



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

**Interjurisdictional Scan: Youth Leaving the Child Welfare System and
Transitioning to Adulthood**

Final Report
Compiled for the Directors of Child Welfare
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Executive Summary

The Directors of Child Welfare (DCW) commissioned the Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC) to conduct a cross-jurisdictional scan of legislation, policies, services and programs in the area of youth transitions out of care, with a focus on culturally informed models. A similar scan was conducted in 2006 (Reid & Dudding).

In delivering on this work, CWLC administered a survey in all provinces and territories and conducted a high-level scan of the literature, focusing on a few comprehensive studies. CWLC also initiated outreach to Indigenous leaders and organizations across Canada yet could not conduct proper consultations, as the designated timeline did not allow CWLC to follow OCAP principles¹ and adhere to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). While CWLC has received some information on programs and services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis from select jurisdictions, many programs are delivered by delegated agencies, which were not included in the scan. This represents a significant gap.

Additionally, the perspectives of end-users and front-line service providers, including community based non-profit organizations, are largely absent from the data set. Finally, the scan excludes information related to program funding and user accessibility – it is not known whether youth are accessing the services available to them.

A more complete picture – one which provides insight into how programs are being received on the ground – will require input from service providers, youth in and from care, First Nations, Inuit and Métis organisations and knowledge keepers, as well as members of other over represented communities, such as African Canadians and LGBTQ2S+ peoples.

Noting these limitations, CWLC cautiously shares observations and recommendations from the cross-jurisdictional scan.

Highlights from the Literature. Brain science provides evidence that cognitive, emotional and behavioural development continues past adolescence, with development of the prefrontal cortex (responsible for impulse control, decision-making and strategic planning) continuing through age 25 (Arain et al., 2013). Known as “emerging adults,” youth age 18 to 29 face heightened vulnerability, especially when they are obligated to make significant life transitions without a supportive family or community (Arnett, 2015; Trocmé et al., 2019). Research on homelessness; poverty; mental health and substance misuse; incarceration and criminal justice involvement demonstrates that youth leaving care are at a much higher risk of facing multiple

¹ The First Nations principles of OCAP are a set of standards that establish how First Nations data should be collected, protected, used, or shared. Standing for ownership, control, access and possession, OCAP® asserts that First Nations have control over data collection processes in their communities, and that they own and control how this information can be used (First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.).

challenges than their peers who are not in care (Mann-Feder, 2019a; Doucet, 2019; Trocmé et al., 2019; Stein, 2004).

Approaches to youth transitions out of care and into adulthood that focus primarily on independent functioning and critical life skills are now viewed as inadequate (Lee & Barrick, 2014; Mann-Feder, 2019b; Doucet, 2019). Youth leaving care need to experience “interdependence,” such that identity formation and social support networks and relationships come to function at the heart of a successful transition into adulthood (Lee & Barrick, 2014; Mann-Feder, 2019b; Doucet, 2019).

An emerging body of outcomes data also indicates that leaving permanent care prematurely can result in poor outcomes in adulthood, while an extended time in care may encourage more favourable outcomes (Doucet, 2019; Courtney & Hook, 2015; Courtney & Lee, 2012; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). Recent analyses indicate that, after controlling for a variety of youth characteristics, each additional year in care is associated with a 46% increase in odds that youth exiting care will achieve a further level of education (Courtney & Hook, 2015; Doucet, 2019).

Summary of Observations from Survey Results. Since the time of the 2006 scan, a considerable effort has been made across Canada to better support youth who are transitioning out of care and into adulthood. A summary of these changes is provided below, along with a cross-country snapshot of the current programmatic and legislative landscape.

- **Age:** The age of support to youth in post-care has gone up across the country since 2006. With one exception, all provinces and territories offer some form of post in-care services up to the age of 21. Many offer some form of support up to age 26+, and most jurisdictions have either added more services or are in the process of reviewing programs to increase supports.
- **Eligibility:** In most jurisdictions, youth are eligible for post-care services regardless of where they are living, but restrictions still exist in some provinces and territories for youth living with kin, in foster care, or for those accessing kinship services.
- **Workers:** In all provinces and territories, case workers are trained to do general child protection work and have little specialized training in the area of “emerging adults.” Furthermore, the sheer number of services, programs, and eligibility criteria can prove challenging for workers assisting youth in accessing what is available.
- **Interdependence:** A small number of jurisdictions have adopted frameworks and principles specific to youth leaving care that encourage the development and maintenance of strong relationships. In most jurisdictions, these specific requirements pertain only to children and youth in care, with the assumption that caseworkers will provide this as part of general casework with youth post-care.

