



## LOCAL LEADERS

REGISTERED  
CHARITABLE TAX  
STATUS SUB-  
COMMITTEE

**FINANCE  
BOARD  
COMMITTEE**

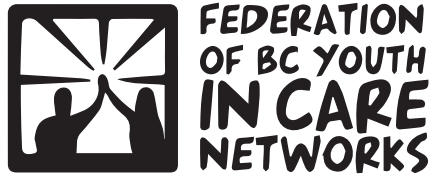
**"OG"  
(OUTREACH  
GROUP)**



# Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks



2016 YouthSpeak Report:  
The top issues facing BC's youth in & from government care today  
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks



By coming together, we're not alone!  
ADVOCATE • CONNECT • EMPOWER

Created by youth from care in 1993, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial non-profit organization with charity status dedicated to improving the lives of youth in and from care in BC between the ages of 14 and 24.

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#youthincareareawesome #jointhevillage #standwithyouthincare



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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Vancouver Foundation for the funding to support FBCYICN in doing this phase of the YouthSpeak work. We thank the members of the reference group who provided wisdom and expertise in the report's editing process including: Pam Alcorn (Federation of Community Social Services of BC), Michelle Wywrot (Ministry and Children and Family Development), Brian Hill (Representative for Children of Youth of BC), Mark Gifford and Trilby Smith (Vancouver Foundation), Lynell Anderson and Debbie Cox.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the authenticity and honesty of the 392 young people in and from government care (250 participated in the focus groups across BC and 142 additional voices contributed to the online survey). Your voices created this opportunity for insight, and allows us to work towards improving the lives of youth in and from care across BC.

You are shining examples of youth leadership. Thank you for your faith in us to share your experiences respectfully and we hope you feel proud of the awareness and change you inspire.

Finally we would like to thank the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and the Public Guardian and Trustee for their support planning a tour across BC and hosting the focus groups in the first phase of the YouthSpeak process.

### Suggested citation

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2016 Youth Speak Report. New Westminster, BC:  
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks



## Greetings Readers,

On behalf of the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, I am pleased to introduce our 2016 YouthSpeak Report. In preparing this report it has been our privilege to learn from almost 400 young people across the province about the top issues facing young people in and from government care today, and to work with a team of young people and partners to compile, analyze and broadly share this information.

Our report enters the public dialogue at an important time in the history of child welfare in BC. Thanks to the combined and collaborative efforts of many, for example, the public is now more aware of the substantial gap between the supports available to young adults in the general population and those available to youth aging out of care. While most young adults in BC receive a range of financial, social and emotional supports from their families, many youth aging out of government care experience poverty, social isolation and unstable housing or even homelessness.

There is also heightened public awareness of and concern about the over-representation of Aboriginal children in government care. Although Aboriginal children represent only 4-6% of the general population, 50-60% of the children in care in BC are Aboriginal.

Yet, today, we are hopeful.

We are hopeful because along with growing public awareness comes growing public support for positive change. For example, a recent survey found that “71% of British Columbians favour the provincial government supporting young people who have aged out of foster care at age 19 with their living expenses (including housing, food, education and health care) through a stipend or living supplement until they turn 25” ([http://www.fosteringchange.ca/2016\\_youth\\_transitions\\_survey\\_early\\_results](http://www.fosteringchange.ca/2016_youth_transitions_survey_early_results)).

We are also hopeful because of the inspiring young people in and from care that we have the opportunity to connect with and learn from, including the youth whose authentic, frank views and voices fill the pages of the 2016 YouthSpeak Report. We are grateful for the expertise that so many young people share with us, providing valuable insight into the varied and complex experiences of youth in and from care while highlighting the many strengths and challenges of the BC Child Welfare system.

As with everything we do, our hope for the 2016 YouthSpeak Report is that it helps to improve the lives of young people in and from care in BC. We are committed to expanding our work with partners and supporters – in government and in the community – to realize positive change.

We hope we can count on your help.

Growing public support for change is essential, so we encourage everyone to continue to speak up and out about improving supports for young people in and from care.

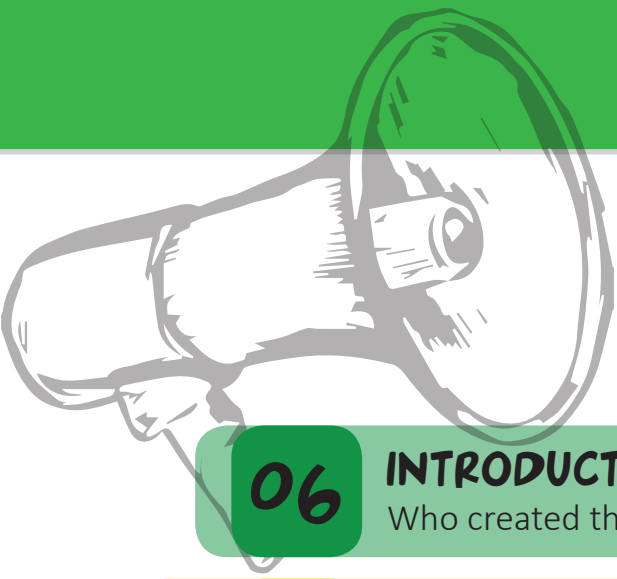
It’s also essential that changes are informed by the voices and views of young people, both individually and collectively. The 2016 YouthSpeak Report provides a thoughtful and thought-provoking collection of voices that should be heard and considered as proposed changes unfold. Please share it broadly!

Sincerely,  
Jules Wilson  
Executive Director



**FEDERATION  
OF BC YOUTH  
IN CARE  
NETWORKS**





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# INTRODUCTION

Who created this report and how?



## YOUTHSPEAK REPORT

### What is a YouthSpeak Report?

The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) have conducted YouthSpeaks since 2000. They are a process to check in and listen to young people in and from care (aged 14 to 24) and their issues, experiences and ideas.

We find out about their top challenges and recommendations, and then engage decision makers and the community to advocate for change and take action. The YouthSpeak process involves three phases that includes this report:

#### Phase 1—Focus Groups

FBCYICN hosted focus groups with youth in and from care (aged 14 to 18) in 14 communities across the province of BC, from Haida Gwaii to Prince George to Kamloops to Nanaimo. Each group identified the top issues they face while being in, or having recently transitioned out of, care. Grouping the input from each focus group together, FBCYICN and the McCreary Centre Society highlighted 11 themes or areas to further explore.

#### Phase 2—Survey + Report

With training and support from FBCYICN and McCreary Centre Society staff, a team of young people with government care experience developed a survey to find out more about the 11 theme areas and learn more about young people's overall experiences. The 2016 YouthSpeak Report captures their survey responses, highlights the top 5 issues for young people in and from government care and the youth research team's recommendations for systemic change to address the top issues.

#### Phase 3—Taking Action

FBCYICN presents the report findings and recommendations to groups of youth as well as youth-sector, government and community leaders to develop solutions and action plans that address the issues.

### Chart on Top 5 Issues from Past YouthSpeak Reports

2004 Top 5 Issues	2007 Top 5 Issues	2009 Top 5 Issues
Motivation to stay in school	Foster Homes	19 is scary
Finding employment	Family Connections	No trust
Stigma	Respect for youth in care	Abuse
Youth 16 and over not being taken into care	Education	Ministry taking too long to change
Stability - being bounced around to different homes and social workers	Transition to Independence	Criminal Record Check to go to friends

### YouthSpeak Youth Engagement

Listening to youth is critical when making any recommendations that affect their lives, but research and recommendations are stronger and have greater impact when young people with lived experience are trained and supported as researchers to develop the

research tools and analyse the results. Our team of brilliant and hard-working youth researchers developed the YouthSpeak survey and analysed the results to produce the key findings.



## Who is the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks?

Created by youth from care in 1993, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial non-profit organization with charity status dedicated to improving the lives of youth in and from care in BC between the ages of 14 and 24. If you've ever experienced government care (time in foster homes, group homes, residential mental health and addiction facilities, custody centres, extended family placements or been on youth or independent living agreements) and are between ages 14 and 24, we welcome you!

Together as youth, alumni, allies, staff and board members, we provide programs and services that support BC's youth with government care experience to advocate for themselves and system change, connect with supportive peers, allies, resources and opportunities and get empowered with goal, skill and leadership development.

### Programs and Services:

- Bursaries—For school, training and transitioning from government care
- Local Youth in Care Networks (Locals)—Supportive groups of young people with government care experience based in local communities
- Youth Retreats—Build skills and relationships with supportive peers from care and allies
- Youth Voice + Community Engagement—Raise awareness and build a movement for child welfare change
- Leadership + Volunteering—Develop leadership and life skills and give back to the community
- Support + Advocacy Services—Support to overcome barriers, navigate resources and address systemic issues

## Who is the McCreary Centre Society?

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-profit committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation and community-based participation projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to identify and address the health needs of youth in the province of BC. McCreary provides vital

information and tools that empower communities to be places where youth can thrive.

### Notes about the Research

Young people completed the survey online and were informed that their participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. It took on average 29 minutes to complete the survey, and there was no relation between survey completion time and young people's age.

**Analyses:** These report findings are based on responses from the 142 young people who provided valid survey responses. A total of 264 individuals accessed the survey but 122 did not answer any questions or did not meet the criteria of having government care experience, being between the ages of 14 and 24, and living in BC.

McCreary Centre Society carried out the analyses using SPSS statistical software. All comparisons and associations included in this report are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . This means there is up to a 5% likelihood that the results occurred by chance.

Percentages that represented only a few young people were not reported due to risk of deductive disclosure (may reveal the identities of some participants). In these instances, categories were grouped together and the combined percentage was reported, or the results were presented descriptively.

Quotations throughout the report are from youth-participant responses to open-ended survey questions and community focus groups.

**Limitations:** The findings may not be representative of all young people in and from care. For example, the experiences of young people with literacy challenges, those who were English Language Learners, or those who did not have access to a computer may not have been captured in this report.

Our team of youth researchers who designed the survey reflected on the findings and identified what surprised them or stood out next.

