

**Ask. Listen. Believe.**

## **National Report Card**

**National Youth in Care Network  
November 2011**

**Nicole Herbert, NYICN National Conference Coordinator  
Yvonne Andrews, NYICN Interim Executive Director**

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## About the National Youth in Care Network

The National Youth in Care Network (trade name Youth in Care Canada) is a national charitable organization driven by youth and alumni of care across Canada. The NYICN exists to voice the opinions and concerns of youth in and from care and promote the improvement of services for this group.

The NYICN mandate is to:

- Increase the awareness of the needs of youth in and from government care by researching the issues and presenting the results to youth, child welfare professionals and the general public through research, publications and speaking engagements.
- Provide emotional support to youth in and from state care.
- Guide the development of Youth in Care Networks

We are the only national constituency-driven, consumer-focused organization in the child welfare sector. We are the longest-running national child welfare organization in Canada, and the oldest national youth-directed organization in Canada.

Since 1985 we have conducted research, participated in policy development, advised and trained caregivers and child welfare professionals, and supported the development of over 70 provincial and community level youth in care networks in Canada. We provide social service programming in the areas of networking, advocacy and education.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, the National Youth in Care Network would like to thank all of the young people and alumni from care who participated in our provincial and territorial report card consultations, and who attended our national conference in Ottawa. Without your willingness to express your concerns, opinions, and ideas, this project would not be a success. The diversity of your experiences and your courage in sharing your stories has contributed to improving the wellbeing of your peers across Canada.

In particular, we would like to thank our National Child Day Media Panel presenters Shanna Allen, Jessica Auger, Colby Gates, Lucas Kreft, Dallas Thompson, and Lilia Zaharieva for eloquently representing the key messages put forward by their peers during the conference.

The National Youth in Care Network would like to acknowledge and thank the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children for their willingness to share the voice of youth in and from care in their report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Children.

The National Youth in Care Network would also like to extend our appreciation to the following organizations for their outstanding support and contributions during our national conference and for their participation as provincial and territorial report card facilitators and/or report card writers:

- Alberta Youth in Care & Custody Network
- Children's Aid Society Teens, Ottawa-Carlton Children's Aid Society
- Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse / Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission, Quebec
- Federation of British Columbia Youth in Care Networks
- Office of the Children's Advocate, Manitoba
- Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta
- Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Newfoundland
- Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, Ontario
- Office of the Ombudsman, Nova Scotia
- Office of the Ombudsman, Child and Youth Advocate, New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association
- Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (Ontario)
- Partners for Youth – New Brunswick Youth in Care Network
- Prince Edward Island Youth in Care Network
- Saskatchewan Youth in Care & Custody Network
- VOICES – Manitoba's Youth in Care Network
- YouthCan (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies)
- Youth Voices of Nova Scotia Society
- Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office

- Yukon Family and Children's Services

## Introduction

In Canada, there are an estimated 80,000 children and adolescents under the age of 18 living in the child welfare system. 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, and in some cases, from one community to the next. These inconsistencies are also seen in the ways that the rights of young people in government care are promoted and protected. It is important to note that the Federal Government is responsible for funding Aboriginal child welfare services.

Youth identify that change is needed at all levels. They recognize that change is required in legislation, policies, practices, screening, training, and monitoring. Young people in and from care in Canada would like to see fair and consistent standards for themselves, their peers, and for future generations, especially when it comes to their rights. They also want to be active participants in their own lives – involved not only in decisions that affect them directly but also in improving the system as a whole. They want to educate their peers, the adults who work with and care for them, and the community. They want to share stories of success and generate hope.

Young people have made it clear that there is a need for better communication and information sharing between young people and adults, and within the system in general. Young people expect that service providers and caregivers are aware of the rights of young people and the resources available to them and share this with them. They also want adults to be more honest with them about why decisions are made. Young people also believe in the value of mentorship, particularly from alumni of care when it comes to the transition to independence, as well as cultural mentors and educational mentors.

To make this a reality, all stakeholders including youth and alumni from care, youth in care networks, child welfare agencies, child and youth advocates, and our governments must work together to begin developing national standards and policies that ensure the very best of care for all of our young people.

## Provincial and Territorial Key Themes

41 priority issues and concerns were identified by participants from the 12 consultations held in preparation for our national conference. We grouped similar topics together to generate a list of issues and concerns for national conference participants to discuss and prioritize. Based on these similarities, the following 20 topics have been highlighted.

- Access to extracurricular activities
- Access to resources and services while in care
- Accessing social workers
- Connections to family
- “Cycle” of being in care
- Education (high school and postsecondary)
- Extension of services and support after care
- Government as “parents”
- Housing and placement security
- Immigration and cultural sensitivity
- Kinship care
- Participation in decision-making
- Personal health and safety
- Placement or systemic rules and age-appropriate choices
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Rights of youth in care
- Stigma of being in and from care
- Systemic abuse
- Training of staff
- Transition to independence/adulthood and permanency

There were also three main themes that surfaced from the comments and observations included in the provincial and territorial report cards and set the tone for the rest of this report.

### *Equality*

For many young people in and from care, the experience of being treated differently from other young people is a major concern. This is reflected in both their right and expectation to be treated fairly by the system and professionals, as well as the desire to be treated as “normal” in their placements and communities. Young people identified that differences in legislation (law) from province to province or territory, differences in the policies among departments and agencies, and the many different interpretations of rules by individuals in positions of authority seem to be dependent on a young person’s care status, level of empowerment, and support network. Even more disturbing were the stories of young people being excluded

from decision-making, school outings, and foster family activities leaving them feeling unimportant, abnormal, and unwanted by those working with and caring for them.

### *Resources*

Access to resources and supports including financial, educational, and emotional is another real concern for young people in and from care. Our participants identified that their needs started long before they were taken into care and continued after they were discharged from the system. Many spoke of the need for more prevention and early intervention services to keep families together. Others focused on the long-term impacts of being in care, as well as their desire to be safe and supported while in care. At the same time, they indicated that these supports should be available to them until they are prepared to transition to healthy independence and become contributing members of society. Perhaps most important to mention here is that participants identified that *“money will only solve part of the problem.”* In order to improve the resources that currently exist and to make these available to all young people, participants stated that those responsible for their care at all levels must work more meaningfully and collaboratively with young people and each other.

### *Relationships*

Participants believe that relationships are extremely important to their development. They pointed out that developing and maintaining healthy relationships is a challenge. Abuse, abandonment, negative family dynamics, moving placements and schools, changing workers, emotional or mental health issues, stigma, poor social skills, and many other barriers often leave young people without a support network. Young people need to feel safe and supported. They need to have positive role models, appropriate mentors, and opportunities to connect with their extended families and engage with their peers.



## Provincial and Territorial Key Recommendations

### Executive Summary

The following recommendations were developed from the National Youth in Care Network's Provincial and Territorial Report Card Consultation Project conducted from September to November 2010, and discussions held with young people and alumni from care during our national conference held November 17-21, 2010 in Ottawa, Ontario. More detailed information is provided later in this report.

The recommendations here have been summarized to reflect the "Top 5" national priorities identified during our national conference:

1. Rights of Youth in Care
2. After Care Services and Supports
3. Education
4. Transitioning to Independence/Adulthood and Permanence
5. Connections to Family

We have also included recommendations related to other important priorities from our report card consultations, namely:

6. Culture and Identity
7. Safety
8. Health
9. Social Stigma

Throughout all our recommendations the theme of wellbeing is discussed. Our recommendations are intended to begin developing national best practice standards for young people in and from the child welfare system in Canada.

The terms "youth" and "young people" are used to describe young people ages 14-18 and the term "alumni" refers to individuals who have aged out of care. "Participants" refers to youth and alumni who participated in our consultations and conference. The term "we" refers to our provincial and territorial report card participants, conference participants, project partners and the National Youth in Care Network.

1. We, the National Youth in Care Network, report card participants, and national conference participants recommend that the federal government of Canada work with all provincial and territorial ministries and child and youth advocate offices to ensure that rights legislation for children and youth in care is standardized across the country to better safeguard the rights and wellbeing all young people in care.

2. We recommend that the Canadian government appoint a National Children's Commissioner to monitor and report on the rights and wellbeing of young people in care in Canada with a strong emphasis on Aboriginal youth in care.
3. We recommend that provincial youth in care networks, the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, and the National Youth in Care Network actively participate in the establishment of a National Children's Commissioner and in ongoing evaluations of this role.
4. We recommend that the Canadian government work with all provincial and territorial ministries and the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates to establish independent offices of child and youth advocates in all provinces and territories.
5. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries ensure that young people in care are adequately and regularly informed about their right to request a review of their plan of care. This includes a review of their placement, school, personal file and the appropriate request process. Young people must also be informed of the complaints procedures available to them should their request be denied or when information within their file is withheld. Young people should be welcome to contribute to their file in writing either to comment on or to correct inaccurate documentation. To ensure that young people are heard in this review, they must be supported to invite an advocate of their choice, and to directly contribute to this review including opportunities to have their comments included in their file, or to correct inaccurate documentation.
6. We recommend that all young people entering the child welfare system receive rights information that is appropriate to their age, first language, and abilities. Rights information should be available in a variety of formats including booklets (print and braille), video, audio, and online. These resources should be reviewed with the young person by either their case worker or immediate caregiver on a regular basis.
7. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries develop guides with all current resources available to young people in care. These guides must be consistent, easy to understand, and easily accessible in print and online.
8. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries inform young people in care about their right to review their case file and of the appropriate request process. Young people must also be informed of the complaints procedures available to them should their request be denied or when information within their file is withheld. Young people should be

welcome to contribute to their file in writing either to comment on or to correct inaccurate documentation.

9. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries review and, where necessary, revise the policies surrounding placement discharge. A young person should not lose his or her bed and be moved unless a “mandatory notification” has been processed, in which case the young person must be informed of the appeal procedures available to him or her. Young people should also be informed of their right to an advocate of their choice should they decide to appeal decisions related to their placements.
10. We recommend that all case workers be required to explain financial entitlements to young people in their care, as well any changes to these policies as they occur. Young people should be informed about how to request funds they are entitled to, and how to appeal decisions that result in withholding funds.
11. We recommend that each provincial and territorial ministry collaborate with their provincial or territorial child advocate or ombudsperson and provincial youth in care networks to conduct an annual report card consultation on the rights and wellbeing of youth in care.
12. We recommend that the National Youth in Care Network partner with the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children to write national biannual reports based on provincial and territorial report cards to accurately monitor the rights and wellbeing of young people in and from care across Canada.
13. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries provide bursaries and/or financial assistance to young people from care (including those who were temporary wards, permanent wards or lived in kinship care) to attend postsecondary education up to age 25.
14. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries provide young people leaving care an opportunity to participate in an exit interview. This should include a review of their file, an interview to assess young people’s level of satisfaction with the services they received, and any recommendations they have to improve the care system.
15. We recommend that aftercare support workers be assigned to all young people who have transitioned from care for at least one year. These individuals would meet with the young person on a regular basis, provide home visits, and offer support wherever possible including referrals and basic counselling where needed.

16. We recommend that extended placement options be provided to young people over the age of 18 who are attending school.
17. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries establish more supported independent living programs and housing for young people ages 16 – 21. These programs are intended to support and prepare young people well before the transition to independence.
18. We recommend that regional managers of child welfare agencies ensure that case workers and caregivers are supported to promote stable, long-term placement options to their young people. Placement changes and school interruptions should be kept to a minimum for young people in care.
19. We recommend that all young people in care be encouraged and supported to participate in recreational and extracurricular activities within their schools.
20. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries provide bursaries and/or financial assistance to young people from care (including those who were temporary wards, permanent wards or lived in kinship care) to attend post secondary education up to age 25.
21. We recommend that all young people in or from care who are attending postsecondary education be provided with a support worker up to the age of 25.
22. We recommend that case workers, caregivers, and other adult supports should demonstrate higher expectations of young people in and from care and challenge them in healthy ways to achieve academic success. Caregivers should also be well informed about the resources and supports available to assist young people in care to complete high school and access postsecondary education.
23. We recommend that all provinces and territories extend the age at which young people have access to child welfare services and supports to 25 years of age. As part of this recommendation, a national review of programs that have successfully supported permanency and programs that provide extended care supports for those over age 18 should be considered.
24. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries review their placement screening procedures to ensure caregivers are genuine, caring people. Caregivers should be required to complete initial and ongoing training to promote longer-term placements and fewer cases of placement breakdown.

25. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries review and, where necessary, revise the policies surrounding placement discharge. A young person should not lose his or her bed and be moved unless a “Mandatory Notification” has been processed, in which case the young person must be informed of the appeal procedures available to him or her. Young people should also be informed of their right to an advocate of their choice should they decide to appeal decisions related to their placements.
26. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries review the average number of young people to staff or social worker ratio in order to reduce caseloads, prevent case worker and caregiver “compassion fatigue” and allow for more contact and better relationship-building with young people.
27. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries and foster parent associations collaborate with their provincial youth in care networks or the National Youth in Care Network to implement youth-friendly and age-appropriate life skills and preparation for independence training. This training should be offered to young people no later than 16 years of age or a minimum of two years prior to aging out of care.
28. We recommend that caregivers teach young people in their care how to set up and manage a bank account. Set up savings and investment plans with young people and teach them to manage their money and save for things they need or want.
29. We recommend that all young people in care preparing to transition out of the system be provided with a transitions worker at least 90 days prior to leaving care. This individual would assist the young person in securing affordable housing, furniture, and other start-up necessities.
30. We recommend that every young person entering the child welfare system receive a lifebook. This lifebook should reflect family and extended family of origin (as much as is appropriate), information about their culture, and life while in care. Every effort should be made to engage the young person to keep their lifebook up-to-date.
31. We recommend that legislation and policies be developed and strengthened to emphasize the importance, value, and expectation of maintaining family and extended family connections as a right. Case workers and caregivers should encourage and support young people to have contact with their families unless this places the young person at risk. Contact should never be denied or limited as a consequence for issues related to the young person’s behaviour.

32. We recommend that case workers keep in touch with the young person's biological or adoptive family to ensure contact remains an option in the future even if it is not currently appropriate or wanted.
33. We recommend that regional child welfare offices make every effort to ensure that siblings are not separated unless absolutely necessary (e.g., due to a safety risk). When this is not possible, child welfare authorities should at minimum keep siblings within the same community and support regular visits.
34. We recommend that foster parent associations and training programs for foster parents emphasize the importance of encouraging their young people to interact with and participate in family activities alongside biological children of care providers.
35. We recommend that young parents from care are provided with the option to attend parenting skill-building opportunities so they can keep their children.
36. We recommend that when an apprehension is necessary, daily physical contact between mother and baby should be encouraged whenever possible.
37. We recommend that each provincial and territorial ministry create more placement options for young parents in care to have their children living with them.
38. We recommend that more preventative measures be taken to ensure that Aboriginal children and youth living on reserve are not removed from their homes and/or communities when child welfare intervention is required. When no other option is available, either through on-reserve child welfare services or extended family, it is recommended that young people be placed into or supported by off-reserve Aboriginal child welfare services in order to maintain their cultural connections.
39. We recommend that the Federal Government allocate more funding to on-reserve child welfare services. First Nations children and youth in care on-reserve have the right to equitable and culturally appropriate care. Federal government funding is currently inadequate and must be increased.
40. We recommend that all child welfare agencies make every effort to ensure that all Aboriginal children and youth (status and non-status) are provided with meaningful opportunities to learn about their culture, traditions and family of origin.
41. We recommend that case workers demonstrate a basic understanding of and ability to navigate the immigration system. Case workers should know how

- to advocate on behalf of young people in order to confirm their immigration status, help them maintain their cultural identity, and fast track the process of receiving legal status for children or youth new to Canada.
42. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries make efforts to ensure better cultural matching at the request of children and young people in care. When this is not possible, caregivers must be well-informed about different cultures, resources, communities, and mentors available to the young person so that they may maintain, learn about, or develop their cultural identity.
  43. We recommend that all case workers assigned to new immigrant or refugee children and youth in care make every effort to investigate all options for the young person to be safely reunified with their families whenever possible and with the young person's consent as according to Article 10 of the Convention.
  44. We recommend that all provinces and territories legislate the right of children to be free from all forms of violence including physical punishment.
  45. We recommend that all immediate caregivers be required to attend non-violent crisis intervention training every two years.
  46. We recommend that child welfare agencies conduct regular scheduled and unscheduled placement visits to ensure that the environment is safe for all residents.
  47. We recommend that stricter guidelines and supports are established to appropriately assess, monitor and support the emotional and mental health needs of young people in care. The use of pharmaceuticals must be viewed as a last resort.
  48. We recommend that when medication is deemed necessary, all efforts are made to do so with the young person's consent. Health care providers, case workers, and caregivers must work with the young person to ensure that other forms of support are provided including regular counselling, reassessment of their health needs and affects of medication, and opportunities for the young people to learn how to manage their health needs appropriately.
  49. We recommend a nation-wide review of the policies and practices that are in place within child welfare systems to assess the emotional and mental health of young people placed into care. The purpose of this review is to help indicate gaps in service, as well as best practice approaches to promoting healthy childhood/adolescent development.

50. We recommend that caregivers seek ways to extend positive or healthy activities that the young person was involved in before coming into care. Maintaining these activities can make the transition into care and between placements less traumatic for young people and supports healthy attachment.
51. We recommend that all child welfare agencies provide more funding and opportunities for young people to participate in a wide-range of healthy activities that meet their individual needs.
52. We recommend that all young people are provided with opportunities to socialize with their peers including extra-curricular school activities, and participation in local or provincial youth in care networks.
53. We recommend that the National Youth in Care Network's Primer Sensitivity Training program be implemented and mandated across the country for workers, caregivers, educators, and others working with young people in and from care.
54. We recommend that all provinces and territories extend the age at which young people have access to child welfare services and supports to 25 years of age. As part of this recommendation, a national review of programs that have successfully supported permanency and programs that provide extended care supports for those over age 18 should be considered.
55. We recommend that the Federal Government of Canada work with the National Youth in Care Network and the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates to establish a National Youth in Care Day.