- **Cultural connection:** Most provinces and territories acknowledge the need for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth to be connected to their culture and community – a marked change from when Dudding & Reid conducted their survey in 2006. However, specific services are primarily offered only to youth in care. The focus on culture and community is assumed to carry forward to youth post-care through individual case work but is often not clearly articulated.
- **Healing and housing:** Most provinces and territories do not offer specific programs or services to youth post-care that support healing or help with the transition between child and adult mental health systems. Few provinces and territories are providing focused assistance with housing, with some discouraging support due to liability.
- **Specialized programs:** Few jurisdictions have specialized post-care programs for LGBTQ2S+, racialized, and Francophone youth. All provinces and territories have protocols that aim to transition youth with disabilities who are in care to the adult disability system at the age of majority. Few specialized supports exist to address the specific needs of youth with disabilities who also grew up in the care of the child welfare system.
- **Data:** Most jurisdictions collect data on the number of youth in their programs; many also collect data on the number of youth leaving care. Many provinces and territories collect data on the number of youth who finish post care programs, and the majority are able to disaggregate data for Indigenous youth. Some jurisdictions can disaggregate further across First Nations, Inuit and Métis and have identified an “other” field for further identification, however, most do not use it. As one exception, Ontario is beginning to disaggregate for specific cultures. A few provinces and territories track data for LGBTQ2S+ youth and youth with disabilities. No provinces and territories collect outcomes data for youth post-care.
- **Evidence:** Few post-care programs have been evaluated against target outcomes.
- **Networks:** A few provinces and territories have formalized and funded youth in care networks, while others have youth-led networks. A few jurisdictions have processes to engage youth, but most conduct ad hoc consultations.

Recommendations. Given the overrepresentation of former youth in care among those who are homeless, involved with the justice system, living in poverty or struggling with mental health and substance misuse, provinces and territories should:

1. Shift the approach to post-care such that it is in keeping with current literature on “emerging adulthood” as a distinct life phase, one that requires specialized approaches to programming and service provision. Youth with care experience should have access to a complete network of support based on their capacity and needs, including access to

culture and traditional territories, education, housing, mental health and healing, and medical and related essential services. This shift should:

- a. Embed the need for services for youth post-care in legislation;
 - b. Ensure that staff working with youth have specialized training and understand the needs of emerging adults in care.
2. In keeping with current literature on brain development, continue to increase the amount and the length of support for youth leaving care – at a minimum, to age 25 – and extend post-care supports equitably to youth regardless of care status, including:
- a. Youth who have been in kinship care and kinship service;
 - b. Youth engaged in customary care and customary adoption;
 - c. Youth accessing Jordan’s Principle;
 - d. Youth who have had extensive experience in foster care and exited before the age of majority; and
 - e. Youth who are caring for their younger siblings.
3. Require, rather than encourage, case workers to support youth to connect to their culture and build relationships that will support them post-care. In addition, ensure youth have access to resources for emotional healing and assistance for housing. Ensure that resources and training are available for case workers to meet these expectations.
4. Support and fund the creation of a youth in care network in each jurisdiction and develop formal mechanisms to engage youth.
5. Collect disaggregated data on youth who are accessing and *not* accessing post-care services, and partner with academic institutions to identify and measure longer term outcomes for youth exiting care.

Introduction

In 2006, Reid and Dudding set out to explore why youth aging out of the child welfare system in Canada do not fare as well as their peers. Their report, *Building a Future Together: Issues and Outcomes for Transition-Aged Youth*, shone a spotlight on existing research, programs, and practices and highlighted the voices of youth with lived experience to offer a knowledge base for building stronger policies and practices across Canada and around the world.

At the time of their report, Reid and Dudding recognized that little Canadian research existed on the topic of youth transitioning out of care. Yet, what did exist pointed very clearly to youth 'aging out' facing a plethora of issues and unmet needs associated with the shift to adulthood. Research from countries all over the world indicated that youth exiting the child welfare system are more likely than their peers to leave school before completing their secondary education; be dependent on social assistance; be unemployed or underemployed; be incarcerated or involved with the criminal justice system; experience homelessness; have mental health problems; and be at higher risk for substance abuse problems (Reid and Dudding, 2006).

Reid and Dudding's work signified an important shift towards identifying a set of interrelated factors that can help to determine how successful a youth is likely to be in life after care; their analysis centered on the following eight factors:

- Education and training;
- Housing;
- Relationships;
- Life skills;
- Culture and identity;
- Emotional healing;
- Youth engagement; and
- Financial support.

The first seven areas are referred to as "pillars," while the final area – financial support – is identified as the foundation on which all of the pillars are built: "The concept of pillars and a foundation is particularly apt because none of these areas are autonomous and each contributes to... 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" (Reid and Dudding, 2006). In effect, Reid and Dudding's framework served as a starting point to better address the needs of youth exiting the child welfare system on a systemic basis.

With close to 15 years now past since the publication of *Building a Future Together: Issues and Outcomes for Transition-Aged Youth*, CWLC now seeks to provide the DCW with:

1. An update on prominent and emergent research themes related to youth leaving care.
2. A snapshot of the current legislative and programmatic landscape across Canada, with a focus on culturally informed models.
3. A series of recommendations in pursuing further research and policy directions.

Study Limitations.

In delivering on this work, CWLC administered a survey in all provinces and territories and conducted a high-level scan of the literature, focusing on a few comprehensive studies. CWLC also initiated outreach to Indigenous leaders and organizations across Canada yet could not conduct proper consultations, as the designated timeline did not allow CWLC to follow OCAP principles² and adhere to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). While CWLC has received some information on programs and services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis from select jurisdictions, many programs are delivered by delegated agencies, which were not included in the scan. This represents a significant gap.

