

Written Submission for the Ministry of Children of Family Development Youth Transitions Engagement On behalf of the BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness

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Written Submission to MCFD

Child and Family Service Legislative Reform Consultation

BCCEYH, Purpose, and Connection to Child and Family Services

In 2017, the BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness (BCCEYH) was founded with the purpose of leading the development of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness in BC. The BCCEYH seeks to magnify the voices of young people with lived expertise to inform this plan and is supporting a provincial youth-led youth homelessness conference in partnership with A Way Home Kamloops.

The BCCEYH is a coalition of over 40 organizations across the province which meets regularly to work toward the development of the provincial plan to end youth homelessness, to discuss current youth homelessness issues and to develop reports on various provincial ministries' roles and priorities related to youth homelessness. These reports are used to work collaboratively with the Office of Homelessness Coordination and provincial ministries towards our goal of preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness.

Introduction

This submission aims to provide evidence-driven policy, program, and legislative change recommendations to MCFD based on MFCD's promises in the 2022 provincial budget announcement.

To develop our submission, a thorough and exhaustive literature review was conducted on reliable and relevant resources from organizations and sites such as A Way Home Kamloops, A Way Home Canada, Representative for Children and Youth (RCY), McCreary Centre Society, Truth & Reconciliation Commission, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, BC Housing Research Centre, The Homeless Hub, and other Canadian and US academic journals and research. Publications from these organizations represent their resolution to end youth homelessness by devoting to insightful youth-related research and offering actionable policy and program recommendations.

While we are thrilled that the BC government will extend the government care stay to the age of 21 and (in 2024) provide enhanced supports up to the age of 27, it concerns us that specific and detailed support programs and actions are yet nowhere to be seen, and that youth with imminent need of support are falling through the cracks. This report serves as a brief actionable outline and reference in aspiration to answer questions like 1) what are the feasible **youth-specific housing models**, 2) how should the **transition planning supports** and the **transition plan** look like, and 3) what types of supports are needed among youth and what **specific programs** could potentially work. Although this submission serves as a recommendation for the future legislative change and planning, we also aim to deliver the message that many actions should be taken immediately to improve



the quality and expand the range of transition and post-care supports to youth currently in and from care.

Firstly, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of extending government supports to youth and care stay beyond the age of 19. The period from age 18 to age 25, according to Arnett, is called *emerging adulthood*¹. Emerging adults should not be treated the same as adults because they experience a considerable amount of change, instability, and identity exploration.

Wraparound supports are required during this period of time to help emerging adults successfully transition to adulthood. As such, government and youth-serving agencies should not expect emerging adults to be self-dependent past the age of 19, and the *Child and Family Service Act* should reflect this fact. The extension of government care and support until the age of 27 is necessary and will undoubtedly play a crucial role in ending youth homelessness.

Youth-Specific Housing Frameworks/Models

After the extension of government care is in place, there are a variety of feasible youthspecific housing frameworks and models to consider besides foster care. These options include 1) transitional housing with a convertible lease, 2) permanent supportive housing, 3) scattered-site housing, 4) the "**Foyer**"² model, and 4) the **Housing Outreach Project-Collaboration** (HOP-C)³.

Transitional housing with a convertible lease is an option that many youth favor because they can later take on the lease without any hassle of finding a new place or moving and achieve housing stability immediately.

While general transitional housing might be more suitable for youth with lower support demand, the "Foyer" model is a type of transitional housing combined with a series of housing, education, employment training, life skills, and case management supports. The Foyer model can serve as an alternative to foster care placement, as it provides more well-rounded supports to young people. Some highlights of the Foyer model include 1) the flexibility of the length of stay and return, 2) program fees collected from the residents functioning as their future start-up funds, 3) intensive daily activities and workshops on topics relating to housing, work, life skills, and general health and well-being, and 4) specific aftercare program.

¹ Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <u>https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.5.469</u>

² Gaetz, S., & Scott, F. (2012). *Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada*. (Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press). https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/foyer_report23112012.pdf

³ HOP-C Working Group. (2020). *Stabilizing Pathways Out of Youth Homelessness: A Practice Guide.* Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. https://www.homelesshub. ca/stabilizingyouthpathways



HOP-C is a framework of supports that goes with any type of housing that youth are in. Its central principle and values are team-based, wraparound support model with a focus on peer support and community building, clinical mental health support, and transitional case management.

