



## **Strategic Plan 2018-2021**

**Approved by YICC Board of Directors  
September 2018**



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This strategic plan will serve as a road map for guiding growth, managing priorities, and tracking progress for Youth in Care Canada (YICC) over the next three years. With this plan as its foundation for the coming years, the organization will seek to maintain a balance between being proactive towards its priorities and being reactive to new opportunities that may become available.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Youth in Care Canada is a national, charitable organization driven by youth and alumni from child welfare authorities across Canada. YICC exists to voice the opinions and concerns of youth in and from care.

Since 1985, we have engaged young people in and from care, and those who work with them, in research, policy development, and the training of caregivers and child welfare professionals. We have assisted in and supported the development of provincial and community-level youth in care networks across Canada, and we have helped to further the national and international youth in care networking movement. See **Annex A** for a list of key past initiatives of the organization.

YICC membership consists of youth in government care, youth transitioning out of care and alumni from care, as well as organizations and allies that support youth in Canada, and that play a role in child advocacy.

Backed by this plan, it is our hope that YICC will continue to have a positive impact on the lives of youth in care and alumni from care.

## 3. VISION, MISSION AND MANDATE

**Vision:** Our vision is that all young people in and from care across Canada know their rights and receive standardized, high quality care that meets their diverse needs.

**Mission:** YICC exists to voice the opinions and concerns of youth in and from care.



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**Mandate:**

- *Making Connections:* Providing support and networking opportunities to youth in and from government care and support the development of local and provincial youth in care networks across the country.
- *Making Change:* Increasing awareness of the rights and needs of young people in and from government care and improving their access to resources and support.

**4. GOVERNANCE**

The YICC Board of Directors is made up of no less than 5 and no more than 15 Directors. No more than 2 Directors can be elected from each province or territory. Individuals elected to the Board of Directors must be 18 years or older and members in good standing from the youth or alumni categories. To ensure the Board remains youth-focused, at least ½ of the Directors must be voting members (i.e. youth / alumni ages 18 – 29), however we also encourage alumni over the age of 30 to sit on the Board and provide mentoring and professional expertise. Directors are elected for 2-year terms and no Director can serve more than two consecutive terms (or 4 consecutive years).

**5. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

As the population in Canada grows, so does the number and diversity of young people in and from care. More specialized multi-disciplinary approaches are required to address and treat the increasing complexity of socio-economic disparities, cultural barriers, mental health issues and disabilities.

The 2016 Census marked only the second time that foster children were counted across the country. Among children in private households aged 14 and under, 28,030 were reported as foster children. Among indigenous children, 3% were reported as being in foster care. Data for youth aged 14-18 in care is not available on a national level, but research estimates that the Canadian systems domain involves well over 100,000 children and youth at any given time.

The legislation and policies that govern child welfare are the responsibility of each provincial and territorial government. This means that the services, support and resources available to children and youth are different across the country. Another aspect that differs among



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provinces and territories is the age of majority and therefore the age at which government's responsibility for guardianship ends.

Each province and territory uses its own language to classify the status of young people in care. There are a variety of categories of care that describe the young people and alumni served by Youth in Care Canada. Examples of these categories include:

- **Temporary Care:** Describes young people who have been removed from their parents' care (or placed into care by their parent) and placed under the temporary guardianship of the government, or a designated indigenous agency, until they can either be returned to their parent; a new guardianship can be determined (e.g. extended family); or they come under the permanent care of the government or designated indigenous agency. (Also known as: Temporary Ward, Temporary Custody Order.)
- **Permanent Care:** Describes young people who have been removed from their parents' care and are under the guardianship of the government, or a designated indigenous agency, until they can be adopted or they reach the age of majority in their province or territory. (Also known as: Crown Ward, Permanent Ward, Continuing Custody Order.)
- **Non-Care Agreements:** Describes young people in need of services and support who are not placed into care. The government, or designated indigenous agency, signs an agreement directly with the young person to determine what the expectations will be. Generally speaking, these expectations include participating full time in school and / or rehabilitation in exchange for financial support.
- **Extended or After Care Agreements:** Describes young people who have aged out of the child welfare system and are still in need of services and support. The government, or designated indigenous agency, signs an agreement directly with the young person to determine what the expectations will be. Generally speaking, these expectations include participating full time in school and / or rehabilitation in exchange for financial support.
- **Youth in Custody:** Some provinces and territories consider youth in custody, both in justice and mental health settings, eligible for membership regardless of whether or not their time in custody was under a child welfare authority or other government department.



