



# Policy Memo: Fostering Change

October 24, 2018

*For most young people, family is there to lend a hand with things like rent, groceries, and support as they make the first few steps into adulthood. Unless they've been in foster care.*

fostering  
CHANGE



firstcall BC CHILD AND YOUTH  
ADVOCACY COALITION

## Who We Are

We're a team of organizers dedicated to challenging systemic injustice for youth in and from government care. Together, we learn contemporary activism skills and use them to advocate for needed policy changes.

We're all former youth in care, and passionate about changing systems and building community together. We're supported by the Fostering Change Campaign, hosted by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

## The problem

### Youth are aging out of care without support!

When youth age out of care at 19, the government services and supports they rely on in place of a family are simultaneously cut off. Research shows:

- up to 57% of homeless youth in BC communities were formerly in care
- only 53% turn 19 with a completed high school education
- 63% of youth in care are Indigenous
- educational, economic, social, and wellness outcomes for many youth aging out of care are poor compared to most young people<sup>1</sup>

Last year, over 17,000 British Columbians signed a public petition which called on decision makers to do more. Since the petition, dozens of elected representatives to the provincial government (MLAs) have signed the #SUPPORTTHE700 pledge.

## What we know

- Youth from care need specific programs and services that meet our needs to thrive!
- Some changes have been made, but they primarily serve only the most successful youth.
- The provincial government has served youth through funding piecemeal programs. Programs funded through grants and OTO (One Time Only) money cannot be relied on.
- Many youth need more time than is currently allowed to take advantage of opportunities (like attending post-secondary, for example).

## The Agreements with Young Adults Program:

This program supports youth who have aged out from a Youth Agreement (YAG) or Continuing Custody Order (CCO) for attending education, training or life skills programs or a rehabilitation program. It provides up to \$1,250 per month, and is needs-based, which means that the program funds budget shortfalls instead of ambitiously supporting youth goals.

### **Lisa's Story: Challenge**

*Lisa has been attending Simon Fraser University for the last 2 years. After the first year, they changed programs. They get AYA year-round and get the provincial tuition waiver.*

*Lisa must fill out paperwork every month to continue their AYA. They also need to manage school paperwork, check in with tuition waiver people, and navigate programs and services. If they need a counsellor, they must go to many different organizations and get on waiting lists. If they have a housing need, their AYA worker will tell them to go to a different (non-MCFD) office to get support.*

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin Shaffer, Lynell Anderson, Allison Nelson, OPPORTUNITIES IN TRANSITION: An Economic Analysis of Investing in Youth Aging out of Foster Care Summary Report (also cover page quote)

**The good:** Agreements with Young Adults (AYAs) support any youth who has aged out from care under the two legal statuses for 48 months, regardless of whether they take time away from school. They can attend many different programs and still get funds. AYAs are a clear step forward for some youth.

**The bad:** Youth must prove their need every month, and many of them don't receive the full \$1,250 despite needing it. Youth can access a number of programs, but it means they need to fill out lots of paperwork and have different workers for each program.

## Background

Last April, Ministry of Children and Family Development representatives told us that 13% of eligible, post-19 youth from government care are accessing MCFD AYA services at any one time. AYAs are the primary way MCFD supports the 1,000 youth who age out of care every year. It tells us that the program intervention the government has relied on for years is not working.

Premier Horgan told us that the government is working on an action plan. In April 2018, Premier John Horgan responded on behalf of six ministries to our policy asks. He made a commitment to *"expand and improve supports to youth transitioning from care through the development of an action plan to be created by the Cross-Ministry working group."*

## Policy Solutions

### Our goal:

- **Guaranteed, consistent, and adequate** financial support through the Agreements with Young Adults program, eliminating all eligibility criteria, including a minimum in-care time period and age cap.

### Policy solutions must be:

- **Comprehensive:** Support that lifts us into equity with our peers, including financial support based on actual living costs in our communities, mental health and life skills resources, and supportive people in our lives.
- **Universal:** All youth who age out of government care at 19 have access, regardless of legal status or readiness to attend post-secondary. Additionally, this support must be available to any youth who has spent time in care and does not have access to support at 19.

### Lisa's Story: Solution

1. *Lisa has sufficient financial resources to pay for housing in an area close to school.*
2. *The AYA worker connects them with counsellors, manages their tuition waiver paperwork, and creates a transition plan with them. There is a number to call when things go bad.*
3. *Lisa can choose to attend different programs without risking losing all of their support. They can leave the community and come back without fear of aging out of new services.*
4. *Lisa has the same opportunities to succeed as their peers.*

## The Path to Solutions

### ✓ requires legislative and regulatory change

*Youth from care need to have the same gradual and extended transition to adulthood that most young people enjoy.<sup>2</sup>*

Right now, the Agreements with Young Adults program is part of the Child and Family Community Services Act (CFCSA). The Act needs to be changed to ensure universal and comprehensive benefits are guaranteed to youth after turning 19.

**Can we count on your support for legislative change?**

### ✓ requires a whole government approach

Barriers to fairness for youth in and aging out of care exist across government. Here are a few examples:

- **Public transit fees** are unaffordable for many youth and pose a barrier to education, healthcare and maintaining social connections.
- **Public transit fines** that go unpaid due to financial hardship prevent youth from obtaining a driver's license and can burden youth with poor credit scores that make it hard to access banking services and credit.
- **Public housing** remains high-barrier with large waitlists and youth from care end up without support to find shelter.
- **Person with Disabilities Benefits** are used for 47% of youth leaving care, but does not come with specifically targeted services for those with experience in the government care system.
- **Tuition Waivers** remain limited to youth who've spent at least two years in care and who are under 27.
- **Poverty Reduction** lives with many ministries – shouldn't youth from care?

**Can we count on your support to reduce barriers for youth in and from care?**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid