Youth from care have expressed that caregivers and workers are often too focused on how they are behaving in the moment and whether their behaviour made them 'worthy' of supports and services, instead of incorporating their histories of trauma into their interventions (ibid.). An example of a trauma-informed program, centered on fostering resiliency, is the Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) program currently being implemented in regions of QC and NB (Collin-Vézina et al., 2010; 2011). ARC employs a strengths-based approach and recognizes trauma as often being the root cause of behavioural and emotional issues of youth in care. The framework encourages traumatic healing and growth by addressing key underlying issues all while fostering attachment, emotional regulation skills and building on a young person's competencies.

Sources: Doucet, M. (2020). [Relationships Matter: Examining the pathways to long-term supportive relationships for youth 'aging out' of care](#). PhD Social Work, McGill University, School of Social Work.

Collin-Vézina, D., Coleman, K., & Milne, L. (2010). [Attachment, self-regulation, competency \(ARC\) trauma study](#). *IN-the-KNOW*, 2, 1-3.

Collin-Vézina, D., Coleman, K., Milne, L., Sell, J., & Daigneault, I. (2011). [Trauma experiences, maltreatment-related impairments, and resilience among child welfare youth in residential care](#). *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 9(5), 577-589.



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key health and wellbeing supports:

- Family doctor, dentist, and optometrist
- Specialist health professionals if required (e.g., orthodontist, physiotherapist, endocrinologist)
- Sexual health supports and services
- Annual health checkups
- Trauma-informed mental health supports, including reducing physical restraints and restrictive environments as interventions
- Lifelong access (i.e., no session limits) to supports to heal from trauma (e.g., therapist, psychiatrist, etc.) including specialized, alternative and complementary healing supports (e.g., action therapy, ecotherapy²⁰, animal-supported therapy²¹, art therapy, mind-body approaches to mental health treatment²², culturally relevant ways of healing, etc.)
- Counselling for young couples
- Ongoing supports for youth in domestic violence situations
- Supports and services for young parents (e.g., bonding with baby, parenting, reduce intergenerational child protection involvement)
- Lifelong access to health benefits coverage when needed, including coverage of medications, optical care, dental, ambulance assistance
- Lifelong disability supports
- Nutrition training, including how to optimally do groceries (e.g., budgeting, finding deals, meal planning, healthy options)
- Access to universal online platform (and/or smartphone app) tailored to youth in/from care (medical and non-medical) focused on prevention and early intervention
- Access to recreational supports and services in the community (arts, sports, culture, youth groups, etc.) and guidance for youth to explore and discover their own interests
- Emotional support certification of animal companions, including worker support in obtaining this
- Local gym membership
- Harm reduction and rehabilitation supports and services for substance use
- Culturally safe and responsible health and wellbeing services and supports
- Connection to peer support groups (e.g., mental health, recovery)

20. [Do You Need a Nature Prescription?](#) WebMD, April 13, 2021

21. [The Therapeutic Value of Horses.](#) Psychology Today, August 23, 2017

22. Burnett-Zeigler, I. et al. (2016). [Mind-Body Approaches to Treating Mental Health Symptoms Among Disadvantaged Populations: A comprehensive review.](#) Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 22(2), 115-124.

- Self-care and wellbeing training and workshops (e.g., mindfulness and self-regulation tools, stress management)
- Developmentally appropriate, strengths-based and trauma-informed mental health and addictions training and workshops so youth can have a better understanding of themselves, their families and their history
- Access to eating disorder programs and supports
- Supports for getting to/from appointments
- Transparent and trauma-informed conversations between social worker and youth about why they have been placed in care – these conversations need to happen immediately upon placement
- Inclusive sex positive education and dialogue (e.g., rights, consent, testing, birth control, 2SLGBTQ+ sexuality and identity, etc.)
- Gender affirming care
- Free birth control
- Access to an advocate youth can turn to for advice on navigating the health system, finding the right health professional to consult, how to get a second medical opinion
- Access to Jordan's Principle protections past the age of 18



Advocacy & Rights

Every young person should have their rights respected and should experience environments where their voices are heard²³, and their silence is addressed holistically.