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- **Traditional Customary Care:** For certain indigenous child welfare agencies, customary care refers to care throughout an individual's lifespan and it is a way of life in which the community takes care of its own members according to its own customs, traditions and standards. Customary care is sanctioned by tribal laws that are indigenous to each Band or Native community. Tribal laws give Chief and Council the authority to act on behalf of the community in matters related to child and family services. For this reason the contents of a Customary Care Agreement may vary between each Band or each indigenous community. The mandated Children's Aid Society may or may not be involved in traditional Customary Care Agreements. A traditional Customary Care Agreement may be entered into by a child, the child's parents, the child's Band, or the alternative caregivers who will be providing out-of-home care for the child, pursuant to the Band's customary care declaration.
- **Formal Customary Care:** Where a Children's Aid Society determines that an indigenous child is in need of protection, removal of the child from the parents/caregiver is required and there is a customary care declaration by the Band, the Society may grant a subsidy to the person caring for the child. Formal customary care is recognized as a culturally appropriate placement option for indigenous children, but the child's placement must be supervised by a Children's Aid Society pursuant to the Band declaration and the terms of a signed Customary Care Agreement. Financial assistance will not exceed foster care rates. A customary care child file must be created and child in care standards and recording requirements apply; a customary care home file is created and licensing standards apply.
- **Kinship Services:** If a child is unable to remain in his or her immediate family's care, outreach to extended family/kin is an option that must be considered and explored. These families are assessed in accordance with provincial foster care standards and regulations.
- **Adoption:** Adoption provides the child with a family for a lifetime, often called a "forever family". A child who is adopted has the same status and rights as if he/she were born into the family.
- **Youth Transitioning out of Care:** Supporting youth leaving care is a critical element of planning for the future of children and youth. In most provinces youth age out of care when they turn 18, but many still require support in some form or another. Programs for youth transitioning out of care vary from province to province.



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There are a number of strong and active provincial youth in care networks across the country, examples of which can be found in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick. Some provinces have no network at all, while others have youth-focused organizations that play a similar role as a network but may not be independent of child welfare agencies. Youth in Care Canada would like to facilitate helping provinces and territories establish, revitalize, rebuild or reaffirm independent and youth-led networks, and bring together all of Canada's youth in care networks and related organizations for discussions on common themes and trends in the child welfare system.

## **6. PRIORITIES FOR 2018-2021**

To fulfill its mandate, the Youth in Care Canada Board of Directors has set the following priorities for the next three years:

1. Continue to build the organization and expand its membership and partnerships
2. Increase national awareness of critical issues facing youth in care issues through research and knowledge-sharing, with a specific focus on disproportionately affected youth in care (ex. indigenous, LGBTQ+, etc.)
3. Engage youth in and from care through targeted outreach activities

These priorities will guide the work of the YICC and progress will be measured against them on a regular basis.

### **6.1 CONTINUE TO BUILD THE ORGANIZATION AND EXPAND ITS MEMBERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Youth in Care Canada continues to be in a period of rebuilding, and will need to keep taking concrete steps to stabilize its foundations for future growth. Over the past decade in particular, YICC has experienced significant transitions and must now focus on obtaining stable, long term funding to ensure that it can have a positive impact on youth in and from care.

Supporting and expanding our membership and partnerships is a key part of being able to deliver on our mandate. We need to be more visible, do more outreach, and gather more allies



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if we want to regain lost ground and get us on more solid footing. We also need to strengthen and build upon our relationship with provincial and territorial children and youth advocates.

