



Transforming Knowledge into Skills

BUILDING BRIDGES TO BELONGING

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR YOUTH



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

The voice of child welfare in Ontario

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Belonging is more than a placement. It is acceptance and security, a feeling of being rooted. Youth in care have told us that they lack this sense of belonging, as they feel pushed to leave child welfare care before they are ready.

- » Research shows that outcomes for youth in care can be improved. This guide has been developed to inspire those in the child welfare community to “build bridges to belonging” for youth in care. Belonging can be created through permanent families, mentors, community activities and youth engagement. Once that foundation has been laid, there are many other things that staff, foster parents and volunteers can do to help ensure success of youth beyond their time with child welfare.

Using the dimensions of the Ontario Looking After Children model as a starting point, and the philosophy of “what would a good parent do,” this guide details objectives, current knowledge and innovative practices from Ontario and other jurisdictions. The guide also provides “Ideas on Which to Build”.

The purpose of this guide is to advance the philosophy of helping all children and youth to grow up “belonging”. The Steering Committee endorses the idea of “the good parent” as a model and – to the greatest degree possible – normalizing the experience of growing up in care. Specific objectives of the guide are to:

- » Shift the program focus away from “leaving” to helping youth create **lifelong relationships**, including at least one key one-to-one relationship(s) with a mentor for every youth in care
- » Encourage youth to be involved in a wide variety of **interests**, curiosities, and community activities so that youth can build relationships, develop skills and learn about different things regardless of age
- » Provide meaningful opportunities for youth to contribute, and a welcoming environment in which they can **connect with other youth**

- » Help youth to achieve optimal **health** through education, referral and connection to relevant specialists, and extension of benefits coverage
- » Help youth to achieve optimal **mental health** through early detection, referral to other services and collaboration where services do not exist
- » Ensure that every youth graduates from **high school**
- » Provide the essential coaching, emotional and financial support so that youth pursue and complete **post-secondary** education
- » Encourage youth to explore all aspects of their **identity** through life books, social histories, role models, mentors and special events
- » Provide opportunities through **work experience**, volunteering and career planning for youth to learn how to present and conduct themselves in different situations
- » Provide every opportunity for youth to learn practical skills, such as nutrition, hygiene and money management within the **family setting** and in a group setting according to the youth’s individual needs
- » Work to support the youth in a **family home** for as long as the youth has a relationship with the agency and when this isn’t possible, assisting them to find housing appropriate to their needs
- » Gradually move to “**permanent homes and families**” for youth – at least until they are finished high school, and use Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) contracts only when this is not an option
- » Strike a balance between “**caring**” and “**liability**”, and “terminate” the ECM contract only in extreme circumstances and **be flexible** in terms of the age a youth must leave care
- » Provide **financial support** according to the needs and goals of the youth, and provide an annual cost of living increase that is consistent across agencies in a given region
- » Ensure that youth understand their **rights and responsibilities**, specifically for the time period between 18 and leaving care
- » Try to **measure outcomes** and use this information to improve services

The committee recognizes that there are many children and youth in care with exceptional needs. For some, including youth with intellectual disabilities, the exit from care is a transition to another care system. For others, leaving care is precipitated by other factors including pregnancy, reunification with extended family or contact with the justice system.

This guide suggests that no matter what challenges youth in care present, those caring for them must do it from the perspective of a “good parent”. Much more work is needed to support very high risk youth. However even the most challenging youth will benefit by knowing that someone is their “good parent” while they struggle to find their way.



INTRODUCTION

Why Build Bridges to Belonging

This guide was named “Building Bridges to Belonging: Promising Practices for Youth” to emphasize the core belief that youth in care need to feel a sense of belonging and that it is the responsibility of the child welfare community to provide the services that promote this feeling. Typically, these youth do not have strong roots in family and so are deprived of the safety net, acceptance and security—belonging—that those relationships can provide.

Youth have told us that they feel they are being pushed to leave care before they are ready (OACAS, 2006). Indeed, the child welfare system is predicated on endings, possibly at 16, likely at 18 and absolutely at 21. In stark contrast to children and youth in “normal family” homes, in-care youths’ relationships with foster parents, foster siblings, biological siblings, workers, teachers, group home primary workers and friends at school are all too fragile and inevitably end. Youth in care seem to be “conditioned” to be on the move instead of focusing on growing up, making friends, finishing school and thinking about their future.

Child welfare practice focuses on finding a permanent home for a child or youth quickly and when that cannot be accomplished, the focus for teens switches to preparing them to live on their own. Permanency and preparation for adulthood need not be mutually exclusive. Instead, when no permanent home can be found, the focus should become finding and supporting a lifelong relationship for a youth. While it will always be part of a youth’s identity that they grew up in care, they cannot belong to a system, no matter how well intended its members. Youth in care need someone to belong to, someone who will take responsibility when needed, who can be relied on, no matter what.

Youth advocates, academics and experts all describe the benefits to youth of permanence and the permanent relationship. Even if a youth grows up in care, learns life skills through a formal program and finishes their education, the permanent relationship provides a home for the holidays, a place to call in an emergency and a feeling of belonging.

If staff, foster parents and volunteers of the child welfare system can lay the foundations for a permanent relationship for youth, what else must be done to help youth succeed? The Ontario Looking After Children model (OnLAC) provides a structure through which we can be sure needs are addressed in all parts of a child’s life. Youth in care have also provided another way. They have asked the child welfare community to use “what would a good parent do” as the test of every policy and to keep it at the forefront of every service we provide to them.

What Would a Good Parent Do?

Youth have a long history of advising the child welfare community about how to improve their in-care experience and prepare them better for next steps. Since 1985, youth have participated in OACAS conferences. Recommendations have always centred on particular areas such as foster care, worker-youth relationships and finances. In June 2007, youth in care were asked to make a presentation to CAS and Ministry of Children and Youth Services staff, and the child welfare community. The youth decided that while more funding and consistency of policy within and between agencies were issues, there was a greater overriding consideration—they wanted their corporate parent to consider what a good parent would do when raising children. This challenge fits consistently with the voices of youth receiving Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) and what CAS staff heard through the 2006 OACAS Youth Leaving Care report which recommends that youth not leave care before they are ready, the provision of more financial and emotional support beyond 21 and “termination” as a last resort—a more “parental” model.

Youth have said that as good parents, CASs would:

- » Do everything possible to ensure that children and youth live in as normal a family setting as possible, leading to lifelong relationships
- » Help create, encourage and support at least one meaningful lifelong relationship
- » Ensure that children and youth succeed in school
- » Help youth to grow up to be responsible young adults, and to make the transition to living on their own only when they are ready
- » “Fight” for their relationship with their children and do everything within their power to encourage them to stay and make use of all the supports available to them
- » Talk to the youth about their dreams and plans for the future and actively involve them in the planning to make these dreams a reality
- » Expect a young person to reach for their highest potential and reinforce these expectations with encouragement and support
- » Be there to support youth as they face significant life events
- » Keep an open door; even if a youth left, they must know that they can come back to a supportive environment to refocus on the future

Lessons from Research

The principles of “what would a good parent do” are partly borne out in research in the United States. Of particular interest is the *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at 21*, which indicates that remaining in care longer may lead to higher educational attainment, higher earnings and delayed pregnancy.¹

In Canada, the only longitudinal study that has been completed deals with a very small sample. It followed 37 youth over a 2 1/2 year period after their exit from care. Relative to their peers who did not live in care, youth from care in this British Columbia study:

- » Have a lower level of education
- » Were more likely to rely on income assistance as their main income source
- » Engaged in higher levels of alcohol and drug use
- » Had a more fragile social support network as well as tenuous ties to family
- » Reported that their single biggest health condition was depression especially among young parents

As time progressed:

- » Transience and homelessness increased, and
- » More participants were on income assistance²

Educational outcomes are a major predictor of outcomes for children and youth. Ninety four percent of CASs participated in the OACAS Gateway to Success Survey of the Educational Status of Crown Wards and Former Crown Wards. This survey showed:

- » Despite legal requirements for youth under 18 to be in school, 21% of youth are not enrolled in any schooling. In part, there may be acceptable circumstances for non-attendance, such as medical fragility. Further exploration of this area is necessary.
- » Only 42% of 19- and 20-year-olds appear to be successfully completing high school. In contrast, the provincial high school graduation rate was 75% in 2006-2007.
- » Only 21% of 18-20 year-olds had participated in post-secondary education. In contrast, 40% of 18-24 year-olds of the general population across Ontario participated in post-secondary education in the fall of 2006.
- » Of those who do enroll in post-secondary schooling, 84% gravitate towards apprenticeship or community college and 16% enrol in university.³

Our own Ontario survey of 300 youth on Extended Care and Maintenance and 300 CAS staff tell us:

- » Not to require young people to leave care until they are ready
- » To be available for emotional support for several years beyond age 21
- » To provide emotional support even after financial support ceases, and
- » That “termination” should be the Society’s last resort⁴

¹Courtney, (2007)

²Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C. & Feduniw, A., (2007)

³Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (2008)

⁴Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (2006)

How This Guide Was Developed

This guide is based on an extensive literature review as well as phone interviews with selected Ontario CASs and a survey administered through the OACAS to which 21 agencies responded. CASs have been moving forward in their efforts to provide effective services to youth but generally speaking have been doing it in isolation. The intention of this guide is to highlight and share the many innovative practices that CASs are already using to “build bridges to belonging.” Individual CASs are not named in this guide.

This review shows that many of the necessary bridges can be built within the existing legislative framework through a change in service philosophy, using existing resources and fundraised dollars and a variety of volunteer support.

Using This Guide

This guide is about how to “build bridges” so that our youth feel like they belong and have the best chance at achieving their dreams. It is intended to promote consistency and collaboration within the field. Using “what would a good parent do” as its principal philosophy and a framework of OnLAC, combined with issues of particular concern to older youth, it provides:

- » Reference information: “**What We Know**”
- » What bridges we have already built: “**innovative ideas**”
- » “**Ideas on Which to Build**” that come from Ontario research and reports, and national and international examples and
- » Any notable templates or tools where relevant: “**Tools**”

Each section begins with an objective based on “what would a good parent do.”



RELATIONSHIPS

Family and Individual Relationships

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Currently agency programming is about preparing youth to leave. Many agencies are trying to shift the programming focus from leaving to helping youth create lifelong relationships. Life in the family-based setting should remain uninterrupted so that youth can focus on school, work and growing up.

What We Know

- » Multiple moves in homes and school interruptions create a feeling of instability, inconsistency and transience; relationships and attachments may be severed.
- » Since becoming Crown wards, 20% of young people had more than two placements; 36% had three or more.⁵
- » Youth report they need at least one supportive adult relationship as they make the transition to independence.⁶
- » Many youth continue to have some connection to family and may return to live with them; reunification preparation would be beneficial.
- » Staff are rarely in the position to support youth on a lifelong basis.