Besides youth-specific housing framework suggestions, youth with lived expertise also demand that government develop low-barrier housing options with reduced eligibility requirements and expectations⁴. At-risk and homeless youth should be able to access housing without any prerequisites.

Quality of Foster Care and Competence of Foster Parents

In spite of the new youth-housing models for older youth, in BC, the majority of foster homes operate under a Family Care Home Agreement⁵, meaning a child is often cared in homes with foster parents. Foster care is a well-intentioned practice, but without adequate training for foster parents and prudent screening of perspective candidates, foster care placement can be a pathway to youth homelessness.

In 2018's youth forums held by young people with lived expertise of homelessness, some youth voiced out that "(the) *oversight of foster homes and group homes was lacking and that they found themselves facing oppression and discrimination in a place that was supposed to be a home for them.*" Moreover, youth also reported that some foster placement options were devoid of love or a sense of belonging and, in their view, were not responsive to their needs; in other cases, young people also spoke about a lack of support to stay connected to their family and culture. On top of that, youth also mentioned the negative impacts of poorly planned transitions from foster home to foster home, resulting in a lack of stability or permanency⁶.

Given the feedback, it is necessary to enhance the oversight of foster and group homes, carry out the BC foster care education program in fidelity, and improve the transitions from one placement to another or proactively intervene to prevent moving out from happening. Specifically, the foster care education program should give extra attention to the module on **attachment** as attachment is further eroded when children/youth are separated from their biological parents, and again through multiple separations from foster families over successive placement⁷. When foster parents understand the foster child's early attachment

⁴ McParland, K., & The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. (2020). *FROM MARGINALIZED TO MAGNIFIED: Youth Homelessness Solutions From Those With Lived Expertise*. <u>https://rcybc.ca/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/2020/02/Final.From-Marginalized-to-Magnified.pdf</u>

⁵ Foster Family Handbook (5th edition). Ministry of Children and Family Development. British Columbia.

⁶ McParland, K., & The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. (2020). *FROM MARGINALIZED TO MAGNIFIED: Youth Homelessness Solutions From Those With Lived Expertise*. <u>https://rcybc.ca/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/2020/02/Final.From-Marginalized-to-Magnified.pdf</u>

⁷ Pacifici, C., Delaney, R., White, L., Cummings, K., & Nelson, C. (2005). Foster Parent College: Interactive Multimedia Training for Foster Parents. *Social Work Research*, 29(4), 243–251. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42659604



process, it helps them to understand the foster child's anger so that they, in turn, can learn to inhibit their own tendencies to respond negatively to it.

In addition to foster care education program, MCFD could also develop online and/or DVD resources that are handier and timelier to foster parents whenever they need to review important concepts/skills or are in need of instructions on certain topics. Online parenting counselling (such as Foster Parent College⁸, an interactive multimedia training venue for foster parents) are also proved to be effective in responding to conflict. For example, the *Anger Outbursts Program* in FPC adopts an attachment theory perspective and leads foster parents to first think about the child's background and family history, how the problem behavior is manifested, and how it is being managed; then the program host synthesizes the information into a succinct set of clinical insights aimed at helping the parents better understand their child's behavior; lastly, the host then suggests a number of steps parents can take to deal with the problem. With this extra resource that foster parents can use besides social worker, it will not only provide timely resolution to a conflict but also raise the quality of a response (given that sometimes the workload of social workers is high and negligence happens).

Transition Out of Care Plan & Planning

The ultimate goals of the supported living arrangements are meant to amend the lack of parental functions and familial support among youth with care experience and eventually help them successfully transition to adulthood and independence. Hence, transition planning supports and the transition plan must be as specific and practical as possible to ensure youth's housing stability and successful aftercare outcomes.

Transition planning is imperative as it has a direct causal link to youth homelessness. According to BCCEYH's recent online survey, **over three quarters** of the at-risk young persons had been in the government care system and only **35%** of those in care had a transition plan upon aging out. Among those with a transition plan, **60%** of them **did not find their transition plans helpful,** mostly (74%) due to a lack of housing/accommodation arrangements for when they turned 19 years old⁹.

Youth aging out of government care would benefit from proactive youth involvement (earlier transition planning starting around the age of 14 or 15) and essential life skills training. The transition plan should also be tailored to each young person according to his/her unique circumstances and needs. On a fundamental level, the plan must include well-defined accommodation arrangements and contingencies, post-care support services, financial assistance sources, education and employment arrangements, and access to

⁸ Pacifici, C., Delaney, R., White, L., Cummings, K., & Nelson, C. (2005). Foster Parent College: Interactive Multimedia Training for Foster Parents. *Social Work Research*, 29(4), 243–251. http://www.istor.org/stable/42659604

⁹ BC Youth Housing Action Plan Preliminary Results - 2022



health services. We should also ensure that post-care support services are embedded in the care team meeting prior to transition and that youth know how to seek supports¹⁰.