## Background

In order to report on the ideas, concerns and opinions of young people in care today, the National Youth in Care Network realized a national consultation was needed. The purpose of our consultations was to provide opportunities for youth and alumni from care to openly voice their opinions about the services and supports available to them, as well as their overall wellbeing.

We also wanted to learn about their level of understanding of their rights and the resources that exist to ensure their rights are respected. Most importantly, we wanted to hear young people's recommendations to help improve the system for themselves and their younger peers. It was our goal to then share this information on a national level in the form of a National Report Card. This report would be shared with youth and alumni from care, provincial and federal governments, child welfare agencies, and child and youth advocates to begin developing youth-led policy and best practice standards across the country.

To ensure these consultations were consistent and relevant to youth and alumni in all provinces and territories, we turned to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a foundation for rights discussions. Canada ratified the UNCRC in 1991, making it our only national rights charter for children and youth.

### **NYICN Provincial and Territorial Report Card Framework**

Meaningful engagement is very important to the NYICN and all youth in care networks across Canada. As we began planning our consultations, we referred to existing youth-friendly models including the Next Step developed by the McCreary Centre Society (MCS) and YouthSpeak, developed in partnership between MCS, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN), and the former BC Child, Youth and Family Advocate's office. We also drew from youth-led research models used by the NYICN over the years. Within all these models, participants are engaged in discussions that help prioritize their issues, needs, and opinions. The result is a better understanding of the impacts, challenges, and solutions to their problems.

The provincial and territorial report card framework was developed as a guide to assist the National Youth in Care Network and project partners in the step-by-step planning and facilitation of in-person consultations with young people in and from care. It was designed to ensure that information was provided and collected in a safe, sensitive, and consistent way across the country.

The framework was circulated to project partners who were invited to provide feedback before it was used in the provinces and territories. As groups began planning and facilitating their consultations, NYICN staff were available to provide support and co-facilitate consultations when requested.

## **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was created in 1989. It was developed in consultation with human rights experts, community leaders, child welfare agencies, government officials, and policy makers from around the world.

When countries ratify the UNCRC this means that they agree to and accept the obligation to respect, protect, promote, and fulfill the rights of children and youth in their country. This includes adopting or changing laws and policies that will help to implement the rights within the Convention.

*“... countries must ensure that all children - without discrimination in any form - benefit from special protection measures and assistance; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about and participate in, achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner.” UNCRC*

For the purpose of this project and our focus on young people in and from care in Canada, the following 10 UNCRC articles were discussed most directly during the consultations:

### **Article 9 (Separation from parents)**

You should not be separated from your parents unless it is for your own good (for example, if a parent is mistreating or neglecting you). If your parents have separated, you have the right to stay in contact with both parents unless this might harm you.

### **Article 12 (Respect for the views of the Child: Freedom of expression)**

You have the right to get and to share information as long as the information is not damaging to yourself or others.

### **Article 19 (Protection from all forms of violence)**

Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse, and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

### **Article 20 (Children deprived of family environment)**

If you cannot be looked after by your own family, you must be looked after properly by people who respect your religion, culture, and language.

### **Article 21 (Adoption)**

If you are adopted, the first concern must be what is best for you. The same rules should apply whether the adoption takes place in the country where you were born or if you move to another country.

**Article 25 (Review of treatment in care)**

If you are looked after by your local authority rather than your parents, you should have your situation reviewed regularly.

**Article 27 (Adequate standard of living)**

You have a right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet your physical and mental needs. The government should help families who cannot afford to provide this.

**Article 30 (Children of minorities and Indigenous groups)**

You have a right to learn and use the language, customs, and traditions of your culture, as well as the right to practise the religion of your choice whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where you live.

**Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture)**

You have a right to relax, play, and join in a wide range of activities.

**Article 39 (Rehabilitation of child victims)**

If you have been neglected or abused, you should receive special help to restore your self-respect.

**Report Card Participants**

Between September and November 2010, a total of 12 report card consultations were held in 8 provinces and one territory. 20 organizations across Canada partnered with the NYICN to support the consultations. 5 were hosted by provincial youth in care networks, 2 were hosted by programs focused on young people in and from care, and the rest were co-hosted by various combinations of local youth in care networks, youth-serving agencies, provincial advocate's offices, and child and youth departments of government.

In total, 166 young people between the ages of 13 and 24 were engaged in report card consultations. Of those, 113 were youth ages 14 to 19 and 53 were alumni of care ages 19 to 24. In addition to these young people, there were also a number of alumni over the age of 25 and youth-serving professionals who volunteered to assist with the consultations. The role of adult supports was to take in-depth notes, provide youth-friendly support, and debrief any issues or strong emotional responses that might arise from discussions.

Following the consultations, each province and territory submitted their report card results electronically. Report card themes and recommendations were then used as the foundation for national discussions held from November 17 to 21, 2010, in Ottawa, Ontario during the NYICN's *Ask! Listen! Believe! 2010: A National Conference for Young People and Alumni from Care*. Representatives from each of the consultations presented their results during the conference.

The information gathered from the report cards and national conference discussions will also be included in the NYICN's contribution to the *Civil Society Report on Children's Rights in Canada* which will be submitted by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) to the Government of Canada in November 2011. In February 2012, the Civil Society Report will be submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. For more information about the CCRC and the rights of children in Canada, go to [www.rightsofchildren.ca](http://www.rightsofchildren.ca).

## National Conference

From November 17-21, 2010, the National Youth in Care Network hosted *Ask! Listen! Believe! 2010: A National Conference for Young People and Alumni from Care* in Ottawa, Ontario.

The main purpose of this conference was to engage our members from across the country in national discussions based on provincial and territorial report card results and to begin developing youth-led recommendations for national best practice standards for all young people in care.

More information on workshops and special guest speakers at the conference are provided at the end of this report.

### **Conference Participants**

In total, 9 of the 10 provinces and one of the 3 territories were represented at the conference. The number of daily participants ranged from 117 to 122 as a few individuals were day participants or workshop presenters.

Participants represented provincial and local youth in care networks, provincial and regional child welfare offices or Children's Aid Societies, child and youth advocate offices, foster family associations, and other youth serving organizations. Also in attendance that week were 5 of our original founding members who established the National Youth in Care Network in 1985. More information about the conference week and outcomes will be provided in the final report.

### **NYICN National Conference Discussions**

On the opening day of the conference, delegates from each province and territory presented their report cards to their peers and adult supports. This provided an opportunity for all delegates to learn about the issues, concerns, and ideas of others from across the country and to begin identifying their shared themes and recommendations.

Following the report card presentations, youth, alumni, and adult delegates discussed what the terms "prevention" and "intervention" meant to them. As these

two topics were raised consistently throughout the provincial and territorial report cards, the NYICN wanted to learn more about how young people and alumni from care understood these terms according to their own experiences.

*Prevention:* Participants described prevention as being surrounded by natural supports and people who understand, develop trust, and show you they care. For some, it was about respect for yourself and others and involved taking action (e.g., keeping families together, educating your young people about their rights). For other participants, prevention was service-based and included programs that addressed self-esteem, empowerment, and life skills, and having places to go for help.

*Intervention:* For the majority of participants, intervention was a much more concrete term that described direct services, some of which might be considered preventative in nature by professionals. Some of the examples given included:

- Doing something when you see a young person falling through the cracks
- Healing activities
- Counselling and parenting support
- Tutoring, training, and opportunities to get more experience
- Elders providing teachings and support in the home
- Reconnecting family, culture, and community
- Kinship care
- Family group conferencing
- Inter-agency cooperation
- Youth in care networks
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs

Overall, relationships and ongoing communication were identified as being important both to prevention and intervention. These relationships were also identified as an important part of making sure that young people are appropriately informed, understand what is happening and why, and have a voice in decisions affecting them.

### **Process**

The following list of 20 topics was collated from all 41 topics identified in the provincial and territorial report card consultations. From this list, participants were asked to prioritize their top 5 issues and concerns as individuals. (Note that participants were not expected to prioritize the topics identified in their own province or territory.)

Participants were then assigned to discussion groups. Each of the top 5 issues and concerns was assigned to one group for discussion. Each group was assigned an adult support person or alumni over the age of 24 to facilitate discussions and ensure notes were taken so the youth and alumni under age 24 could participate

actively. Each group then presented the highlights of their work back to all participants.

### **National Priorities**

The list below has been ordered by the number of votes received from conference participants (ages 14 to 24 only). The top 5 bolded topics were considered national priorities:

#### **Top National Priorities**

- 1. Rights of youth in care (43)**
- 2. Extension of services and supports after care (41)**
- 3. Education (38)**
- 4. Transitioning to independence/adulthood and permanency (32)**
- 5. Connections to family (21)**

#### Other Priorities

6. Participation in decision-making (19)
7. Housing and placement security (16)
8. Immigration and cultural sensitivity (15)
9. Stigma of being in and from care (12)
10. Access to resources and services in care (10)
11. Systemic abuse and safety of youth in care (10)
12. Government as “parents” (10)
13. Personal health and safety of youth in care (9)
14. Access to extracurricular activities (9)
15. Accessing social workers (9)
16. Placement/systemic rules and age-appropriate choices (9)
17. Training of staff (7)
18. Privacy and confidentiality (4)
19. “Cycle” of being in care (4)
20. Kinship care (2)

## **Top National Priorities and Recommendations**

### **1. RIGHTS OF YOUTH IN CARE**

#### ***Why is this an issue or concern?***

- Young people and workers lack awareness about rights.
- Rights are not explained in youth-friendly language or format.
- Rights are not respected and people are not held accountable.
- Youth voice is not getting heard.
- Rights and rules are inconsistent across placements, agencies, and provinces.