⁵Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2008)

⁶OACAS (2006)

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Having youth stay in foster care beyond 18 and continuing the foster care per diem as the youth grows older. Youth are not expected to leave their home and are not offered ECM. The youth remains in the foster home and their focus is on completing school and exploring options for the future, including further education.
- » Identifying a potentially permanent relationship through discussion with the youth and review of the youth's history
- » Using Family Centred Conferencing to identify significant individuals in a youth's life
- » Searching for family members using the agency's kin department
- » Supporting youth to live with family members for a trial period; youth continue to receive ECM and agency provides Child and Youth work support
- » Providing extra funds for visits so that all siblings can visit and enjoy family activities at the same time

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » California law requires child welfare agencies to take actions so no child leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a committed adult.⁷ Youth are required to identify someone who is important to their plan and the agency is required to take steps to maintain that relationship.
- » New York City's "You Gotta Believe: Finding Permanent Homes to Prevent Homelessness" places teens and preteens from foster care into permanent homes. Prospective families are trained and prepared to provide permanent, not temporary, homes, and receive certification for adoption. <http://www.yougottabelieve.org/>



- » Colorado's Project UPLIFT: Caring Connections for Adolescents Project UPLIFT (Understanding Permanency Lessons in Future Teamwork) Adolescent Connection was a nine month pilot study in 2002-2003 in five Colorado counties, with the aim of connecting adolescent youth with previously involved adults. Youth participants included a number who had significant barriers to permanency, including involvement with the juvenile justice system or behavioural/mental health issues.

Of the 56 youth, 47 made at least one connection. A total of 122 connections were documented for these youth. Twelve connections were adoptions or intentions to adopt, and two youth were being reunited with birth families.⁸

- » *Projet de Qualification des Jeunes (PQJ)* is a program piloted, researched and implemented in Quebec. Social workers identify youth between 16 and 19 who are at **highest risk** (behaviour disorder, no chance to return to biological family, high risk "street" behaviour). They are paired with a worker. Using a modified version of the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment, youth and staff maintain and initiate family contact, and develop new contacts with other supportive adults based on activities, and interests while working on employment, education and/or life skills. This helps to broaden the youth's network of supportive individuals.⁹ http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/_fl/2008-es-19-eng.pdf

- » *Group Home Step-up Project: Moving Up and Out of Congregate Care*, Alameda (California) County Children and Family Services used case mining and web-based-search technology over a six-month period to try to locate family who would commit to being involved with 72 young people living in group homes. The outcome was that 50% of the youth were placed or scheduled to be placed with family; 17% remained in care but with family actively involved in the treatment plan.¹⁰ <http://www.cpyy.org/reports.html>

- » *The California Permanency for Youth Project* is dedicated to assuring that no youth will leave the California child welfare system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult <http://www.cpyy.org/index.html>; it provides strategies and many tools to help agencies find connections for youth. Agency self-assessment in support of permanency planning can be found at <http://www.cpyy.org/Files/OrgDevelopmentGuide.pdf> Please pay special attention to the Permanency Pact under Tools.

- » There are a variety of permanency programs in California:

- Destination Family, Youth Permanency Project, individualized, youth-focused planning for a permanent family that involves the youth's voluntary and active participation. <http://www.destinationfamily.org/index.html>
- The Ruby Slippers Project, a permanency planning program for youth that places the youth at the centre of the planning; youth are involved in finding the family and building relationships with that family as well as sorting out how to retain ties to important "others". Program is so named because there is no place like home. <http://www.sacdhs.com/article.asp?ContentID=1755>

⁷Oldmixon, (2007)

⁸Connecting adolescents (2004) cited in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2006 June.

⁹Conversation with Jean Boislard, Director Readaptation And Social Services, Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux

¹⁰Alameda County Children and Family Services, (2005)

» Lifelong Family Connections for Adolescents <http://www.csrox.org/programs/family-connections.php>; A Massachusetts initiative that:

- Helps youth identify caring adults who are willing to make a lifelong commitment
- Develops potential placements for youth who do not have permanent connections within their social network
- Provides relationship training for both youth and adults to promote a successful match
- Offers ongoing support to help identify community resources and address relationship issues

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Consider kin, subsidized adoption, custody/guardianship, customary care and repatriation options and supports in planning; build in safety nets so youth may return.
- » Provide subsidies, training and support services to permanent legal guardians of youth when adoption is not an option. University of Illinois study has concluded that federally subsidized guardianship is a permanent and cost-effective alternative to retaining children in long-term foster care. www.cfric.illinois.edu/pubs/pdf.files

» Consider adoption of youth after their 18th birthday where there is a level of commitment to a youth and access orders that impede adoption are no longer valid. Adoption can be done with or without subsidy (youth who are adopted may still be eligible for post-secondary supports from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (Former Crown wards includes adopted persons.)

Tools

» *Permanency Pact* available at http://fosterclub.com/files/PermPact_0.pdf. A free tool from Foster Club (A national U.S. web-based network for children and youth in care). The tool is designed to encourage lifelong, kin-like connections between a young person and a supportive adult. It lists 45 supports that an adult might provide to a youth transitioning from care.

» *There's No Place Like Home: A Guide to Permanency Options for Foster Youth* http://www.cpy.org/sacramento_files/SacramentoGuidePermanencyOptionsYouth.pdf



RELATIONSHIPS

Mentoring

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Mentors are those who can help or guide an individual's development. Mentors can play a significant role in a person's life by sharing their knowledge and life experience, and by encouraging their mentee. Many agencies are actively planning for and supporting a key one-to-one relationship with a mentor for youth in care.

What We Know

- » Many youth may not be able to relate to their peers in school; mentoring and peer programs provide opportunities to share experiences and build friendships with other youth and adults who can relate.¹¹
- » Mentors provide social capital by:
 - giving children responsible role models
 - providing a sense of society's expectations
 - opening their horizons to new possibilities
 - answering questions about those possibilities
 - giving them a sense that they are part of a larger network rather than condemned to society's fringe¹²

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Creating a relationship with a mentor around a sport [interest]; one agency partnered with a sporting goods distributor who provided apparel, coaching and a pool of potential mentors, the goal being to run the community's marathon.
- » Creating mentoring programs with local professional organizations such as the police.
- » Matching volunteers with youth based on the volunteer's occupation and the youth's future plans.
- » Instituting a number of programs which prepare youth in care to mentor other youth in care; youth mentors are sometimes paid honoraria and have other responsibilities such as newsletters and websites; youth are sometimes given credit for volunteer hours.
- » Hosting dinners for alumni and current youth in care.



¹¹National Youth in Care Network, (1996) as cited in Reid & Dudding (2006)

¹²Big Brothers, Big Sisters http://bbbsba.org/be_a_big/theNeed8.php



Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

» Alberta's Ministry of Children and Youth Services is at the first stage of implementing a formal youth mentoring program. The mentoring strategic plan was recently approved and funded, and will involve ten different ministries and 17 community organizations. There is also a pilot project involving Big Brothers and Big Sisters (website not yet developed).

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Formalize relationships with corporate sector to provide and develop mentors for youth.
- » Build on natural interests and relationships that have developed in the youth's life (e.g. sports, community groups, Big Brother and Big Sisters, CAS volunteers).
- » Use alumni for support and advice in specific areas such as housing, as recommended by youth graduates.¹³



¹³Havalchak et al., (2007) cited in Goodman et al., (2008)



RELATIONSHIPS

Community Activities

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents provide as many learning opportunities as possible for their children. Many agencies are encouraging and supporting youth to be involved in a wide variety of interests, curiosities and community activities so that youth can build relationships, develop skills and be exposed to new experiences regardless of age.

What We Know

- » Participation in community-based activities can be a protective factor and another indicator of well-being. Youth who reported being involved in community or extracurricular activities also reported slightly better health and somewhat diminished risk-taking behaviour.¹⁴
- » Group leaders, religious leaders and coaches all represent positive role models for youth.¹⁵
- » Participation in school or community-based extracurricular activities help youth develop positive social skills, build self-esteem and connect to supportive peers and adults.¹⁶
- » Ontario Child Benefit is to be used for recreation, tutoring or skills-building activities for children and youth in care.

» Continued participation in community activities can be a touchstone during times of change.

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Paying registration and equipment fees so that youth can participate in community activities
- » Supporting participation in community activities for youth over 18
- » Asking the youth to make a reasonable contribution to the cost of an activity or to repay a fee if they do not attend an activity (repayments may be negotiated using ECM or summer earnings)
- » Paying for or sharing the cost of driving lessons

¹⁴McCreary Centre Society (2003) cited in Rutman (2005)

¹⁵Casey Family Programs (2003a) cited in Reid & Dudding (2006)

¹⁶Casey Family Programs (2001)



RELATIONSHIPS

Youth Engagement and Youth Space

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Growing up in care is a part of a youth's identity. Youth should feel that they have a voice. As good parents, many agencies are trying to provide meaningful opportunities for youth to contribute and a welcoming environment in which they can connect with other youth.

What We Know

- » Adult-supported youth engagement is more effective than youth trying to organize on their own.
- » Opportunities empower youth to assume greater responsibility for their well-being, promote civic participation, and help youth develop leadership and communication skills.¹⁷
- » Youth need meaningful, respectful opportunities to contribute to the agency; they also need coaching about reasonable outcomes.
- » Youth must be supported to grow into roles where they can participate in the agency; this is a good way for agencies to invest in the skill development of youth.

» Believing that they can make a difference helps young people to develop self-confidence. When youth become causal agents in their own lives rather than being acted upon, they can develop the confidence to contribute to their communities at large.¹⁸

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Youth involvement has included:
 - fundraising initiatives
 - presentations to the Board and community groups
 - former youth in care being on the Board of Directors
 - participation in the Annual Meeting
 - creating newsletters and websites for youth in care
 - creating curriculum for life skills group (honoraria)

¹⁷Oldmixon (2007)

¹⁸Casey (2001)

- inviting youth to activities using "phone trees"
- adjudicating a special award created by youth to recognize youth who have stayed in school despite obstacles
- » Dedicated youth space within the agency for life skills and where activities are held; youth can access computers or snacks and sometimes do laundry.
- » Someone who is responsible for the youth space and who encourages youth participation and connection, and ensures that resources (computers, brochures, food, etc.) are available.
- » Youth engagement around specific issues such as income tax clinics hosted by staff from the Finance department.
- » Special events for current youth and sometimes former youth in care such as holiday-themed or Alumni dinners; youth are invited to attend and staff and youth in care jointly prepare for and host the event.
- » Provision of transportation for youth in more rural areas so that they can attend events and activities.
- » Providing jobs for youth at the agency.
- » Youth involvement in YouthCAN. Thirty-five of 51 agencies are active with YouthCAN; Youth Champions (staff) work alongside Youth Leaders (youth) to host meetings, search out resources to meet the learning requirements of meetings, coordinate fun activities for youth to interact and team-build with youth from other agencies. www.ontarioyouthcan.org

» Youth involvement with the Youth Policy Advisory and Advocacy Group (YPAAG); YPAAG provides an opportunity for interested youth and former youth in care to advocate, advise on policy making and make recommendations to public officials, Ministries, and others around the age of eligibility for services, emotional, educational and financial supports.