**Key commitments** under this priority include:

- Update a strategic plan for 2018-2021
- Seek support to secure core funding to ensure the long term growth and stability of the organization
- Increase individual and organizational members through the development of a targeted membership recruitment strategy
- Develop a targeted outreach plan with provincial and territorial children and youth advocates
- Lead regular engagement with existing provincial and territorial youth in care networks
- Support the creation of youth in care networks where they do not currently exist, with a particular emphasis on Ontario and Alberta
- Recruit, train and mentor new Board members
- Organize at least one major fundraising initiative each year

## **6.2 INCREASE NATIONAL AWARENESS OF CRITICAL ISSUES FACING YOUTH IN CARE ISSUES THROUGH RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED YOUTH IN CARE (INDIGENOUS, LGBTQ+, ETC.)**

YICC has participated in and conducted a variety of research projects and advocacy initiatives over the past 30+ years. Issues related to the rights of young people in care, transitioning to independence and adulthood, the stigma associated with being in care and access to post-secondary education have been consistent themes and continue to be among the top priorities for young people and alumni of care.

Youth identify that change is needed at all levels. They recognize that change is required in legislation, policies, practices, screening, training, and monitoring. Specific areas of focus in terms of national standards include:

- rights legislation, education, resources and tools
- transition planning, extended care resources and after care support
- post-secondary education resources and support
- mandatory and specialized caregiver and service provider education



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- statistical data collection and reporting

With the introduction of Primer and Multi-Media Storytelling a few years ago, YICC began providing more formalized facilitator training to ensure the consistent delivery of these workshops. With future resources, we hope to revitalize these key tools and reach out to an even wider audience for the benefit of our members and partners.

In addition, education has been consistently identified as an area where outcomes for young people in and from care are significantly lower than those of non-systems youth. The most negative impacts can be directly related to interruptions caused by placement instability; limited financial resources; and a lack of expectation, encouragement, support and hope.

Young people in and from care, when given the opportunity and supported financially and emotionally to pursue their educational aspirations, can experience positive results similar to those young people who receive similar support from their families. An additional potential benefit from providing the resources necessary for young people from care to succeed academically is that many of these young people become passionate about utilizing their knowledge, skills and lived experience to “give back” by working in the child welfare field.

Over the last number of years we have seen many provinces begin offering more financial aid to youth in and from care, including tuition waivers and other forms of financial assistance. While a very positive development, there are still some gaps and some groups of youth in care that do not meet the criteria to make them eligible for such assistance. Additionally, there is no consistency in this kind of support across the country.

Building on past work, we seek to pursue research and awareness opportunities with the next generation of youth in and from care as well as those who work with them.

**Key commitments** under this priority include:

- Develop a national post-secondary education report card for youth in and from care and regularly update our interactive map for youth in and from care outlining the financial support available for post-secondary education in all provinces and territories
- Enhance information and resources available to support young people transitioning out of care



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- Launch a project specifically seeking the views of indigenous youth in and from care on key issues facing indigenous young people in the child welfare system
- Remain up to date and develop official positions on key reports or changes related to the child welfare system in Canada
- Continue the administration and promotion of the Ken Dryden Scholarship or other related projects supporting educational advancement for youth in and from care

### **6.3 ENGAGE YOUTH IN AND FROM CARE THROUGH TARGETED OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

In an age of instant communication and social media, it is critical that Youth in Care Canada take steps to reach its membership and partners through as many means of communication and outreach activities as possible. We need to have clear visibility and a constant presence on all communications platforms that reach our desired audience.

**Key commitments** under this priority include:

- Continue to ensure a relevant website and social media presence
- Create stronger brand awareness through the development and use of consistent promotional materials and platforms
- Distribute quarterly e-newsletters to members and partners
- Explore mechanisms to re-launch national youth gatherings
- Recognize members and supporters through e-newsletters and social media
- Promote provincial/territorial youth in care days/weeks and other youth in care related activities and events
- Strengthen the capacity of the organization to communicate with members in both official languages
- Create education and resource materials to facilitate self-sufficiency and advocacy (e.g. life skills, budgeting, information on rights, etc.)

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Youth in Care Canada is embarking on an important period in its 30+ year journey to improve the lives of youth in and from care. This strategic plan sets out a roadmap for its priorities and activities over the next three years. We are optimistic that we will succeed in meeting our objectives, and are committed to measuring progress on a regular basis. Together with our



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members and partners we will continue to make a difference and be an effective national voice for youth in and from care.