### ***What's working?***

- Your Life – Your Rights in British Columbia
- Rights 2 Success (R2S) in British Columbia
- Yellow Book, a youth-friendly rights pamphlet in Ontario
- Moving, Moving On, Moving Out in Manitoba
- System Kidz radio show in Manitoba
- Advocates' offices
- Internet access to rights information

### ***What can young people do about this?***

- Ask for help and advice.
- Speak up and share experience.
- Advocate for yourself and others.
- Get involved in advocacy groups, committees, or initiatives.
- Re-write rights materials and produce rights videos.
- Host “rights nights” or focus groups to educate youth, caregivers, and workers.
- Promote national legislation on rights for youth in care.

### ***What can adults and the system do about this?***

- Respect the rights of youth in care.
- Advocates and adult liaisons help advocate for young people.
- Host and/or support groups to discuss issues and concerns.
- Share resources and success stories.
- NYICN to develop national framework for rights of youth in care.
- Develop and support youth in care networks.
- More youth appreciation.

### ***Recommendations***

- Create a National Youth in Care Advisory Board to work with government.
- Standardize the rights of youth in care across Canada.
- Create a National Child and Youth Advocate who will engage with the NYICN to promote rights and address rights violation issues.
- Develop rights of youth in care website by and for children and youth.
- Develop rights of youth in care video(s) by and for children and youth.
- Develop age-appropriate rights materials.
- Create a national campaign focused on decreasing the negative stigma associated with children and youth in care.
- Mandate NYICN's Primer sensitivity training nationally for workers, caregivers, educators, and others working with young people in and from care.
- Create more opportunities for recognition and appreciation of those who go above and beyond for young people in and from care.

## **2. SERVICES & SUPPORTS AFTER CARE**

### ***Why is this an issue or concern?***

- Many youth in care don't have access to the same family supports and resources as mainstream young people (i.e., they cannot live at home with the support of family after a certain predetermined age).
- Many young people are not mature enough or don't have the necessary life skills to live independently, finish school, or work when they age out of care.
- After care services and supports are inconsistent between agencies and provinces.
- Some young people are not aware of services and supports available and don't access them.
- Some people think that once youth in care turn 21, it's time for them to pay for their school costs and learn how to manage money in the "real" world.
- Aging out results in a loss of services and support at a critical time in development.
- Aging out interrupts and impedes educational attainment and success.

### ***What's working?***

- Youth Educational Assistance Fund (YEAF) in British Columbia
- Age out at 19 but have a support worker until 21 in Ontario
- Age out at 18 but can be extended to 21 if going to school in Saskatchewan
- Youth in care networks including alumni (those who have aged out of care)
- Youth in care networks providing transition services and support
- Support from friends and family

### ***What can young people do about this?***

- Access independent living and life skills training if available.
- Get involved in a youth in care network.

### ***What can adults and the system do about this?***

- Provide emotional support and advice for youth leaving care.
- Workers should better prepare young people for the transition to independence.

### ***Recommendations***

- There should be a universal age for coming out of care.
- Extension of care should be standardized across Canada.
- Financial and emotional support should be provided to young people when they age out of care.



- Postsecondary education should be covered when the young person is ready (e.g., age 25 to 28).
- Establish more local youth in care networks to improve communication and networking.

### 3. EDUCATION

#### ***Why is this an issue or concern?***

- Without an education it is difficult to get a job.
- Instability from moving around when in care causes chaos.
- Youth in care don't live with or receive support from their parents while going to school.
- Curriculums are different from school to school.
- Teachers aren't aware of or supportive of youth in care issues.
- Not enough support provided.
- Program funding doesn't match with average graduating age.
- Some youth in care have to work to survive so they don't have time or money to go to school.

#### ***What's working?***

- School work experience or apprenticeship programs – getting experience in a variety of trades
- Alternate schools with smaller classrooms and more individual support
- Workbooks for youth in care (e.g., how to transition)
- Tutoring and recreation programs
- Bursaries and scholarships specific to young people in and from care
- Extended care services and supports
- Flexible education plans
- Educational credits for life skills and projects

#### ***What can young people do about this?***

- Lead by example.
- Participate in networking opportunities.
- Educate yourself about what's going on in your province.
- Share experience and information with peers.
- Inform educators about the needs and issues of young people in and from care, as well as how to work better them.
- Get more involved in advisory committees and advocate for change.
- Fundraise for education.

#### ***What can adults and the system do about this?***

- Listen to young people in and from care and make change. Be accountable.

- Support and engage in youth in care networks and networking opportunities.
- Help young people to develop their strengths.
- Encourage and advocate for young people.
- Include more life skills in school curriculums.
- Create more interactive education that addresses varying learning styles.
- Develop more appropriate personal education plans that reflect the needs and situations of young people in care.
- Develop incentive programs to keep young people in school (e.g., tutoring, extracurricular activities, rewards, etc.)
- Educators should be honest about what they can and can't do.
- Provide in-school workers to assist and support young people in and from care.
- Have high expectations for young people in and from care. Treat them the same way you would treat your own children.
- Agencies providing care or service to young people in and from care should set performance targets that reinforce stability and more natural transitions to limit the negative impacts of change (e.g., fewer moves, fewer changes of schools).
- Reinforce the positive impact that teachers and other school professionals can have on the lives of young people in and from care.

### ***Recommendations***

- Lower the costs of postsecondary education.
- Extend services and supports for young people when they leave care.
- Stop cutting funding for young people in and from care. Allocate resources towards education.
- Standardize provincial and national educational policies, curriculum content, and timeframes.
- Mandatory sensitivity training from young people from care should be provided to anyone working with young people in and from care. This would include information about their needs and issues and how to develop more effective transition and education plans with them.

## **4. TRANSITIONING TO INDEPENDENCE/ADULTHOOD AND PERMANENCE**

### ***Why is this an issue or concern?***

- Young people need support.
- Learning to be an adult takes time.
- Process of moving. The transition can be very abrupt.
- Young people suffer within a cycle of dependency.

### ***What's working?***

- *No notes were available for this section.*

***What can young people do about this?***

- *No notes were available for this section.*

***What can adults and the system do about this?***

- Better prepare young people for the transition to independence and adulthood.
- Train caregivers to teach life skills to young people in their care.
- Support the NYICN to provide post-transition support for alumni.
- Ally with advocates, networks, and other relevant agencies to promote awareness of issues and networks across Canada.

***Recommendations***

- Make it mandatory for young people in care to complete a standardized independent living or life skills program 2 years before they age out of care.
- Develop a residential housing and life skills training program for young people transitioning out of care.
- Establish a national standardized age of 24 for young people from care to receive financial and other services. Provide emotional and other non-financial support to former youth in care for as long as they require it.
- Create a national alumni mentoring program to provide support to young people in and from care and promote the benefits of networking.
- Create a National Youth and Alumni of Care Advisory Council that meets regularly with government to monitor and discuss the ongoing application of rights and programs for youth in and from care in Canada.

**5. CONNECTIONS TO FAMILY**

***Why is this an issue or concern?***

- Many young people in and from care don't have enough contact with family.
- Connections aren't always a priority. Sometimes contact depends on the caregiver's willingness to work with the family or the worker's caseload rather than the family's needs and rights.
- The further apart you live, the more difficult contact or access can be.
- Without contact, young people lose connections and family information.
- It is very difficult to build relationships with family that you didn't grow up with.
- Contact with family can help young people understand their identity.
- Sometimes there is too much contact (when it's unsafe or unhealthy) or young people are forced to have contact.
- Sometimes young people in care are used by one parent against the other.
- Being separated from siblings can feel like being punished.
- Often siblings not living in the same placement are not allowed to visit each other.

- When one sibling is removed and others are not, it can be very isolating. A young person can feel abandoned or at fault.
- Can't maintain contact with siblings when you or they age out of care.
- When you are separated from your siblings you grow up differently and may not be comfortable with one another later in life if reconnected.
- In smaller communities, everybody knows your family's business.
- In placements where there are birth children, young people in care often feel excluded from the family or feel that they are treated differently.
- Sometimes visitation is treated like a privilege and is limited as a punishment.

### ***What's working?***

- Regular visits with family members
- Maintaining contact by phone
- Foster parents encouraging contact
- Siblings being kept together
- Social workers making arrangements for in-person visits at least twice each year for young people living in a different province or territory than their family
- Workers and caregivers communicating and coordinating contact
- Facebook
- Lifebooks or scrapbooks documenting life before and during care
- Supervised visitation

### ***What can young people do about this?***

- Promote the importance of connections and contact with family.
- Promote the importance of lifebooks and actively contribute to your own lifebook.
- Participate in conferences and share experiences.
- Get involved in youth in care networks and Big Brother or Big Sister programs.

### ***What can adults and the system do about this?***

- Ask the young person how much and what type of contact they want to have and with whom.
- Alumni can mentor and support young people through family contact.
- Promote the importance and value of family connections.
- Allot funding and other resources towards maintaining family connections.
- Train those involved to facilitate healthy connections.
- Hold people accountable for facilitating and supporting family connections.