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Advertise opportunities for youth to become involved in the agency and on websites
- » Create websites specifically for the purpose of youth connection





HEALTH

Physical Health

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good health is integral to everyone's success. As good parents, many agencies are trying to help youth to achieve optimal health through education, referral and connection to relevant experts, and extension of benefits coverage.

What We Know

- » Access to family doctors is limited; youth may need assistance with referrals.
- » Eighty-two percent of Crown wards have special needs such as Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, developmental and learning disabilities.¹⁹
- » Relative to their peers who did not live in care, youth from care in a British Columbia study were engaged in higher levels of alcohol and drug use.²⁰
- » Youth who grow up in a family may receive the protection of the parents' employee health benefit plans.
- » Prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FAS-D) is at least 10 to 15 times greater in foster care as compared to the general population (U.S. study).²¹

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Example

Agencies report:

- » Health care, dental and vision are benefits provided to youth from 18 to 21, and to 24 and 25 in some cases depending on the circumstances.
- » Extended benefits are provided for youth who are continuing post-secondary education/trades. (Note that for those in post-secondary, this may also be available through the educational institution for an additional and modest fee; options are also available through OSAP.)
- » Care is provided specifically to youth in care through a nurse-practitioner program.
- » Early and regular conversations about sexual health occur using local sexual health clinics.
- » The KARE Plan (Morneau & Sobeco) is used to provide extended health and dental benefits to children and youth in care, resulting in decreased costs, portability of a child's record, and streamlined administration and reporting.

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Provide full medical and dental checkups for youth when they leave care and subsequent treatment if necessary.
- » Ensure immunizations are updated.
- » Facilitate connections with dentists and doctors before youth leave.
- » Make youth aware of their entitlements for basic and extended health coverage through such means as one-to-one contact, newsletters, pamphlets, youth groups and plans of care.
- » Ensure that youth have copies of key medical records before they leave care.
- » Educate youth about Trillium Drug Program (covers costs of drugs if you are not covered by another program and spend the majority of your income on medication). <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/drugs/trillium.html>
- » "Improve sex education and pregnancy prevention for youth in care": one of the recommendations from an annual American study of youth graduates.²²



¹⁹Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2008)

²⁰Rutman (2007)

²¹Astley et al., 2002, cited in Goodman et al., (2008)

²²Havalchak et al., (2007) cited in Goodman et al., (2008)



HEALTH

Mental Health

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Due to the trauma suffered in their young lives, youth in care need special attention and support to achieve optimal mental health. As good parents many CASs are trying to help youth to achieve optimal mental health through early detection, referral to other services and collaboration where services do not exist.

What We Know

- » In 2007, 82% of Crown wards had special needs such as behaviour disorders, multiple disabilities, developmental disabilities, emotional difficulties and ADHD/ADD.²³
- » Prevalence of mental disorders among Ontario Crown wards was found to be 31.7%. Boys were twice as likely to have a mental disorder.²⁴
- » Relative to their peers who did not live in care, youth from care in a B.C. study reported that their single biggest health condition was depression, especially among young parents.²⁵
- » Treatment plans must be flexible. Youth are sometimes not able to make use of services when offered.
- » Forty-six percent of children and youth use psychotropic medication; 29% were in therapy.²⁶

²³Ministry of Children and Youth Service (2008)
²⁴Burge (2007) as cited in Goodman et al., (2008)
²⁵Rutman (2007)
²⁶Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2007)

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Train staff and caregivers so that they can screen children and youth to facilitate earlier intervention.
- » Strengthen CASs' partnerships with community agencies to obtain earlier access to key services for children/youth (e.g. children's mental health).²⁷
- » Orient staff and caregivers to the effects of trauma and how this affects a child's behaviour at various ages and stages; staff could learn to project what children and youth will need.
- » Ensure that youth are connected to adult services (not just referred) prior to leaving care.
- » Investigate OACAS proposal for Crown Ward Aftercare Benefits which is designed to effect a smoother transition to adulthood for Crown wards by providing health, dental and EAP benefits for 48 months following their discharge from care on their 21st birthday. Health and EAP benefits would be offered by existing private sector benefits providers and secured through a competitive tendering process, helping to prevent former Crown wards from being introduced to and becoming dependent on adult services designed for marginalized and impoverished populations.



Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Facilitating in-depth conversations between medical personnel and youth to build understanding of medication, its purpose, proper use, side effects and to determine what supports if any they will need to manage it.
- » Providing a mental health component in life skills programs.
- » Using agency benefits provider to cover youths' treatment needs including therapy until age 21 and beyond depending on the circumstances.

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » B.C.'s Agreements with Young Adults can provide financial assistance and support services to young people age 19 – 24 who want to take part in rehabilitative programs among others. <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/aya.htm>



²⁷Goodman et al., (2008)



EDUCATION

High School

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Canada's high school education rate is second only to that of the United States among 17 peer countries.²⁸ As a good parent, many agencies are trying to make every effort to ensure that every youth in care graduates from high school.

What We Know

» The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) Crown Ward Review 2006 tells us:

- 82% of Crown wards were assessed as special needs
- 40% are progressing slowly or were identified as "promotion at risk"
- 49% had behavioural issues²⁹

» OnLAC reports for youth age 16+ indicate:

- 86% of youth want to do well in school

- 20% expect their highest achievement will be high school

- 19% hope to graduate from post-secondary studies³⁰

» The OACAS Gateway to Success reports say:

- 21% of youth are not enrolled in any schooling
- 42% of 19- and 20-year-olds appear to be successfully completing high school (provincial rate is 75%)³¹

» Other research and reports say:

- Home and school are considered important socialization territories for children and youth.³²
- Prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FAS-D) is at least 10 to 15 times greater in youth in foster care as compared to the general population.³³
- One of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' specific goals is that every child will graduate from high school.³⁴

²⁸Conference Board of Canada (2006)

²⁹Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2007)

³⁰Looking After Children Ontario Provincial Report (2007 September)

³¹OACAS (2008)

³²Lemay and Ghazal (2004)

³³Astley et al., (2002) cited in Goodman et al., (2008)

³⁴Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Strategic Framework (2008)

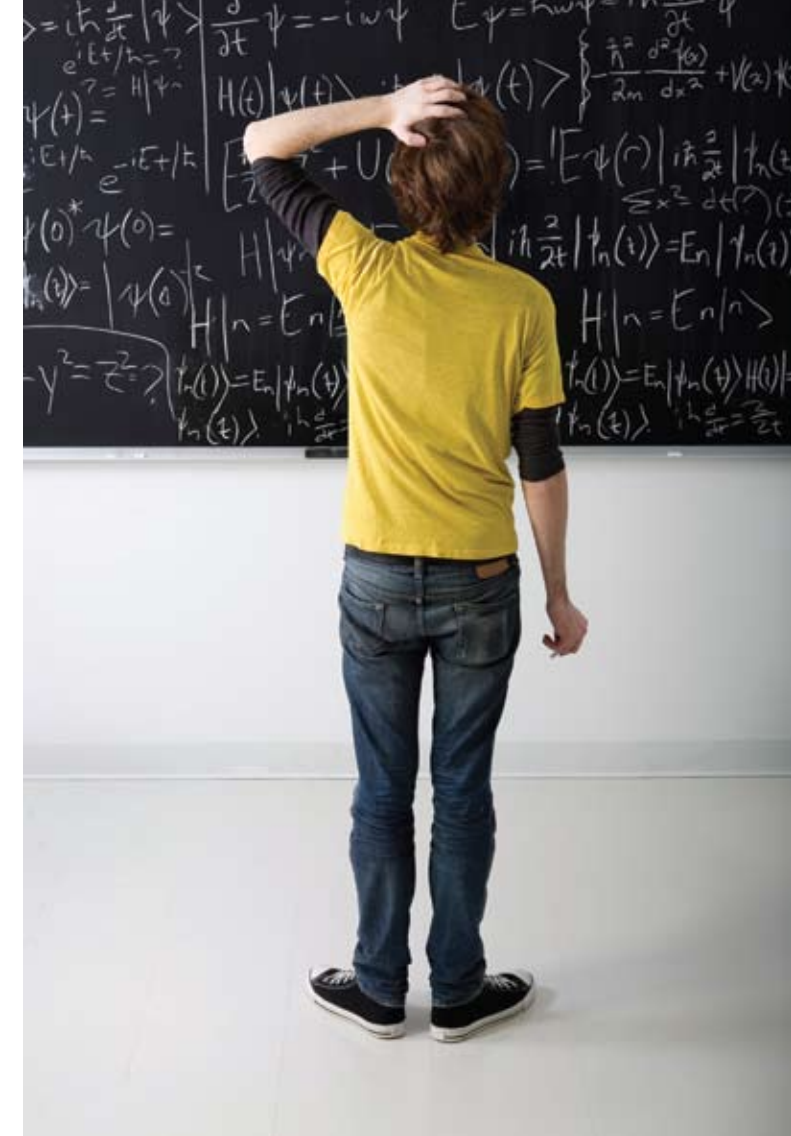
Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Using volunteers who are teachers and retired school principals, and youth workers with expertise in the area to advocate on behalf of children and youth in care
- » Implementing homework clubs with local university students as tutors
- » Using volunteer drivers to get young people to and from school if they have moved from the area
- » Using skilled volunteers (graduates of teachers' college) to assist with college and university applications and programs to complete high school as well as organizing college tours
- » Preserving a child's school time by not taking them out of school during school hours for CAS business
- » Paying for educational assessments to avoid long waiting lists
- » Using pro bono law services to advocate for a child or youth's public education rights, especially in the case of suspension <http://www.childadvocacy.ca/gethelp/>
- » Celebrating smaller academic successes with small cash awards (funded with help from a corporate donor), which reward youth for staying in school and completing their school year despite obstacles
- » Paying for dresses, photos and dinner for graduation ceremonies
- » Asking foster parents about their own literacy, providing book exchanges and encouraging them to be role models for children and youth
- » Training foster parents in educational advocacy and homework help
- » Tracking and reporting on the success of youth in care in public school using existing test measures such as the Education Quality Assurance Office

Innovative Ideas—International Examples

- » Designated Teachers model in United Kingdom where trained teachers educate other school personnel about the challenges and needs of children and youth in care. Designated Teachers, along with other responsibilities, act as advocates to monitor the progress of individual young people and ensure they receive all available assistance. <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/carematters/> Implementation Plan <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00279-2008.pdf>





Ideas on Which to Build

» Use Student Success programs already available through local Boards of Education such as:

- A Student Success Team (principal, student success teacher, guidance counselor, special education teacher and other educators) found in every school provides extra attention to students who need it. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/pathways/> and <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/strategy.html>

- Specialist High Skills Majors allow students to focus on a future career through a bundle of classroom courses, workplace experiences and sector certifications. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/specialist.html>
- Cooperative Education allows students to use hands-on learning toward two compulsory high school credits. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/expansion.html>
- E-Learning provides students with online courses and allows teachers to share resources across the province. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/elearn.html>

- » Start early. Focus on building educational supports at the elementary and middle school levels.³⁵
- » Identify reasons for non-enrolment for youth under 18.³⁶
- » Consider OnLAC findings and how to best support foster parents in setting expectations and supporting good results.³⁷
- » Build understanding of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and the educational supports necessary and provide training for all caregivers especially foster parents.
- » Integrate educational and developmental learning tools by creating partnerships and tutor/mentoring programs between schools, child welfare agencies and foster parents.³⁸
- » Utilize Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent (OCB-E) funds for tutoring.
- » Advocate for young people in care to remain in their school even if their address changes.