## KEY FINDINGS:

The top issues facing young people



### The 2016 Top 5 Issues

Most young people with government care experience ages 14-24 identified the same challenges and areas where much more support is needed—with one difference. Those still in care identified having a more supportive social worker as a key need, while

those who've left care identified better supports for transitioning out of care as a key need. Based on the findings we have listed the following 5 most commonly identified issues:

1. Permanency: To thrive they need stability as well as life-long relational and cultural connections

2. Transitions: Aging out into poverty

3. Mental Health: Trauma and instability require long-term healing and it's rarely available

4. Supportive Social Workers: Strong relationships for all, not just the "lucky ones"

5. Youth Voice: They know what they need and if asked will share

*Note: Throughout this report, the term young people captures the responses of 14-24 year olds, youth reflects the responses of 14-18 year olds, young adults captures the responses of those aged 19-24.*

### Other Important Findings

- Youth have varied experiences in care. Some had a positive experience overall and others did not. For example, around half felt they had supportive and caring foster parents (55% among those in foster care) and found their most recent social worker helpful (48%), whereas the other half did not feel this way. Many young people liked and valued their social workers but felt they were too busy to meet youth's needs.
- Workers don't have enough time. Nearly half (48%) of the youth found their social worker helpful and (45%) reported theirs had a meaningful impact on their life, but many (54%) found their workers were not accessible when they needed them. Many wrote about how their workers did not have enough time to focus on their needs.
- It's better to live in some places than others. There's a bit of a "postal code lottery" in BC, like many provinces. Sometimes, the quality of service and support youth report depends on where they live. For example, young people reported that it's better in many ways to live in the Interior than the Lower Mainland.
- Youth still move a lot. The majority of young people had moved multiple times while in care, and most identified stability as an important issue affecting youth with care experience.
- Young adults feel less safe. Most young people felt very or quite safe where they were currently living. Young adults (aged 19 to 24) were less likely to feel that way than youth (aged 14 to 18), and those living on their own were less likely to feel safe than youth in foster homes (71% vs. 97%).
- It can be really hard to finish high school. Seventeen percent of youth had left school before graduating from high school. Most youth were currently in school, including 27% who were pursuing post-secondary education. Mental health challenges were the most commonly identified barriers to accessing or completing post-secondary education.
- Young people can't access the mental health support they need. Many young people experience trauma before and during their time in care, and trauma takes a long time—often a lifetime—to heal. The majority of young people felt they needed help for a mental health condition in the past year. Among these young people, 43% reported they did not get the help they needed. Young adults were more likely than youth to have missed out on needed mental health services because they did not think they could afford it and because they were unaware of services available to them.





- Care experience means poverty. Less than 3 in 10 young people felt they always had enough money to meet their needs, and young adults were less likely than youth to report having enough money to buy needed clothes.
- Young people can't afford fun. Most young people reported they had been offered opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities while in care, and their caregivers supported their interests and activities, but only 1 in 3 were currently taking part in activities. Most young people identified lack of money as a barrier to their participation.
- Cultural connections are still an unmet priority. Young people identified the importance of focusing on youth's cultural needs while in care. Their suggestions to help improve youth's cultural connectedness included offering them more support to learn about their ancestors and to connect with extended family and Elders. They also highlighted the importance of foster parents and social workers being sensitive, knowledgeable and accepting of Aboriginal culture and approaches.
- Youth still aren't involved in their transition plans. More than 4 in 10 young people reported they had minimal or no involvement in developing a plan for how they would transition out of care (percentages were comparable for young adults and youth).
- Housing support is key to better transitions. When asked what would help, or would have helped, with transitioning out of care, young people most commonly identified housing support. Young adults were more likely than youth to identify that support in various areas would have been helpful with their transition out of care.
- Youth stay in care for a long time. Youth had most commonly (30%) been in care for 10 or more years.
- Youth aren't ready for independence at 19. Most young adults (69%) reported not feeling ready for independence at age 19 and only 50% of youth in care between the ages of 16 and 18 felt ready to leave.
- Young people are giving back to the community as unpaid volunteers. Despite most young people living in poverty, 45% volunteer without pay. Volunteering increases to 54% among those who have transitioned—right when money is tightest.



**“We need to prevent child apprehension in the first place by providing the space, support and encouragement...to children and their families.”**

# YOUTH'S BACKGROUND

## Who experiences government care in BC?



YOUTHSPEAK REPORT



YOUTH'S BACKGROUND SNAPSHOT

### Young people's age range



### Young people's identified gender



65% female



24% male

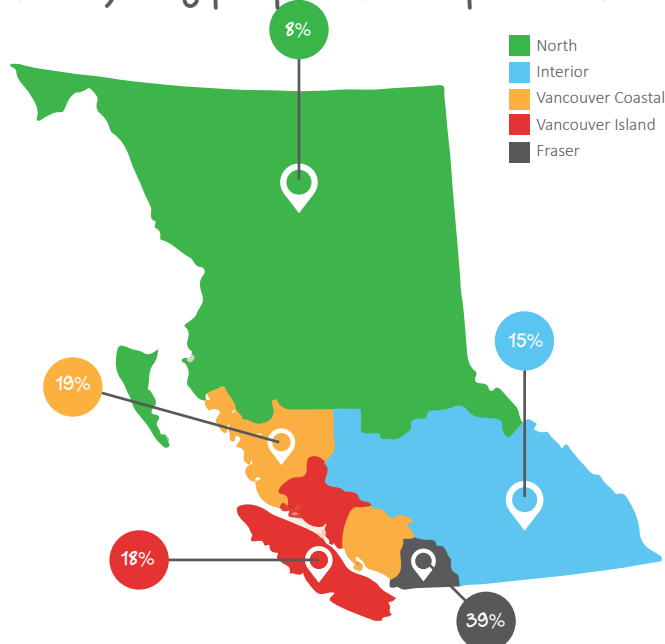


7% gender fluid



4% two-spirit

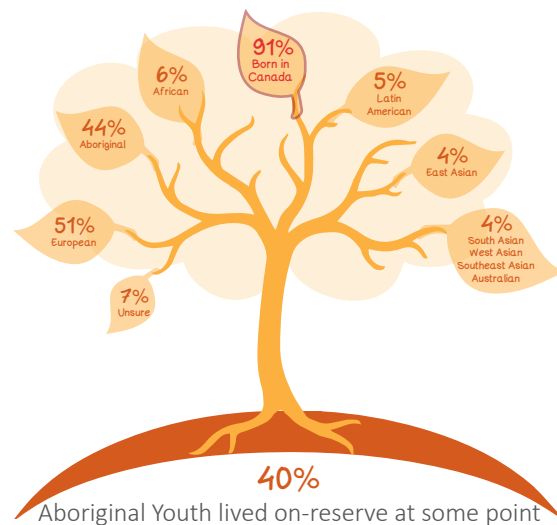
### Where young people who responded live



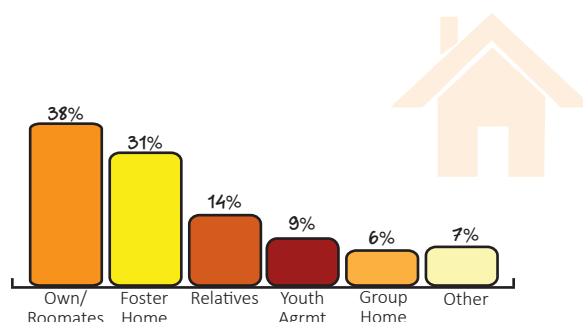
“It is great that there are safe places for youth to go, and that most of the staff at these places put full effort into support[ing] the youth in their care. The only comment I have is that there needs to be more residences for youth who need a safe house. I know funding is not great, but comparing that to the amount of youth on the streets and/or couch surfing, it's worth it to keep fighting for it.”

They said it!

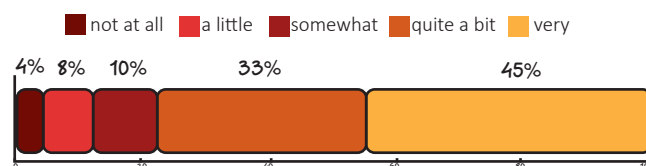
### Family background



### Who young people live with



### How safe young people felt in current living situation



~ Note ~

YouthSpeak infographics are based on 142 respondents. For some questions participants were able to choose more than one response option. Some rounding occurred resulting in amounts greater than 100%.

Young people = 14-24 year olds, Youth = 14-18 year olds, young adults = 19-24 year olds

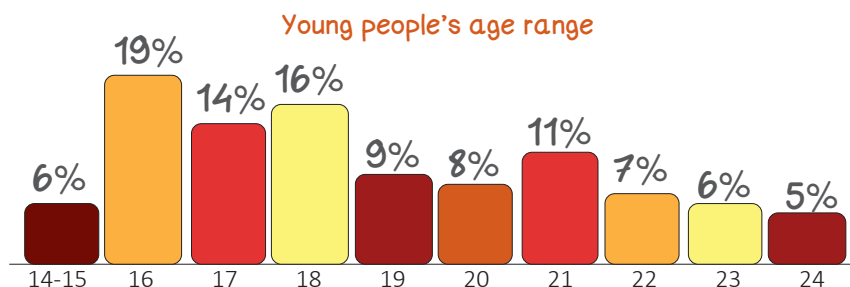


Young people ranged in age from 14 to 24, and their average age was 18 ½ years. Around half (49%) were between the ages of 16 and 18.

The majority of young people (65%) identified as female, while 24% were male, 4% were Two Spirit, and the rest used other descriptions for their gender such

as gender fluid or non-binary.

Young people identified with a range of sexual orientations, including straight/heterosexual (61%), bisexual (14%), pansexual (7%) and gay or lesbian (4%). Six percent were a-sexual and 6% were questioning their sexual orientation.



## Family Background

Most young people (91%) had been born in Canada. Their family backgrounds most commonly were European (51%) and/or Aboriginal (44%; they could mark more than one background). They also identified as African (6%), Latin American (5%), East Asian (4%), South Asian (4%), West Asian, Southeast Asian and Australian. Seven percent of youth did not know their background.