## ***Recommendations***

- Legislation and policies should be strengthened to emphasize the importance, value, and expectation of maintaining family and extended family connections as a right.
- Family and extended family contact should be based on the best interests and wants of the young person in care with the encouragement and support of workers and caregivers. Contact should never be denied or limited as a consequence, nor should it ever be forced.
- Every young person should have a lifebook as soon as they come into care. This lifebook should reflect family and extended family of origin (as much as is appropriate) and life while in care. Every effort should be made to keep the lifebook up-to-date in partnership with the young person.

## NYICN National Report Card Recommendations

The recommendations here have been summarized to reflect the “Top 5” national priorities identified during our national conference:

1. Rights of Youth in Care
2. After Care Services and Supports
3. Education
4. Transitioning to Independence/Adulthood and Permanence
5. Connections to Family

We have also included recommendations related to other important priorities from our report card consultations, namely:

6. Culture and Identity
7. Safety
8. Health
9. Social Stigma

### **RIGHTS OF YOUTH IN CARE**

Throughout the provincial and territorial report card consultations and our national conference, young people and alumni identified many inconsistencies within child welfare systems across the country, specifically in terms of how their rights are respected and explained to them. Participants also repeatedly voiced how their human rights and freedoms seem to differ greatly from those of their peers not from care.

According to the UNCRC, all articles within the Convention apply to all young people under the age of 18. However, it is clear that these rights and how they apply to youth in care are often misunderstood, not always respected, inconsistently applied, and in too many cases, viewed as privileges. Also, in some parts of Canada the rights of young people in care are not legislated placing them at greater risk of rights violations and further limiting young people or their caregivers to advocate on their behalf.

The findings from our nation-wide consultations clearly show that children and young people in care do not have an adequate understanding of, or know how to exercise, their rights. They are not aware of the options available to them when they require additional support or protection such as the services offered by provincial or territorial child and youth advocate offices. In other cases, young people report they are fearful to request or reach out to external supports. Overall, youth stated that decisions are generally made for them and not with them, and sometimes with no explanation.

It is also clear that young people in care want their caregivers to explain their rights to them in an age-appropriate manner. They also want to be engaged in important decisions affecting their wellbeing, for their caregivers to be more transparent and honest with them about why decisions are made, and to know how to appeal these decisions if they disagree.

- Young people believe change is required at all levels: Legislation, policies, practices, screening, training, and monitoring.
- Young people have made it clear that there is a need for better communication and information sharing between young people and adults, and within the system in general.
- Young people expect service providers and caregivers to be aware of the rights of young people and the resources available to them, and to share this with them. They also want adults to be more transparent and honest with them about why decisions are made.

The implications for change in all these areas will be different in each province and territory unless basic national standards are developed.

1. We, the National Youth in Care Network, report card participants, and national conference participants recommend that the federal government of Canada work with all provincial and territorial ministries and child and youth advocate offices to ensure that rights legislation for children and youth in care is standardized across the country to better safeguard the rights and wellbeing all young people in care.

2. We recommend that the Canadian government appoint a National Children's Commissioner to monitor and report on the rights and wellbeing of young people in care in Canada with a strong emphasis on Aboriginal youth in care.
3. We recommend that provincial youth in care networks, the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, and the National Youth in Care Network actively participate in the establishment of a National Children's Commissioner and in ongoing evaluations of this role.
4. We recommend that the Canadian government work with all provincial and territorial ministries and the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates to establish independent offices of child and youth advocates in all provinces and territories.
5. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries ensure that young people in care are adequately and regularly informed about their right to request a review of their plan of care. This includes a review of their placement, school, personal file and the appropriate request process. Young people must also be informed of the complaints procedures available to them should their request be denied or when information within their file is withheld. To ensure that young people are heard in this review, they must be supported to invite an advocate of their choice, and to directly contribute to this review including opportunities to have their comments included in their file, or to correct inaccurate documentation.
6. We recommend that all young people entering the child welfare system receive rights information that is appropriate to their age, first language, and abilities. Rights information should be available in a variety of formats including booklets (print and braille), video, audio, and online. These resources should be reviewed with the young person by either their case worker or immediate caregiver on a regular basis.
7. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries develop guides with all current resources available to young people in care. These guides must be consistent, easy to understand, and easily accessible in print and online.
8. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries inform young people in care about their right to review their case file and of the appropriate request process. Young people must also be informed of the complaints procedures available to them should their request be denied or when information within their file is withheld. Young people should be welcome to contribute to their file in writing either to comment on or to correct inaccurate documentation.

9. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries review and, where necessary, revise the policies surrounding placement discharge. A young person should not lose his or her bed and be moved unless a “mandatory notification” has been processed, in which case the young person must be informed of the appeal procedures available to him or her. Young people should also be informed of their right to an advocate of their choice should they decide to appeal decisions related to their placements.
10. We recommend that all case workers be required to explain financial entitlements to young people in their care, as well any changes to these policies as they occur. Young people should be informed about how to request funds they are entitled to, and how to appeal decisions that result in withholding funds.
11. We recommend that each provincial and territorial ministry collaborate with their provincial or territorial child advocate or ombudsperson and provincial youth in care networks to conduct an annual report card consultation on the rights and wellbeing of youth in care.
12. We recommend that the National Youth in Care Network partner with the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children to write national biannual reports based on provincial and territorial report cards to accurately monitor the rights and wellbeing of young people in and from care across Canada.

## **SERVICES AND SUPPORTS AFTER CARE**

As the UNCRC is intended to protect children and youth under the age of 18 years, alumni from care (those over age 18) identified that promoting these rights earlier in life increases the likelihood of successful transitions from dependent child to healthy independence in adulthood.

Young people identified many inconsistencies related to being informed of their entitlements and receiving varied services and supports based on their care status, their relationship with and response rate of their workers, and their behaviour. Some participants said that service providers don't do enough to create safe environments and that their basic needs (eg. clothing, toiletries) were not being met, while others felt access to service was limited as a consequence and created more instability in their lives instead of teaching them any lessons.

Participants also noted that young people in care are still learning and developing just like other teenagers and that they are going to make mistakes. Some feel as though they are under-supported in their development as individuals and as



contributing members of society because they aren't given the responsibilities of learning to manage money, develop a healthy work ethic or other life skills.

13. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries provide bursaries and/or financial assistance to young people from care (including those who were temporary wards, permanent wards or lived in kinship care) to attend postsecondary education up to age 25.
14. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries provide young people leaving care an opportunity to participate in an exit interview. This should include a review of their file, an interview to assess young people's level of satisfaction with the services they received, and any recommendations they have to improve the care system.
15. We recommend that aftercare support workers be assigned to all young people who have transitioned from care for at least one year. These individuals would meet with the young person on a regular basis, provide home visits, and offer support wherever possible including referrals and basic counselling where needed.
16. We recommend that extended placement options be provided to young people over the age of 18 who are attending school.
17. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries establish more supported independent living programs and housing for young people ages 16 – 21. These programs are intended to support and prepare young people well before the transition to independence.

## **EDUCATION**

There are a number of challenges facing young people in and from care that have a direct effect on their educational achievements. Some are related to navigating systems and accessing the resources required, while others relate to the individual's circumstances and competing priorities (e.g., housing, employment, family obligations, and relationship issues). Other significant barriers they may face are internal and include low self-esteem, mental health and addiction issues, and unresolved trauma.

Regardless of the roots of these barriers, too many young people find themselves unable to meet the rigid requirements related to things like school schedules and funding. They are often intimidated by or discriminated against in the school environment, and can be overwhelmed by the workload.

Participants said that lack of financial supports to attend postsecondary schooling is very common in their peer group and often discourages young people from pursuing postsecondary education. They identified that there are discrepancies between programs and resources available and a lack of awareness about scholarships and student loans. For others, the issue is more about not having the necessary tools (e.g., access to computers or Internet) and supports (e.g., tutoring, mentorship) required for them to plan appropriately and succeed in their education.

Young people in care are concerned that not enough of their peers are graduating from high school. They believe this is a violation of their right to grow and develop to their full potential through the best education possible. They consider low expectations from the adults in their lives and the system not making education a priority for them to be largely to blame.

Many young people said that coming in and out of care without being made a permanent ward excludes them from accessing some services and supports, especially when it comes to after care extensions and postsecondary education.

Young people also said that age 21 is not realistic when it comes to young people in and from care completing their education. It also results in too many young people from care ending up on welfare, living in poverty, and making poor lifestyle choices.

18. We recommend that regional managers of child welfare agencies ensure that case workers and caregivers are supported to promote stable, long-term placement options to their young people. Placement changes and school interruptions should be kept to a minimum for young people in care.
19. We recommend that all young people in care be encouraged and supported to participate in recreational and extracurricular activities within their schools.
20. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries provide bursaries and/or financial assistance to young people from care (including those who were temporary wards, permanent wards or lived in kinship care) to attend post secondary education up to age 25.
21. We recommend that all young people in or from care who are attending postsecondary education be provided with a support worker up to the age of 25.
22. We recommend that case workers, caregivers, and other adult supports should demonstrate higher expectations of young people in and from care and challenge them in healthy ways to achieve academic success. Caregivers should also be well informed about the resources and supports available to assist young people in care to complete high school and access postsecondary education.