Tools

- » An introduction to the basic strategies for managing the challenges associated with FASD for care providers, service providers and educators. <http://www.torontocas.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/FASD.pdf>
- » "Back To School - Tips and Resources for Better Educational Outcomes" (visit www2.oacas.org to view archived announcement for September 3, 2008)

³⁵OACAS (2008)

³⁶OACAS (2008)

³⁷OACAS (2008)

³⁸Goodman et al., (2008)



EDUCATION

Post-Secondary

Apprenticeships, Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, Private Career Colleges, University

What are we trying to achieve?

Educational achievement is one concrete way to end a cycle of poverty. As good parents agencies are trying to provide the maximum amount of coaching, mentoring, emotional and financial support so that youth pursue and complete post-secondary education.

What We Know

- » Youth in care take longer to achieve their educational milestones because of multiple transitions and interruptions in their academic careers and lives.
- » Youth are intimidated by the amount of resources required to attend college, private career colleges, university or trade and apprenticeship programs and consequently do not pursue their dream.
- » Only 21% of 18 – 20-year olds had participated in post-secondary education, lower than in the general population.³⁹

- » For those who do enrol in post-secondary schooling, 84% gravitate toward apprenticeship or community college and 16% to university.⁴⁰
- » Youth and staff are not aware of all the financial supports available to former and current Crown wards.
- » In a family setting, good parents would provide a place to live and a place to come home to if the youth was living away from home.
- » Youth still require emotional support when they leave for school. Tutoring, coaching and ongoing parental and agency support is essential.

³⁹OACAS (2008)

⁴⁰OACAS (2008)



Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Supporting their Crown wards with tuition, books and living expenses until age 25
- » Using in-house and area career planning experts (staff, volunteers with educational backgrounds and programs) to support youth
- » Developing links with local community college(s) to help youth access upgrading programs and increased preparation support to enter college
- » Using the **Ontario Crown Ward Post-secondary Application Fee Reimbursement Program** for reimbursement of application fees to Crown wards and former Crown wards who are entering their first full-time college diploma, university degree or OSAP-approved private career college, starting September 2008 or later. Application fees may be reimbursed retroactively.
- » Using **Ontario Access Grants for Crown wards** which provide tuition grants for current and former Crown wards completing their first full-time degree/diploma program at an OSAP-approved post-secondary institution, starting September 2008 or later
- » Creating a document for agency-wide use that articulates how to apply for grants and bursaries for youth
- » Using volunteers to assist youth with college tours
- » Sending “care packages”
- » Contacting youth monthly
- » Asking local agencies to assist their youth during times of crisis, and invite them to appropriate youth programs
- » Providing funds so students may return home to their “network” throughout the year

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » Alberta’s Advancing Futures Bursary Program pays for post-secondary education. Funded by the Province, it pays for living and school expenses while regional offices stay involved to provide other types of support. They provide the maximum student living allowance. There is no clawback of any kind. Twenty-six percent are in an adult education program to upgrade to high school; the same number are working towards a diploma or certificate and the rest are in a degree program. Last year the students’ completion rate was 73%—higher than the provincial average.
- » Nova Scotia has recently formalized a program to extend support to youth aged 21-24 who are in some type of educational program—either high school equivalency or programs offered through Nova Scotia private career colleges or universities. Youth receive a monthly living allowance, clothing, transportation, recreation, books, tuition and worker support. Youth must sign a Post Care and Custody Agreement.
- » British Columbia’s Youth Education Assistance Fund provides bursaries of up to \$5,500 to former youth in care to pursue post-secondary education.
- » Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) programs in Texas assist with college preparation, upgrading and plan college tours in addition to other activities. http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_protection/preparation_for_adult_living/default.asp
- » Treehouse Coaching To College program in Washington State pairs mentors with youth in care in high school; their goal is to guide the youth through one-to-one assistance as well as workshops on essay writing and other skills. http://www.treehouseforkids.org/whatwedo/coaching_to_college

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Establish agency or regional expertise regarding OSAP applications, scholarships, awards, national and provincial Access Grants, Distance Grants and Opportunity Grants, as well as others.
- » Ensure the use of application fee reimbursements through Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.
- » Ensure that care providers and students are aware of Crown Ward Access grants through Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.
- » Establish educational trust funds for youth using Criminal Injuries Compensation Benefits and Survivor Benefits with youth permission.
- » Investigate OACAS proposal for Crown Ward Aftercare Benefits which provides health, dental and EAP benefits for 48 months following a youth’s discharge from care on their 21st birthday; health and EAP benefits would be offered by existing private sector benefits providers, secured through a competitive tendering process, helping to prevent former Crown wards from being introduced to and becoming dependent upon adult services designed for marginalized and impoverished populations.
- » Advocate for program similar to the Advancing Futures Bursary program in Alberta where the provincial government covers the cost of tuition, books, uniforms, equipment and living costs so that the youth can reach their educational goals.
- » Update information on available financial supports via OACAS or YouthCAN websites.
- » Prepare youth for their post-secondary experience by providing mentors or readings e.g. http://www.canadianliving.com/relationships/friends_and_family/how_to_survive_university.php.

Tools

- » List of provincial and national bursaries http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not_secure/plan_grants_full_newapp_1234.htm





IDENTITY

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents help their children to explore all facets of their identity. Youth in care have particular challenges because of their separation from their biological family. Many agencies are trying to encourage and support youth to explore all aspects of their identity through life books, social histories, role models, mentors, and special events.

What We Know

- » Challenges to the formation of identity include separation from birth family, lack of continuity of care, and living away from family or community.
- » Too often youth leaving care wish they had more exposure to their culture and their history.⁴¹
- » Elements of identity include race and ethnicity, religion, nationality, immigration status, gender identification, sexual orientation, disability, regional differences, geographical focus (urban or rural) and economic class.⁴²
- » Youth in care grow up being oppressed systemically because they are youth in care.
- » Feeling a part of a larger shared culture also contributes to identity; voting, volunteering and civic engagement can contribute to identity formation.

⁴¹National Youth in Care Network (2006) cited in Reid & Dudding (2006)

⁴²Casey Family Programs (2001)

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Trying to ensure that youth leave care with a life book or life box—some agencies have a uniform format for their life books
- » Using volunteers to create life books
- » Hosting or taking youth to events that connect them to their heritage and/or identity, such as traditional ceremonies, cultural, religious and community activities i.e. Black History Month, Take Back the Night marches, December 6th National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence, Pride events
- » Using “cheque days” (days when youth can pick up their monthly Extended Care and Maintenance allowance) to stage celebrations, and connect with youth
- » Connecting youth with programs in the community regarding sexual orientation
- » Working with federal and provincial agencies to ensure that youth have a complete set of identity documents

- » Creating a program to ensure that all agency services are open, inclusive, safe, affirming and positive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, two-spirit, intersex, gender non-conforming, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth; program provides training for other child welfare agencies and organizations
- » Providing funds so young people can visit their family in their country of origin

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Provide photo album, memory box or digital media (memory stick, CD, DVD) to each child or youth as soon as they come into care; ensure this memory keeper moves with them.
- » Use Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent to fund activities that support a child’s identity.
- » Explore the ramifications with youth when they wish to tell their “story,” (TV, radio, newspaper, small and large magazines and newsletters, video, live audiences). Once a story is on the Internet, for example, it is in the public domain forever.

Tools

- » Knowing Who You Are: Helping Youth in Care Develop Their Racial and Ethnic Identity, Casey Family Programs (2005)
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Projects/REI/>
- » Best Practice Principles: Gay and Lesbian Youth in Care
http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/child_welfare_services/pdf/best_practice_principles_-_youth_in_care.pdf
- » Scrap Mania—article on digital scrap booking <http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1547>
- » Life Story Work for Children and Young People in Out-of-home care
http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/fostercare_lifestory_fact.pdf





WORK EXPERIENCE, CAREER PLANNING, VOLUNTEERING

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Parents, extended family and role models like coaches, and teachers, help guide youth by demonstrating appropriate behaviour and sharing experience. As good parents, many agencies are trying to provide opportunities for youth to learn how to present themselves in different situations.

What We Know

- » Youth involved in employment or volunteer activities are in a position to:
 - acquire important skills
 - identify and exercise new talents
 - renew their sense of self
 - gain confidence
 - feel a sense of achievement.⁴³
- » Many young people acquire their first job through the connections of family or friends.
- » Youth who volunteer are more likely to feel a part of a larger shared culture which contributes to identity development.

⁴³Casey (2001)

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Creating jobs within the agency complete with access cards and desk space for youth
- » Taking advantage of provincial and federal youth employment grants to hire youth
- » Using formal career planning tools such as the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment
- » Using guidance counselors and local agencies with expertise in career planning
- » Formalizing partnerships with local agencies and organizations to provide youth with experience e.g. 4H Clubs, trade programs
- » Hosting an annual career fair for youth

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » WAY—Workforce Academy for Youth in San Diego provides a six-month paid internship at a County Department (like City Hall). Youth aged 17 - 21 who have left the child welfare system and who have a high school diploma or GED are eligible. There are mentorships with job coaches, case managers and Senior Life Coaches. The program has provided internships to 30 youth since 2006. It provides youth with an opportunity to not only learn job skills but also to see themselves as part of meaningful work in the department.
http://www.sanpasqualacademy.org/work_readiness.htm
- » The Youth Empowerment Services (YES!) Program provides services to youth to support them in their academic pursuits and career choices. There are paid internships, work experience opportunities for 12 - 14 year olds, field trips to local businesses in addition to traditional life skills learning opportunities.
- » The Annie E. Casey School-to-Career Partnerships operating in eight states provides workplace skills in a hands-on environment for foster youth ages 16–24. Modeled after a public-private partnership started in Baltimore in 1999, the program offers eligible youth a variety of services, including job-readiness training; job opportunities with major employers such as UPS, Home Depot, and Marriot International; tuition reimbursement; health benefits; work supports; and job retention services. In 2003, more than 340 youth across eight program sites were placed in jobs with an average wage of \$7.92 per hour. Fifty-one percent received health benefits, and the program had an 81% retention rate.⁴⁴



Ideas on Which to Build

- » Youth in care should participate at the agency in Grade 9 "Take Your Kid to Work day".
- » CASs should create volunteer positions for their youth at the agency to help youth gain experience and volunteer hours.



