



Report to the Ministry of Children & Family Development February 2024

Introduction

In 2021, MCFD announced exciting expansions and a re-imagining of youth transitions services. The multi-year plan spanning from 2019 - 2024 is creating changes both at a policy level and legislative level. Now in the plan's final year, the *BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness* (BCCEYH) has created this report to provide feedback and input to highlight youth in care's experiences with the expansion of these transition services over the last three years.

With the Province investing nearly \$35 million over three years, including increases of \$4.6 million in 2022 - 2023, \$10 million in 2023 - 2024 and \$19.8 million in 2024 - 2025, there is tremendous opportunity for improvement and continued expansion. We are heartened by the intentions expressed in the changes being made and we would like to serve as allies in creating further change. We are particularly impressed by the great work being done to empower delegated agencies to support their Indigenous and Metis youth. We have seen some great results from these changes.

The changes MCFD is building are monumental and such large projects cannot be implemented without the need for iteration and revisions. In our collective experience as service providers, the implementation of the programs and supports offered in this expansion have not been smooth sailing, revealing gaps which create barriers for youth. We've seen these gaps in the service system to have detrimental effects on youth who are currently transitioning out of care, especially youth in the 17 - 20 age bracket.

It is exciting that BC is being held up as a national leader in creating new standards of care and we are grateful for the hard work that has gone into making steps forward. It is vital we remain diligent and follow through on those commitments to ensure promises of action and policy changes are being implemented as intended. This report hopes to shine a light on the gaps youth have identified in the following program areas:

- Temporary Housing Agreements & Temporary Service Agreements
- Rental Subsidy Program
- Transition Planning (SAJE)
- Agreements with Young Adults (AYA)

- Capacity & Communication

1. Temporary Housing Agreements & Temporary Service Agreements

a) What was Announced

Eligible young adults on a Temporary Housing Agreement (THA) can now access a Temporary Support Agreement (TSA) on their 19th birthday regardless of their living arrangement; There is now a two-year time-frame in effect for accessing a THA and TSA which are available to young adults between the ages of 19 and 21. (MCFD Transitions RoadMap)

b) Gaps in Implementation

Both agreements are complicated and hard to understand, and there appear to be loopholes that mean access is inconsistent. It has been explained that a young person can age out in their MCFD placement, yet frontline workers have not observed this to be the case.

c) Young People's Experience

One of the BCCEYH organizations has only observed one young person offered the option to remain in their placement after aging out. This youth was told by their MCFD worker that the only support they would receive is financial and other supports would stop as they aged out. The young person was also told that while they would not be kicked out, that they should try to leave as soon as possible because MCFD did not have enough placements. As a result, this young person felt compelled to move out of their placement with a poorly designed transition plan due to the pressure to leave quickly. This transition plan did not include a plan for permanent housing, only a 6-month rental agreement through a landlord network without providing any additional supports. This left the young person to struggle on their own and was detrimental to their well-being. The service provider voiced strongly their concern for this young person to MCFD, making it clear the most supportive response and intervention would be to have this young person move onto a THA and remain in their placement. Unfortunately, this request was denied, with no clarity as to why such a decision was made.

This is one of many examples shared with the BCCEYH where attempts to advocate for a young person to remain on a THA were denied, and where the young person and the service organization were not provided clear reasons for the decision. It appears information about THAs is not clear to the MCFD workers who we have been in touch with. Many youth who are aging out without adequate transition planning or THAs have

complex needs which require an array of interconnected supports that unfortunately are not made available to them.

d) Recommendations

- Allow contracts within Specialized Homes and Support Services (SHSS) within MCFD to provide housing support and housing for youth past the age of 19.
- Provide clear and consistent direction across BC to MCFD workers and community supports about how and when to access these supports.

2. MCFD Rent Subsidy

a) What was Announced

Through this program, eligible young adults can access a \$600-a-month rent supplement for up to two years. All eligible young adults are encouraged to apply. 50% of the rent supplements are available to Indigenous young adults. The rent supplement program aims to prioritize the most vulnerable young adults and applications are assessed based on income criteria. (MCFD rent supplement faq https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/faq_rent_supplements.pdf)

We appreciate the announcement stating that this would be seamless and would like to know what date this level of integration can be expected to be made available to the youth who so desperately need it.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/youth-transitions>

b) Gaps in Implementation

Currently, the MCFD rent supplement program announcements appear to be unpredictable and the window for applications is quite short. There isn't a timeline of when supplements are available, very short notice is given when they are, and there is no transparency on the quantity available. This causes an unnecessary panic for youth and those who support them in the service sector, who are often given less than 2 weeks to get all the necessary documentation ready for the release date. Workers have long queues of priorities that cannot be set aside on such short notice. Without the necessary lead time to notify youth, or help youth apply, many applications that could have been made will not be coming through and the need for these rent supplements may be under represented.