Additionally, the perspectives of end-users and front-line service providers, including community based non-profit organizations, are largely absent from the data set. Finally, the scan excludes information related to program funding and user accessibility – it is not known whether youth are accessing the services available to them.

A more complete picture – one which provides insight into how programs are being received on the ground – will require input from service providers, youth in and from care, First Nations, Inuit and Métis organisations and knowledge keepers, as well as members of other over represented communities, such as African Canadians and LGBTQ2S+ peoples. To garner an accurate lens on Indigenous-specific services, the DCW should conduct further study with First Nations, Inuit and Métis organisations on culturally informed models, following UNDRIP and OCAP principles.

Literature Summary

This summary provides an overview of prominent and emergent research themes and evidence on the topic of youth transitions out of the child welfare system and into adulthood. It includes a discrete lens on youth with disabilities, and an outline of Canadian-based outcomes data.

² The First Nations principles of OCAP are a set of standards that establish how First Nations data should be collected, protected, used, or shared. Standing for ownership, control, access and possession, OCAP® asserts that First Nations have control over data collection processes in their communities, and that they own and control how this information can be used (First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.).

Emerging Adulthood as a Unique Life Phase. In Canada and across the Western world, a shift in socioeconomic landscapes has meant that young people are increasingly entering adult roles later in life; today, many young people remain at home and are financially dependent on their parents until the end of their 20s (Mann-Feder, 2019b; Schwartz et al., 2013; Arnett, 2015; Beaujot & Kerr, 2007; Trocmé et al., 2019). Canadian census data indicates that 42% of young people between the ages of 20 and 29 are still living with their parents (Statistics Canada, 2011; Trocmé et al., 2019). This shift has prompted the unfolding of the *theory of emerging adulthood* which asserts that, in this context, identity exploration and instability dominate personal development throughout the 20s (Arnett, 2000; Mann-Feder, 2019b; Doucet, 2019). The term “emerging adulthood” is associated with young people transitioning to adulthood between the ages of 25 and 29 (Arnett, 2015; Trocmé et al., 2019). Simply put, the literature on the topic indicates that the journey to self-sufficiency is contingent on the availability of long-term *financial and emotional support* well into the second decade of life [emphasis added] (Mann-Feder & Goyette, 2019a).

Importantly, however, the bulk of child welfare services end when a young person reaches the age of majority (18 in most countries and jurisdictions) (Mann-Feder, 2019a). As a result, youth exiting the system are subject to accelerated transitions and are not afforded the same level of support as their peers who are not in care – rarely are financial and emotional needs met and adverse early experiences, including the severing of family relationships, make youth leaving care doubly vulnerable in the current socioeconomic environment (Mann-Feder, 2019a; Stein, 2004; Doucet, 2019; Trocmé et al., 2019).

Adolescent Brain Development. Leaving care policies that support services past the age of majority are in keeping with an emerging body of evidence on adolescent brain development (Doucet, 2019). It is well documented that brain development of the prefrontal cortex – which is responsible for impulse control, decision-making and strategic planning – does not fully mature until age 25 (Arain et al., 2013; Gauvrit et al., 2017; Gavin et al., 2009; Giedd, 1999; Doucet, 2019). According to Steinberg’s (2005) research, heightened vulnerability during emerging adulthood results from continuously developing behavioural and cognitive systems that are attributable to both independent and common biological processes (Doucet, 2019). Research has further shown that cognitive-emotional balance is a psychological development process that is learned throughout emerging adulthood, as young people struggle to survive and establish a sense of security (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Doucet, 2019).

Independence to Interdependence. Approaches to youth transitions out of the child welfare system and into adulthood that focus primarily on independent functioning and critical life skills are now viewed as inadequate (Lee & Barrick, 2014; Mann-Feder, 2019b; Doucet, 2019). Youth leaving care need to experience “interdependence,” such that identity formation and social support networks and relationships come to function at the heart of a successful transition into adulthood (Lee & Barrick 2014; Mann-Feder, 2019b; Doucet, 2019). Crucially, the literature continues to demonstrate that youth who have left care experience difficulties engaging in

close relationships and acknowledging dependency needs (Mann-Feder, 2019b; Doucet, 2019). In considering the experiences of former youth in care, researchers argue that supports must move beyond classroom-based didactic learning toward a more holistic method, where young people feel cared for and loved (Greenson et al., 2015, Munson et al., 2015; Marion & Paulsen, 2019; Doucet, 2019).³ Here, connections to culture and community remain a vital part of the solution (Fast et al., 2019; Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office, 2019; Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, British Columbia, 2017).