⁴⁴Oldmixon (2007)



LIFE SKILLS

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Families teach children the practical skills of living through role modeling as well as instruction. As good parents, many agencies and caregivers are trying to provide every opportunity for youth to learn these practical skills within the family setting and in a group setting according to the youth's individual needs.

What We Know

- » Tangible life skills are those needed for daily living, self-maintenance and obtaining and sustaining gainful employment; intangible life skills are those needed for interpersonal relationships and maintaining employment: decision-making, problem-solving, and social skills.⁴⁵ Intangible life skills are likely learned in a family.
- » In a family or stable home, youth have the opportunity to learn life skills through practice and observation. With a stable relationship, the process can evolve through questions and practice.⁴⁶
- » Parents teach their children skills according to their age and developmental level.
- » A recent evaluation of Life Skills Training programs in Los Angeles "finds no reason to believe that classroom-based Life

Skills Training had a significant positive impact on any of the concrete indicators of successful transition to adulthood" (e.g. educational attainment, employment, earnings, and avoidance of economic hardship).⁴⁷

- » For most youth, it appears that independent living assistance comes from a variety of sources—biological parents or other family members, teachers and schools, foster parents, caseworkers, and independent living programs.
- » Foster youth do not always have the same opportunities to learn about household management and other vital adult life skills as youth who live with their birth families.⁴⁸
- » Life skills training is particularly critical for those foster youth who have been placed in group homes where household responsibilities differ from what they are likely to experience on their own.⁴⁹
- » Life skills training provides a critical peer connection with other youth participating in group programs.
- » Life skills delivery methods must be flexible and adaptable depending on a youth's placement experience, community experience and the culture of the agency.

⁴⁵Casey (2001)

⁴⁶Reid & Dudding (2006)

⁴⁷U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2008)

⁴⁸Oldmixon (2007)

⁴⁹Oldmixon (2007)

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » The development of formal programs to teach foster parents and caregivers how to use natural opportunities for life skills development; one agency begins emphasizing natural skills development as in a regular family to foster parents when children as young as seven
- » The provision of opportunities to youth to manage progressively larger amounts of money such as clothing allowance
- » A variety of life skills programs with:
 - flexibility for both group and individual instruction
 - different levels of programming
 - program lengths ranging from 8 to 20 weeks.
 - drop-in life skills group for youth living on their own run by older youth who are now agency volunteers
 - flexibility for participation depending on the developmental needs of the youth
 - a range of subject matter covering everything from budgeting and grocery shopping to conflict resolution
 - varying degrees of participation by youth mentors who earn volunteer hours or honoraria
- » That program attendance is never a condition of receiving financial support
- » Supporting youth to remain in foster care until age 21



Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

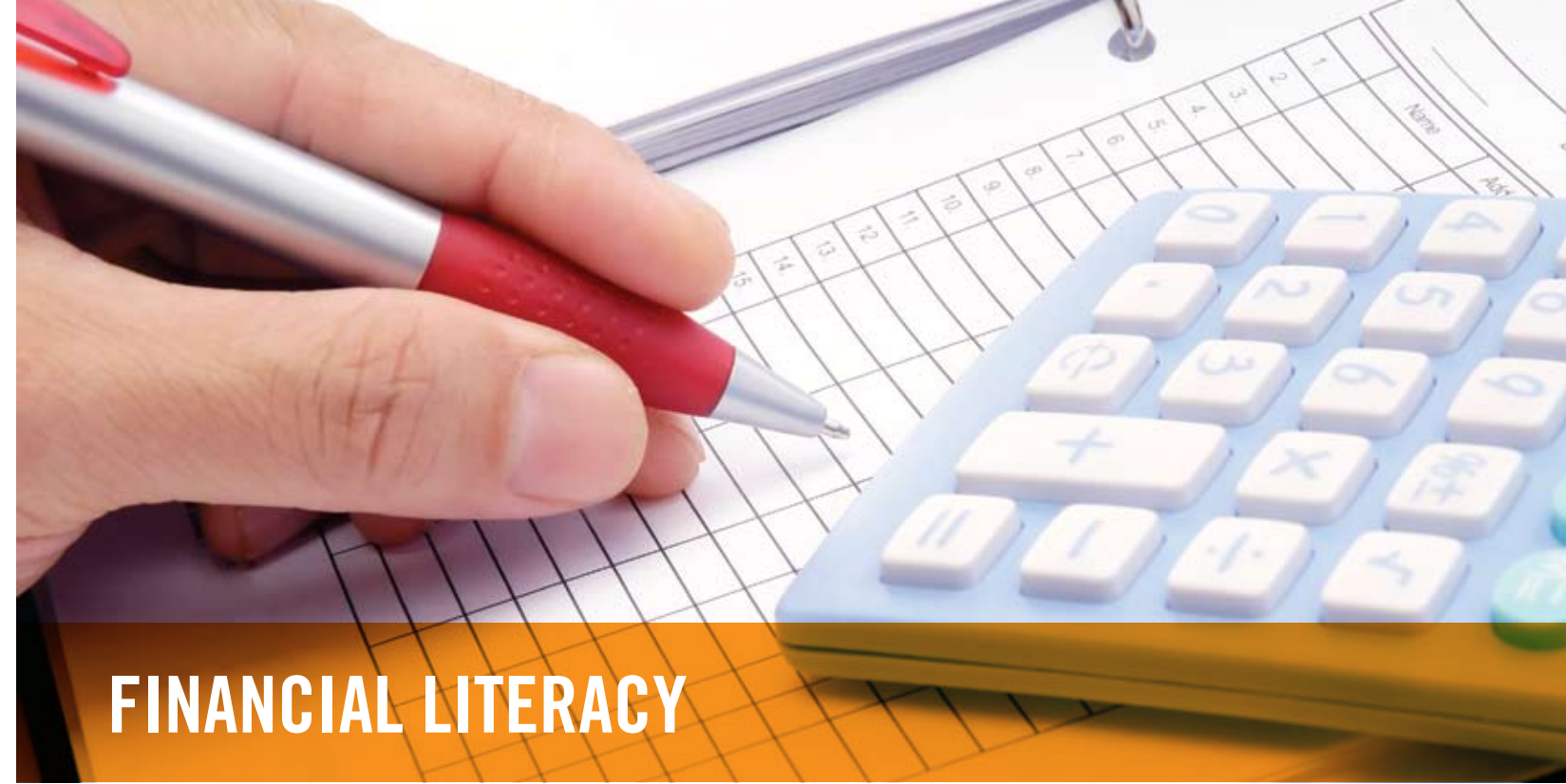
- » San Francisco program offers four independent living (IL) skills courses based on age of youth. The Early IL course for youth aged 14 and 15 focuses on group work and building self-esteem; the Core IL course for ages 16 – 18 helps with life skills, home work and college preparation; the Transition program is for 17 -18 year olds and the After Care program is for youth 18 - 21 to assist with housing, jobs and financial skills. <http://www.sfilsp.org/>
- » The AI Center (achieving independence) provides support and tools for Philadelphia youth transitioning from care into adulthood. The Center provides guidance, resources, a chance to earn and save money (up to \$2,100), career counselling and life mentors.

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Ensure that foster parents and group home providers are teaching and role modelling life skills.
- » Institute regular contact between independence workers or those providing the programs at different agencies to build competency.

Tools

- » The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) is an evaluation of youth independent living skills. It consists of statements about life skills that the youth and his/her caregivers complete. All assessments and the scored reports are free of charge. <http://www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/assess/whatis.htm>



FINANCIAL LITERACY

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Money management is a critical life skill. Good parents teach their children how to save money, budget and plan for large purchases. Many agencies are trying to teach youth money management skills.

What We Know

- » Ministry of Children and Youth Services is placing more emphasis on the use of the Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent; agencies are expected to open bank accounts for youth over the age of 15.

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » providing opportunities for youth to manage progressively larger amounts of money such as their clothing allowance; these funds are not withheld as a disciplinary measure as they are used to teach financial literacy
- » dedicating a specific staff person's time to obtaining Criminal Injuries Compensation and Survivor Benefits for youth and placing these in trust funds; youth are then counselled on the use of the funds
- » providing transportation to part-time jobs in rural areas so that youth have the opportunity to both earn and manage money
- » providing savings accounts
- » providing income tax workshops

- » providing part-time jobs for youth at the agency
- » teaching foster parents how to teach children and youth about money
- » teaching youth money management skills as part of life skills programs
- » assisting youth with applications to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » The Opportunity Passport™ helps participants learn financial management; obtain experience with the banking system; save money for education, housing, health care and other specified expenses; and gain streamlined access to educational, training and vocational opportunities. It has three related components:

- a personal debit account to be used to pay for short-term expenses
- a matched savings account, also known as an Individual Development Account (IDA), to be used for specific assets, such as education expenses and housing down payments/deposits
- door openers, a host of opportunities to be developed on a local basis, examples include pre-approval for registration for community college courses or expedited access to job-training or adult education courses www.jimcaseyyouth.org





HOUSING AND HOMES

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents do not turn their children out at 16, 18 or 21, never to return. Many agencies are trying to create, support and sustain a family home for youth for as long as the youth has a relationship with the agency. In a situation where youth cannot live in a family home, agencies are assisting youth to secure and sustain a safe living arrangement suitable to his or her individual needs.

What We Know

- » In 2006, 43.5% of the four million young adults in Canada aged 20 -29 lived in the parental home, up from 41.1% in 2001.⁵⁰
- » Compared to their peers, youth aging out of care are more likely to experience homelessness.⁵¹
- » Family-based care with its continuum of options and supports is the preferred placement option for the majority of foster children/youth.⁵²
- » Youth who could remain in an individualized normalized family setting would not have to face living on their own before they are ready.

- » Increased placement stability would mean that children and youth have a better chance of experiencing relationships as permanent.
- » Assistance with home-finding should be flexible and diverse to accommodate a wide range of needs.
- » Solutions for at-risk youth cannot be found solely within child welfare; partnerships with other Ministries, community partners and organizations are required.
- » Youth have limited experience finding a place to live or picking the right roommate.