## **TRANSITIONING TO INDEPENDENCE/ADULTHOOD AND PERMANENCE**

The age at which young people “graduate” out of care varies from 16-19 across Canada, although some provinces provide forms of aftercare support up to age 21. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *“a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”* This is a universal standard, and one that Canada, along with most other nations, agreed to by ratifying the UNCRC in 1991. Despite this, some provinces and territories release young people from care as young as age 16. In other provinces and territories, young people can remain in child welfare care as of their 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Studies indicate that longer term support for young people in and from care promotes successful school outcomes, provides opportunities to develop long term relationships, and contributes significantly to the young person’s development and emotional health. It also improves the young person’s ability to successfully manage independence such as securing gainful employment, affordable housing, adequate nutrition, and medical care.

Alumni participants shared that many young people from care lack the necessary life skills, information about resources, and maturity to successfully live independently. At the time they transition out of care, they are suddenly given more responsibility but not enough preparation and support to manage appropriately. For instance, young people who had lived in residential care setting such as group homes said that they are given too many rules, too much structure, and not enough options to make choices for themselves which results in feeling under-equipped to make good decisions when they are on their own. Examples included overly strict schedules that instruct the young person when to wake up, shower, do laundry, go on outings, eat meals, attend school, participate in recreation time, and go to bed. Other concerns related to not having access to a vehicle to practice driving or to get to work.

Some participants shared they were under-supported in their development as individuals and as contributing members of society because no one had taken the time to teach them responsibilities associated with healthy independence including money management, developing a healthy work ethic, and other basic life skills. They also identified the need for more staff or social workers, an improved ratio of staff to young people, and better training.

Other participants mentioned that permanence is too narrowly defined as “adoption” which is not always the preferred option for young people and leaves them with no other choice but to move out on their own. For many, they felt unprepared for the demands of independence and viewed the transition as “scary”

and “difficult”. They believe that being forced into independence before they are ready is often the cause of emotional or mental health issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and attachment problems (e.g., extreme difficulty building or maintaining healthy long-term relationships). For some, not being prepared to live on their own can result in “graduating” to the adult welfare system, ending up in poverty or homeless.

Young people believe in the value of mentorship, particularly from alumni of care when it comes to the transition to independence, as well as cultural mentors and educational mentors.

23. We recommend that all provinces and territories extend the age at which young people have access to child welfare services and supports to 25 years of age. As part of this recommendation, a national review of programs that have successfully supported permanency and programs that provide extended care supports for those over age 18 should be considered.
24. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries review their placement screening procedures to ensure caregivers are genuine, caring people. Caregivers should be required to complete initial and ongoing training to promote longer-term placements and fewer cases of placement breakdown.
25. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries review and, where necessary, revise the policies surrounding placement discharge. A young person should not lose his or her bed and be moved unless a “Mandatory Notification” has been processed, in which case the young person must be informed of the appeal procedures available to him or her. Young people should also be informed of their right to an advocate of their choice should they decide to appeal decisions related to their placements.
26. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries review the average number of young people to staff or social worker ratio in order to reduce caseloads, prevent case worker and caregiver “compassion fatigue” and allow for more contact and better relationship-building with young people.
27. We recommend that all provincial and territorial ministries and foster parent associations collaborate with their provincial youth in care networks or the National Youth in Care Network to implement youth-friendly and age-appropriate life skills and preparation for independence training. This training should be offered to young people no later than 16 years of age or a minimum of two years prior to aging out of care.
28. We recommend that caregivers teach young people in their care how to set up and manage a bank account. Set up savings and investment plans with

young people and teach them to manage their money and save for things they need or want.

29. We recommend that all young people in care preparing to transition out of the system be provided with a transitions worker at least 90 days prior to leaving care. This individual would assist the young person in securing affordable housing, furniture, and other start-up necessities.

## **CONNECTIONS TO FAMILY**

Like all children and adolescents, young people in and from care need to feel safe and supported. They need to have positive role models, appropriate mentors, and opportunities to connect with their extended families and engage with their peers. They must also be provided with the opportunity to not only choose their friends, but also those they consider to be family.

Family connection should be respected and deemed a firm priority, supported by all stakeholders. Young people in care believe that establishing or continuing family connections must be understood as a right and not a privilege. It should also be understood that connections to family in this context extends beyond biological or adoptive parents. It includes siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, stepparents, mentors, elders, and peers.

Relationships are an integral part to every young person's development. However, developing and maintaining these relationships can be a challenge for some. Abuse, abandonment, negative family dynamics, moving placements and schools, changing workers, emotional or mental health issues, stigma, poor social skills, and many other barriers often leave young people without a support network. Young people have reported being excluded from foster family activities leaving them feeling unimportant, abnormal, and unwanted by those working with and caring for them

30. We recommend that every young person entering the child welfare system receive a lifebook. This lifebook should reflect family and extended family of origin (as much as is appropriate), information about their culture, and life while in care. Every effort should be made to engage the young person to keep their lifebook up-to-date.
31. We recommend that legislation and policies be developed and strengthened to emphasize the importance, value, and expectation of maintaining family and extended family connections as a right. Case workers and caregivers should encourage and support young people to have contact with their families unless this places the young person at risk. Contact should never be denied or limited as a consequence for issues related to the young person's behaviour.

32. We recommend that case workers keep in touch with the young person's biological or adoptive family to ensure contact remains an option in the future even if it is not currently appropriate or wanted.
33. We recommend that regional child welfare offices make every effort to ensure that siblings are not separated unless absolutely necessary (e.g., due to a safety risk). When this is not possible, child welfare authorities should at minimum keep siblings within the same community and support regular visits.
34. We recommend that foster parent associations and training programs for foster parents emphasize the importance of encouraging their young people to interact with and participate in family activities alongside biological children of care providers.

Young people in care who become parents while in the system raised concerns about the threats of having their children taken from them. For some young parents, this was the outcome. Many young parents felt as though they are not given the chance to be successful, loving parents and that the system often prevents the bonding between mother and child, an injury that can't always be repaired. These young people felt judged by their own files and that workers were making biased decisions that shifted the focus from their needs as young people in care to protecting their children. Others reported that case workers had applied for apprehension orders before the young parent had even left the hospital with their newborn infant.

Young parents identified that although not all young people may be able to comprehend the challenges and costs of having a child, their rights and the policies involved are not always clear to them either. This lack of clarity sometimes resulted in apprehension of the child which further created financial strain and continued the cycle of system dependency for the parent and their child.

35. We recommend that young parents from care are provided with the option to attend parenting skill-building opportunities so they can keep their children.
36. We recommend that when an apprehension is necessary, daily physical contact between mother and baby should be encouraged whenever possible.
37. We recommend that each provincial and territorial ministry create more placement options for young parents in care to have their children living with them.

## **CULTURE AND IDENTITY**

### **Aboriginal**

Aboriginal children and youth (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) live in all provinces and territories. Aboriginal children and youth are overrepresented within the child welfare system making up approximately 25% of children in government care.

The UNCRC speaks to the child's right to have access to their culture, language and traditions. Being able to develop an identity is important regardless of culture or ethnicity. Unfortunately, going into care and moving while in care separates young people not only from family but also from friends and can lead to gaps in their understanding of themselves. Many young people lose their cultural connections when they come into care and some have identified that they were forced to participate in the traditions of their caregivers which further confused them. Participants highlighted that there is not enough encouragement and support to sustain the family and cultural connections required for young people to develop a healthy identity.

Being a young person new to Canada can present challenges. It can mean that the young person may experience discrimination and have more difficulty navigating his or her way through the child welfare system. Our participants indicated that this is also the case for citizens of visible minority groups including those of Aboriginal heritage. Participants shared that discrimination can be extremely frustrating and can lead to mental health issues such as depression.

38. We recommend that more preventative measures be taken to ensure that Aboriginal children and youth living on reserve are not removed from their homes and/or communities when child welfare intervention is required. When no other option is available, either through on-reserve child welfare services or extended family, it is recommended that young people be placed into or supported by off-reserve Aboriginal child welfare services in order to maintain their cultural connections.

39. We recommend that the Federal Government allocate more funding to on-reserve child welfare services. (recommendation is incomplete)

40. We recommend that all child welfare agencies make every effort to ensure that all Aboriginal children and youth (status and non-status) are provided with meaningful opportunities to learn about their culture, traditions and family of origin.

### **Immigrant & Refugee**

Many immigrant young people enter and then leave the child welfare system without legal immigration status. This not only violates their right to nationality but also limits their access to services, makes getting an education more challenging because of the costs of being an 'international' student, and puts them at risk of being deported.

Some young people shared that while they came into care with a strong grasp of their cultural identity, they left the system not knowing who they are or where they come from. They developed a different identity as a result of their experiences in care. Loss of identity has a negative impact on the young person, their family, and their community. Young people may resist the system in an effort to maintain connections with their family and to preserve their identity.

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41. We recommend that case workers demonstrate a basic understanding of and ability to navigate the immigration system. Case workers should know how to advocate on behalf of young people in order to confirm their immigration status, help them maintain their cultural identity, and fast track the process of receiving legal status for children or youth new to Canada.

