

# Are We Making The Grade?

A REPORT CARD ON THE WELL-BEING OF BC YOUTH IN CARE

November 2010





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The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of young people in and from government care in BC, between the ages of 14 and 24.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is committed to providing opportunities for young people to identify their needs, issues and ideas about being in care. Recently, we were invited by the National Youth in Care Network (NYICN) to create a report card on the well-being of youth in and from care in British Columbia and present this at their November 2010 national conference in Ottawa .

To create this report card we reviewed all of the YouthSpeak reports from the last 10 years to determine the top concerns for youth in and from care in BC. YouthSpeaks are consultations where young people come together to brainstorm the current issues for youth in care and then come up with solutions to address them.

The five key areas identified by young people are:

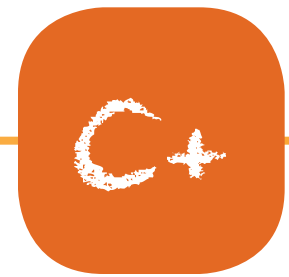
- 1. Rights**
- 2. Permanency**
- 3. Transitioning Out of Care**
- 4. Education**
- 5. Social Stigma**

We not only wanted to honour the voices of previous YouthSpeak participants, we wanted to give more young people an opportunity to reflect further on these issues. So we trained a team of eight young people, known as the BC Delegation Team, to facilitate a provincial consultation with 40 youth in and from care to find out what these issues mean to them; why this is an issue; what's working; and actions needed (recommendations) for improvements. Finally, young people were asked to assign a letter grade based on the information they heard throughout the consultation and their own experiences. The assigned letter grade reflects how well young people think BC is doing related to that particular issue.

So, how *is* BC doing in ensuring the well-being of BC's youth in care? Read on to find out!



# RIGHTS



Rights are based on our needs. Respecting everyone's rights means everyone's rights matter equally. Rights are owned, not earned, and cannot be taken away (we always have them, no matter what).

All children and youth in Canada have rights! It's the guardians' and government's job to protect every young person's rights. There are two main places where children and youth's rights are outlined. The first is an international "treaty" (official agreement) called the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which has been signed by almost all countries in the world. The rights outlined in the UNCRC are based on "The 4 Bs":

**Be Healthy:** The rights that fall under the "Be Healthy" category are not just about having a healthy body, but having a healthy mind too. These include the right to medical and dental care, the right to recreation, the right to go to school, and the right to be fed clothed and cared for.

**Be Safe:** The rights that fall under the "Be Safe" category are not just about being safe; they are about feeling safe too. These include the right to be protected from being hit or embarrassed as a punishment, the right to privacy, the right to be protected from being teased or bullied and the right to be protected from racism, sexism and other types of discrimination.

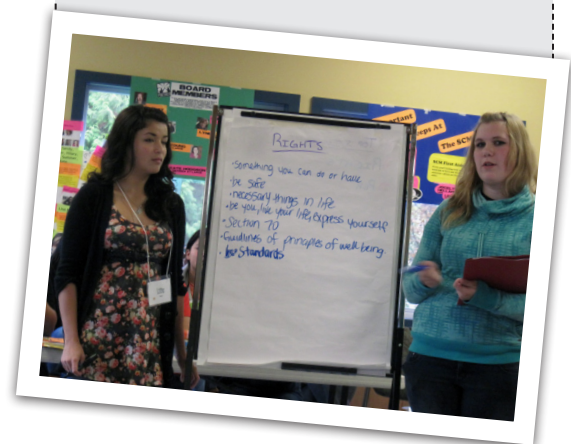
**Be Yourself:** The rights that fall under the "Be Yourself" category help you to be free and proud to be yourself. These rights include non-discrimination, your right to participate in social and recreational activities, your religion and your culture, as well as the right to speak your own language.

**Be Heard:** The rights that fall under the "Be Heard" category ensure that you can express your feelings, thoughts and opinions, especially when important decisions are being made about you. These include the right to an advocate or interpreter and to a lawyer in certain circumstances. They include the right to learn important information like your rights, and to be informed about rules and decisions so that you understand what's going on before you speak up.