⁵⁰Statistics Canada (2006)

⁵¹Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults (MISWAA) (2005)

⁵²Goodman, et al., (2008)

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Payment of foster care per diems to caregivers of youth older than 18 so that youth can reside either with their extended family or foster family
- » Semi-independent living programs that pair a number of youth with a live-in mentor
- » A direct-pay system with landlords using an agreement where the youth, not the agency, is acknowledged as the tenant
- » A transitional living program for youth 18 - 21 who have completed or are completing life skills programs
- » Varying degrees of assistance to help youth find housing
 - staff person with particular expertise
 - working with other community agencies
- » Continuing relationships with landlords so that they are receptive to youth renters
- » The provision of financial and instrumental moving assistance e.g. moving van.
- » Place to store belongings when they move
- » Using agencies within the community as sources of good used furniture



Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » First Place for Youth in Oakland has a variety of strategies to help youth on the road to permanency. The PATH Program—Permanent Avenues Toward Home, is a “host-home” housing model that builds upon positive permanent relationships already existing in the lives of young people. PATH pairs youth with a permanent caring adult of their choosing who provides a home. The program builds on the relationship between youth and adult, allowing for the natural transition from adolescence to adulthood to occur within a supportive and stable environment. To participate, youth must identify a qualified permanent adult in their lives that is able to provide a home to the youth for up to two years or the day before their 25th birthday. <http://www.firstplaceforyouth.org/>
- » TRAC—Transition Resource Action Centre in Dalla offers a two-year housing program to youth until age 21. The program has three levels with increasing responsibilities and independence. In level one, TRAC pays all expenses and a residential adviser lives on-site. In the second, youth live in four-person homes and must pay for food and personal expenses while TRAC pays the rent. The third level is mostly independent and youth must pay 30% of what they earn for rent and utilities. <http://www.traconline.org/>

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Agencies may be able to negotiate priority for youth with local housing authority.



THE EXTENDED CARE AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT (ECM)

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents neither force nor encourage children to leave before they are ready. Ideally youth should remain in a family setting until they finish school and some agencies are moving in this direction. ECM works best with youth who have not been able to live in a permanent family.

What We Know

- » *The Child and Family Services Act* allows agencies to provide care beyond 18 using ECM.
- » Extended Care and Maintenance Agreements (ECMs) were introduced in 1994 and have not been revised since that time.
- » ECM was first introduced to steer Crown wards away from chronic dependence on welfare.
- » In policy and practice ECM consists of emotional, case management and financial support.
- » ECM may represent a financial incentive to disengage from a foster family as youth can be enamoured of the amount of money before realizing how difficult it is to make ends meet.
- » Youth receiving ECM are encountering new situations (e.g. living on their own for the first time) in their lives and generally need more time with their workers.

Innovative Ideas—Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Providing emotional support regardless of whether the youth is meeting the requirements for financial support under the auspices of ECM; emotional support is not linked to financial support.
- » Establishing saving goals for youth who work and receive ECM. There is no “clawback” and money is placed in a savings account. Goals are established individually, based on the needs of the youth.
- » Update the 1994 ECM guidelines to reflect the fact that research indicates that youth do better when living with a family.
- » Ensure all youth without the support of a permanent family are considered eligible for ECM despite high-risk behaviour because they:
 - take longer to reach their milestones and need the most gradual and extended transition to adulthood possible

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Update the 1994 ECM guidelines to reflect the fact that research indicates that youth do better when living with a family.
- » Ensure all youth without the support of a permanent family are considered eligible for ECM despite high-risk behaviour because they:
 - take longer to reach their milestones and need the most gradual and extended transition to adulthood possible

- lack the familial support that the rest of the population may rely on to deal with difficult situations and life events.
- are already at a disadvantage because of the trauma and disruption in their young lives

- » Ensure a youth’s eligibility for ECM despite high-risk behaviour is articulated in Agency policy.
- » Give each youth a copy of the Ministry’s ECM guidelines written in accessible language; ECM contracts should acknowledge that youth have received these guidelines so that they know their rights and responsibilities.
- » ECM file documentation should focus on the contract and goals integrated within it; recording takes time away from face to face contact with youth who need more support.
- » ECM finances should be treated consistently in government programs that include an assessment of income; for example, ECM payments are not treated as income by Revenue Canada but are considered income by the Ontario Student Assistance Program.
- » CASs must ensure that youth are aware of the complaints process and are supported to access the process and/or the Child and Family Services Review Board (CFSRB).



Administrative Guidelines from OACAS memo to the field ECM Best Practices: Response to Auditor General’s Recommendations, March 16, 2007

- » ECM contracts be signed yearly, unless there is a significant clinical reason to suggest the contract period be shorter. This will reduce the number of occurrences of contract gaps, where an ECM contract expires before a new one is signed.
- » Youth sign the contract and sign that they received the contract in same meeting. The Auditor General’s report reaffirms that youth sign an ECM contract *and* sign that they received the contract. Splitting this dual signature requirement into two separate meetings creates compliance issues. It is suitable for an Executive Director or their designate to sign an ECM contract before the youth does, which would then allow the youth to sign the contract and sign they have received the contract in the same meeting. Please note there continues to be a requirement that youth receive a full copy of the 1994 ECM Guidelines with each contract signing.
- » Distinction between *contractual goals* and *contractual requirements*. The Auditor General faulted CASs when “goals” were not met. Setting goals with youth is good clinical practice and CASs are encouraged to continue to do this. ECM contracts must be clear in distinguishing between a goal and a contractual requirement, which would avoid a “breach of contract” when a goal is not met.
- » Meetings between a youth and the Society occur “no less than every three months”. Although workers often plan to see the youth more often, the contract should specify “no less than every three months” even if the goal is to see a youth monthly/bi-weekly. It is hoped this will largely remedy issues where workers set expectations for more frequent contact and youth miss a single appointment, which would result in non-compliance. This language still supports seeing the youth far in excess of what would be normally considered reasonable, but without the threat of “breach of contract.”



TERMINATION: AN OUTDATED CONCEPT

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents do not force youth out of the family home before they are ready. Therefore, for good corporate parents termination is not an option. Liability would not enter into the discussion. Where safety, either to the youth or others in the home, is a concern parents would find a safe place for that youth and maintain their helping relationship. There would be no "cutting off" the relationship.

If a youth did want to leave of their own volition, parents would fight for their relationship with their youth and encourage them to stay and make use of all the support they could. Agencies are trying to ensure a better balance between supporting youth and concerns about liability.

If a youth did leave, even on poor terms, there would always be an open door.

What We Know

- » Being in care can provide financial and emotional support which forms the basis for future success.
- » Due to many factors including trauma, medical conditions, age and stage of development and experiences in care, some youth are not able to make use of the services CASs provide until they are ready.
- » Some agency staff become frustrated with the youth's lack of progress and justify ending the relationship due to a lack of resources which could be made available for other youth.

- » Youth in care eager for perceived freedom do not fully understand the impacts of leaving.
- » Important decisions of all kinds should be made with timelines that encourage reflection and sober second thought.

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Providing emotional support continually regardless of a youth's behaviour or activities or whether they are meeting the terms of their ECM contract; terminating the agency's relationship with the youth is an absolute last resort. While w may be withheld because a youth is not living up to their responsibilities, emotional support is always "flowing."
- » Using e-mail and text messaging as way to maintain contact with a youth "on the run"
- » Hiring a process server to locate youth
- » Establishing a decision-making process regarding termination that involves increasingly senior levels of staff up to and including the Director of Service and the Executive Director. One staff member, usually a supervisor, is responsible for negotiating with the youth, but the decision to terminate involves any agency staff who could contribute to the decision.

- » Providing notice to the youth of important meetings by registered mail
- » Providing written information to youth as to how they can begin to receive services again; this "comeback clause" should be contained within the ECM contract
- » Trying to include "emotional support only" cases in caseload weighting systems and distribution of work
- » Using an Order of Supervision as a safety net so that youth who terminate their wardship can return
- » Keeping a file open even while a youth is "on the run" instead of the usual practice of closing it and opening it when the youth returns; this is done by placing a note on file detailing the steps taken to attempt to locate the youth (similar to a Serious Occurrence Report). This is the agency's way to acknowledge an issue of liability and that their choice is to keep the file open and to try to reconnect with the youth.

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Any youth who was a Crown ward at age 16 should have the right to return at any time up to the age of 21.
- » Government should extend the age of protection to 18. Protection and supports would be available to youth who need them during their transition to adulthood. The age of 18 would also be consistent with other age prescriptions set in law like the age of school attendance.
- » Wardship of 15- and 16-year old youth should not be terminated without return to family AND the use of a long-term safety net such as an order of supervision.
- » Youth should receive written notice if the agency is going to change the terms of their ECM contract, i.e. no financial assistance or ending the contract. Written notice should also include a copy of the appeals process and timelines. If a contract has naturally expired, the agency cannot refuse to sign a new contract without three months written notice. This includes when a youth turns 18. This allows youth to plan.
- » If an ECM contract is not going to be offered or made available to a youth when they turn 18, the youth should be advised of this three months prior to their 18th birthday in addition to their right to appeal this decision. This allows youth to plan.
- » Funds and ECM cannot be terminated until the appeal process is complete.
- » Youth should be told of their right to request support from the Office of Child and Family Services Advocacy throughout the process to terminate their wardship.
- » Consideration should be given to having a panel of youth or former youth in care to make recommendations as part of the agency appeals process.





AGE OF LEAVING

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Many youth need to remain in care longer as they are dealing with serious mental and physical health issues, addictions and the effects of trauma. As youth in care take longer to reach typical milestones, there needs to be flexibility in the age of leaving so that youth can determine when they are ready. Some agencies are focusing on creating

permanent relationships, and encouraging youth to remain at home until they are ready to leave.

What We Know

- » In 2006, 43.5% of the four million young adults in Canada aged 20 - 29 lived in the parental home, up from 41.1% in 2001.⁵³
- » Youth in care need as gradual and extended a transition as possible.⁵⁴
- » As youth take on new challenges in their lives, like living on their own and furthering their education, they need more support, not less.
- » Some youth in care will need adult support services and these may take longer to establish. As a result, it is essential that linkages to these adult support systems are established for the youth to facilitate a smooth transition.

- » Currently, agencies that provide service beyond 21 do so in order to assist youth to complete their current educational level. A variety of resources are used to facilitate this (e.g. charitable funds, part-time employment opportunities, informal supports).