Wraparound Transition Supports

Throughout the time youth are in government care or other supported living arrangements, practical wraparound transition supports should be offered to them.

These supports should include but not be limited to:

1) Financial knowledge supports such as a bank account with saving set up as soon as a young person enters care, with regular contribution (perhaps from part of the unconditional income supplement or youth's working income) to savings, and/or ongoing financial management training and mentorship.

2) Education & professional development supports such as high school and post-secondary tutoring, and/or supports for post-secondary application process, including application fees.

3) Housing supports such as supports in apartment viewings (i.e., having someone accompany youth to view housing options, getting transportation to viewings), and/or tenant rights and appeals process training.

4) Relationships supports such as reconnection with birth family when appropriate and desired by youth, and/or family mediation and counselling services.

5) Culture and spirituality supports such as connection to cultural programs and ceremonies, and/or connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers for Indigenous youth, from their nation/community of origin.

6) Health and well-being supports such as lifelong access to supports to heal from trauma including specialized, alternative and complementary healing supports, and/or family doctor, dentist, and optometrist.

7) Advocacy & rights supports such as workshops on how to advocate against the stigmatization associated with having been in care.

8) Emerging adulthood development supports such as identity development opportunities outside of the in-care experience.

Due to the length restriction of this submission, it is highly recommended to read the full lists of transition supports and actionable items in Doucet's *equitable standards* report¹¹.

¹⁰ State of Victoria. (2012). *Care and Transition Planning for Leaving Care in Victoria: A framework and guide*. <u>https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201706/care-and-transition-planning-for-leaving-care-framework-1212_PDF.pdf</u>

¹¹ Doucet, M. M., & The National Council of Youth in Care Advocates. (2021). *EQUITABLE STANDARDS FOR TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD FOR YOUTH IN CARE*. Child Welfare League of Canada.

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The suggested wraparound supports should serve as a consultation list when hiring **Youth Transition Navigators**. **YTN**s should have the capacity and ability to provide those crucial supports to youth transitioning out of care.

Program Guides

After pointing out the necessary wraparound supports, we would like to provide specific program references that could potentially serve as examples or frameworks for future pilot programs in areas of **life skills**, **cultural connection**, **mental health**, **rehabilitation**, **pre-college experience**, and **employment interventions**.

Life Skills Program

It is noteworthy that all the previously-mentioned transition supports can also be incorporated into life skills training programs such as financial knowledge and tenant rights workshops. Life skills training programs should also cover topics on "**budgeting**, **fire safety**, **health**, **nutrition**, **cooking**, **repairs** and **maintenance**, **skin** and **hygiene**, **environmental awareness**, **community contacts**, and **First Aid**"¹².

Cultural Connection Program

As for the cultural connection program, the HOP-C report has a comprehensive module (2)¹³ on cultural safety about shared respect and respecting people accessing services for who they are and what they need. Moreover, there is another module (7)¹⁴ on how to integrate culture into the original HOP-C support framework, including eight specific considerations for the adoption of a previously existing program (HOP-C) to a new context, and a HOP-C North example of adapting program context for local Indigenous youth on an organizational, staff, and individual levels.

Additionally, acceptable efforts to preserve the Aboriginal identity of a child/youth in care such as 1) attending cultural activities such as powwows, 2) internet searches, 3) age-appropriate reading materials, 4) having Aboriginal artwork or artefacts in the foster home, and 5) providing a child/youth with Aboriginal foods are recognized by Indigenous child welfare advocacy organization¹⁵. Lastly, having the child/youth's Indigenous community work directly with MCFD or Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) in the development of a care/transition plan is also a way to incorporate cultural connection.

 ¹² Gaetz, S., & Scott, F. (2012). *Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth-A Framework for the Foyer in Canada*. (Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press).
<u>https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/foyer report23112012.pdf</u>
¹³ HOP-C report, pp.27-30

¹⁴ HOP-C report, pp.119-123

¹⁵ INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE, CONNECTEDNESS AND REUNIFICATION-FROM ROOT CAUSES TO ROOT SOLUTIONS (A Report on Indigenous Child Welfare in British Columbia). (2016). <u>https://fns.bc.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf</u>



Acknowledging our gap in Indigenous-specific content, we would like to refer to the Aboriginal Housing Management Association's (AHMA) submission, "Youth Transitions Transformation," to complement more detailed policy recommendations regarding Indigenous youth's needs.