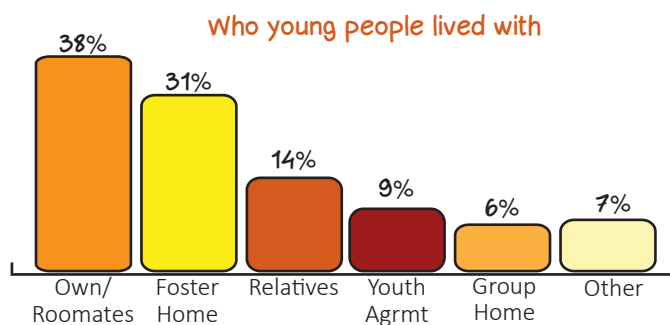
Among Aboriginal young people, 40% had lived on a First Nations reserve at some point, with most of these young people not currently living on reserve.

## Where Young People Live

Young people reported currently living in each of the five regions of the province. Specifically, 39% were living in the Fraser region (Abbotsford, Surrey, Burnaby, etc.); 19% were in Vancouver Coastal (Vancouver, Richmond, North Shore, etc.); 18% were on Vancouver Island (Victoria, Nanaimo, Duncan, etc.); 15% were in the Interior (Kelowna, Kamloops, Cranbrook, etc.); and 8% were from Northern BC (Prince George, Prince Rupert, Terrace, etc.).

Young people most commonly indicated currently living on their own or with roommates, and/or in foster care. Seven percent indicated an arrangement not among the list of options, such as housing programs or Assisted Living.

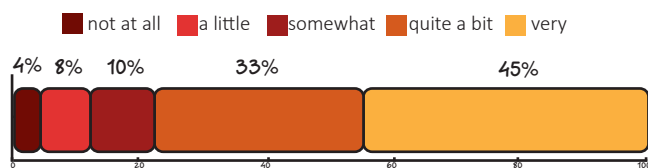
A little under half of young people (45%) felt very



Note: Youth could choose more than one response.

safe where they were currently living, while 4% did not feel safe at all. Youth living in a foster home were more likely to feel safe than youth living on their own (97% felt very or quite safe vs. 71% of youth living on their own). Similarly, youth were more likely to feel safe than young adults. There were no differences in feelings of safety among youth of various gender identities.

## How safe young people felt in current living situation



**"Make sure children have time to be children. We grow up faster than most. We learn to take care of ourselves quicker, learn to do things without asking for help. Adults forget that we aren't like normal kids, we didn't have normal childhoods. So make sure future kids in care have opportunities to be kids."**

# GOVERNMENT CARE EXPERIENCE

## What is it like to be in BC's care today?



YOUTHSPEAK REPORT

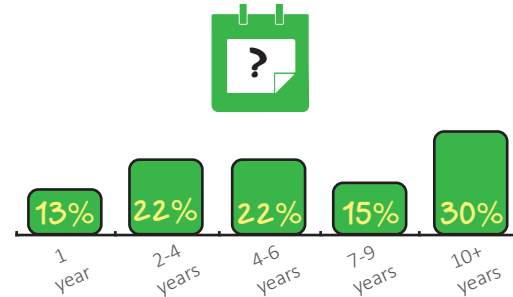
### Of the young people surveyed

21% of Aboriginal young people had been under the care of a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA).  
8% were unsure if they had been under the care of MCFD or a DAA.

49%  
of youth were  
currently  
in care

51%  
had been in care  
in the past

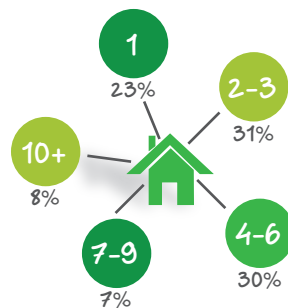
### # of Years in care



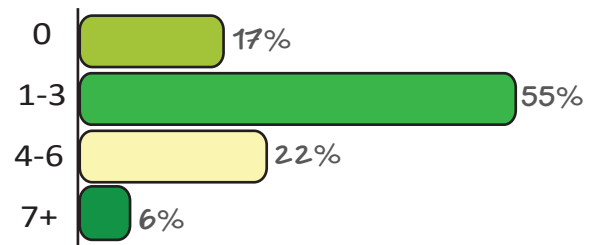
### Top 5 living situations while in care

Foster Home	72%
Youth Agreement	30%
Group Home	29%
Independently	25%
Extended Family Program	24%

### # of foster homes experienced



### Greatest # of moves in 1 year



“ Social workers need to keep more in touch with the youth because not all foster care is safe or caring. What I've experienced was a horrible time in foster care. ”

They said it!

### % of young people who felt their caregivers were supportive (reported by caregiver type)



### What would help (would've helped) with transitioning out of care?

#### YOUTH AGED 14-18



#### YOUNG ADULTS AGED 19-24

~ Note ~

YouthSpeak infographics are based on 142 respondents.

For some questions participants were able to choose more than one response option.

Some rounding occurred resulting in amounts greater than 100%.

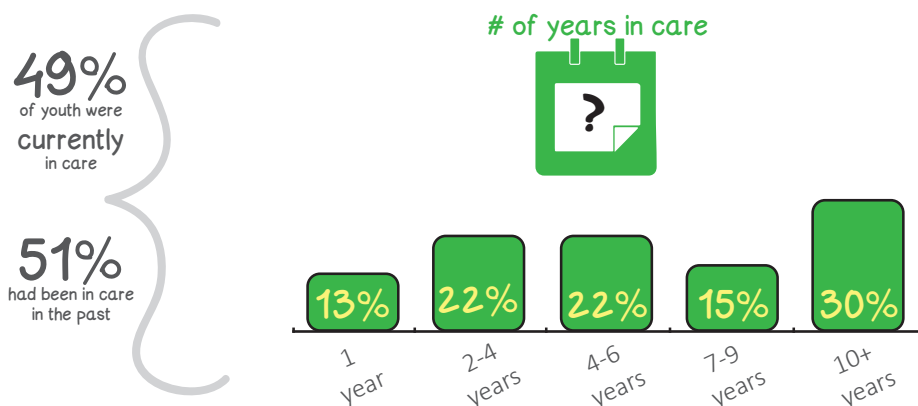
Young People = 14-24 year olds, Youth = 14-18 year olds, Young Adults = 19-24 year olds





Around half (49%) of young people surveyed were currently in government care, and the rest (51%) had been in care in the past. Young people had most commonly been in care for 10 or more years overall. The vast majority of young people (95%) had been under the care of the Ministry of Children and

Family Development (MCFD), and 21% of Aboriginal young people had been under the care of a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA; they could mark more than one agency). Eight percent of young people were unsure which agency/ministry they had been under the care of.



Note: Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

While in care, youth most commonly lived in foster homes, group homes, or were on a Youth Agreement. Also, 32% of young adults reported having been on Agreements with Young Adults (AYA).

Most common living situations while in care	
Foster Homes	72%
Youth Agreement	30%
Group Home	29%
Independently	25%
Extended Family Program	24%
Shelter/Safe House	17%
On the Street	13%
Youth Custody Centre	5%

Among survey participants, young people in the Interior were the most likely to have lived in foster homes, and young people in the Fraser region were the least likely (90% vs. 59%).

## Experiences in Foster Care & Group Homes

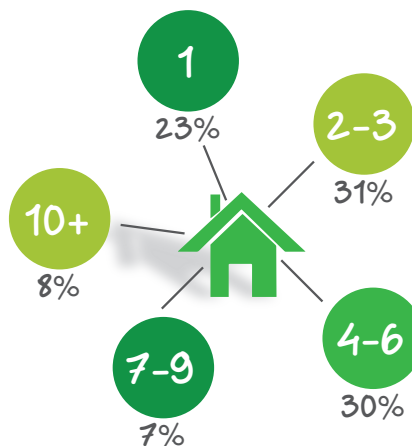
Among young people who had stayed in foster homes, they had most commonly stayed in 2 to 6 homes. A little under a quarter had been in one foster home and 8% had been in 10 or more. Among young people who had been in group homes, a little under half (47%) had

stayed in one group home, while 36% had been in 2 or 3 and 17% had been in 2 or more.

When the different types of placements were combined, 5% of young people overall had been in four or more group homes and in four or more foster homes.

When asked about the greatest number of moves they had experienced in a year while in care, 17% of young people reported they had not moved. They most

## Young people's most common living situations while in care



commonly reported two moves as their greatest number in one year, although a total of 42% reported three or more moves in a year.

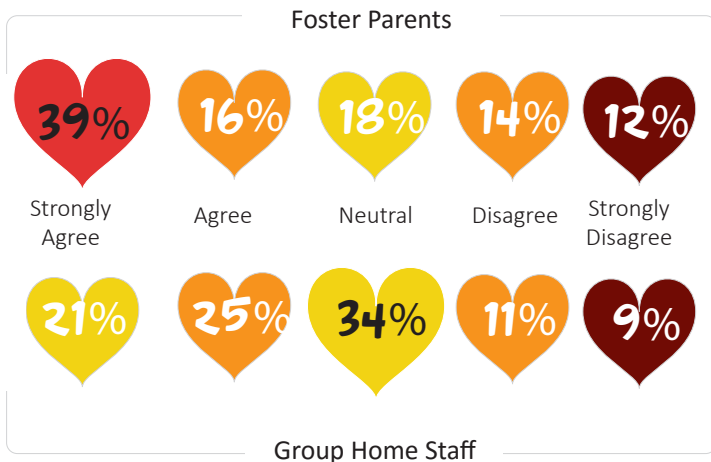
Note: Young people could choose more than one response. Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.





Over half of young people (55%) felt they had supportive and caring foster parents (among those who had been in a foster home). A little under half (46%) felt the staff in their group home were supportive and caring (among those who had been in a group home).

## Young people who felt they had supportive and caring foster parents or group home staff



A number of young people added comments about their experience in foster care. Some were grateful for the supportive and caring foster parents they had, whereas others were dissatisfied with their placements and wished they had more of a say in where they lived.