“Nothing About Us Without Us!”

Youth in care alumni, Fostering Change BC

23. Social policy can often be disconnected from the lived realities of the people it impacts, resulting in minimal systemic change (Abrams et al., 2016). Youth in and from care must be empowered to define their own goals and milestones for success based on their lived experience and the unique context they are transitioning from. Social workers and supportive adults must empower youth 'aging out' of care by considering them as viable experts and contributors to social policy and change pertaining to the transition to adulthood, as opposed to treating them as outsiders on the margins of an adult-led child protection system and society (Doucet, 2020). This can be supported by including them as decision-makers in their transition planning process, investing in advocacy and mentoring opportunities, involving them in the policy making process, and engaging them as co-researchers through emancipatory and social justice research approaches (Blanchet et al., 2013; Dupuis & Mann-Feder, 2013).

Sources: Abrams, L.S., Curry, S.R., Lalayants, M. & Montero, L. (2016). [The Influence of Policy Context on Transition Age Foster Youths' Views of Self-Sufficiency](#). *Journal of Social Service Research*, 43(1), 37-51.

Doucet, M. (2020). [Relationships Matter: Examining the pathways to long-term supportive relationships for youth 'aging out' of care](#). PhD Social Work, McGill University, School of Social Work.

Blanchet-Cohen, N., Linds, W., Mann-Feder, V., & Yuen, F. (2013). [Introduction to the special issue on transforming practices: Emancipatory approaches to youth engagement](#). *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 3, 320-327.

Dupuis, J., & Mann-Feder, V. (2013). [Moving towards emancipatory practice: Conditions for meaningful youth empowerment in child welfare](#). *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 3, 371-380.



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key advocacy and rights supports:

- Ongoing trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate self-advocacy training and skills²⁴
- Workshops on how to advocate against the stigmatization associated with having been in care
- Consistent definition of who is considered a 'youth' across sectors and service providers²⁵
- Welcome package for youth as they come into care providing information on rights, resources available and supports available to them
- Youth-centered and youth-friendly training on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), how it applies to youth in care and what accountability processes are in place
- Full awareness of rights post age of majority (i.e., both as a young person in society and a young person in care)
- Youth-friendly social media literacy training
- Youth-centered engagement and empowerment in all forms of intervention and case management decision-making
- Legal protections in addressing concerns and rights infringements - youth are able to freely express their needs and wants without fear of repercussions, and are believed
- Youth are involved in all interventions and transition plans as equal stakeholders
- Youth have the agency to bring together key stakeholders in their circle of care to work through decisions and conflict (e.g., social workers, parents, caregivers, Elders, other important family and community connections, etc.)
- Access to non-redacted files and documents, with no time limits
- Supports and resources for youth who wish to obtain their files, including mental health supports as this process can be very traumatic
- Full awareness of rights (i.e., both as a young person in society and a young person in care), taught in a youth-centered and youth-friendly way
- Full awareness of the responsibilities of workers and caregivers towards youth in care, and the accountability process if those responsibilities are not fulfilled

24. This includes the recognition of self-denial and self-devaluation signs, such as avoidance and apathy, as obstacles to self-advocacy. Alternative rights-guidance intervention should be available, using recreational, interest-based, and mentorship roles to guide youth who have patterns of self-denial and self-devaluation.

Source: Corrigan, P.W. & Rao, D. (2012). [On the Self-Stigma of Mental Illness: Stages, Disclosure, and Strategies for Change](#). Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 57(8), 464-469.