There is also a source that outlines specific rights for children and youth in care in British Columbia. These come from Section 70 of the Child, Family, and Community Services Act. The Section 70 Rights are based on the principles from the UNCRC but it also contains specific rights that address the needs of youth in care.

*When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of rights, here are some things they had to say:*

- Guidance
- Being heard as youth
- Something you have
- Be safe
- Necessary things in life
- Section 70
- Guidelines of principles of well being
- Standards
- Your Life, Your Rights
- Protect privacy



## Why is this an issue?

When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of rights, here are some things they had to say:

YouthSpeak	Issues And Concerns Young People Have Identified Related To Rights
National Report Card Consultation October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education about rights, access to resources</li> <li>• Social workers need to be more aware of our rights</li> <li>• Often deprived of rights and privileges– a lot of people don't know about their rights</li> <li>• Don't know how to enforce or access our rights</li> <li>• Basic needs are often not met</li> <li>• Angry, frustrated, hurt</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Continuing to experience] abuse, including neglect, emotional, physical, and sexual, while in care</li> <li>• Disrespect by foster parents</li> <li>• Unequal treatment</li> <li>• Not being heard or listened to</li> <li>• No privacy (over-crowded homes)</li> <li>• Restrictions on recreation</li> <li>• Religion forced on or not able to practice own religion/culture</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2007 A Time for Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to provide more opportunities to explore healthy activities, allowing youth to figure out who they are and to also gain skills, accountability, and pride</li> <li>• More respect for the rights of youth in care</li> <li>• Cultural awareness and sensitivity including appropriate placements</li> <li>• Prejudice in foster homes or held by foster parents</li> <li>• Social workers need to listen to young people (and believe them) when they say they are not happy so youth don't have to hurt themselves to get help</li> <li>• Adults are worried that it will result in more work if youth know their rights</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2004 Are You Listening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth 16+ are not being taken into care when needed</li> <li>• More diversity awareness and education for caregivers, workers, community and young people</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Cowichan Valley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No privacy – foster parents going through rooms and personal stuff</li> <li>• Not being told all of your rights in care</li> <li>• Not being heard</li> <li>• Being treated differently in foster homes than the natural kids</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Burnaby)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being heard or taken seriously</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 1999 (Kamloops)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invasion of privacy by foster parent</li> </ul>

## *What's Working*

Although rights have been identified as an issue, there are some things currently being done (via programs, services, awareness initiatives, etc.) to improve this. Below you will find information about some of these positive things as identified by youth and adult participants during the Report Card consultation process:

**FBCYICN's Your Life, Your Rights book:** This book helps young people to know all about their rights and how they can advocate for themselves if they feel that their rights are not being respected.

**FBCYICN's Rights 2 Success:** This program offers a workshop about the rights of children and youth. It aims to empower young people to claim their rights so that they can participate effectively in decisions that are made about them and advocate on their own behalf if their rights are not respected. These workshops are offered to both youth and adults.

**MCFD's Know Your Rights pamphlet on section 70:** This booklet details the unique rights young people in care have in BC and addresses common questions and concerns.

**MCFD's Complaints Process:** MCFD has a complaints process that young people can use when they have concerns about the services they are (or not) being provided. In an effort to inform BC youth in care about the complaints process, they consulted with young people and created a complaints process booklet to explain it. This booklet also includes a pre-paid postcard form for young people to fill out and send directly to MCFD Client Relations should they have a complaint or other feedback.

**Society for Children & Youth (SCY)'s Child and Youth Rights Awareness Campaign:** This campaign promotes child and youth rights – as outlined in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – and encourages everyone to use a rights-based approach in their programs, services, and support to children, youth and families.

## *Recommendations*

The Federation believes that it is not only important to identify and explore the issues facing youth in care, we also need to work together to come up with key actions we can take to help improve these issues. Young people were asked to identify the key actions they felt would help reduce the issues related to rights. Here are their top two recommendations:

1. Making sure EVERY youth in care receives the Your Life, Your Rights book; every province should have one like it!
2. More youth need to know about their rights.