*"I was fortunate enough to finally end up with the most amazing social worker and incredible foster parents after 2 years of moving around. I then spent 5 years living with them and still stay connected. They are my family. I am forever grateful."*

*"I was bumped back and forth between foster homes and it wasn't until I reached this foster home that someone finally stood up for me and cared about my well-being... I was lucky enough that I had my foster mom there to help guide me onto a good path. I know if it wasn't because of her I would not be attending school and I would be involved in high risk activities much like other people in the system are."*

### Social Workers

Around half of young people (51%) reported having had between 1 and 3 social workers, while 30% had 4 to 6 and 19% had 7 or more social workers. Young people provided feedback about their most recent social

worker. Around half felt comfortable approaching their social worker to discuss their wants or needs; felt their social worker informed them about their rights as a youth in care; and found their social worker helpful. Young adults were more likely than youth to rate their most recent social worker as unhelpful (i.e., very little or not at all helpful; 39% vs. 21%). Also, young people who identified as a gender other than male or female were more likely to feel their social worker did not help them reach their goals compared to young people who identified as male or female.

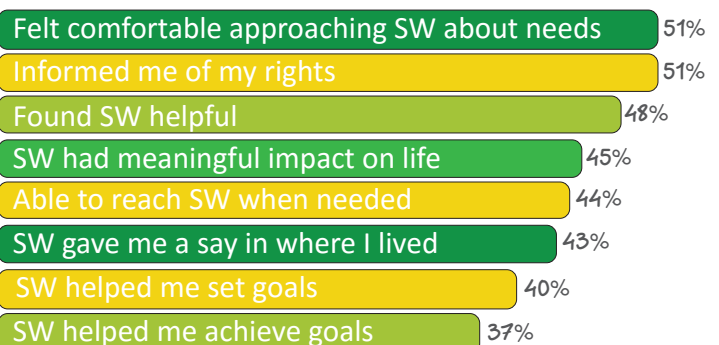
Regionally, young people who completed the survey on Vancouver Island were the most likely to feel their social worker gave them a say in where they lived and had a meaningful impact in their life, whereas young people in Vancouver Coastal were the least likely to feel this way.

*"Truly I love my social worker... I always hated social workers growing up and it's taken a lot to say I like her... Every day I learn another lesson on life but I wouldn't have been able to without her."*

Young people most commonly (45%) indicated knowing they had a Plan of Care document which outlined their goals, strengths, challenges and the resources available to address these. A quarter of young people (25%) reported not having one, while 30% did not know if they had one. Young adults were less likely than youth to report having had a Plan of Care (35% vs. 55%).

Young people's comments on the survey suggested that many liked and valued their social workers. However, a number of young people felt their social workers were too busy due to their caseloads and, as a result, did not have enough time to focus on meeting their needs.

### Young people's feedback about their most recent social worker (those who marked 'quite a bit' or 'very much')



Note: SW = social worker.



"I had a wonderful social worker, but due to her caseload she was limited and couldn't focus on me... She did her best, but she couldn't be there for the times that mattered most."

"Majority of the time, I felt rushed by my social worker during our meetings. Even if we were having a face to face conversation, it's as if their attention was elsewhere and I could sense that they had other things on their minds."

"Socials workers are too busy all the time. I want my social worker to help me, but she often doesn't have the time for it because she has so many other teens/kids she's responsible for. Also, I can never contact my social worker by phone for some reason, I have to email her."

"I think that the Ministry needs more one-on-one transition workers because at least with transition workers we would be able to get the support we need."

When asked what would help them with the process of transitioning out of care, or what would have helped, young people most commonly identified housing support (64%). Young adults were more likely than youth to feel that support in various areas would have been helpful.

"A housing program designed for youth transitioning out of care [would have been helpful]. It feels like we are just thrown to the wolves. I was lucky in getting into [a specific housing program], but most aren't that lucky."

"It would have been great to still be in touch with the social workers after aging out of care because you are usually on your own by the time you hit 19."

"I would have appreciated if we had more than a year to plan the transition, and plan my goals and future education for a career."

"No one really preps you to age out of care, plus it's scary – no one is ready to be an adult at 19, I mean really."

## Transitioning Out of Care

Forty-five percent of young people had already transitioned out of care, and 14% were in the process of doing so. The majority of those who reported they were in the process of transitioning were aged 16 to 18.

In all, 35% of young people reported being quite a bit or very much involved in creating a plan for how they would transition out of care, while 22% reported being somewhat involved and 44% felt they were very little or not at all involved. There were no differences based on young people's age.

Fifty percent of youth aged 16 to 18 felt ready to transition out of care, compared to 0% of younger youth. Among young adults, 31% recalled feeling ready for this transition.

What would help, or would have helped, with transitioning out of care

### YOUTH AGED 14-18



### YOUNG ADULTS AGED 19-24

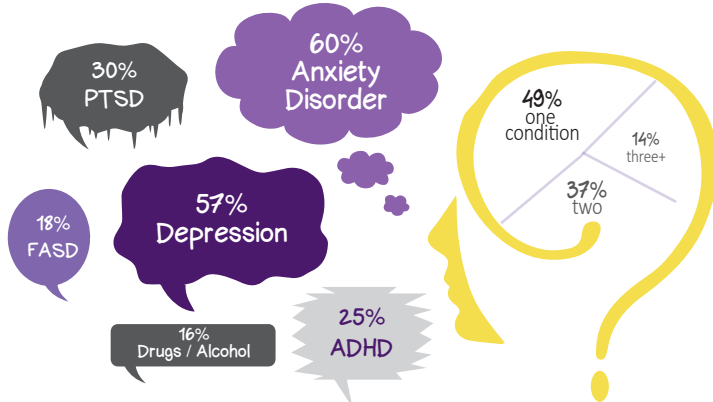
Note: The age difference for "Someone to turn to when needed" was not statistically significant.

# WELL-BEING, CONNECTIONS & SUPPORT

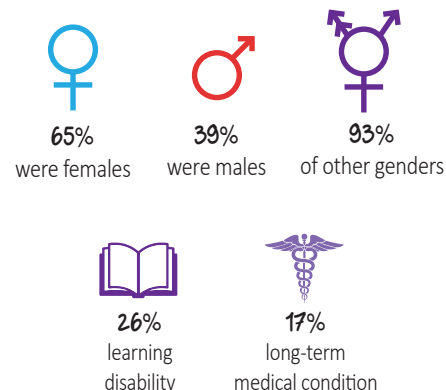


## YOUTHSPEAK REPORT

### Top 6 most common mental health conditions + disabilities



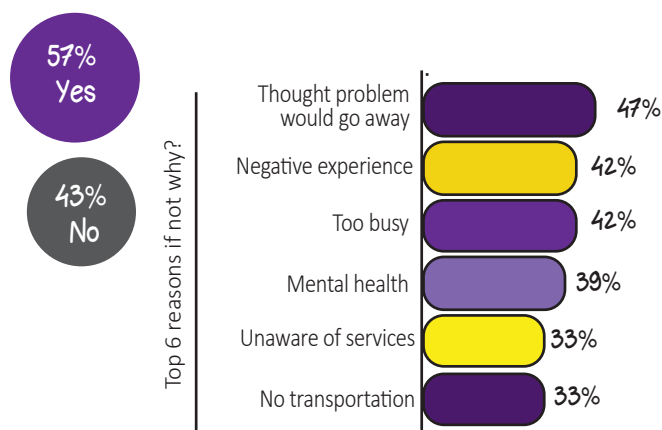
### Of those who reported having a mental health condition or disability



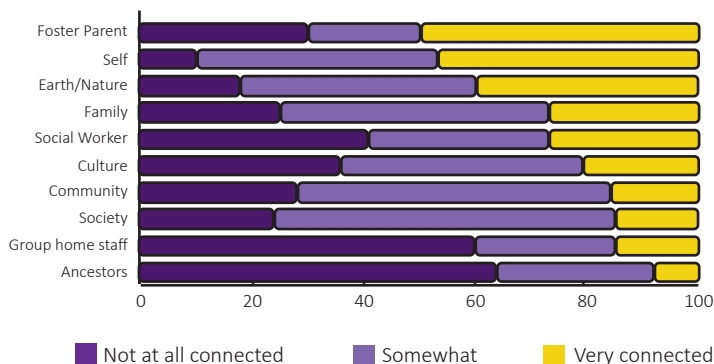
### Services + supports accessed



### Did they get the help they needed?



### How connected youth felt to...



“ I was fortunate to get such an amazing counsellor while I was going through the worst time of my adolescent-hood. Without her compassion and guidance, I would not have been placed with such incredible people who raised me as their own. It took a community to raise me and for that I am grateful. ”

They said it!

76% of respondents reported having at least one mental health condition or disability

63% of those had a mental health condition

~ Note ~

YouthSpeak infographics are based on 142 respondents.  
For some questions participants were able to choose more than one response option.  
Some rounding occurred resulting in amounts greater than 100%.

Young People = 14-24 year olds, Youth = 14-18 year olds, Young Adults = 19-24 year olds



## Physical & Mental Health

Most young people (76%) reported having at least one health condition or disability, and the most common was a mental health condition (63%).

Females were more likely than males to report having a mental health condition (65% vs. 39%), and young people who identified as another gender were the most likely to have such a condition (93%). Young people also reported having learning disabilities (26%), a behavioural condition (e.g., conduct disorder; 36% of males vs. 12% of females), and/or a long-term medical condition (e.g., diabetes, asthma; 17%).

### Most commonly reported mental health conditions and disabilities

Anxiety Disorder or panic attacks	60%
Depression	57%
PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)	30%
ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)	25%
FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder)	18%
Alcohol or other drug addiction	16%
Attachment Disorder	12%
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	8%
Antisocial Personality Disorder	8%
Bipolar Disorder	7%
Borderline Personality Disorder	7%

Among young people who had health conditions or disabilities, around half (49%) had one type, while 37% had two and 14% had three or more different types of conditions.

Young people were also asked if they had specific conditions or disabilities, and 83% indicated having at least one. They most commonly reported having Anxiety Disorder—with females the most likely to have this condition (e.g., 63% vs. 35% of males)—as well as Depression.

Most young people who had mental health conditions reported having between 1 and 3 specific conditions, while 35% reported having four or more.

The vast majority (97%) of young people who had a mental health condition felt it affected their daily life

at least sometimes, and 29% felt it always affected them. Males were the least likely to report that their mental health condition affected them on a daily basis.

Young people were asked if they thought they needed help due to a mental health condition in the past year. The majority felt they needed help, and 57% of these young people felt they got the help they needed. The remaining 43% of young people who felt they needed help reported not getting the support they needed (29% of young people overall).