Youth with Disabilities. While research in Canada is sparse, three international studies place a distinct focus on former youth in care with disabilities (Marion & Paulsen, 2019). Vinnerljung et al. (2015) find a higher prevalence of disability pensions among this population in Sweden, and higher rates of psychosocial problems compared to other adults with a disability pension (Marion & Paulsen, 2019). They argue that this group should be regarded as high-risk for gaining a disability pension in the future (Vinnerljung et al., 2015; Marion & Paulsen, 2019). In Victoria, Australia, Broadley (2015) finds that former youth in care with disabilities do not receive the transitional and post-care support and housing they require – many are shifted into housing options that are unsuitable for their needs or unsafe (Mann-Feder & Goyette, 2019). Finally, Havlicek et al.'s (2016) Illinois-based research shows that the transition of youth in care with Autism Spectrum Disorder is filled with barriers, including perceptions of two separate systems and abrupt transitions; a lack of training, identification, and tracking of autism; and confusion about services and funding (Marion & Paulson, 2019).

Outcomes Data. Overall, evidence continues to show that youth exiting the child welfare 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 abuse (Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2012; Rutman et al., 2007; Tessier et al., 2014; Trocmé et al., 2019). In a recent pan-Canadian study analyzing data from the National Youth Homelessness Survey, Gaetz and colleagues (2016) found that youth in care are 200 times more likely to experience homelessness, with LBGQTQ+ youth in care at even greater risk compared to their peers in care (63% vs 56%) (Doucet, 2019).⁴

An emerging body of outcomes data further indicates that exiting care early can result in poor outcomes in adulthood, while an extended time in care may encourage more favourable outcomes (Courtney & Hook, 2015; Courtney et al., 2012; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Dworsky, 2005; Doucet, 2019). Recent analyses by Courtney and Hook (2015) show that, after controlling for a variety of youth characteristics, each additional year in care is associated with a 46% increase in odds that youth exiting care will achieve a further level of education (Doucet, 2019).

³ Appendix A provides information on the evaluation of Independent Living Programs in Canada, along with U.S. and Canadian-based research on youth experiences in leaving care.

⁴ Appendix B provides further information on Canadian outcomes studies that consider youth exiting care.

Finally, cost-benefit analyses conducted in Ontario and British Columbia (Vancouver) point to a respective return of \$1.36 and \$1.11 for every dollar spent on extended supports, thereby further bolstering calls to expand services for youth leaving care (Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2012; Sherlock & Culbert, 2015).

Survey Observations

Since the time of the 2006 scan, a considerable effort has been made across Canada to better support youth who are transitioning out of care and into adulthood. A summary of these changes is provided below, along with a cross-country overview of the current programmatic and legislative landscape.

Age of Support.

- The age of support has gone up across the country since 2006 – with one exception, all provinces and territories offer some form of post in-care support to age 21, with many jurisdictions offering supports to age 24.
- In a growing number of jurisdictions there is acknowledgement via legislation and standards that transition work is expected.
- Most provinces and territories have made recent changes to add further supports for post-care youth or are in the process of reviewing programs to make additions.
- Some provinces and territories offer specialized services for youth aged 16-17 that were not formerly in the care of agencies – these programs appear to be relatively new. Practices vary as to whether youth accessing these services are also eligible for post in-care supports.
- Most jurisdictions begin offering services to youth while they are still in care (before they reach the age of majority) to assist them in the transition to adulthood.

Residence and Care Status of Youth.

- Most jurisdictions offer post in-care supports to youth regardless of where they are living (e.g. in foster care, residential care, independently, or with kin).
- Some provinces and territories have restrictions on youth eligibility in accessing post in-care services, particularly for youth living with kin and in foster care.
- In a few jurisdictions, youth who have formerly been in foster care are able to access some post-care supports even if they exited care before the age of majority.
- In a limited number of jurisdictions, youth in kinship care and accessing kinship service can access post-care supports.

Staffing and Training.

- Few jurisdictions have specialized staff related to youth transitions.
- In all provinces and territories, staff are trained to do general child protection work – little specialized training exists for how to work with youth exiting care, particularly around the needs of youth as they enter the “emerging adulthood” phase of development.

Nature of Supports.

The number of services and supports for youth transitioning out of care and the related eligibility criteria to access services varies widely across the country. Services are often provided by different community service providers and case workers frequently provide referrals to these programs. Specific eligibility restrictions and multiple over-lapping programs in some jurisdictions may be acting as a barrier for youth to access the services they need; they are also likely to be confusing for case workers attempting to assist youth.

Financial Supports.

- The amount of financial support and the process for determining financial supports for living expenses varies greatly across jurisdictions.
- Some jurisdictions establish a set amount for all youth; others set the amounts on an individual basis with the case worker; and others use a combined method of a set amount that can be topped up by a case worker.
- Few jurisdictions have a specific process or benchmark for setting rates.

Education Supports.

- The number of supports related to education have increased in most jurisdictions; all provinces and territories offer something in this area.
- Some jurisdictions offer full tuition coverage and a living allowance that will cover the majority of costs. Other jurisdictions have more limited tuition and living allowance support.
- Some provinces and territories either pay tuition or have agreements with educational institutions to pay tuition.
- All jurisdictions offer some form of living allowance and other forms of support for youth to finish secondary school up to at least age 19.
- Most provinces and territories offer some form of living allowance and/or other forms of support for youth to participate in post-secondary education, with many offering

supports past age 21. That being said, living allowances are not always provided and the level of living allowance support across the country varies greatly.