Other recommendations include:

- Addressing rights throughout the community as well because all youth have rights and they are probably just as clueless as youth in care
- Make a youth-friendly, accessible website about rights
- Opportunities for young people tell other people (eg. like at Locals!)
- Proper follow-up from adults on rights information
- Make a variety of different materials
- School curriculum around rights
- Rights training
- More access and consistency with rights information

## *Summary*

There are some positive steps being taken to promote and protect youth rights in BC; further, BC protects specific rights for youth in care which is not the case in other provinces. The province needs to work better to ensure all youth in care are consistently informed of their rights and what they can do if they are being violated.



# PERMANENCY



Generally, when people think of permanency for youth in care, they think of adoption. However, research shows that there are three types of permanency:

## Relational Permanency

Relational permanency means creating strong, long-lasting connections “with a biological family member/siblings, school staff, foster parents, social workers, youth workers, community members, and organizations like Federation of BC youth in care Networks – anybody who gives you positive, unconditional commitment” (BC Youth Focus Group, 2009).

## Legal Permanency

Legal permanency has to do with who is responsible for the young person, and making sure this is as consistent as possible (i.e. not a lot of changes in guardianship – parents, social workers, adoptive parents, etc.).

## Physical Permanency

Physical permanency is about creating a safe, stable, healthy and lasting living arrangement.

Young people have identified relational permanency as the most important kind of permanency but this part of permanency is the most overlooked by decision makers!

*When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of permanency, here are some things they had to say:*

- Not moving around and having a safe place to stay
- Structure
- It's not necessarily adoption
- Family
- Stable home, commitment
- Trust leads to motivation to improve
- Physical, mental, emotional security
- Genuine interest, not financial gain
- Permanency beyond 19



## Why is this an issue?

When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of issues related to permanency, here are some things they had to say:

YouthSpeak	Issues And Concerns Young People Have Identified Related To Permanency
National Report Card Consultation October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster care provides a false sense of permanency because it often ends at 19</li> <li>• Not many homes are geared for permanent cases and long-term relationships</li> <li>• Lack of permanency affects education</li> <li>• Foster families often make you feel like an outsider</li> <li>• How can you learn how to build 'healthy' relationships if you don't have stable relationships while in government care?</li> <li>• Lack of permanency leads to mental health issues (low self esteem, depression, detachment – a lost sense of belonging)</li> <li>• Too much separating sibling groups – either because there are too many or the relationships are not seen as healthy</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No family connections</li> <li>• Not being able to see real family</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2007 A Time For Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need someone to help you find your way in life</li> <li>• Do not separate siblings in care</li> <li>• More interactions between social workers and youth (more regular visits)</li> <li>• Lots of support for youth moving from home to home while in care</li> <li>• Need to support youth in care to see their families – youth need to know their roots and be connected. Where do you go if you don't know where you come from?</li> <li>• Sibling contact whether in or out of care and supports to make this possible</li> <li>• More foster homes that are family-oriented</li> <li>• Need to know you still have family</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2004 Are You Listening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stability, bouncing from home to home and worker to worker</li> <li>• Social worker case loads are too big</li> <li>• More "emotional check-ins"</li> <li>• Better attitudes/relationships – foster parents calling social workers over small stuff</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Cowichan Valley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a say with who you live with</li> <li>• Passed around too much</li> <li>• Separation from siblings</li> <li>• No pre-placement visits</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Burnaby)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being kept with siblings</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 1999 (Kamloops)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being treated as an equal family member</li> </ul>

## *What's Working*

Although permanency has been identified as an issue, there are some things currently being done (via programs, services, awareness initiatives, etc.) to improve this. Below you will find info about some of these positive things as identified by youth and adult participants in the consultation process:

**AFA's Teen Adoption Campaign:** AFA has consulted with young people about their experiences in care or with adoption and created various tools to inform young people about teen adoption – one kind of permanency – including a video and information booklet.