Among young people who completed the survey, those in Northern BC were the most likely to report missing out on needed mental health services, and youth in the Interior were the least likely.

## Reasons for Missing Out on Needed Services

Young people who did not get needed mental health support identified a number of reasons for missing out on these services. The most common was thinking or hoping the problem would go away.

Young adults were more likely than youth to have missed out because they did not think they could afford it and because they were unaware of available services. Percentages were comparable across gender and region.

**“I think support should be there even when the youth isn't asking as sometimes we pass it by as though we're doing fine when we're not.”**

## Services Accessed

Young people identified a wide range of services they had accessed in the past year. The most common were doctors, dentists, and social workers. Youth were more likely than young adults to have accessed dentists (81% vs. 46%) and social workers (85% vs. 25%), whereas young adults were more likely than youth to have accessed social assistance (58% vs. 28%) and food banks. The majority of young people who accessed services found them helpful.

Among survey respondents, the percentage of young people who accessed mental health support ranged from 25% in the North to 59% in the Fraser region. The





percentage who accessed one-to-one workers ranged from 35% in Vancouver Coastal to 63% in the Fraser region.

A couple of young adults reported accessing Community Living BC (CLBC), and no young people had accessed Provincial Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (PDHHS).

Services and supports accessed in the past year		
	Accessed Service	Found Helpful
Doctor	78%	81%
Dentist	65%	92%
Social Worker	63%	77%
One-to-one / youth worker	51%	90%
Mental health support	49%	69%
Outreach support	35%	85%
Social Assistance	34%	70%
Job training	32%	83%
Band services *	31%	60%
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks	30%	82%
Food bank	26%	82%
Persons with Disabilities (PWD) support	18%	75%
Public Guardian and Trustee	17%	83%
Transition worker	16%	67%
Representative for Children and Youth (RCY)	14%	60%
Sexually Exploited Youth (SEY) worker	7%	100%

**“I was fortunate to get such an amazing counsellor while I was going through the worst time of my adolescent-hood. Without her compassion and guidance, I would not have been placed with such incredible people who raised me as their own. It took a community to raise me and for that I am grateful.”**

Seventeen percent of young people felt they had been discriminated against when accessing services at some point. These young people identified discrimination based on age, family background, sexual orientation, gender identity, having mental health challenges, and being a young person from care.

Some of young people’s experiences of discrimination when accessing services:

**“Discrimination is ubiquitous in this colonial system.”**

**“Being queer, disabled and a person of colour has caused numerous situations that haven't been good and have often times caused pain.”**

**“I felt like I was not taken seriously by social workers because of my anxiety.”**

## Connections

Most young people (94%) identified they had someone they would feel comfortable talking to if they had a serious problem. The most commonly identified people were friends or romantic partners (73%). Young people also identified foster parents (42% among those who had been in foster homes), counsellors (36%), adult relatives (36%), one-to-one or youth workers (35%), siblings (33%), social workers (28%), group home staff (20% among those who had been in group homes), teachers (19%) and Elders (19% among Aboriginal young people). A few young people identified people not included among the list of options, which most commonly were mentors.

Females were more likely than males to feel they could turn to a sibling for support, and youth were more likely than young adults to feel they could turn to a social worker for support (37% vs. 19%).

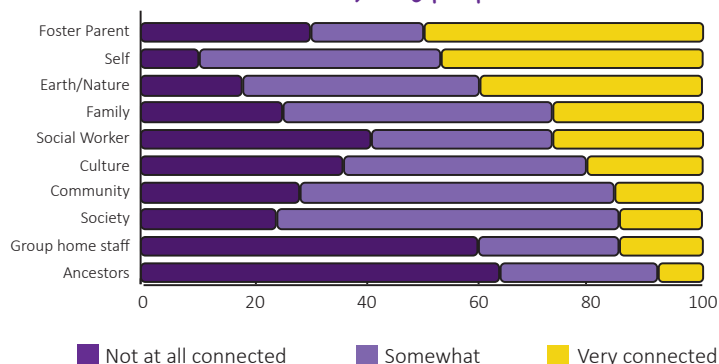
Young people were asked about their sense of connection in various domains. They were most likely to feel very connected to their most recent foster parents (where applicable), themselves and the earth/nature. They were least likely to feel connected to their ancestors, although Aboriginal young people were more likely than non-Aboriginal young people to feel at least somewhat connected to their ancestors (49% vs. 22%).

Also, Aboriginal young people were more likely than non-Aboriginal young people to feel very connected to their culture (31% vs. 10%). Males were more likely than females and youth who identified as another gender to feel very connected to themselves (71% vs. 33% and 42%). Youth were more likely than young adults to feel very connected to their most recent social worker (35% vs. 19%).





## How connected young people felt to...



*Note: Among youth who indicated that each item applied to them.*

When asked about sensitivity around their cultural needs while in care, most young people felt there was not at all (48%) or only a little (32%) sensitivity, whereas the rest felt there was quite a bit (9%) or a lot (11%) of sensitivity. Percentages were comparable for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people.

Young people in the Interior who completed a survey were the most likely to feel there was sensitivity around their cultural needs while in care, whereas young people in the North and Vancouver Coastal regions were the least likely to feel this way.

In response to what could be done to help them feel more connected to their culture while in care, a number of youth stated they would appreciate support to learn more about their family tree and ancestors, to connect with extended family and Elders and learn about their traditions. Another suggestion was to offer free classes for youth in care which explored culture. Other youth felt they had the tools to connect with their culture when they felt ready, and did not need assistance to do so. A number of Aboriginal youth highlighted the importance of foster parents and social workers being culturally sensitive, knowledgeable and accepting of Aboriginal culture and approaches. One young person expressed that feeling connected to their culture helped them with their transition out of care and into adulthood.

## Ways to Connect Youth in Care to their Culture...

“When I aged out, I went to the ceremony with my social worker and I got to invite my family and teachers. It brought all of the pieces of my life together and made me feel more rooted and better able to move forward. The cultural aspect is extremely vital to ensuring that Aboriginal youth are better prepared for the aging out process.”

“Foster parents, social workers and others in this field need to...embrace the diversity and complexity of cultures, recognizing the importance and the beauty of our [Aboriginal] culture.”

“An option to explore my roots and a genuine effort to keep looking into it. Funding to look into genetic testing. I feel like a part of me is missing because I have no idea where my roots lead.”

“Having regular cultural nights with people from home. Physically going out to explore and learn about the lands and the waters.”

“Having foster parents who were willing to understand and learn with you. Having them not push their culture on you.”

“Being able to go to my reserve and learn things from the Elders.”

“Assign social workers that speak the same language and share the same heritage. Social workers that understand different cultures and the way parents and children from other cultures perceive government forces.”

“I like the fact that while I’m in care, I get to learn about different cultures through staff at whatever group home I’m in. Examples: smudging and meditation.”

“Constant affirmations and validity of my culture and race, deconstructing stigma and allowing for healthy participation and growth. I lost my language and culture via colonialist ideologies within the social work system.”

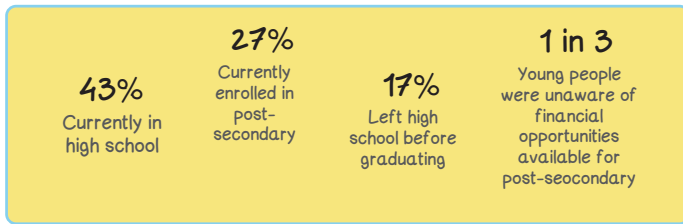


“The teachings of the medicine wheel incorporated into my care as well as having my social worker (from an Aboriginal delegate) as well as my caregivers educated about the teaching/caring methods of my culture.”





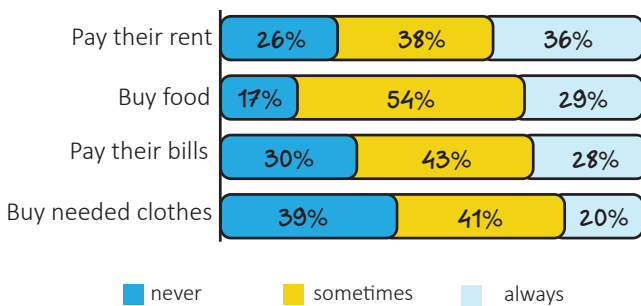
### Education experiences of young people



### Life skills taught to young people in care



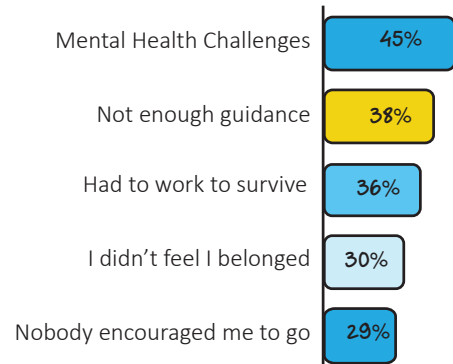
### Young people who felt they had enough money to...



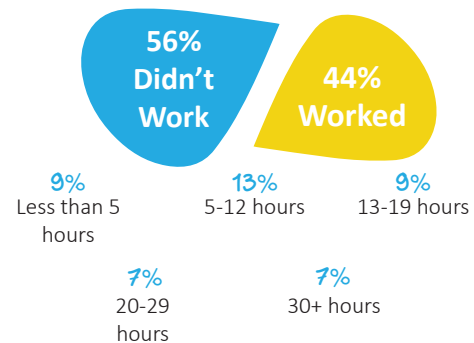
#### ~ Note ~

YouthSpeak infographics are based on 142 respondents.  
For some questions participants were able to choose more than one response option.  
Some rounding occurred resulting in amounts greater than 100%.

### Top 5 barriers for young people accessing and/or completing post-secondary



### Young people who worked at a paid job in the past month



“ We need help financially even more than you guys might think. I just finished school...and it was some of the WORST most broke months of my life. And now I am homeless and without a job trying to make things work without any money. I don't know what to do now. ”

They said it!

Young People = 14-24 year olds, Youth = 14-18 year olds, Young Adults = 19-24 year olds





## Education

Most young people were currently in high school (43%) or post-secondary education (27%), whereas the rest were not attending school but had graduated from high school (14%) or had left high school before graduating (17%).