- In most jurisdictions extensions to educational supports have been made to account for arbitrary age cut-offs – this represents a significant shift from 2006.
- Education prep and planning is typically left to the case worker to help youth maneuver through the education system (Alberta is one exception where a specific program is in place). Some jurisdictions have multiple education supports with varying eligibility criteria. Again, this may be acting as a barrier for youth to access services.

Other Programming.

- Most program supports beyond education tend not to be specific for youth transitioning out of care, but rather an extension of services that are offered while in care. Within this, the following supports are available:
 - **Emotional Healing (emotional and physical wellness).**
 - Counselling services for youth exiting care are mostly provided through the adult systems that exist within communities. In some jurisdictions, if funded services are not readily available, youth are supported to access the services they need on a case by case basis. In Ontario, crown wards who have left care have access to a benefits plan up to age 29 (dental, vision, drugs program).
 - **Relationships, Culture and Identity.**
 - A small number of jurisdictions have adopted frameworks and principles that identify the need for youth transitioning out of care to develop and maintain strong links and relationships. In most jurisdictions, however, specific requirements for relationship development and connection to culture are articulated for children and youth in care; for youth post-care, it is assumed that caseworkers will provide this support as part of general case work.
 - All provinces and territories acknowledge the need for Indigenous children and youth to be connected to their culture and community. This also represents a significant shift from the 2006 study, where Indigenous-related considerations were absent. Yet, as stated above, the majority of services in this area are specific to youth in care, under the assumption that this work will carry forward to youth post-care via individual case work.

- **Life Skills and Housing.**

- A few provinces and territories have life skills staff and programs that are specific to youth leaving care. In some jurisdictions, this work occurs through local community organizations. Many jurisdictions leave it up to the caseworker to ensure that life skills support is offered.
- Most jurisdictions provide some form of financial support for housing – some provinces and territories negotiate funds on a case by case basis, while others have set allowances.
- A small number of jurisdictions offer specialized support to help youth leaving care locate and secure housing. Most leave this work to individual case workers. In one jurisdiction, active casework occurs to help youth find housing with kin or within their community.
- A few jurisdictions clearly state that they are not responsible for housing as there is concern for liability if they are seen to be “approving” a residence.

The Most Vulnerable Populations.

- All jurisdictions reference services and programming for First Nations, Inuit and Métis, however, as previously mentioned, specific expectations for planning and service delivery are primarily related to youth in care vs. youth post-care.
- Few jurisdictions indicate that they have specialized programming for LGBTQ2S+, racialized, and Francophone youth, youth with disabilities, or other vulnerable populations post-care. A select number of jurisdictions have training for working with LGBTQ2S+ youth post-care.
- All jurisdictions have protocols in place that aim to transition youth with disabilities to the adult disability system at the age of majority. The focus of the transition work is primarily to ensure young adults’ needs regarding their disabilities are taken care of in the adult system. In a few jurisdictions, specialized supports are provided to address the needs of this group as being unique in the adult system given their history of being in care. Transitions to the adult system are frequently delayed due to a lack of services in the adult system.

Data Collection.

- All jurisdictions collect data on the number of youth accessing specific services, with many collecting data on the number of youth completing post-care programs. Most jurisdictions also collect data on the number of youth exiting care.
- No jurisdictions collect data related to youth outcomes post-care (education attainment, employment, well-being, etc.).

- The majority of provinces and territories are able to disaggregate data for Indigenous youth, and some can disaggregate further across First Nations, Inuit and Métis. A few jurisdictions have identified an “other” field for further identification, however, most do not use it. As one exception, Ontario is beginning to disaggregate for specific identities (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.).
- A few jurisdictions track data for LGBTQ2S+ youth and youth with disabilities.

Outcomes Measurement and Tracking.

- Overall, specific outcomes have not been identified for youth exiting care.
- Few program evaluations have been conducted. Alberta has identified and begun to measure target outcomes for its education and youth mentoring programs. Quebec is developing an outcomes framework and has done some preliminary work on its transition programs for youth aged 16-18.
- Many jurisdictions have identified that they plan to move forward with more work in the areas of outcome development and measurement.

Youth Engagement.

- A few provinces and territories have a formalized, government led and funded youth in care network; many others have youth-mobilized and led networks, with varied funding structures. Most jurisdictions that do not have a youth network are looking into creating one.
- A few jurisdictions have specific processes in place for engaging youth in program design; while the majority do not, they have conducted some form of ad hoc engagement through surveys or focus groups as part of recent change efforts.

Recommendations

1. **Strategic Shift.** Shift the approach to post-care such that it is in keeping with current literature on “emerging adulthood” as a distinct life phase, one that requires specialized approaches to programming and service provision. Youth with care experience who are “emerging adults” (25 to 29) should have access to a complete network of support based on their capacity and needs, including access to culture and traditional territories, education, housing, mental health and healing, and medical and related essential services. This shift should:
 - a. Embed the need for services for youth post-care in legislation;
 - b. Ensure that staff working with youth have specialized training and understand the needs of emerging adults in care.