**Belonging 4Ever – Creating Permanency For Youth In And From Care:** This report is the result of a collaboration between the Federation and First Call. It was written to help create a better understanding of permanency and to raise awareness about what we can do to improve it.

**FBCYICN,** who raise awareness about the importance of permanency and its various types.

**Building Relationships Activity Book:** This multi-partner project was created to help young people build healthy relationships with their caregivers or adoptive parents. It covers topics that were identified by youth in and from care and is designed to support young people to develop emotional life skills that will help them on their journey.

**Foster families who include foster youth in family time.**

## *Recommendations*

The Federation believes that it is not only important to identify and explore the issues facing youth in care, we also need to work together to come up with key actions we can take to help improve these issues. Young people were asked to identify the key actions they felt would help reduce the issues related to permanency. Here are their top two recommendations:

1. Create a workshop for foster parents and social workers on the benefits of permanence for youth in care and how they may face struggles without it!

2. Make youth in care feel wanted.

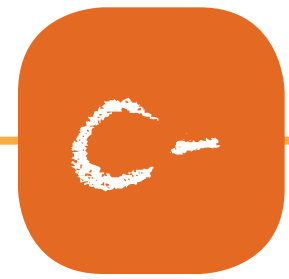
Other recommendations include:

- More awareness about the different kinds of permanency.
- Social workers supporting young people to choose options that best support their personal idea of permanency.
- Less moving around for young people.
- Supporting our chosen relationships.
- More opportunities for young people to network together.

## *Summary*

There is more work than ever being done to research, understand and inform young people and service providers about what permanency means. However, more work needs to be done to inform everyone so that young people's permanency wishes and needs are better reflected in their plans of care.

# TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

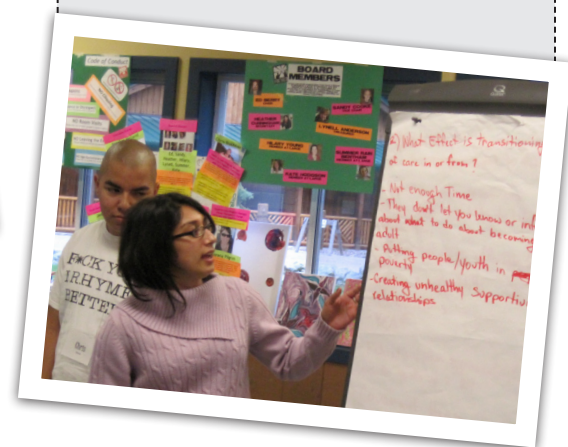


Transitions, in this case, are about how young people are supported to leave the government's care and live on their own as adults. In BC, young people leave government care at age 19. Youth leaving care can get some support to assist them before they leave care and after they turn 19. These transitional supports include the option of going on Independent Living or Semi-Independent Living before they "age out;" this provides young people with the experience of living on their own while still getting some financial support from MCFD and personal support from their social worker and a one to one worker.

Many youth can also access community organizations to learn life skills and have the option of having a youth worker for support; however, these supports usually end at 19 as well. After 19, MCFD does provide funding (money) for post-secondary education (see "Education" section), but they do not provide funding to those who are not seeking post-secondary education.

*When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of transitioning out of care, here are some things they had to say:*

- Skill development (bills etc)
- Social skills, manners
- Be able to have lasting relationships
- Severing ties
- Unprepared
- Guidance around relationships with biological parents
- Loss of trust of guardians





## Why is this an issue?

When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of transitioning out of care, here are some things they had to say:

YouthSpeak	Issues And Concerns Young People Have Identified Related To Transitioning Out Of Care
National Report Card Consultation October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support around income</li> <li>• Need care from families</li> <li>• Post secondary access</li> <li>• Need more support from MCFD</li> <li>• Foster parents need more training in helping youth transition</li> <li>• Transitioning interferes with school and life</li> <li>• There's not enough time</li> <li>• There's no support and you have to figure it out on your own</li> <li>• 19 is scary and we need more continuous support</li> <li>• High proportion of youth that transition from child welfare end up on welfare</li> <li>• Youth are set up to live in poverty</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not prepared</li> <li>• Loss of support</li> <li>• Money (lack of or cut off)</li> <li>• Inconsistent preparation for leaving care</li> <li>• Lack of resources after 19</li> <li>• More responsibility</li> <li>• Loneliness / abandonment</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2007 A Time For Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life skills! Life skills! Life skills!</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2004 Are You Listening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not having shit when you move out</li> <li>• Better plans for youth moving out</li> <li>• After 19 money support</li> <li>• After 19 human support</li> <li>• Independence allowance needs to be more</li> <li>• More semi-independent support</li> <li>• Need "plan B" when independent, if it doesn't work</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Cowichan Valley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Living – not enough information about it</li> <li>• Leaving care before you are ready – not ready to leave when you turn 19</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Burnaby)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being taught enough before going on independent living</li> </ul>

## *What's Working*

Although transitioning out of care has been identified as an issue, there are some things currently being done (via programs, services, awareness initiatives, etc.) to improve this. Below you will find info about some of these positive things as identified by youth and adult participants in the consultation process:

### **MCFD's Agreements with Young Adults**

**(AYA):** This program provides financial support to young people transitioning out of care who are pursuing school, training and other programs.

**FBCYICN** and other organizations that support youth up to age 24 and provide life-skills training.

### **FBCYICN's Community Kits Project:**

This project worked together with community partners across BC to provide young people with transition kits. These kits provide resources related to a particular need (independent living, culture, becoming new parents, etc) that has been identified by the young people in that community. The purpose of this project is to connect young people to the resources and support they need during key transitions in their life.

**After Care Petition:** One of the Federation's youth members wrote a letter to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) urging them to ensure young people are being provided with adequate supports and resources during their transition from care. The Federation supported this member to meet with the Minister of MCFD to discuss this issue further.

## *Recommendations*

The Federation believes that it is not only important to identify and explore the issues facing youth in care, we also need to work together to come up with key actions we can take to help improve these issues. Young people were asked to identify the key actions they felt would help reduce the issues related to transitioning out of care. Here are their top two recommendations:

1. More flexibility for the cut-off age (currently, all young people in care must leave the government's care at 19).
2. More foster parents who are trained to teach young people leaving care basic life skills for independent adulthood.

Other recommendations include:

- Create a report that highlights best practices across the world that are presented back
- Set up a program that teaches all young people more life skills
- Developing life-long relationships
- Need to listen!
- Need earlier, longer transition process and skill-building

## *Summary*

There are some programs, services and initiatives in place to ease the transition out of care. Financial support is available to young people pursuing post-secondary education, and other kinds of support (like life-skills training, transitions kits) are available only through particular organizations. There needs to be earlier, more individualized and holistic transitions-support in all areas for young people leaving care. Further, more work needs to be done to make sure all young people have access to the supports currently available.

# EDUCATION



When we talk about education we mean high school and post secondary school (eg. college, university). Primary and high school is a right (something everyone gets to have) in BC.

Most BC youth in and from care struggle in both primary and secondary school; only 7% ever attend university, college and other post-secondary school. Youth in and from care face many barriers (difficulties that get in the way of reaching goals) in their lives to achieving their education goals. These barriers include:

- Instability (e.g. changing living situations, new schools, new social workers/foster parents)
- Mental health issues
- Lack of a healthy support system (people to go to for help or guidance)
- Adult mentors
- Lack of financial (money) support

Many youth in and from care who graduate high school with good enough grades for post-secondary school continue to face the same barriers they faced while in care, and they also face sudden independence. Depending on their care status, a young person in BC may receive a minimal amount of financial support for post-secondary school after they turn 19 including Youth Education Assistance Fund (which funds \$5500 per education year for youth who were on a Continuing Custody Order) and Agreements with Young Adults (which funds up to \$1000 per month for 24 months to cover education costs and living expenses for youth who were on a Continuing Custody Order or a Youth Agreement).