Mental Health Program

Research¹⁶ has shown that youth with care experience were more likely than youth never in care to report **poorer mental health**, including a greater likelihood of self-harming (39% vs. 17%) and attempting suicide (16% vs. 4%) in the past year (2018). As such, developing a trauma-informed mental health intervention and encouraging all the protective factors are keys to boosting and improving at-risk, homeless, and in and from care youth's mental health.

Based on McCreary's 2022 youth mental health research, protective factors linked to positive mental health among youth with care experience include having trustworthy and supportive adults as well as peer support and meaningful friendships. In addition, regular involvement in meaningful activities in the community helps to buffer against mental health challenges and to promote positive health and well-being. Most importantly, feeling heard and valued can boost youth's confidence and increase their self-esteem.

Given the research evidence that peer support is a key element in improving youth's mental health, a mental health **group** intervention¹⁷ within a non-clinical setting was designed as a piece of broader pilot intervention that sought to develop a feasible, integrated set of supports for youth within their first year of transitioning to stable housing.

Highlights of the intervention include its **non-clinical setting** in a community arts hub; the open (participation was voluntary) and flexible (content adjusted per participants' requests and needs) format; the group format; professional training of staff and specialists with expertise in trauma; mindfulness-based focus; weekly communication of topics covered in the prior week and a reminder of weekly intervention date; and the trauma-informed and harm reduction approach (for detailed program components, instructions, and implementation considerations please refer to the original research).

Other mental health programs and implementational worksheets are available in HOP-C's module 5^{18} .

¹⁶ McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy. (2022). *The mental health of BC youth with government care experience: A Youth Research Academy report.*

https://www.mcs.bc.ca/mental health youth with government care experience

¹⁷ Vitopoulos, N., Cerswell Kielburger, L., Frederick, T. J., McKenzie, K., & Kidd, S. (2017). Developing a traumainformed mental health group intervention for youth transitioning from homelessness. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 48(6), 499–509.

¹⁸ HOP-C report pp.70-95



Reduction and Prevention to Youth's Substance Use & Rehabilitation Program

Substance use and mental health problems oftentimes are interconnected. Research on youth's substance use¹⁹ has shown that youth with care experience are more likely to use substance than youth never in care because of their experience with trauma. The research also highlights the link between substance use and mental health challenges, and underscores the importance of understanding the reasons that youth might use substances.

There is therefore a need for more education for the general public/adults on the reasons youth might use substances and more mental health and substance use counsellors available in schools and in the communities. Having a supportive family and/or supportive adults; feeling connected to school and community; having housing stability; feeling meaningfully engaged and listened to in their activities; and having friends with healthy attitudes are all proven to be protective factors which reduced the chances that youth would use substances. Government care and youth-serving agencies should make effort to facilitate the formation of youth's positive and meaningful relationships as a way to reduce substance use.

Besides preventative measures to substance use, changes and more support are needed to be made and given to youth-specific rehabilitation programs. Youth with substance use challenges/justice involvement due to substance use have voiced out their recommendations on how rehabilitation programs can be improved to reduce the barriers to accessing treatment and to increase the likelihood of successfully completing the treatment and maintaining the progress after discharge.

These recommendations²⁰ include putting pictures of what a treatment program's physical space looks like on the program website to help alleviate anxiety and misconceptions, and to reduce fear of services; programs should take account of each youth's unique circumstances and relationships, and tailor treatment accordingly; addressing program participants' mental health issues in concurrent with substance use ones; lengthy waitlists should be eliminated to its minimum and if youth have to be put on the waitlist ensure they receive regular check-ins so they know they have not been forgotten about and know where they are on the list; there should be no wait between detox services and treatment; offering anger management training to youth in treatment to reduce the likelihood of them being asked to leave; programs should be culturally-sensitive; having Indigenous-specific treatment programs as well as Indigenous culture, staff, and management at all health care services; and providing support to youth during their transition out of treatment programs.

