

Poverty Reduction Consultation Submission

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

March 16 2018

11 participants, 2 facilitators

Supported by First Call with alumni of care at the Vancouver Island University Tuition Waiver program, and a peer-support navigator.

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The Demographic:

Participants varied from 21-29 and all were alumni of government care. Many lived in dozens of foster placements and other types of government care. Only 2-4% of youth from care attend university, and VIU is a unique program with over 100 alumni of government care attending. VIU supports with housing, emergency funding, and other resources for students that do not fit into government program eligibility.

The community:

At 19, youth from care in BC navigate the impossible task of ‘aging out’. It’s an idea that only youth from care face – in which essential wraparound supports that are deemed of utmost importance and integrity to a person’s life dissolve after reaching a legislated age of majority.

As per communication coming from this community for many years, this community needs solid, committed action to the outcomes of youth ‘aging out’ of care that looks at care post-19 dramatically differently.

Issue areas:

Housing

- We heard consistently that housing youth from care remains an issue. As Stats Canada showed in 2011 data, almost 59% of youth 20-24 and 25% of youth 25-29 still live with their parents¹. Youth from care do not have access to any natural support after forcible removal from their parent’s homes.
- Services can often too high barrier and not relevant to particular youth. One participant stated that they weren’t eligible for a Nanaimo service because they didn’t deal drugs or work in the sex trade.

¹ http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/2011003/fig/fig3_3-1-eng.cfm

- Services are sparse/lacking in certain geographic locations and communities where there is high need. One participant shared that they had to leave their community to access emergency housing, and another highlighted they had to leave their community to receive treatment across the province.
- Housing options change for those once you age out of the care system. One participant shared when they were accessing AYA it was up to them to find secure housing, a skill they didn't age out of care with.

The Agreements with Young Adults program

This program is the primary way that alumni of care access specific aging-out supports after leaving care. However, MCFD shows only 700 youth 19-26 received support in one year. Additionally, youth were counted in that tally if they only received a few hundred dollars per year. 1000 youth age out each year, which demonstrates a significant under utilization of this program.

- One participant worked as a resource navigator. She often spent hours in MCFD offices advocating for youth, demanding meetings with particular staff over others, and shared non-public info about funding for dietary restrictions. "You can tell them you're vegan and get an extra \$60 a month".
- The major theme is that this program is opt-in and requires youth to meet specific eligibility requirements. These programs have high barriers. As one participant stated "Opportunities are only great if you're ready for them."
- Youth described feeling alienated from the care system and not wanting to engage with it after many years of poor quality care.

Better communication of existing resources

- We heard that knowledge about existing programs is poor. Youth described hearing numerous anecdotal reports that there is mis/under-informed social workers around the province regarding programs for youth after 19. "My worker never told me about an AYA program and what that looked like." These programs do provide some hope: "I didn't even think I was capable of education until I saw the VIU program."
- Individuals are requiring very specialized case-based advocacy to get basic needs. One participant described waiting in MCFD offices for hours to ensure that a youth would be able to go to certain staff and supervisors, intentionally avoiding one.
- There are many miscommunications stemming from a lack of clarity about existing AYAs. In some cases, you are required to access band funding before you may be eligible for grant funds. One participant described that peers receiving AYA did not know "if you say that you're vegan, they'll give you an extra \$60 per month."

Care is disempowering

- We know that care is difficult. One participant said "Being a youth in care is about survival". Youth learn to speak through their social workers, and come out of traumatic experiences without life skills and

- We know that there's confusion between AYA funding and other services. Youth are forced to jump through many hoops to access AYAs, and to do so on their own.

Solutions:

These solutions were identified in the larger group through a closing flipchart exercise.

1. The AYA program should be guaranteed to all youth leaving care and participation should be assumed unless youth opt-out.
2. Resources need to be low-barrier.
 - a. The YEAF program, Tuition Waiver, and AYA programs all require youth to jump through hoops and fit into "care status boxes" to access sporadic support that can end abruptly.
3. Youth in transition need more life skills to be independent after care.
 - a. The current model of AYA life skills programs does not meet this need.
4. Youth need a consistent cultural identity connection.
5. Tuition waivers should have their age limit removed, time-in-care requirement reduced, and be available for more than just a first degree.