c) Young People's Experience

We have met youth who expected to transition out of their programs or placements before the age of 19 but were not yet age-eligible for the rent supplement. There was then a gap between when the youth moved out and when the next announcement for applications came out, leaving them in a vulnerable position unable to pay market rent. Many youth are pressured to apply for PWD, and while this can sometimes mean a higher level of monthly income, it also means a completely severed connection to MCFD, which can then result in no supports that are readily accessible to these vulnerable young adults.

d) Recommendations

- We recommend that all youth aging out of care are automatically enrolled onto the rent subsidy, if they need it, and that it is a seamless process for them.
- We recommend MCFD provides a full calendar-year or more of regular dates when the Rent Supplement Applications will be accepted or change the program to have applications open year-round. This could be implemented following the well-established SAFER model available to seniors in BC.
- We also recommend guaranteed rent supplements for all youth from government care who need it, and increases to the amount available to keep pace with the rising costs of rent across the Province.
- We would also like to see practices around moving youth to PWD be examined, the financial supports are important but the connections to ongoing supports can be more important for many vulnerable young adults.

3. MCFD Transition Planning, Navigator Role

a) What Was Announced

(MCFD Standards

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/policies/cf_5_children_youth_in_care.pdf)

5.10(1) Transition planning is initiated with the youth and their Care Circle or Team when the youth is 14, or for youth who are over the age of 14, upon coming into care. This occurs by including goal setting and planning to support their transition into adulthood in their Care Plan and

reviewing it at least annually with the youth.

5.10(2) A comprehensive Care Plan for youth in care, aged 14 and older, identifies transition planning goals and activities to support such goals across the Care Plan domains.

5.10(3) Concurrent permanency planning and family finding processes are continued throughout transition planning.

Note: these standards must be met, regardless of whether a SAJE Navigator or SAJE Guide is involved with the youth.

b) Gaps in Implementation

Youth Transition Plans are being requested by young people and organization's but MCFD currently does not provide these to everyone consistently. One service organization within the BCCEYH has requested these for all of the young people receiving their services but only 2 have been provided since the beginning of 2019. A regional inequity of transition planning has also become apparent to us, with planning meetings more likely to happen in one region versus another region in the Province. When transition planning is provided by MCFD, it has been positive for the youth, and we request similar helpful planning to be provided consistently.

We understand that changes take time to implement however, there is a current lack of transparency surrounding transition planning policies where BCCEYH members have been trying to piecemeal information together and determine how it connects with the new Navigator role. It would appear that current policy is not in line with the Navigator role as described in the MCFD Standards. Additionally, observations of the Navigators currently in place show they may be overwhelmed, unable to provide extensive outreach, and as a result are reverting to triaging their planning very close to transition dates.

c) Young People's Experience

One youth was told that there's no Navigator who would be available to help her. The Navigator role was delegated to a youth worker from a contracted organization until the program coordinator notified MCFD that the youth worker's role was to focus on the youth's mental health/court date/physical wellness and not coordinating an appropriate transition plan. From there, the Child & Youth Mental Health CYMH (MCFD) counselor took on the Navigator role. From this we can only assume was that there were not enough staff within MCFD to complete this role. The youth also struggled with responding to messages and missing appointments with Social Workers. Social Workers would not do outreach when they would not hear back from the youth. On top of these complications, the youth's Social Workers kept changing which also made it difficult to create an appropriate transition plan.

d) Recommendations

- We recommend that staffing levels are increased further across BC to make transition planning and support a priority. This preventative measure will save many youth great hardship while also saving the Province an even greater amount of spending that would be required in the future should youth not be supported to become independent and thriving adults.
- Community supports require more clarity on all of the steps and timelines for the creation of transition plans. We also need these plans to be consistently created, administered, and monitored for all youth across BC. We request that youth are connected to staff dedicated to the appropriate roles who themselves are well supported within MCFD to reduce turnover and provide consistent, transparent support to all youth.

4. Agreements with Young Adults & SAJE

a) What Was Announced

“Expanded eligibility for post-19 supports and services.” (MCFD Transitions Roadmap)

b) Gaps in Implementation

The extension of care is desperately needed for all youth who have had experiences in care, regardless of the type of care agreement they were associated with. This announcement is prudent and urgently needed to be implemented. Ideally, we would like to see temporary measures put in place while we await Legislative changes in 2024 to ensure no youth falls through the cracks. Unfortunately, some of the most vulnerable youth are still left to fend for themselves at the age of transition when complex supports are needed that could be better administered with an AYA in place than without one.