Related recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls:

- *MMIWG Call 12.11 All levels of government and child welfare services reform laws and obligations with respect to youth “aging out” of the system, including ensuring a complete network of support from childhood into adulthood, based on capacity and needs, which includes opportunities for education, housing, and related supports. This includes the provision of free post-secondary education for all children in care in Canada.*

2. Availability of Supports. In keeping with current literature on brain development, continue to increase the amount and the length of support for youth leaving care – at a minimum, to age 25 – and extend post-care supports equitably to youth regardless of care status, including:

- a. Youth who have been in kinship care and kinship service;
- b. Youth engaged in customary care and customary adoption;
- c. Youth accessing Jordan’s Principle;
- d. Youth who have had extensive experience in foster care and exited before the age of majority; and
- e. Youth who are caring for their younger siblings.

3. Importance of Connection to Culture, Relationship Building and Emotional Healing.

- a. Provide clear expectations and adequate resources to case workers such that they are required (vs. encouraged) to focus on connecting youth post-care to their culture, and to aid youth in building relationships that can support them post-care;
- b. Ensure that youth are assisted to transition from the child and youth system to the adult system for their mental health and other health needs such that there is not a break in their treatment;
- c. Ensure that youth post-care have access to adequate counselling and medical supports;
- d. For youth with disabilities, strengthen planning with adult disability systems such that a smooth transition occurs. In addition, ensure that youth with disabilities post-care can access supports and programming that addresses their unique needs as former youth in care, particularly in the areas of relationship building, culture and emotional healing.

Related recommendations from Youth in Care Canada presentation to the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples regarding Bill C-92:

- *Ensure sufficient and equitable support for Indigenous youth that are leaving care, including: continued support to access culture and traditional territories; continued access to essential services; and enabling Indigenous youth leaving care from any child welfare system, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to receive transitional support from provinces and territories, including post-secondary tuition waivers, subsidized housing, and extended care agreements.*

4. Education Support.

- Ensure that youth leaving care and youth post-care are provided with focused assistance to access available supports and services;
- Ensure that caseworkers and support staff are enabled to efficiently assist youth in both understanding and navigating the various programs available.

5. Financial and Housing Support.

- Ensure staff and caseworkers are actively assisting youth to find and maintain stable housing;
- Ensure that financial supports are adequate to allow youth reasonable living standards based on the cost of living within the community in which they reside.

Related recommendations from Youth in Care Canada presentation to the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples regarding Bill C-92.

- *Require sufficient and equitable funding for Indigenous child welfare systems and clarify that Indigenous youth in and from any system of care should not have to experience financial need or deficiencies in their care before sufficient and equitable resources, including funding, are allocated.*

6. Youth Voice.

- Ensure that each jurisdiction has a strong, funded youth in care network and a formalized, youth-led youth engagement strategy;
- Engage former youth in care in a formalized way to garner their perspectives on existing and needed services.

7. Quality Assurance.

- Collect disaggregated data on youth who are accessing and *not* accessing post-care services. Look to the U.S. as an example of a national database;
- Partner with academic institutions to identify and measure longer term outcomes for youth exiting care, with a distinct focus on social determinants of health.

Related recommendations from Youth in Care Canada presentation to the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples regarding Bill C-92:

- c. Require all provincial and territorial child welfare systems to track Indigenous youth in and from care, and associated accountability measures.*

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Appendix A:

Evaluation of Independent Living Programs (ILPs)

Goyette, Turcotte, Mann-Feder, Grenier and Turcotte (2012) conducted a mixed method program effectiveness study examining two different ILPs offered to youth in the process of leaving care (ages 16-17) at 4 Centres Jeunesse in Quebec: Moving On (*Droit devant*) focused on emotional maturity (n=12 males), and Friendship Group (*Moi et cie*) focused on social skills (n=19 females) (Doucet, 2019). While most youth participants (79%) expressed satisfaction with the group intervention approach of both programs, no outcome differences were identified pre-and post-participation (Doucet, 2019).

In an earlier Quebec-based mixed methods longitudinal study of an intensive pilot ILP (*Project qualification des jeunes, PQJ*) for youth ages 17 to 20 (n=61), Goyette and colleagues (2006) found that the program did not meet the objective of inserting youth into the job market or job training programs by wave 7 of data collection (Doucet, 2019). However, personal skills and aptitudes scores significantly increased from 7.57 to 15.44, and youth reported a 7% increase of independent living skills (Doucet, 2019). It is important to note that comparison groups were not included in the Quebec-based studies, which limits the ability to assess ILP impact (Doucet 2019).