Around 1 in 3 young people (34%) were unaware of financial opportunities available to support post-secondary education for young people in and from care. Youth were more likely to be unaware of these opportunities than young adults (47% vs. 20%). The opportunities that young people were aware of included Agreements with Young Adults (AYA; 61% of young adults vs. 29% of youth), bursaries (41%), student loans (37%), the Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAF; 56% of young adults vs. 19% of youth), scholarships (36%), grants (33%) and tuition waivers (36% of young adults vs. 19% of youth).

Among young people who had tried accessing post-secondary education, around half felt it was very challenging (22%) or quite a bit challenging (26%) to access it, whereas the rest felt it was a little (34%) or not at all (18%) challenging.

Barriers to accessing or completing post-secondary education	
Mental health challenges	45%
Not enough guidance with how to apply for school	38%
Have had to work to survive	36%
I didn't feel I belonged	30%
Nobody encouraged me to go	29%
I was unaware of opportunities for financial support	25%
Not enough on-campus support	16%
I haven't been eligible for financial support	15%

*Note: Young people could choose more than one response.*

Young people identified a number of barriers to accessing or completing post-secondary education. The most common obstacle was mental health challenges. Other common barriers were not getting enough guidance with the process of applying for school, and young people being unable to pursue

their education because they had to work in order to survive.

Females and young people who identified as another gender were more likely than males to report a feeling of not belonging as a barrier to accessing or completing their post-secondary education (36% and 39% vs. 0%).

Some young people added that they appreciated the support and guidance they did receive when applying for post-secondary funding because the process of applying was stressful. A few stated that the available financial support was not enough for them to pursue their education, including single parents who struggled to cover their living expenses.

### Thoughts on Barriers when Accessing or Completing Post-Secondary Education...

**"Accessing YEAF was like pulling teeth out of an angry bear... Had I not had support from two people who knew paperwork in and out I never would have made it anywhere."**

**"The support I was informed that I am entitled to receive from MCFD has been very difficult to receive. It's like pulling teeth every time I need them to pay for my books and tuition. If I had known it would be so difficult and would put so much stress on me, I probably would have preferred to go through my band instead."**

**"As a single parent, student loans don't offer enough for living expenses."**

**"The tuition waiver fees do not cover all of tuition and I understand that it's the school's choice to decide how much is given...Each semester I have to pay \$200 or so from my pocket, because they won't cover the full tuition."**

## Life Skills

Young people reported learning various life skills while in care, and the most common were cleaning and goal setting/planning. Youth aged 14 and 15 were less likely than those aged 16 to 18 to report gaining skills to find a job.



## Life Skills Taught to Young People while in Care

Young adults had different experiences of learning life skills while in care, compared to youth. Specifically, young adults were more likely than youth to report being taught how to find housing (57% vs. 25%) and set up contracts (39% vs. 22%). In contrast, youth were more likely than young adults to report that they were taught how to cook (67% vs. 49%), grow food (48% vs. 22%), engage in traditional ways of catching food (40% vs. 17%), communicate well with others (75% vs. 56%), manage their stress (64% vs. 42%), engage in goal setting/planning (82% vs. 58%) and effectively manage their time (65% vs. 37%).

Aboriginal young people were more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to report gaining skills in traditional ways of catching food (e.g., fishing, hunting; 42% vs. 18%), as well as in growing food (49% vs. 24%) and healthy cooking (70% vs. 47%) while in care.

Skills taught to young people while in care	
Cleaning	75%
Goal setting/planning	70%
Being compassionate toward others	66%
Communicating well with others	66%
Grocery shopping	63%
Finding a job	62%
Healthy cooking	58%
Budgeting/money management	55%
Stress management	53%
How to get ID	52%
Time management	51%
Keeping a job	42%
Finding housing	41%
Paying bills	35%
Growing food (gardening, etc.)	35%
Maintaining housing	35%
Setting up contracts (cellphone, etc.)	31%
Traditional ways of catching food (fishing, hunting, etc.)	29%
How to do taxes	13%

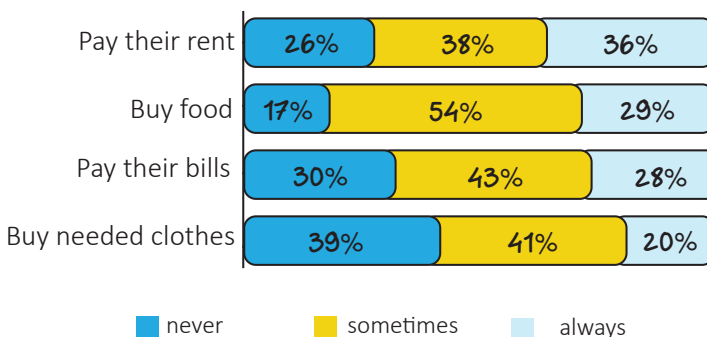
Young people identified different methods of learning life skills which they felt were best for them (they could choose more than one method). In

addition to practicing on their own (78%), they identified learning through their friends (48%), life skills workshops (46%), their caregivers (39%), one-to-one workers or youth workers (36%), learning online (29%) and through their social workers (25%).

## Money & Work

Less than 3 in 10 young people reported always having enough money to buy food, pay their bills and buy needed clothes. A little fewer than 4 in 10 young people always had enough money to pay their rent (among those who had rent to pay).

### Young people who felt they had enough money to...

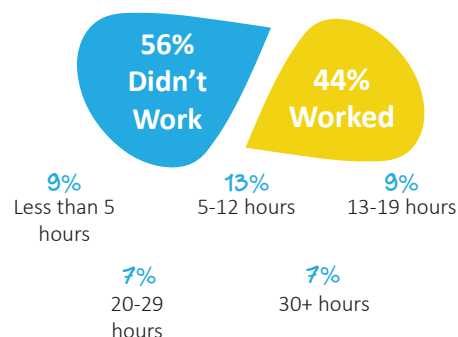


*Note: Among young people who indicated that each item applied to them.*

Young adults were less likely than youth to have enough money to buy needed clothing (52% vs. 25%). A total of 44% of young people worked at a paid job in the past month. Among young people who worked, around half (49%) worked 12 hours or less, while 16% worked 30 hours or more. Forty-five percent of young people were currently volunteering without pay. Most young people (65%) had at least one volunteer or paid job (33% had one, 14% had two and 18% had three or more).

Youth were less likely than young adults to be working at a paid job (31% vs. 57%) as well as to be volunteering without pay (35% vs. 54%).

### Young people who worked at a paid job in the past month







“I know the basic info I need right now, but I also need more life-skills to learn to move on. I’m 17 turning 18 soon & I wanna move out on my own already but my social worker needs to help me or even a different worker to support me.”



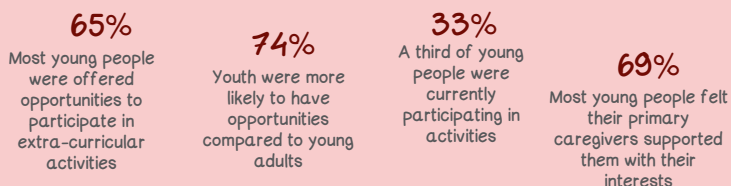
“I would like to volunteer with some foster children or advocate for foster children or youths that are transitioning out of care.”

# ACTIVITIES & YOUTH VOICE



## YOUTHSPEAK REPORT

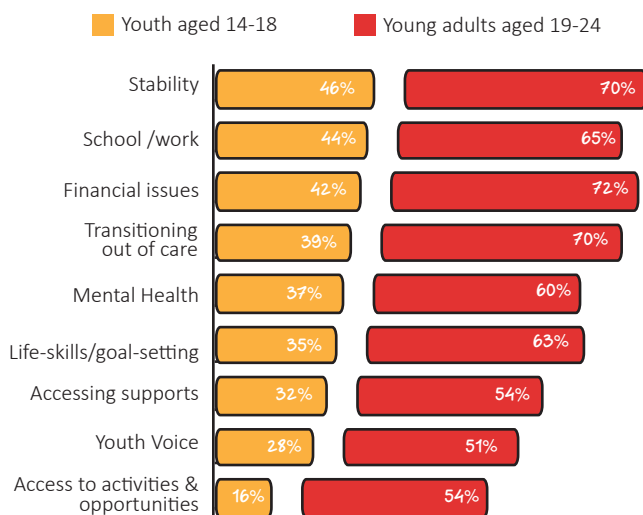
### Extra-curricular activities



### Common activities

music soccer  
boxing gym membership  
kayaking swimming  
joining a choir yoga  
team sports nature  
culture dance

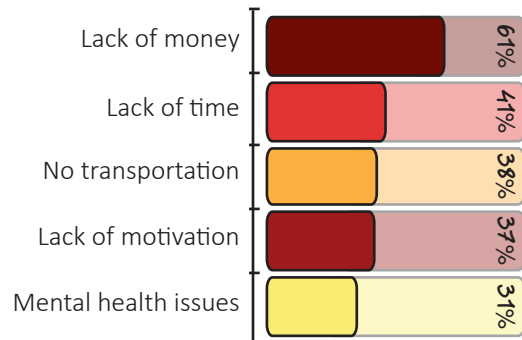
### Most important issues by age



#### ~ Note ~

YouthSpeak infographics are based on 142 respondents. For some questions participants were able to choose more than one response option. Some rounding occurred resulting in amounts greater than 100%.

### Barriers to participation



### Expressing their voice



“ I wish there was more emphasis on extra-curricular activities when I was in care. It would have most likely kept me from dropping out of high school. ”

They said it!

Young People = 14-24 year olds, Youth = 14-18 year olds, Young Adults = 19-24 year olds



## Extra-Curricular Activities

Most young people (65%) reported that they were offered opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities while in care (regionally, percentages ranged from 46% in Vancouver Coastal to 88% in the Interior). A third (33%) of young people were currently taking part in activities. Youth were more likely than young adults to report having these opportunities while in care (74% vs. 56%) but were equally likely to indicate taking part in activities now.

Forty-four percent of young people identified extra-curricular activities in which they wanted to take part but were not currently involved. Percentages were similar for young people previously and currently in care. Common activities included boxing/kickboxing, going to the gym/having a gym membership, music (e.g., music lessons, joining a choir), dance, yoga, team sports (e.g., soccer), swimming, kayaking and other activities which connected young people to nature and their culture.