Unfortunately, we have seen youth who were on Voluntary Care Agreements or Special Needs Agreements left to completely fend for themselves. Without adequate housing or supports, their options for housing often put them at greater risk of abuse, violence, and sometimes increased their risk of exposure to active substance use. All of these influences can compound existing trauma, creating even greater difficulty in breaking cycles of abuse and poverty they may have been subjected to in their short lives.

c) Young People’s Experience

Some of the youth we work with are approaching the age of transition, or have recently transitioned out of care before SAJE services have rolled out. Several youth will be moving out of care without adequate supports before the new Legislation rolls out and/or before the SAJE programming is consistently administered across BC.

One youth we work with was told by their worker that if there is a possibility that they can move home they will not qualify for SAJE. This issue applies to many services for the youth we work with, and while we understand that reunification is always the best-case scenario, there are many young people who will not be going home even if they technically could. From our perspective, the homes that the youth could technically return do not always offer a consistently safe environment. The care-givers may be able to present a safe environment during a home visit, or series of home visits, but when the worker is not present a different environment that is not supportive is the reality for that youth. The sentiments of the youth about their own safety do not always outweigh the brief encounters that workers have with the home environment and we believe more weight should be given to the youth's experience.

d) Recommendations

- Improved communication to all organizations who serve youth in or from the government care system and to the young people themselves around access to SAJE.
- A retroactive consideration for youth who are on TCA or VCA and currently not eligible for SAJE.
- Given the rate of inflation since the amount of the monthly income supplement was first set at \$1,250/month, we recommend increasing the monthly amount to be announced in the 2024 provincial budget and considering building in annual indexing.
- Greater emphasis on youth's voices when assessing home or resource safety.

5. Issues with Capacity & Communication Gaps

a) What Was Announced

"Expanded eligibility for post-19 supports and services." (MCFD Transitions Roadmap)

b) Gaps in Implementation

Social workers within MCFD appear to be facing overwhelming workloads and juggling numerous cases and responsibilities. The demands placed on them seem to exceed manageable levels, impacting their ability to provide quality consistent support to transitioning youth while also having a work-life balance.

MCFD workers across BC also appear to be receiving different information at different times on how best to support youth. Community support workers report that workers within MCFD seem to be left in the dark not knowing what services and programs are available through MCFD and community agencies. We know of examples where community workers save emails from MCFD about policy/process changes to share with MCFD workers when they are not aware of policy changes announced, or the worker changes and the next worker has a different understanding of how the programs work.

Turn-over in youth workers appear to be becoming more common. Many program staff do not know who to connect with for youth's supports when workers leave MCFD, there is sometimes a delay in a new worker being assigned and the lack of consistent support is quite detrimental to the youth. The BCCEYH and its members have nothing but empathy for this situation and recognize that it's an issue commonly shared within the sector and arguably in all sectors of the province. What we know is that the sector-wide capacity issues that are happening both within MCFD and youth-serving organizations are having significant effects in the lives of youth and families.

c) Young People's Experience

One of the youth who is living in supportive housing was promised supports by their worker including access to a season pass to the local ski hill and support in finding their own market housing unit. That youth worker left MCFD and the new worker was not aware of these promises and was not able to follow through on providing the items that were promised to the youth. Other program staff had witnessed these verbal promises being made but nothing was put into writing, so no follow up was possible and the youth is left disillusioned and disappointed.

d) Recommendations

- Consider contracting or partnering with organizations for transition planning services and ongoing transition planning supports for youth aging out of care.
- Adopt the Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care Evaluation & Fidelity Model, created by the Child Welfare League of Canada
- Increased inter-ministerial collaboration that build on the great inroads being made already.
- Increase funding to prevention programming and family supports services. Grow support for existing programs that keep families together and create new programs to fill gaps.
- Partner with the BBCCEYH on a communication strategy to share our changes and updates on MCFD service delivery and to receive on the ground feedback on how these changes are impacting the lives of youth.

Closing

The BCCEYH has a strong and diverse membership and can provide critical information, feedback, and suggestions based on the immediate and long-term needs of youth. We would like to make our group available to you for ongoing communication particularly with our members who are youth with lived expertise. We believe our ongoing input can help MCFD initiatives and program changes be implemented in timely and appropriate ways that reflect the priority issues identified by frontline workers and youth.

As MCFD continues to make these important changes to its services that expand supports for youth past the age of 19, the BCCEYH would like to support this work and encourage further collaboration and communication. Changing systems is challenging and hard. We are hugely supportive of the changes so far and want to be a partner in this continued work.

We know that you, like the BCCEYH, want the best for youth who are in and from care in BC and we can all do better when we work together. We encourage your feedback on this report and would like to be a resource to you as your work evolves. Please include the BCCEYH in consultations and opportunities to provide feedback on MCFD programs. We would very much welcome the attendance of MCFD staff at our meetings and events, and we look forward to working together!

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