Rutman, Hubberstey and Hume (2014) conducted a mixed methods quasi-experimental ILP impact evaluation of the Link program offered in the Greater Vancouver area in B.C., with former foster youth between the ages of 19 and 26 who participated in the program (n=21) and who did not (n=22) (Doucet, 2019). The researchers found that a higher percentage of Link program participants were doing well in more areas of their lives after 9 months in the program than those who did not participate in the program, especially related to health (93% vs. 67%), mental health (75% vs. 50%), career planning and employment (64% vs. 40%) and daily living (81% vs. 60%) (Doucet, 2019). Youth participants expressed during the interviews that the Link program offered a 'home-like' environment that made them feel welcome (Doucet, 2019). However, the researchers also found that while the percentage of Link youth engaged in education and training remained consistent throughout the program, their interest in attending school decreased from 36% to 21% by the end of the program (Doucet, 2019).

Youth Experiences in Leaving Care

In a 2011 Pennsylvania study, young people who had recently "aged out" of care, or were in the process of "aging out," were interviewed individually and in small groups about their experiences and understanding of the transition to adulthood (Doucet, 2019). Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook (2011) found that many of the youth in their sample (n=45, ages 18 to 23) that chose to leave care prior to reaching the age of majority were often misinformed about

their options to remain in care and did not completely understand the realities of leaving care (Doucet, 2019). Youth often equated adulthood with independence from the child welfare system, and thus felt they had to leave care to achieve adulthood (Doucet, 2019). This affected their ability to develop supportive relationships; most former youth in care in their study felt this was a substantive challenge during their transition out of care (Doucet, 2019).

In a 2008 longitudinal mixed methods study examining the exit patterns of youth in care in Missouri, youth 'aging out' of care between the ages of 17 and 19 (n=404) were interviewed regarding the time of exit and reasons underlying their exit from care (Doucet, 2019). McCoy, McMillen and Spitznagel (2008) found that a significant number of youth in care in their sample (51.7%) left the system before their 19th birthday, with 39% choosing to leave before they were required (youth-initiated discharge) (Doucet, 2019). Youth with externalizing behavioural and non-compliance issues left earlier than did other youth, and a notable proportion of youth (39%) who wanted to leave the foster care system on their own stated a strong dislike or frustration with the system as the main reason for choosing to leave care (Doucet, 2019).

Emerging findings from the first wave of data collection of a longitudinal study in Quebec (n=1136) found that at age 17, one year before 'aging out', 69% of youth felt somewhat or very ready to transition to adulthood, while 28% felt they were only a little or not at all ready (Goyette & Blanchet, 2018; Doucet, 2019). Of those who felt ready, 66.4% knew where they were going to live after exiting care and had a sense of being able to count on a support network during their transition out of care (Doucet, 2019). Interestingly, the researchers also found that youth who were the most unsatisfied with their experience in care were the most likely to feel ready to leave care, while those who had a positive experience tended to express wanting more time in care before transitioning to adulthood (Doucet, 2019).

Rutman, Barlow, Alusik, Hubberstey and Brown (2003) found that youth leaving care in B.C. at stage 1 of Participatory Action Research (PAR) study (n=20, ages 16-29) expressed a need for emotional healing from past traumas stemming from their experiences prior to and during their time in care (Doucet, 2019). This need was often left unaddressed due to the focus of their transition plan on independent living skills rather than emotional needs (Doucet, 2019). Youth felt this impacted their ability to connect with others, establish healthy relationships, and pursue post-secondary education and employment (Doucet, 2019).

Rutman and colleagues (2007) found that youth exiting care in B.C. (n=37) considered leaving care as a partially positive event, freeing them from judgmental and controlling social workers and restrictive Ministry policies (Doucet, 2019). However, they found that youth in their sample often did not realize the magnitude of the challenges of adulthood until they experienced it first hand, and by that time there was no option for them to return to the child welfare system for support (Doucet, 2019).

Mann-Feder and White (2003) found in Quebec, most youth in care in their sample between the ages of 16 to 19 (n= 21) valued the quality of relationships with staff and emotional support more than transitional programs and services (Doucet, 2019). Most youth felt the timing of the transition was inadequate, as the lack of gradual steps towards their exit from care did not allow them to gain hands-on experience of independent living skills (Doucet, 2019). Some youth felt the sudden timing of discharge was harsh and did not provide any closure - there were no real goodbyes during their final days in care (Doucet, 2019).

Appendix B: Outcomes of Youth Exiting Care

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS, 2010) found that in the 2008-2009 academic year, only 44% of foster youth graduated from **high school** compared to 81% of the general population (Doucet, 2019).

Regarding **post-secondary education**, OACAS (2012) found that the ability for former youth in care in Ontario to participate was truncated by their low high school graduation rates; they enrolled in post-secondary programs at half the rate of their peers (Doucet, 2019).

Rutman and colleagues' (2007) BC-based study found that all youth in care alumni in their sample were **living below the poverty level**, based on Statistics Canada income measures (Doucet, 2019). They also found that reliance on social assistance increased over time; by time 4 of their data collection, 40% of alumni stated income assistance as their main source of income (Doucet, 2019). This is in stark contrast to their peers; only 2.5% of B.C. youth between the ages of 19 and 24 were on income assistance in 2003 (Rutman et al., 2007; Doucet, 2019).