**“I want to learn how to play an instrument. I also always wanted to learn how to box.”**

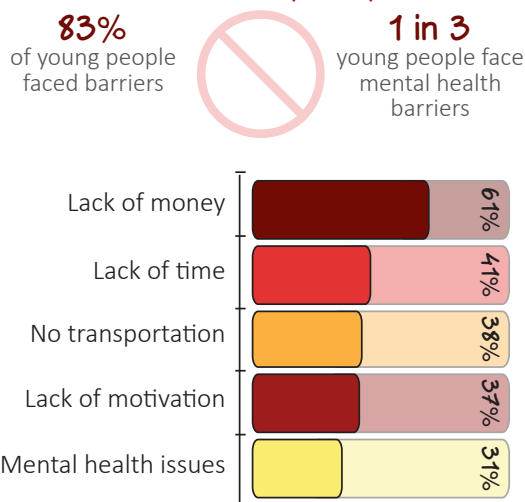
**“Learning from the lands and waters.  
Learning more about my Indigenous culture and language.”**

**“Martial arts, learning my language, music lessons.”**

Most young people (69%) felt their primary caregivers supported them with their interests and activities, while 20% had neutral feelings and the remaining 11% did not feel supported. Percentages were comparable for young people currently in care and those previously in care.

The majority of young people (83%) reported facing barriers to taking part in extra-curricular activities, and the most common barrier was lack of money. Other commonly identified barriers were lack of time, transportation and motivation. Around 1 in 3 young people reported that mental health challenges created barriers to taking part. Four percent of young people identified a barrier not included among the list of options, most commonly being a single parent.

## Barriers to participation



*Note: Young people could choose more than one response.*

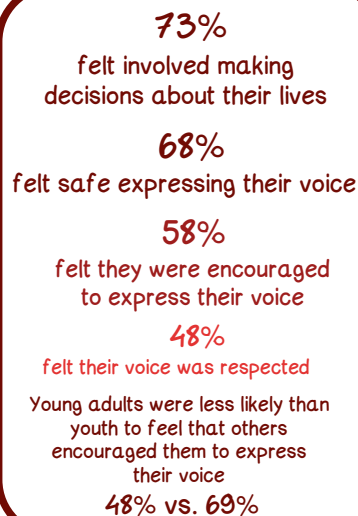
Young people currently in care were less likely than those previously in care to report experiencing barriers to taking part in extra-curricular activities. Similarly, youth were less likely than young adults to identify various barriers, including lack of money (44% vs. 80%), lack of time (32% vs. 51%), mental health challenges (21% vs. 41%), lack of encouragement from others (15% vs. 39%) and lack of awareness of opportunities to take part in activities (11% vs. 36%).

## Youth Voice

Young people were asked about expressing their voice and having a say in decisions that affected their life. Most young people felt they were quite or very involved in making decisions about their life (73%); felt safe expressing their voice and opinions (68%); and felt that people around them encouraged them to express their voice (58%). A little under half (48%) felt their voice was respected when speaking to others about their situation.

Young adults were less likely than youth to feel that others encouraged them to express their voice (48% vs. 69%).

## Expressing their voice



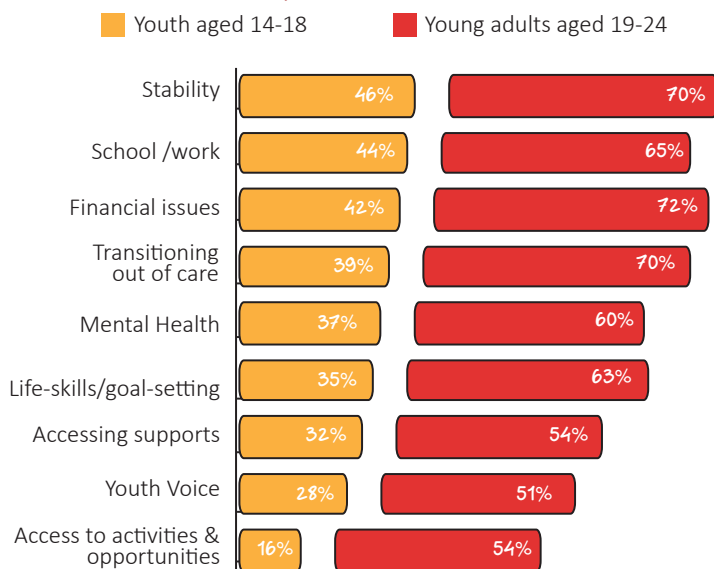




## Most Important Issues Identified by Young People

Young people were asked to think about their experience in government care and to identify the most important issues that have affected them (they could choose more than one issue). The response options were based on the qualitative findings from YouthSpeak focus groups, which asked youth about the issues, needs and experiences of youth in and from care.

### Most important issues by age



*Note: Young people could choose more than one response.*

Young people most commonly identified connections – such as with adults, peers, culture and community – as the most important issue that has affected them. They also commonly identified stability (e.g., permanency, structure) and financial issues.

When looking at the top five issues, youth and young adults identified four of the same issues, specifically connections, stability, financial issues and school/work. They differed on one issue, in that youth identified supportive social workers in their top five, whereas young adults identified transitioning out of care. The percentages among young adults were higher than among youth in most areas. For example, a little over half of young adults identified youth voice and access to activities as important issues that have affected them, compared to a minority of youth. Further, the majority of young adults identified other issues as important, such as mental health, compared to a minority of youth.

There were no differences in identified issues among the various genders, with the exception that males were the least likely to identify mental health as one of the most important issues affecting them (e.g., 23% of males vs. 52% of females).





Protective factors are supports, experiences or other aspects in a young person's life that can reduce their risk of unhealthy outcomes and increase their chance of positive health. Young people who had supports in the top five identified areas were more likely than their peers without these supports to report healthier circumstances.

### Connections/Permanency

Young people who moved less while in care...

- Had fewer mental health diagnoses (compared to those who moved more)
- Were more likely to be employed
- Were more likely to have enough money to pay their bills and buy needed clothes

Among young people who had been in foster care, those who felt comfortable talking to their foster parents if they had a serious problem....

- Were less likely to have missed out on accessing needed mental health care (26% vs. 51% who did not feel comfortable talking to their foster parents)
- Were less likely to have left high school before graduating
- Were less likely to report challenges accessing post-secondary education

### Relationship with Social Worker

Young people who felt comfortable talking to a social worker if they had a serious problem...

- Were less likely to have missed out on accessing needed mental health services

Young people who felt their social worker had a meaningful impact on their life...

- Were more likely to be employed

Young people who found their social worker helpful...

- Were less likely to report challenges accessing post-secondary education

### Transitions

Young people who always had enough money to meet their basic needs...

- Were less likely to report barriers to participating in extra-curricular activities (compared to those who never had enough money)

- Were less likely to experience challenges accessing post-secondary education
- Were less likely to forego post-secondary education because they had to work in order to survive
- Were less likely to miss out on accessing needed mental health services
- Were less likely to be experiencing mental health challenges on a daily basis (among those with a mental health condition)
- Were more likely to feel ready to transition out of care

### Mental Health

Among young people with a mental health condition, those who got the help they needed for their condition...

- Were less likely to have left high school before graduating (compared to those who did not get the help they needed)
- Were less likely to report challenges to accessing post-secondary education
- Were more likely to have enough money to meet their basic needs
- Were less likely to experience barriers to engaging in extra-curricular activities
- Were less likely to be experiencing mental health challenges on a daily basis
- Were more likely to feel ready to transition out of care

### Youth Voice

Young people who were involved (quite a bit or very much) in creating a plan for how they would transition out of care...

- Were more likely to be employed (than those who were less involved in creating their transition plan)
- Were more likely to have enough money to pay their rent
- Were less likely to be experiencing mental health challenges on a daily basis (among those with a mental health condition)
- Were more likely to feel ready to transition out of care

Young people who felt they were involved in making decisions about their life...

- Were more likely to feel ready to transition out of care (45% vs. 19% of those who felt only a little or not at all involved in decision-making)





### What we Need to do Now...

The youth researchers who developed the survey reflected on the findings and created recommendations to improve the child welfare system.

They felt that government care may have improved for youth over the past few years, given that youth reported more positive experiences in some areas than young adults who were no longer in care.

However, they felt more work still needed to be done in certain areas. Here were their recommendations.



### 1. Permanency: Connections and Stability

Professional boundaries need to be balanced with caring and serve youth's best interests. In playing the role of family, workers and foster parents should be allowed to love their youth and foster permanent connections with them.

Because social workers and foster parents may not play the family role forever, emphasis on early and ongoing, youth-directed permanency planning should happen for each young person to identify and maintain relationships with all those who do and could love the young person over the course of their lives.

Youth in care should experience longer-term stability in their placements and in their healthy relationships with foster parents, social workers and other important people in their lives.

### 2. Transitions to Adulthood: Aging out into poverty

Overall, the findings suggest that young adults with care experience need more support than they are currently getting in order to ease their transition to adulthood and to reduce their risk of living in poverty. They need housing support, access to job and education opportunities, mental health support and access to other needed services.

Youth in care need more support to learn life-skills well before they turn 19. In particular, they should learn

skills to find and keep their housing to increase their likelihood of experiencing housing stability once they transition out of care.

### 3. Mental Health: Trauma and instability require long-term healing and it's rarely available

More attention should be paid to addressing youth's past traumas and mental health challenges, because these issues affect youth's ability to function properly and to develop healthy connections with foster parents and others. Healing from trauma is a long-term process and counselling and healing support should be available well into adulthood.

### 4. Supportive Social Workers: Strong relationships for all, not just the "lucky one's"

Social workers' caseloads should be reduced so they can devote more time and attention to the youth they work with, allowing for closer relationships and quicker, more tailored support and action.

### 5. Youth Voice: They know what they need

Allow youth to have more of a say in decisions that affect them early on, including their foster placements and developing a plan for transitioning out of care.



### Other Comments & Suggestions from Young People who Completed the Survey

“There will never be justice for indigenous youth and non-indigenous youth on stolen native land. How can we have the foundation of truth, justice and equality without addressing the genocide of Turtle Island in a meaningful way that actually gives the land back to the Original peoples?”