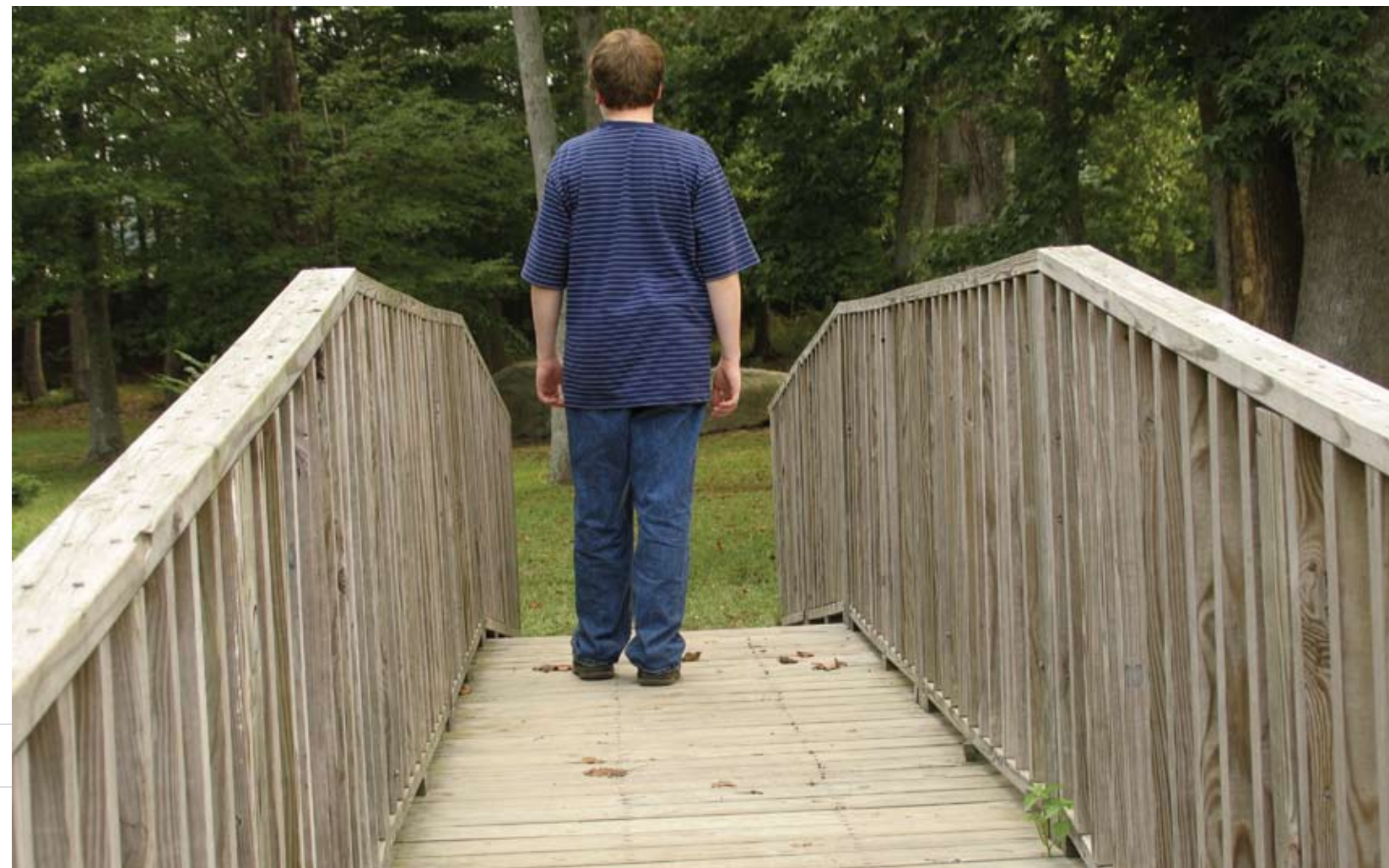
Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Providing services to youth until they are 24 depending on the needs of the youth, including education and mental health treatment
- » Encouraging youth who have left to return as volunteers so that they can continually receive some form of emotional support

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

- » In British Columbia wardship terminates at 18. Youth can access an additional 24 months of support between 19 and 24. B.C.'s program Agreements with Young Adults (AYAs) for youth aged 19 - 24 can provide financial assistance and support services to young people who want to continue their education, get job training or take part in a rehabilitative program. Youth are eligible for support for six months at a time for a cumulative period of up to 24 months. <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/aya.htm>
- » Nova Scotia has recently formalized a program to extend support to youth aged 21 - 24 who are in some type of educational program, either high school equivalency or programs offered through Nova Scotia's private career colleges or universities.
- » First Place for Youth in Oakland, California provides services to youth 16 - 23 who are preparing to leave or who have recently left care. Youth work on education and employment goals, healthy relationships, effective communication and community building. First Place provides housing, case management, community resources and advocacy services. <http://www.firstplaceforyouth.org/>
- » The Next Generation Center run by the Children's Aid Society in New York is geared toward youth ages 14 to 24. It offers a variety of workshops and services in a site that features fitness facilities, a teaching kitchen and a sound studio. Youth work with staff with whom they have bonded instead of being assigned a social worker. <http://nextgen.childrensaidsociety.org/>
- » TRAC—Transition Resource Action Centre in Dallas is a one-stop centre providing services to youth 14 - 24 who are transitioning from care. Individualized support and planning help youth in the areas of financial literacy, transportation, college tours, college preparation and housing. <http://www.traconline.org/>



⁵³Statistics Canada (2006)

⁵⁴Rutman (2005)



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Youth need a solid financial start in life. As good parents, agencies are trying to provide financial support requisite with the needs and goals of the youth with an annual cost of living increase that is consistent across agencies in a given region.

What We Know

- » There is inconsistency within regions and even within cities as to the funds youth receive.
- » ECM and independent living allowance rates were originally based on social assistance rates; youth in care need more than the maintenance of social assistance because they need to build a foundation.
- » Parents will often provide assistance with furniture and household items when a youth leaves home.
- » ECM amounts are below the poverty line based on the Low Income Cut-off and Market Basket Measures.

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Providing different amounts for:
 - ECM ranging from \$725 to \$1,000 per month

- independent living rates (generally the same as ECM rates)
- transportation
- clothing allowance (from one time per year only to seasonal)
- community activities
- birthday and seasonal gifts
- family visits
- start-up funds
- cell phone subsidy for safety reasons (youth can text or call worker)
- utility hook-up costs
- graduation gifts and clothing for prom

- » Negotiating savings targets with youth when they work and receive ECM. Some agencies have a "ceiling" on earnings beyond which youth are not eligible for financial support; others negotiate with the youth and place the funds in savings or trust accounts

- » Depositing ECM funds in savings accounts for youth when they are not following through with their responsibilities
- » Placing Survivor Benefits and Criminal Injuries Compensations funds in dedicated trust accounts to be accessed when youth are 21 or older; the agency supports the youth on decisions about using the funds

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Youth who earn additional funds relative to their need should be encouraged to put additional funds in savings. e.g. tax free savings accounts or guaranteed investment savings accounts that have a higher interest rate.
- » Each youth in care should have a savings account.
- » All workers should be aware of the agency funds and programs that youth can access so that there is consistency.
- » Establish regional agency commitment to consistency of rates with annual zone review and consideration for cost of living.
- » Ensure that youth receive funds relative to their need using all kinds of measures including the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-offs. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/75F0002MIE/75F0002MIE2008004.pdf>;





STAFFING

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Youth require more support at times of transition. Good parents provide more personal support as youth take on increased responsibilities and reach new milestones such as a first job, a first apartment or going to post-secondary education. Some agencies are trying to use staff time to help youth create and sustain permanent relationships with some emphasis on life skills development, completing school and addressing significant issues in their lives.

What We Know

- » Transition is a critical time. Youth need a continuous relationship and the ability to reach a supportive person immediately.
- » Agencies that support youth to remain in foster homes until age 21 have put their resources into supporting foster parents and fewer resources towards independence programming and staff.
- » Until the family model is the primary model for the majority of youth, staffing assistance is required to help youth with transition issues and life skills.

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Every worker continues with their youth and provides specific services related to transition. Their priority is stability and normalization of a primary relationship with the Children's

Services Worker. No other workers are introduced for transition issues.

- » Units and teams that work only with youth who are leaving from age 16 to 21; these teams have staff with different titles— independence workers, independence specialists, transitional specialists, child and youth workers, social work assistants—as well as administrative and supervisory staff.
- » The youth's primary worker remains the same (with documentation and case management responsibilities) and additional workers provide support around issues particular to youth's plan, like housing and life skills.
- » Transitional workers complete an assessment at 30 days and do a follow-up report every six months.
- » Caseloads for "independence workers" range from 12 - 33 depending on the scope of their responsibilities.
- » A waiting list exists for their independence support and programs.
- » Program staff work flexible hours including weekends and are available to youth via cell phone (dedicated number for this purpose).



YOUTH RIGHTS

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents help their children understand and stand up for their rights. Agencies are trying to provide resources so that youth understand their rights and responsibilities, specifically for the time period between 18 and leaving care.

What We Know

- » Youth under 18 have a rights and responsibilities publication available to them through CASs.
- » Youth over 18 have no such document.
- » Youth over 18 should be provided a plain language document of their rights.
- » Youth should be made aware of the Child and Family Services Review Board.
- » Youth need to be supported to continue to learn advocacy skills.
- » Youth receiving extended care have said they don't know what their rights are and they don't know if they have any recourse if they feel that their rights are not being respected.

Ideas on Which to Build

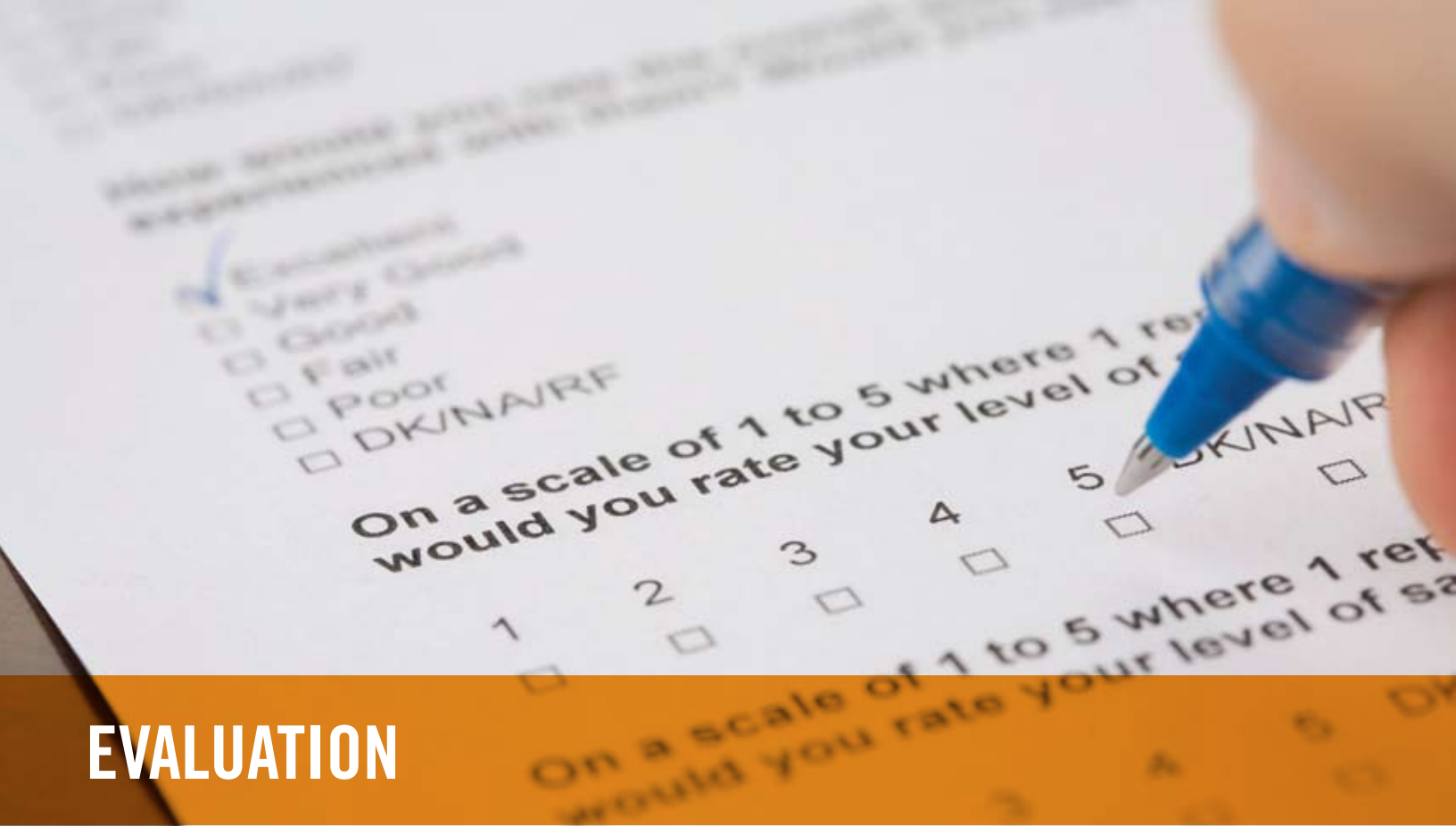
- » Each agency should participate in drafting a template detailing rights and responsibilities for youth over the age of 18; the template should be customized by each agency. Suggestions:

Content

- guidelines for ECM agreements in plain language
- Child and Family Services Review Board process
- responsibilities of youth receiving services
- emergency contacts at CAS
- emergency contacts in the community
- description of ways to participate in the agency

Distribution

- Brochure should be provided by the worker when the youth turns 18 and it should also be available in reception and online; youths should indicate receipt of this information in the ECM agreement.