Beaupré and Flynn (2014) found that 4 out of 10 former Crown Wards in Eastern Ontario between ages 18 and 23 were within the clinical range of borderline or high **mental health difficulties** (Doucet, 2019).

OACAS (2011) reported that a vast majority of youth in care in Ontario (82%) had been diagnosed with special needs, and almost half (46%) relied on psychotropic medication to help them manage their daily lives (Doucet, 2019).

Alcohol and illegal substance use was reported to be higher for youth in care alumni than the overall youth population, and often started at a younger age (Beaupré & Flynn, 2014; Flynn & Tessier, 2011; Rutman et al., 2007; Tessier et al., 2014; Doucet, 2019).

Rutman and colleagues (2007) found that at time 1 of their data collection, two-thirds of their sample of youth in care and alumni in B.C. reported having been involved in at least one **criminal offence** (Doucet, 2019).

Similar to findings in the U.S., a higher percentage of males (88%) than females (66%) reported having been arrested and/or charged with one or more crimes (Doucet, 2019). Rutman and colleagues (2007) noted that criminal justice involvement seemed to decrease over time, and that most incidents were substance use/abuse related (Doucet, 2019).

Appendix C: Summary of Survey Results for Quebec

ELIGIBILITY

Province/ Territory	Age of Protection and Service and support for children/youth in care	Age for accessing post-in-care and youth transitioning services and resources	Status required for post-in-care and youth transitioning services and resources
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age of Protection – up to 18 years Service/support for children/youth in care – up to 19 years for youth in the qualification program Services beyond this age are not part of Youth Protection Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child protection services can offer services up to the age of 19 to youth who are in the youth qualifications program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth transition supports available to youth up to at least 16 years of age. List of criteria include: open child protection case, having been in care for a long period of time

ELIGIBILITY 2

Province/ Territory	Are programs voluntary and can youth leave and return?	Availability in various forms of care	Expectations of the Youth for Participation
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the youth stops participating in the program, in some circumstances, the youth can renew the contract. The program is designed for 3 consecutive years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offered mainly to youth in rehabilitation centres; sometimes offered to youth in foster families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No expectation outside of motivation and active participation in meetings with the child protection worker

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR LIVING ALLOWANCE

Province/ Territory	Allowance provided	Rate Review Period	Rate Determination Criteria	Contribution from Youth or Family
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None. Youth are referred to adult social assistance program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

POPULATION SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

Province/ Territory	First Nation, Métis, Inuit Youth	Youth with Disabilities	Involvement with the Justice System
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific programs

EDUCATION ASSISTANCE

Province/ Territory	Education Planning and Preparation	Tuition Support	Other Resources to Support Education (including books, equipment, transportation, child care, etc.)
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worker supports youth and guides them to resources (e.g. potential employers, registration for school, postsecondary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family or intermediary resource could receive an allocation for a youth over 18 years of age. Youth 18-20 who are in high school (not trade school) have the same benefits as youth 16-17 years Request must be made to the Ministry of Education for bursaries and scholarships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None, but youth foundations can provide subsidies for youth to purchase equipment that helps them persevere in their education.

LIFE SKILLS AND HOUSING

Province/ Territory	Life Skills Programs Offered	Housing Assistance	Accessibility of Programs
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An integrated approach for youth 12-25 that is focused on connection to services in the community will be rolled out province-wide in 2019-20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection workers can direct youth to resources such as supervised living, or accompany youth when signing their lease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As of age 16 for three years. Currently, 820 spots for youth are subsidized

RELATIONSHIP, CULTURAL IDENTITY

Province/ Territory	Relationship Development	Culture and Identity First Nation, Métis, Inuit	Culture and Identity LGBTQ2S, Francophone, other
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child protection worker ensures youth is connected to at least one person of significance that they can turn to after the program (includes contacts with family). Worker situates their action in the youth's community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific programs

EMOTIONAL HEALING AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Province/ Territory	Access to Counselling	Youth In Care Network	Youth Involvement in Program Design
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, according to their needs up to age 18, following which youth are directed to adult services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each establishment has a committee of youth Care jeunesse is not funded by the province 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth informed the Aire Ouverte (transition) program Youth satisfaction surveys are done by establishments

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

Province/ Territory	Legislated and other Structured Frameworks	Specialized Staff and Specialized Training
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each establishment organizes their services according to the needs of the populations they serve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specialized staff for youth transition. Child protection workers training has some specific competencies related to youth transitions

QUALITY ASSURANCE: DATA COLLECTION

Province/ Territory	Participation in Youth Leaving Care Programs	Youth Exiting Care	Youth exiting post-care programs	Disaggregated data
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected annually on the qualification program, including data on who did and did not finish the program, who is in school and who is working Program objectives identified and data collected to measure results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No data collected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No data collected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No

QUALITY ASSURANCE: PROGRAM OUTCOMES & EVALUATION

Province/ Territory	Program Outcomes Identified	Evaluation of Programs	Plan to change programs in next 12-24 months
Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation specifications are in development for three specific objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A preliminary evaluation was conducted in 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No

