

## **Poverty Reduction Consultation Submission**

The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, in partnership with First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

12 participants, 2 facilitators

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### **Contact:**

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## **The demographics**

This meeting had a broad call-out to alumni of care that had ideas around poverty policy. Participants came from a variety of experiences, some in care in BC and some alumni in their 30s not from this province. The room had single parents, a young person in semi-independent living, and many recently aged-out participants.

## **The issues**

- Poverty was defined as a relative lack of resources. Many youth identified with not having access to consistent food, basic resources, mental health supports, and social inclusion activities such as athletic and cultural activities.

### Mental Health

- Many youth from care report trauma and anxiety while in care. PTSD is common in this community, and therefore many participants described frustrations with the mental health system and resources available.
- Youth talked about not having anyone to check in after care. One participant stated that “every youth should have the right to access medical care and forms of support if they are suicidal. [Even] [c]ulturally relevant supports.”

### Agreements with Young Adults Program

*For background, the AYA program serves as the primary way outside of income assistance that youth access supports after care. While the age criteria and length of time eligible has grown considerably over the last few years, only 700 individuals 19-26 accessed it in 2016-17, despite ~1000 potentially eligible youth aging out each year.*

- “AYA/tuition waiver or like program shouldn’t be as hard to get onto it. Same with income assistance, it shouldn’t be celebrated, you are still in poverty.”
- Youth said that the amount of money on AYAs and income assistance does not meet needs. “Housing/rent in safe areas is beyond the amount of money given by AYA. So youth end up living in sro’s for example”
- The programs have high-barriers. There are too many requirements to get onto them, and there is a great deal of miscommunication from staff and youth surrounding AYAs.
- “A social worker’s go-to is to transition youth to social assistance”.

### Inadequate Life Skills

- Every decision is made for us while we are in care, there is a culture shock because suddenly we have to make all of our own decisions without life skills. Don’t know how to cook, get a doctor, and do taxes. Culture shock when you move out of care due to no support. 0-100
- There is not enough transition time from the system. Some youth don’t have access to kitchens while in care (i.e. a foster parent doesn’t trust them to cook alone) and they hit a wall when leaving care of not meeting basic needs.

### Transition Workers

- One youth described that they were ‘lucky to get a transition worker’ and wished for everyone to have supports that are in your life until late twenties. “There needs to be more room for supporting youth until 24-26.”
- Without having these supports, youth often return to the circumstances they were removed from. One participant described going to their parent’s SRO unit in the Downtown Eastside as it was the most stability they could find.

### **Solutions**

Youth were asked to come up with their own solutions on sticky-notes and present them, and after we consolidated the list to something more concrete.

The larger group identified these three priorities:

1. Use monthly Canada Children’s Benefit as start-up seed money for youth from care
  - Participants reflected that they had little money or any inheritance that can help them later on in life
  - Current model was described as a clawback where money meant for youth from care should be better directed to the child themselves
2. Seamlessly transition into adult programs
  - AYA and Tuition Waiver programs, while a good step, are difficult to access and are viewed consistently as high barrier.
  - Mandatory transition planning toward self-sufficiency

- The AYA program must be assumed – youth should always be eligible for the services so that those with highest need receive support.
3. Mentorship and ongoing emotional support
- Participants described having no one to turn to after care
  - One participant said “mentorship by the kids for the kids, by us for us!”
  - A guaranteed (one participant used the word ‘mandatory’) support person in your life after 19.