EVALUATION

What Are We Trying to Achieve?

Good parents can demonstrate effective parenting with different children and youth. Knowing what services work, how they work and for how long can determine what is needed to improve them. Agencies must measure outcomes to understand the impact and effectiveness of their interventions so they can continue to refine services for the benefit of children and youth.

What We Know

- » Research can be retrospective, cross-sectional or longitudinal (prospective) or ongoing program evaluation.
- » At the provincial level there should be consistency in the collection of outcome data on key topics including Transition from Care outcomes.⁵⁵
- » At the program level, outcomes help to determine whether the services provided are meeting the needs of youth.
- » Longitudinal studies in other jurisdictions have used measures including education, employment, income, health, and whether or not a youth is parenting.
- » There is large-scale longitudinal research in the U.S. (Midwest study) that provides methodology for research of this type.⁵⁶

- » Potential corporate, community and government partners use outcomes in their funding deliberations.
- » At present very few agencies are doing outcome research.
- » At present, there is no consensus on what constitutes a successful outcome for youth.

Innovative Ideas: Ontario Examples

Agencies report:

- » Implementing some evaluation efforts when they deliver programs jointly with other community organizations
- » Planning for inclusion of feedback from former Crown wards in client feedback surveys

⁵⁵Goodman et al., (2008)

⁵⁶Courtney et al., (2007)

Innovative Ideas: Other Jurisdictions

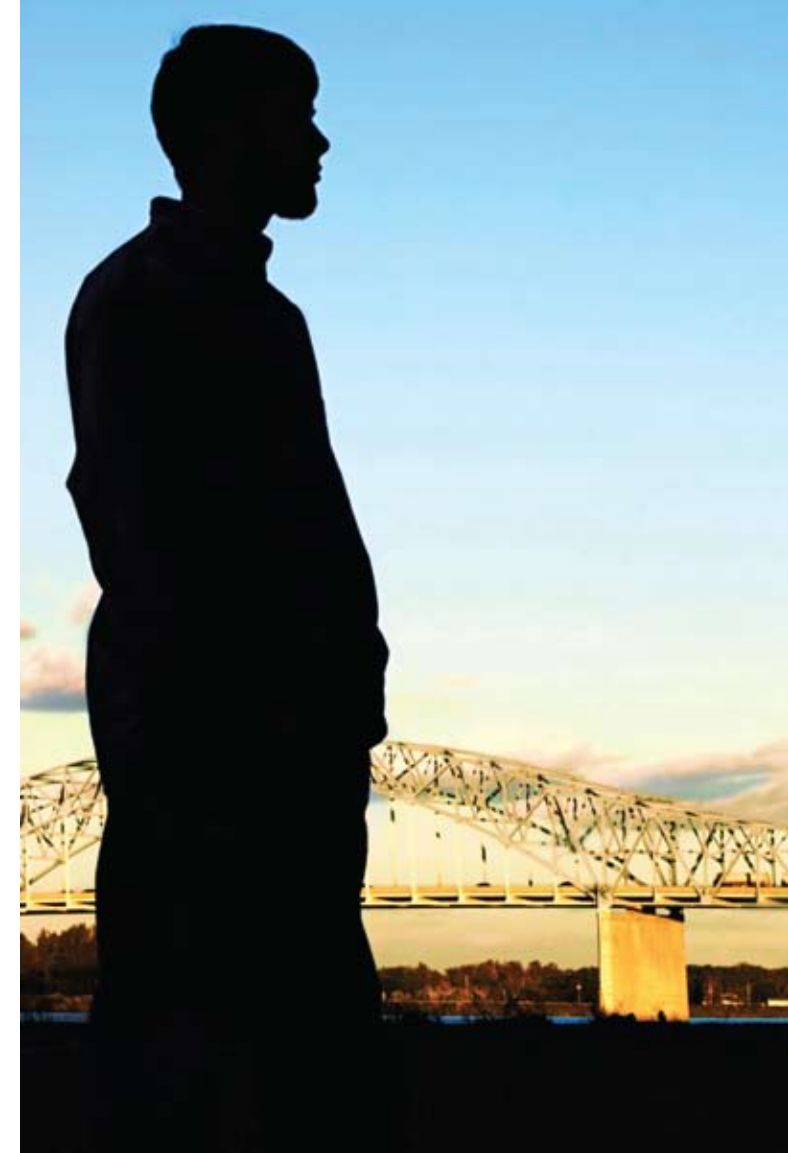
- » Programs in the United States follow their graduates for a period of time to establish outcome data and refine the services offered.
- » Organizations piloting permanency programs in the United States document their success (see examples on pages 10 and 11).
- » First Place for Youth in Oakland, California, uses one staff person to follow participants' progress for one year following the youth's exit from the program. Interviews are conducted by phone or in person at 3, 6 and 12 months following program graduation. The assessment consists of about 100 questions primarily regarding education, employment, housing, mental health, criminal justice involvement and connection to resources. When phone numbers aren't in service, they try to track down participants through other contacts.
- » Various sites that use the Jim Casey Opportunity Passport conduct detailed evaluations. www.kidscount.org/kcnetwork/issues/documents/RIJimCaseYouthinformationshee1.pdf

Ideas on Which to Build

- » Agencies may consider regional evaluations to offset costs.

Tools

- » www.kidscount.org/kcnetwork/issues/documents/RIJimCaseYouthinformationshee1.pdf
- » See <http://firstplaceforyouth.org/about/impact/> for an excellent example of how the evaluation materials are used.





CONCLUSION

When asked about fears about the future, one youth answered with a question: "Am I going to get there?"

The idea of "building bridges" comes from this youth's worry - and the clear objective - yes you will get to the future, safely and securely. "Building Bridges" is about how to span the gap.

Bridges require foundations. Engineers know this and design bridges and the systems for building them with this always topmost in their minds. Without the solid foundation necessary, bridges simply do not last and are, in fact, dangerous for every person who uses them and to society in general.

Youth, whether they are in their family of origin or in our collective care, require foundations. Parents know that for their own children providing that foundation is what a good parent will do. Collectively it is what we must do for those youth who, through no fault or reason of their own are committed to our care. We must be the 'engineers' who keep this belief topmost in our minds and design the systems that provide the very best foundations for our youth.

"This is scary for me. It brings a lot of stress, insecurities, and confusion. Because to me, I'm still a child in need of help, encouragement, and love. I am not ready to leave, and I am scared. I am sad and worried."

"I'm worried that I will have no one to lean on. That I will mess up. That something bad will happen and no one will even know."

"Who do you belong to when you are cut off?"⁵⁷

*These are the voices of youth. They want to belong to someone. Being in care generally means that you no longer belong to your biological family. It means that when youth leave foster care or "age out" they no longer belong. **They need to belong.***

It is our job, it is our responsibility, it is our privilege to do this, because if we do not build the very best "bridges to belonging", we fail both the youth, the 'users' of the bridges, and society as a whole, as society does not then reap the benefits from what all our youth, properly founded, can provide to themselves and us all.

⁵⁷OACAS Youth Leaving Care Report (2006) Verbatim quotes from youth focus groups

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<http://www.firstplaceforyouth.org/> The First Place Fund, Oakland.

<http://www.traconline.org/trac.htm> The Transition Resource Action Centre

<http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/JanFeb2007/2007-01-06.htm>

Article about independent living skills programs across the USA.

<http://www.sfilsp.org/home.html> San Francisco Independent Living Skills Program

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/HCP/Details/education/high-school-graduation-rate.aspx>

Conference Board of Canada, Education and Skills, High School Graduation Rate.

PERMANENCY PACT

In an effort to substantiate and sustain an on-going connection between a youth and a supportive adult,

SUPPORTIVE ADULT

pledges to provide specific support to, and has been accepted as a provider of such support by,

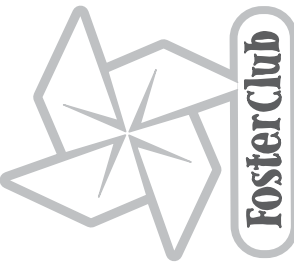
YOUTH

confirmed this _____ day of _____, _____

DAY MONTH YEAR

as witnessed by _____

FACILITATOR



Foster Club's Permanency Pact documents a life-long, kin-like commitment to a relationship between a youth and a supportive adult.

the national network for young people in foster care | www.fosterclub.org

A Home For The Holidays
 A Place To Do Laundry
 Emergency Place To Stay
 Food/Occasional Meals
 Care Packages At College
 Employment Opportunity
 Job Search Assistance
 Career Counseling
 Housing Hunt
 Recreational Activities
 Mentor
 Educational Assistance
 Relationship/Marriage/Parenting
 Transportation
 Assistance With Medical Appts
 Storage
 Motivation
 Someone To Talk To/Discuss Problems
 A Phone To Use
 A Computer To Use
 Clothing
 Spiritual Support
 Legal Troubles
 Cultural Experience
 Apartment Move-in
 Cooking Lessons/Assistance
 Regular Check-in
 Bills & Money Management Assistance
 Drug And Alcohol Addiction Help
 Mental Health Support
 Co-Signer
 Help Reading Forms, Complex Docs
 Mechanical/Building Projects
 Housekeeping
 Home Decorating
 Voting
 Volunteerism
 Finding Community Resources
 Safety And Personal Security
 Babysitting
 Emergency Cash
 Social Circle/Community Activities
 Advocacy
 Reference
 Adoption

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Our Mission

OACAS, in support of its members, is the voice of child welfare in Ontario, dedicated to providing leadership for the achievement of excellence in the protection of children and in the promotion of their well-being within their families and communities.

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