25. For instance, Canada's first State of Youth Report (2021) defines youth as [between the ages of 15 and 29](#).

- Supports for youth who have been involved in the criminal justice system, including prevention and early intervention programs to prevent re-involvement as adults
- Connection to youth advisory/advisory committees
- Invitation to events featuring speakers with lived experience
- Access to youth in care retreats
- Appointed staff or professional to ensure government funds are going directly to the youth
- Youth have a supportive and accessible specialized youth advocate, external to child protection agencies, that they can go to on their own when their rights are being violated and who can advocate on their behalf
- Information provided to youth and their families on how to reach the Child and Youth Advocate (or Office of the Ombudsman) as soon as a young person becomes involved with the child protection system
- Connection to youth in care networks at youth's choice
- Guaranteed and permanent funding for provincial, territorial and national youth in care networks
- Revision of youth protection policies to include an obligation to review these policies regularly, with a youth-centered and youth-informed approach

8



Emerging Adulthood Development

Every young person should experience environments that cultivate personal growth and development as they transition into adulthood²⁶.

“[Youth in care deserve to feel] a sense of permanence [...] A PERMANENT sense of permanence, not a temporary one. [The transition to adulthood] should be done at an individual youth's pace, when they are fully ready, not partially ready based on a false qualifier of age or based on their peers/Ministry's impression of readiness. [It] should be up to the youth to determine when they are ready to 'leave the nest' with [the] FULL option to return if not ready or in the need of respite care. Post [age of majority,] [youth should] be given a worker who acts more [as] a guardian and support figure - the worker answers to and follows the youth's wants and asks, not the other way around.”

Youth in care alumni, Fostering Change BC

“I aged out so... that was probably the worst time of my life. It was like being re-traumatized and thrown back into abandonment.”

New Brunswick Youth in Care Network Leader

26. Emerging adulthood is the life stage between adolescence and adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 29 (Arnett, 2015). This 'new' phase is a reflection of socio-demographic and economic changes that have occurred in the last 50 years. During this phase, young people experience an extended period of self-focus and individual self-discovery, resulting in a delay of achieving key adult life events (e.g., marriage, raising a family, completing post-secondary education, starting a career). This time of self-focus and exploration is completely normal, healthy and temporary, and should be considered a time for society to invest in young people so they can become stable and productive adults. This period is also marked by unstable living conditions – nearly half of young people return to live home at least once between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett & Schwab, 2013). Currently, youth in care are not able to experience this emerging adulthood phase due to legislated age cut-offs for child protection supports and services.

Sources: Arnett, J.J. (2015). [Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties \(2nd edition\)](#). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Arnett, J.J., & Schwab, J. (2014). [Beyond emerging adulthood: The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults](#). Worcester, MA: Clark University.

Munsey, C. (2006). [Emerging adults: The in-between age](#). *Monitor on Psychology*, 37(7).



The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key emerging adulthood development supports:

- Longer and flexible transition period with room for trial and error (i.e., being able to learn from mistakes) and development of backup plans
- Continuous access to supports when needed – no closed files
- Peer-led life skills training including financial health (e.g., how to manage credit cards, debt, budgets, savings, bills, leases, tax returns)
- Readiness-based transition to adulthood
- Supports tailored to each youth – one size does not fit all
- Guaranteed and automatic after care supports
- Book or manual outlining all the supports and services available to youth in care during their transition to adulthood and how to access them (Federal, Provincial/Territorial, Regional and Local)
- Specialized workers for adolescents in care and emerging adults, who have training in adolescent and emerging adulthood development and have a passion to work with this population
- Understanding by workers that the transition to adulthood is not linear – there will be disruptions, trial and error and crises and they must support youth through these
- Responsive workers who respond in a timely manner to youth requests and check in regularly with youth (weekly basis)
- Adequate one-on-one time with workers and youth, including timely and open discussions about planning for the transition to adulthood
- Youth-centered team approach to transition to adulthood planning involving all key stakeholders and youth
- Non-paternalistic relational approaches by caregivers and professionals, who are held accountable for their behaviours
- Assigned person youth can go shopping with
- Safe and non-judgemental supports (harm reduction approach)
- Ceremonies and celebrations of life milestones (e.g., age of majority birthday, transition to adulthood, graduations)
- Regular assessments with youth to understand their needs, capacity and determine which further supports are required
- Identity development opportunities outside of the youth in care experience

Summary

These eight pillars are the foundation of equitable standards for transitions to adulthood for youth in care, with key supports provided as actionable items to ensure jurisdictions, organizations and caring community members are meeting the outlined standards.