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## Annex A – KEY PAST INITIATIVES OF YOUTH IN CARE CANADA

1985 - 1990

- Canadian Child and Youth Care Workers' Association (CCYCWA) conference brings together young people in and from care and a national network for young people in and from care is conceived
- 1st National meeting held bringing together 19 youth from across Canada and 3 from UK
- Cross-Canada Motorcycle Development Trip
- First NYICN newsletter *Youth Exchange* published
- *Who Cares What I have to Say – Nobody Cares. Nobody!, On the Other Side, and To Be On Our Own... With No Direction Home* released
- NYICN becomes 'Incorporated' on August 31<sup>st</sup> 1990
- Secretary of State provides funding for national literacy project (4 cities)
- *Struggle Up* released

1991 - 1995

- *Caring for Children and Youth Who Have Been Sexually Abused* manual and *A Choice to Struggle Upward* video released
- *Thursday's Child – Child Poverty in Canada – A Review of the Effects of Poverty on Children* released
- *The Local Development Manual* released
- Adult Advisory Committee formed
- First National Director hired
- *Pain... Lots of Pain: Family Violence and Abuse in the Lives of Young People in Care* released
- National newsletter name changed to *The Networker*

1996 - 2000

- *Gambling With Our Lives* released
- *Into the Hands of Youth* released
- Ken Dryden Scholarship launched
- Partnership Development Project (BC, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick)
- The Rights Project partnership produces *Real Deal* rights awareness booklet for youth in care in Ontario
- NYICN develops first website



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- Co-host International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) conference youth program in Vancouver, BC
- Partnership Development Project Part 2 (Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario and Alberta)
- Presentation at International Foster Care Organisation conference in Hungary
- Coast 2 Coast Train Trip & Network Buffet Conference in Nova Scotia
- *Coast 2 Coast: A Nation of Youth Unite* video produced
- Partnership for Japan learning exchange
- National Leadership Training Retreat in Quebec
- *Funk'd* magazine for youth in care produced
- *Bifocal* magazine for service providers and caregivers produced
- *From the Roots Up* released
- *The Network Connection* development manual and *Local Development Workers' Survival Guide* released
- Research project on youth in care and school
- Youth for Youth Reintegration: A Model Development Project

#### 2001 - 2005

- National Wide Open Conference in Saskatchewan
- Primer Project
- National Independence Summer Camps
- YouthSpeak
- National Independence Summer Camps
- Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) Task Force
- Primer, *Broken Fairytales*, *Power of Support*, and *Speak The Truth* released
- Sections 35 and 43, Institutional Abuse, Peer Helping, Teen Moms, Inquests, Chemical Management, and Adult Support

#### 2006 - 2010

- Atlantic Summer Camp
- Wards of the Crown Project
- Sharing Our Stories to Make a Difference: Resiliency, Engagement and Access to Education (AKA "Education Project")
- Storytelling For Change Youth Development Workshops (Ontario)
- Two Multimedia Storytelling Train-the-Trainer sessions in Alberta (Volumes 1 and 2 produced)



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- Multimedia Storytelling workshops held in Manitoba (Saskatchewan participated) and Alaska
- Social Cause Marketing Strategy and Developmental Evaluation
- Board training provided by Volunteer Vancouver
- NYICN updates organizational doctrine, changes 'trade or public' name to Youth in Care Canada and launches a re-vamped website
- *Drugs in Our System: An Exploratory Study on the Chemical Management of Canadian Systems Youth* released
- Multimedia Storytelling plenary and Workshop at the International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) Conference in Ireland
- National Ask! Listen! Believe! Conference in Ontario
- NYICN's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

#### 2011 - 2016

- Planning Committee Member for the International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) Conference in British Columbia
- Primer materials updated and facilitator training held as part of the VOICES – Manitoba's Youth in Care Network retreat
- Planning Committee Member for the International Summit of Youth in Care (ISYIC) in Baltimore, Maryland
- Administered the Ken Dryden Scholarship
- Met with young people, organisations and adult supporters across Canada to obtain their help in rebuilding the YICC
- Election of "renewal" Board of Directors
- Completed transition to the new Federal Corporations Act
- Development and approval of new by-laws and new strategic plan
- Opening of a new office in Ottawa

#### 2017-

- Launched new youth-friendly, accessible website
- Developed new online membership application form and improved membership management capabilities
- Contributed to report by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada on mentoring
- Launched interactive map outlining supports in each province for youth in and from care
- Moved the Ken Dryden Scholarship to an online platform
- Held first annual major fundraiser in Ottawa