42. We recommend that provincial and territorial ministries make efforts to ensure better cultural matching at the request of children and young people in care. When this is not possible, caregivers must be well-informed about different cultures, resources, communities, and mentors available to the young person so that they may maintain, learn about, or develop their cultural identity.

43. We recommend that all case workers assigned to new immigrant or refugee children and youth in care make every effort to investigate all options for the young person to be safely reunified with their families whenever possible and with the young person's consent as according to Article 10 of the Convention.

## **SAFETY**

It is very sad to say that abuse and deaths are still happening to children and youth in care across the country. Abuse has many forms (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional)



and young people shared some of their experiences including being locked in their room, being separated from family members, and being made to eat different or lower quality foods from the rest of the foster family. Unfortunately, many young people new to care often don't know that advocates exist, and some feel that legislation like the Freedom of Information Act protects those responsible and restricts officials from taking full responsibility when rights are violated and children or youth come to harm in the system.

Participants identified that there is a serious lack of monitoring and accountability within the system and that young people are falling through the cracks. Young people are being placed in overcrowded and unsafe situations, being treated differently from biological children of caregivers, experiencing neglect and abuse while in care, being bullied, and having their possessions stolen by other young people in placements. Some young people feel their religion, culture, family traditions, and sexuality are not respected.

The outcomes of young people in care not feeling safe are feelings of fear, vulnerability, insecurity, and stress and can lead to trust issues, lower self-esteem, poor communication, rebellion, depression, and suicide. Lack of safety affects school success and creates tension and suspicion among residents and between young people and staff. Young people feel workers don't believe them and sometimes try to cover up abuse. Some participants mentioned that they would only go to an advocate as a last resort and fear that going for help will be viewed as a threat towards their worker and they may be punished.

44. We recommend that all provinces and territories legislate the right of children to be free from all forms of violence including physical punishment.
45. We recommend that all immediate caregivers be required to attend non-violent crisis intervention training every two years.
46. We recommend that child welfare agencies conduct regular placement visits to ensure that the environment is safe for all residents.

## **HEALTH**

Article 6 of the Convention outlines that: all young people have the right to survival and healthy development. Articles 24 and 39 protect the child's right to adequate health and health services. One area of concern identified by consultation participants was the lack of supports such as counselors or therapists to help them deal with the trauma of being taken from their communities, as well the circumstances that led to child welfare involvement. Young people reported that waiting lists for mental health and other services are too long, and many young people don't get their needs met in a timely manner, if at all. It was also mentioned that existing services are not always youth-friendly, and that young people are not engaged in determining the most appropriate services for them.

In recent years, national studies have shown that young people in care are more likely than their mainstream peers to be prescribed pharmaceutical medications or to be chemically restrained. These studies reveal that young people's behaviors are often misdiagnosed as serious mental health conditions. Due to a number of factors including inadequate mental health assessments, frequent placement moves within the care system, lack of training for the immediate caregiver, and lack of monitoring of the young person's mental health these young people are often left to manage their emotional health with limited support. For those who are prescribed medication, this lack of monitoring and support places them at risk of self-medicating, and can seriously damage their mental and physical development.

47. We recommend that when medication is deemed necessary, all efforts are made to do so with the young person's consent. Health care providers, case workers, and caregivers must work with the young person to ensure that other forms of support are provided including regular counselling, reassessment of their health needs and effects of medication, and opportunities for the young people to learn how to manage their health needs appropriately.
48. We recommend a nation-wide review of the policies and practices that are in place within child welfare systems to assess the emotional and mental health of young people placed into care. The purpose of this review is to help indicate gaps in service, as well as best practice approaches to promoting healthy childhood/adolescent development.
49. We recommend that caregivers seek ways to extend positive or healthy activities that the young person was involved in before coming into care. Maintaining these activities can make the transition into care and between placements less traumatic for young people and supports healthy attachment.
50. We recommend that all child welfare agencies provide more funding and opportunities for young people to participate in a wide-range of healthy activities that meet their individual needs.

## **SOCIAL STIGMA**

*Youth in care has become an 'ism.*

The following recommendations related to education for caregivers, case workers, as well as the general public about the daily realities and needs of young people living in care. Their goal is to better inform and equip caregivers to provide the very best care to young people as well as to reduce stigmas and negative messaging associated with young people in and from care.

A significant concern raised by most participants was that of fairness. Young people in and from care often don't feel as though they are treated the same as young people who aren't in or from care. The system is a constant reminder that they are "different". Some of the examples mentioned by participants include being assessed based on risks rather than strengths, being singled out at school, missing out on opportunities because government moves too slowly, rules and restrictions making them feel like they are living in prison instead of a foster or group home, and unfair expectations (e.g., you have to be perfect or you're a failure). They stated that the need for friends and extended family to have criminal record checks done is embarrassing. Participants also identified invasion of privacy and lack of choices as major concerns. They also talked about how media coverage of young people in care and caregivers is most often negative and not accurate.

Participants stated that all of these stigmas and restrictions make it harder to find employment and be welcomed into their new communities. Young people in care shared that some parents distrust them or their peers simply because of where they live, and don't want them in their homes or interacting with their own children.

Some participants believed that all of these restrictions are in place to allow the government or "the system" to protect itself instead of putting the needs of young people first. Parents often feel powerless to help their young people with issues that they feel are unfair because everyone is afraid to challenge the rules.

53. We recommend that the National Youth in Care Network's Primer Sensitivity Training program be implemented and mandated across the country for workers, caregivers, educators, and others working with young people in and from care.
54. We recommend that the National Youth in Care Network partner with provincial youth in care networks and child and youth advocate offices to develop a national campaign focused on decreasing the negative stigmas associated with children and youth in care.
55. We recommend that the Federal Government of Canada work with the National Youth in Care Network and the Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates to establish a National Youth in Care Day.

## Next Steps

As part of our consultations, participants were also asked to identify what young people and adults can do to take action on their recommendations and improve the experiences of current and future young people in care. In order to start moving these recommendations forward, participants identified that young people and

adults must work collaboratively. The following examples of how youth and adults can be involved in making change were taken from the provincial and territorial report cards.

### **The Role of Young People and Alumni of Care: Speak Up**

- Speak up and ask questions.
- Share your stories and experiences.
- Take responsibility for what you say and do.
- Become a positive role model, peer support, or mentor.
- Educate yourself so you can better educate others.
- Get involved in relevant projects and initiatives.
- Advocate with and for your peers.
- Lobby for change.
- Collaborate with government and other service providers to make change.

#### *Challenges and barriers*

- Sense of entitlement
- Poor self-awareness related to skills and abilities
- Poor work ethic
- Lack of motivation
- Limited information
- Lack of encouragement and support

### **The Role of Professionals and the System: Ask, Listen, Believe**

- Encourage and support individual young people.
- Provide opportunities for young people to be empowered and have a voice.
- Engage young people meaningfully at all levels.
- Educate your colleagues.
- Update organizational mission, values, and goals to better reflect a commitment to meeting the needs of young people.
- Revise existing and/or create new legislation, policies and procedures that better meet the needs of today's young people in and from care, with input from these young people.
- Ensure resources are used efficiently and allocate more resources where necessary.
- Reduce and limit barriers to allow more effective access to services and resources.
- Explain decisions honestly and provide information in writing.
- Interpret policies in favour of meeting the young person's needs.
- Offer options and alternatives whenever possible.
- Communicate more.

#### *Challenges and barriers*

- Negative attitude towards young people and fear of youth empowerment
- Limited information and poor communication
- Limited resources

### **The Role of Youth in Care Networks: Unite**

- Provide networking opportunities.
- Promote and facilitate research, awareness, and education.
- Promote network development and provide support for young people in and from care.
- Participate in national standards and advocacy initiatives.

### *Challenges and barriers*

- Lack of resources
- Resistance or limited direct access to young people
- Negative experiences and poor word of mouth
- Misplaced passion and personal relationship issues

### **Resources Required**

For change to take place within the system, both financial and human resources are required. In some cases, it is simply a matter of re-assigning how resources are used. In other instances, new resources will be required. Resources identified through the report cards include:

- **Staffing:** Participants identified the need for more staff who are better trained to work effectively with young people. A higher ratio of staff to young people would reduce caseloads and allow for more contact and better relationship-building between workers and young people.
- **Caregivers:** Young people also recognized the need for more placement options. They want better screening to ensure caregivers are genuine, caring people and feel that all caregivers need better training to ensure less placement breakdown. Participants also highlighted the need for more appropriate placement matching, more consistent monitoring of placements, and more respite availability.
- **Time:** It was clear from the report cards that the system also needs to take a reasonable amount of time to review and revise existing legislation, policies, and procedures in a way that is inclusive of key stakeholders. Recommendations involved the creation of advisory councils where young people and decision-makers could work together to create more effective programs and services.
- **Funding:** All of the report cards show that youth and alumni believe more financial resources are needed at all levels of the system. Additional funding to meet the ongoing basic needs of young people, their caregivers, and their families as well as resources for creating and delivering more effective

programs and services is required not only to sustain the existing system, but also to meet the increasingly complex needs of children, youth, and families.