In summary, the standards are as follows:

-  **1 Financial:** Every young person should have the financial resources required to meet their needs. Youth in care deserve to have a financial starting point that is above the poverty line, and allows them to pursue their career interests and dreams.
-  **2 Educational & Professional Development:** Every young person should experience an environment where they can learn and grow in ways that are meaningful to them and at their own pace.
-  **3 Housing:** Every young person should have a place they can call home, without strict rules and conditions to abide by.
-  **4 Relationships:** Every young person should have people in their life that they can count on unconditionally and interdependently. Youth in care need to feel that they belong, have worth and are valuable members of their communities.
-  **5 Culture & Spirituality:** Every young person should be connected to their culture and spirituality, in ways that are meaningful to them, safe, and at their own pace.
-  **6 Health & Wellbeing:** Every young person should be provided with timely ongoing services and benefits that support their lifelong health and well-being. These supports need to be offered within a trauma-informed, non-judgemental harm reduction approach, without significant wait times.
-  **7 Advocacy & Rights:** Every young person should have their rights respected and should experience environments where their voices are heard, and their silence is addressed holistically.
-  **8 Emerging Adulthood Development:** Every young person should experience environments that cultivate personal growth and development as they transition into adulthood.

FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS: NEXT STEPS

The National Council of Youth in Care Advocates seeks to improve the health and wellness of young people in the child protection system by ensuring they are not forced to transition to adulthood before they are ready, and before they have securely accessed housing, economic resources, health services, and connections to supportive people and communities. Specifically, we seek a fundamental shift in how young people transition out of the child protection system, with strong adherence by governments, organizations and child protection workers to the Equitable Standards presented in this document, which have been co-developed by people with lived experience.

Over the next year, the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates will be engaging key government, community and youth stakeholders in the development of the Equitable Standards Fidelity Model (i.e., evaluation, implementation, training and technical assistance processes), which is planned for release in the fall of 2022. This Equitable Standards Fidelity Model will provide the evaluation criteria by which jurisdictions, organizations and caring community members can assess where they are at in meeting the Equitable Standards outlined in this document, and determine an action plan for filling in gaps in key supports and services. Provincial and Territorial governments should collaborate with local Child and Youth Advocates (or Office of the Ombudsman in jurisdictions where there are no such positions) to ensure accountability and fidelity to the standards through yearly evaluations. The Federal government should also collaborate with an oversight body, such as a National Child & Youth Advocate, to ensure fidelity to the standards.

Upon completion of the Equitable Standards Fidelity Model, the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates will be developing an online Equitable Standards training program for front line workers, supervisors and policy decision-makers. This training program will be piloted, evaluated and then officially released in the fall of 2023.

What we are proposing is bold and long overdue. We are committed to helping systems, organizations and caring community members address the factors that stand in the way of healthy, thriving adulthoods for young people in and from care. We are asking a lot because a lot is required, and everyone involved in the lives of youth in and from care must be involved in this change process. The National Council of Youth in Care Advocates is presenting the solutions and the road map – developed by and for youth in and from care - to make this much needed change concrete and actionable. We are counting on you to commit to action and engage with us as we move forward in implementing this systemic change.

WORDS OF SUPPORT FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUTH IN CARE ADVOCATES



Rachel Gouin, Executive Director
Le CAP – Centre d'appui et de prévention

“These Equitable Standards are the result of an unprecedented collaboration between youth in care networks and First Voice advocates. Grounded in research and the expertise of those who are most affected, the Standards deserve to be widely endorsed, implemented and upheld. I’m especially pleased to see a strong call for services and supports that are adapted and responsive to culture, language and identity.”