“My teachers at school and my social workers were intent on me becoming a successful story, so we all worked together to do what we could. I sought opportunity in youth programs, volunteering, travelling abroad and my culture. I built layers of support, friends, family and community... I am applying for school and I intend to use all of my experiences to improve the systems that both failed and saved my life.”

“I was very fortunate to have lived in a very stable group home with a good social worker at the end who helped me transition (I still contact these people all the time to chat). However I have also seen the worst of this system with my peers and I advocate for change!”

“The future will remain positive if I can stay in my home with foster parents that have loved and raised me since I was 2 years of age. I could not manage life without them on my own and strongly feel foster care should be extended to allow the current support to continue.”

“Thank you for this survey!”

“I really appreciate all the work you all put into this survey, I hope these findings spark a conversation for change!”

“Social workers have too large a caseload—hire more social workers.”

“MCFD needs to be more aware of resources available to youth in care, such as the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks.”

“[We need] more public awareness of what

youth in care face.”  
It Works Well When...

“Workers are persistent, encouraging and attend events to be involved in the local community”

“Foster parents are loving and maintain their relationships with us.”

“[We have] youth transition conferences, creating goals [together].”

“[We get to] live with [our] siblings and not alone in a house—visiting [our] families and being cared for by everyone.”

“My foster family treats me like I’m their real child.”

“[We] get to know a lot of the youth [from care] at camps and other activities.”

“There’s someone to talk to when nobody [else] is there.”

“We are heard.”

“[We are] connected with community and culture.”

“[We get] to have fun and do activities.”

“[We get] healthy food.”

“[We have] good relationships with our foster parents and social workers.”

“[We have] free education!”

“[We have] lots of support to move out.”



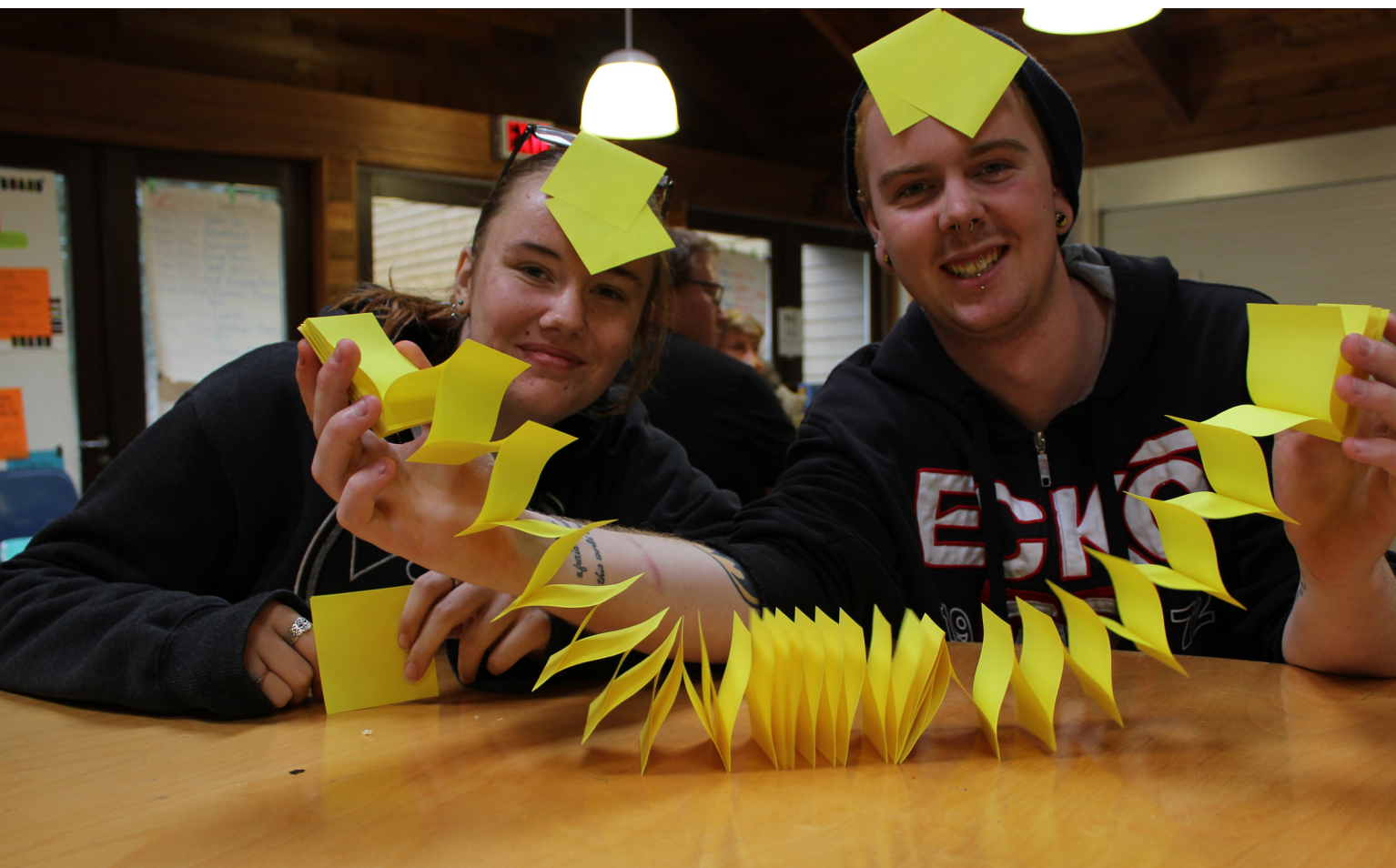
The findings and discussion generated from the YouthSpeak process tell us a story about what happens when appropriate and equitable support is there for our young people in and from care, and what happens when it is not.

Most young people are struggling with the concerns youth from care have been vocalizing for many years: trauma + instability + heavy caseloads + little input to plans + few connections to community and culture + little education and skills training support + early and unsupported transitions = poverty, mental health challenges, social isolation and getting stuck surviving instead of pursuing goals and dreams.

But we also heard from more young people than ever who feel supported, loved, empowered and able to pursue their goals. We know young people from care soar when they are provided the kind of support kids outside of the system typically count on, and our system and broader community have begun to step up in recent years.

Our YouthSpeak process has confirmed what we already knew—many young people are finding their way and thriving despite barriers, but these young people have had to be either lucky or super-hero resilient. We believe no one should have to be lucky or exceptionally resilient to thrive.

Sixteen years after our first YouthSpeak, we've checked in with young people in and from care across the province and know we have made progress in some areas and still have a lot more to do in others. We know building more equitable supports around our young people works for them and works for our communities. Armed with the 2016 YouthSpeak findings and recommendations from the youth researchers, we know where we need to focus our efforts and create plans that can have a meaningful impact on the experience young people have within our child welfare system. We are moving ahead to take action as a collective of young people, agencies, government leaders and the public. Please join us.







**Aboriginal:** The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America (Turtle Island). The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

**Agreements with Young Adults (AYA):** A Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) program that supports young people, aged 19 to 24, transitioning out of care and into adulthood with financial assistance and support services to finish high school, learn job and vocational skills, attend college or university and complete a rehabilitation program. Financial assistance includes living expenses, child care, tuition fees and health care.

**Assisted Living:** A semi-independent form of housing that is regulated under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act to provide support to people who require day-to-day assistance in one or two areas (e.g. medications, bathing or life skills). It is intended for people who are able to make the range of decisions that allow them to live safely in a supportive, semi-independent environment.

**Community Living BC (CLBC):** A provincial crown agency, mandated under the Community Living Authority Act, that funds supports and services through service agencies for adults with developmental disabilities and their families in British Columbia.

**Culture:** The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time.

**Delegated Aboriginal Agency:** An Aboriginal agency and their employees, that undertake administration of all or parts of the Child, Family and Community Service Act through delegation agreements, assigned by the Provincial Director of Child Protection (the Director). The amount of responsibility undertaken by each agency is the result of negotiations between the ministry and the Aboriginal community served by the agency, and the level of delegation provided by the Director.

**Disability:** A physical, mental or learning condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities.

**Elder:** Any person recognized by the Aboriginal community as having knowledge and understanding of the traditional culture.

**In Care:** For the purpose of this report this term refers to those who have experienced foster homes, group homes, residential mental health and addiction facilities, custody centres, out of care options or have been on youth or independent living agreements.

**Learning Disability:** A condition giving rise to difficulties in

acquiring knowledge and skills to the level expected of those of the same age, especially when not associated with a physical handicap.

**Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD):** A BC Provincial ministry that provides complementary services to families and can include services delivered through: Early Years Services; Services for Children and Youth with Special Needs; Child and Youth Mental Health Services; Child Safety, Family Support and Children in Care Services; Adoption Services and Youth Justice Services.

**Out of Care Options:** A series of alternatives to having children and youth come into the direct care of the government with the goal of maintaining family ties and enhancing a child or youth's opportunities to stay connected to their own families and communities. Most common examples include the Extended Family Program, Adoption and transfer of guardianship. The caregivers in these situations are commonly an immediate family member — a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or an older sibling — or someone with an established relationship or cultural connection to the child and their family.

**Placement:** Where MCFD decides a youth in care should live. This could include a foster home, group home or out of care option.

**Transitioning to Adulthood:** The process a youth in care goes through as they get ready to hit the age of 19 and "age out of care."

**Youth Education Achievement Fund (YEAF):** A MCFD program for youth 19 to 24 who have aged out of care on a Continuing Custody order, or who was under the guardianship of a director of adoption pursuant to the Adoption or Infants Act. This program offers youth who are enrolled in post-secondary school \$5,500 a year for a maximum of four years.

**Young People:** For the purpose of this report this term refers to anyone between the ages of 14 and 24 who are in or from care.

**Young Adults:** For the purpose of this report this term refers to anyone between the ages of 19 and 24 who have aged out of care.

**Youth:** For the purpose of this report this term refers to anyone between the ages of 14 and 18 who are in or from care.

**Youth Agreements:** A legal agreement between youth aged 16 and over and MCFD. The purpose of the agreement is to help youth gain independence, return to school, and/or gain work experience and life skills.