¹⁹ McCreary Centre Society. (2019). Youth Research Slam 2019: A Youth-Led Research Project About Substance Use. <u>https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/yrs_substance_use_report.pdf</u> & McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy. (2020). PRESCRIBING PAIN: Misuse of prescription medication, heroin and other substances among youth in BC. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

²⁰ Smith, A., Horton, K., Beggs, M.K., Martin, S., & McCreary Centre Society. (2019). *Beyond a Dreamcatcher: Improving services for Indigenous justice-involved youth with substance use challenges—A youth-led study.* Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

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It is also critical that if youth access rehabilitation programs, they do not risk losing their housing, and are able to maintain connections with their family, culture, and home community. In addition, if youth in a substance use treatment program would like to make a 'fresh start' and transition to a new community after they leave the program, they should receive support to secure housing, as well as to access employment and education supports in their new community.

Pre-College Program

One of the equitable standards mentioned above is education and professional development supports. Educational and professional development support is so important because it helps to reduce a young person's risk of homelessness and to increase their likelihood of finding and maintaining safe and stable housing. However, faced with various challenges, youth with care experience struggle to achieve their educational goals and often have a less than ideal outcome compared to other students²¹. This phenomenon is not only evident in high school achievement but also in post-secondary attainment. While many former foster care youth aspire to attend college (84%), less than 3% attain an undergraduate degree²². Thus, here we provide a US pre-college program²³ example of how we can help more youth with care experience go to post-secondary schools and achieve their educational goals.

This pre-college program, **National Social Work Enrichment Program** (NSEP), was held in the University of Alabama (UA) (an institution rich in social work resources). The program lasts 6 weeks in the summer time and participants live on campus in residence halls, eat in university dining facilities, access on-campus recreational facilities, and attend various workshops in the School of Social Work (SSW) classrooms. There are also opportunities to visit college campuses throughout the state.

Four main NSEP components are:

1) College readiness skill development –programs offering college awareness and exposure, and financial aid workshops.

²¹ Representative for Children and Youth. (2017). ROOM FOR IMPROMENT: TOWARD BETTER EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE. <u>https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/timetolisten-youthvoicesonsubstanceuse-2018-web-final.pdf</u>

²² Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. **&** National Working Group on Foster Care. (2014). *Fostering success in education: National factsheet on the educational outcomes of children in foster care.*

http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?EntryId=1279 &Command=Core_Download&method=inline&PortalId=0&TabId=124.

²³ Jackson, M. S., Colvin, A. D., & Bullock, A. N. (2020). Development of a Pre-college Program for Foster Youth: Opportunities and Challenges of Program Implementation. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 37(4), 411–423. <u>https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-019-00639-2</u>



2) Employment skill development –activities-based approach designed to raise awareness about employer expectations, the work environment, and the skills necessary for success in the workplace.

3) Leadership skill development –for example, youth learn to evaluate their own public speaking ability, prepare and give speeches, and give impromptu talks.

4) Healthy relationship skill development –focusing on building and supplementing key interpersonal skills such as communication and conflict resolution, as well as relationships with peers (for more details please refer to the case study).

Employment/Mental Health Program

Another example of a professional program (specifically in employment) can serve as an employment training intervention for youth as well as a special intervention for mental health issues. The two experimental interventions²⁴, the **Social Enterprise Intervention** (**SEI**) and **Individual Placement and Support** (**IPS**), were designed for and experimented with homeless youth with mental illness to assess their impacts on nonvocational outcomes.

The **SEI** is a research-supported intervention using a group approach that engages homeless youth in paid employment as well as case management and mental health services through involvement in an agency-run social enterprise. The **IPS** model of supported employment is an individually focused, evidence-based intervention, which provides individuals with severe mental illness with customized, long-term, and integrated vocational, case management, and clinical services to help them gain and maintain competitive employment (for detailed implementation procedures please refer to the study).

Participants in both interventions showed improvements in their self-esteem; reduction in attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and inattention problems; and a reduced risk of living in a shelter and a greater likelihood of living in a private residence. This finding suggests that the specific type of intervention (i.e., SEI vs. IPS) might not be as important as having an employment program integrated with clinical and case-management services, frequent contact with youth, and ongoing supports.

Conclusion

It is an excitement to see a milestone be achieved in the near future in the field of youthsupporting services, however, before any visible and meaningful changes are made and before youth homelessness comes to an end, we should never stop improving and working for youth/emerging adults. We are honored to submit this report for the greater change in the *Child and Family Service Act* and future MCFD's youth/children in care policies.

²⁴ Ferguson, K. M. (2018). Nonvocational Outcomes from a Randomized Controlled Trial of Two Employment Interventions for Homeless Youth. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(5), 603–618.