Jennifer Dupuis, President
C.A.R.E. Jeunesse

“Ensuring that young people transitioning out of care have these long overdue supports is critical and we must act NOW! For decades care leavers, researchers, front line workers and stakeholders have been expressing the importance of making changes to existing practices, but the progress to act has remained far too slow. These are children’s lives that are being impacted and we cannot allow these young people to keep falling through the cracks, it’s time to build a strong, stable and crack-free foundation that was constructed with the input of those who are being impacted directly.”



Zo Bourgeois, Coordinator
New Brunswick Youth in Care Network

“These equitable standards are crucial for the protection of our young people transitioning out of care in a safe, healthy and supportive way. Youth should not have to suffer while leaving care, instead they should be ready and fully supported in the best way possible to help them thrive and be successful in their future. Our youth in care deserve permanency, stability, healthy transitions and supportive adults that want their wellbeing to be top priority. It is time to recognize the importance of creating a child welfare system that truly sets our young people for success and proper transitions. No young person should ever have to “age out” again. That term should be put to rest and we should highlight that young people can leave care when they are ready to leave care and not forced because they turned a certain age. Their lives matter, their future matters and it’s our responsibility to put our youth in care first.”



Marie Christian, Director
Voices: Manitoba’s Youth in Care Network (VOICES)

“What do we need in order to grow and develop to our best potential? Time, community, opportunity, and love. Young people in and from care are asking for time to learn and grow, community to surround and support us with both accountability and encouragement, opportunities to learn, make mistakes, master new skills and tap into forgotten ones, and love that can keep us grounded and connected to ourselves, and to the world around us. Listening and responding to the voices of the lived experts reflected in this document will require courage, but the outcome will be so rewarding.”



Cheyenne Ratnam, CEO & Co-Founder
Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition (OCAC)

“This document is not a document that should stay on shelves. The implementation of this document across jurisdictions in this nation will be vital to improving the lives and outcomes of young people in and from the child welfare system, across their lifespans. In Ontario we have already begun doing the work and partnered with the government. My dream is to see governments across the nation take what is in this document, that has been created by us, first voice advocates, and translate that into policy tools, directives, and even legislative changes. The process should include a member-checking process with their local First Voice Advocate organization, and even the National Council. Accountability to creating meaningful changes is vital.”



Conner Lowes, President
Youth in Care Canada

“The equitable standards in this document are not new, but they do comprise the most robust, current, and simplified set of requirements for governments to begin to provide safe transitions to adulthood for young people. If these solutions were implemented as national standards, I firmly believe they would improve the likelihood of success for young people leaving care across the country, as well the quality of their transitions.”



Ashley Bach,
First Nations former youth in care & advocate

“Equitable standards for transitioning out of care means no youth is abandoned or left behind. As youth in care are ‘aging out’ every day, we urgently need the solutions from this report implemented.”



Sandra Noel, Program Leader,
Gaining Lifeskills Our Way (GLOW)
Foster Family Coalition of the NWT

“I agree with the document as a whole, and more specifically Pillar 7 [Advocacy & Rights] - I would like a Northwest Territories Youth in Care Network funded to support the people that could use it.”



Dez Gregoire, Co-Coordinator,
Montreal Youth in Care Alumni Student Association (MYCASA)

“Implementing Equitable Standards across Canada solves the most pressing challenges and barriers for youth aging out of care, but also create a new meaning of 'aging' out of care, that is hopeful and exciting, and not one of fear and loss.”



David French, Managing Director
A Way Home Canada

“A Way Home Canada is grateful to have been included in this collaborative effort to design and think towards what equitable standards for youth transitions should and could look like. Having blended research, best practice and the voices of youth with lived expertise, the strategy embedded within this document has all of the necessary ingredients for real and sustainable change. We applaud those organizations and communities who are already seeking to align themselves with these efforts, but they cannot do it alone. Leadership from Provincial and Territorial governments with the legislated responsibility for Child Welfare need to pivot and work to realize these recommendations. Oversight from the Federal Government is necessary to ensure these systems and responses contribute to positive outcomes they are seeking through their many aligned portfolios. Together, this can all be realized, and in turn, shape Canada as a global leader in transitions for youth in care.”