### **Signs of Success**

Consultation participants were asked how they would know if their recommendations were implemented and real change occurred. The following is a list of desired outcomes that will help us to determine success. Some of these outcomes are related to success within the system itself, while others speak more to how individuals determine their own success and happiness.

- Families remain intact and feel stable and supported.
- Fewer children and youth come into care.
- The generational cycle of child welfare contact is broken.
- Young people in and from care feel safe and supported.
- Young people in care experience more stability (i.e., fewer placement and school changes).
- Young people grow up in culturally sensitive environments and embrace their cultural identity.
- Fewer reports of abuse and death of children and youth in care.
- Lower incidence of suicide by young people in and from care.
- Young people access more health and wellbeing services.
- Young people obtain legal status and appropriate documentation in a timely and less frustrating manner.
- More young people in and from care graduate from high school.
- More young people from care go on to postsecondary school.
- More young people leave care and are successfully independent.
- Fewer alumni of care are on welfare or income assistance as adults.
- Communication between all parties (i.e., young person, family, system, and community) is improved.
- Young people in and from care provide positive feedback about changes to the system.
- Young people in and from care have a more consistently positive care experience.
- Young people in and from care report healthier, longer-term relationships.
- Fewer young people become homeless, street-involved, or exploited resulting in less of a burden on shelter services by young people in and from care.
- Reduction in crimes committed by young people in and from care.
- Less negative media attention about young people.
- Fewer negative community stereotypes about young people.

## **Conclusion**

This report is a collection of the voices of youth in and from care in Canada. All the recommendations are equally important. Youth and alumni worked together to create their provincial report cards and then narrow them down to create national priorities. These recommendations though there are many, all need to be considered carefully and implemented.

The purpose of this report was to shine a light on the many issues facing youth touched by the child welfare system. It is the reflection of many lives and a strong desire for change. It would be unimaginable to see these recommendations implemented without further input from youth in care. Youth have worked hard to have their voices heard through these recommendations and they need to be included in all levels of implementation.

This report and these recommendations provide an opening for governments and child welfare agencies to engage youth in conversation. This is an opportunity for change.

## National Conference Workshops

### Special Guest Speakers

As part of the conference objectives, three special guest speakers were invited to share their thoughts and experiences related to young people involved in the child welfare system in Canada.

Justin Trudeau – *Dream big, everyone matters, invest in individuals, mobilize youth in care to vote*

Justin Trudeau was elected October 14, 2008 as the Member of Parliament for Papineau. He serves as the Liberal Party's Official Opposition Critic for Youth, Citizenship and Immigration. Prior to being elected to Parliament, Justin was a drama teacher. The oldest son of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, he has devoted considerable effort to engaging young people in the political process and advocating on behalf of young people throughout Canada.

Sharla Evans – *Light your candle, turn adversity into greatness*

An alumni of the child welfare system Sharla Evans is a Certified Professional Solution Focused Coach, Inner Journey Guide, writer and also the Creator and Host of her own cable TV show titled, "Light Your Candle with Sharla Evans." Sharla encourages others to journey within themselves and connect with their heart, dreams and authentic self.

Cindy Blackstock – *Jordan's Principle and Shannen's Dream*

A member of the Gitksan Nation, she has worked in the field of child and family services for over 20 years. Cindy is the Executive Director of First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. Key interests include exploring the over representation of Aboriginal children in child welfare care, structural drivers of

child maltreatment in First Nations communities, human rights and the role of the voluntary sector in expanding the range of culturally and community based responses to child maltreatment.

## **Workshops**

The two main workshop themes included Rights & Advocacy and Network Development and the related topics were identified based on the basic levels or types of advocacy required by young people in and from care, as well as the experiences and work of Youth in Care Networks. Workshops were intended to meet the varying needs of individual young people and alumni new to and already involved in Networks, as well as providing some tools to meet the needs of Networks at varying developmental stages. Topics were then presented to national partners for discussion, approval and to determine if partners were willing and interested in facilitation.

The following is a breakdown of the workshops offered over two days during the national conference:

### **Rights & Advocacy**

#### *Self & Peer Advocacy*

#### *Rock a Microphone / Free Stylin'*

Facilitated by: National Youth in Care Network, Ontario

Description: How do you get people to pay attention and listen to what you have to say? This workshop is guaranteed to have 20% less Justin Bieber and 31% more sex, drugs and rock n' roll!

### **Systemic Advocacy**

#### *Youth CAN Make a Difference*

Facilitated by: Youth CAN (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies) & Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, Ontario

Description: Advocacy can be viewed as assisting children and youth in finding their own power from within and teaching them to use it effectively. This workshop will highlight some of the successful advocacy strategies used by YouthCAN and OPACY. Participants will engage in discussion around what effective advocacy is, how to keep it simple, and the importance of youth-adult partnerships. You will highlight your advocacy skills, share your ideas and learn from other natural advocates across the country.

### **Media**

#### *System Kidz: Multi-Media Advocacy, Tips & Strategies*

Facilitated by: VOICES – Manitoba's Youth in Care Network & Manitoba's Office of the Children's Advocate, Manitoba

Description: You've got a voice, and you've got a lot to say about the system. Combine what you've got with all the tools you can use, and you've got a powerful message! In this workshop you will learn how to use multi-media tools to advocate for change and to educate the public. Radio, video, print: using strategic sharing you



can use media to bring attention and inspire change. Sharing stories of what's worked and lessons learned; facilitators invite you to come for a fun and informative morning.

### Rights Education for Young People (for ages 14 – 24 only)

#### *Rights 2 Success*

Facilitated by: Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, British Columbia

Description: Rights 2 Success is a fun and interactive workshop about these rights. The workshop was developed by the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Come to this workshop and you will learn:

- What children and youth rights are
- How to make sure your rights are being respected
- And what to do and who can help if you feel your rights are being violated

### Sensitivity Training for Adults (ages 25+ only)

#### *Primer*

Facilitated by: Saskatchewan Youth in Care & Custody Network, Saskatchewan

Description: Primer is a NYICN project that is researched, prepared and delivered by experts - young people from care. The value of a Primer presentation lies within the sharing of personal stories and experiences, which are validated by academic research. The NYICN conducted a consultation with our membership exploring the major challenges experienced by youth in care. The results formed the basis of Primer, a sensitivity training program for professionals. Primer explores five major challenges facing youth in care; the “ideal” worker; and how to nurture resiliency, wellbeing and empowerment. Primer provides practical recommendations to enhance the quality of life for all youth in care.

### Network Development

#### *Youth Engagement*

#### *Involving Young People in the Creation of Their Own Futures*

Facilitated By: Pape Adolescent Resource Centre, Ontario

Description: The engagement of youth in the program design and implementation of an agency is beneficial for the program and also provides numerous positive benefits for the youth as well. When youth are encouraged to provide service they are also provided with opportunities to enhance their leadership, advocacy, and mentorship skills. In conjunction with allies, youth learn the power of partnership and the value of meaningful participation. Agencies that provide a supportive environment that allows youth the opportunity to explore their own learning, enhance skills, and share power are involving young people in the creation of their own futures. This workshop will explore how The Pape Adolescent Resource Center (PARC) uses the concept of youth engagement to empower youth.

### Strategic Planning

#### *Turn Strategies into Action*

Facilitated By: Cross Consulting, USA

Description: Do you ever wonder why organizations do what they do? Do you wonder how networks have existed for so long and accomplish so much? Would you like to know more or be a part of moving ideas into network action? During this interactive and informative workshop, participants will explore the facets of successful strategic planning. Whether you have been a part of a strategic planning process before or not, there is always something new to be learned. This workshop is designed as a mock-up strategic planning meeting so participants can practice as they learn. This learning format will be WAY more fun and interesting than a standard workshop on strategic planning! Participants will leave the workshop with strategic planning tools, tips, and ideas that they can use with their network.

### Project Management

#### *Projects! Projects! Projects!*

Facilitated by: PEI Youth in Care Network

Description: The PEI Youth in Care Network is inviting you to join them for a workshop on project management within a Youth in Care Network. We hope to show you how the PEI YICN has been able to develop a 6 month plan by focusing on specific projects. For the purpose of this workshop, we will focus on 2 of the projects: Luggage project and Newsletter. We also hope to show you how to manage your time, money and resources when working within a Youth in Care Network.

### Staff & Volunteers

#### *People Who Network*

Facilitated by: YOUCAN, Ontario

Description: In this workshop, participants will discuss when it is time to formalize roles and responsibilities in order to get the work done in youth-driven organizations. Participants will also learn about tips and resources for recruiting, hiring and training appropriate staff and volunteers.

### Fundraising

#### *Fundraising Basics*

Facilitated by: YOUCAN, Ontario

Description: This experiential workshop will cover the fundraising basics - needs assessment; identifying stakeholders; potential donors; types of campaigns; volunteers; role of Board and others. We will also discuss the importance of storytelling and how to effectively incorporate it into your fundraising strategy. Participants will have the opportunity to work in small groups go through the steps of developing an idea. There will be some flexibility to ensure that we can address concerns and questions that come up during the workshop.

### Life Skills (for ages 14 – 19 only)

#### *Cooking 101*

Facilitated by: HT Hospitality Training Inc.

Description: In this workshop, young people will learn the basics of being in the kitchen and prepare some appetizers to share with other conference participants as part of the hospitality activities.