*When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of education, here are some things they had to say:*

- MONEY
- difficulty getting money
- place to stay during education
- developing independence
- flexible employment
- health education—LIFE SKILLS
- finding balance
- help planning, community
- self knowledge
- where to go with life
- values



### Why is this an issue?

When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of education, here are some things they had to say:

YouthSpeak	Issues And Concerns Young People Have Identified Related To Education
National Report Card Consultation October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• System has low or no academic expectations for youth in care</li><li>• Not enough supports for young parents getting education</li><li>• Instability makes academic success difficult</li><li>• Hard to get funds for other stuff like school supplies, field trips</li><li>• Bureaucracy of schools hard for youth in care</li><li>• Having to go to school full-time-only due to funding parameters</li><li>• Culture barriers—what is considered learning not always supported</li><li>• Discrepancies between types of support (i.e. YEAF vs AYA)</li><li>• Dignity and barriers—youth in care taken out of class for testing, criminal record checks etc</li></ul>
YouthSpeak 2007 A Time For Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not enough youth in care are graduating</li><li>• Need tools for school (i.e. computers, internet access)</li><li>• Social workers and foster parents need to be more aware of scholarships so they can tell and support youth</li></ul>
YouthSpeak 2004 Are You Listening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More motivation to stay in school</li><li>• Better plans for youth's education goals</li><li>• More programs to help youth (ie. tutoring)</li></ul>





## *What's Working*

Although education has been identified as an issue, there are some things currently being done (via programs, services, awareness initiatives, etc.) to improve this. Below you will find info about some of these positive things as identified by youth and adult participants in the consultation process:

**MCFD's Young Education Assistance Fund (YEAF):** This funding is awarded to young people, who were on a continuing custody order, ages 19–23 who are pursuing college or university.

### **Alternative programs/schools**

**FBCYICN's Dream Fund:** This Federation program provides two distinct bursaries (Educational Achievement Bursary and Reach for Success Bursary) that assist with costs associated with educational, career and personal development.

**Exploring Your Dreams – An Education Workbook for Youth in and from Government Care:** This workbook was created to help support youth in and from care to successfully transition to post-secondary education. It has activities and information to help the reader through the steps of exploring and discovering their goals, applying to school, planning, and transitioning to post-secondary education.

### **Other success stories from youth in care!**

## *Recommendations*

The Federation believes that it is not only important to identify and explore the issues facing youth in care, we also need to work together to come up with key actions we can take to help improve these issues. Young people were asked to identify the key actions they felt would help reduce the issues related to education. Here are their top two recommendations:

1. More FUNDING!!
2. Expand YEAF and AYA to include other types of care.

Other recommendations include:

- Pushing youth in care to succeed!
- Social workers assisting with transition to school
- Having role models to help/believe in you
- Creating high expectations for youth in care!
- More support from the corporate sector
- Less hand holding – we need to know how to do it on our own, so support needs to happen earlier

## *Summary*

There are several different ways young people in and from care can access some support to pursue education and training opportunities. These opportunities, however, are only available under certain conditions, and are not easily accessible to everyone. More funding is needed and work needs to be done to remove barriers.

# SOCIAL STIGMA



Social Stigma occurs when people in a society disapprove of something about a person or group because it is thought to be different from what's considered "normal." This disapproval usually comes from a lack of understanding about everyone's differences. Youth in and from government care face stigma about being in care. Young people have shared that their peers and adults in society assume things about youth in and from care including: being "troubled", "problem youth", criminals, just a statistic, not able to function in society, having mental health and addiction issues, etc. Many youth in and from care don't talk about their care experience with others to avoid this stigma.

This social stigma sometimes prevents people from recognizing the amazing and unique personalities, accomplishments, skills, talents, backgrounds and cultures of each BC youth in and from care.

*When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of social stigma, here are some things they had to say:*

- Opportunity to celebrate successes
- Support from media
- Ability to be social (eg. attend SCMs more easily)
- Be a part of the change — active, not passive
- Stigma against friends, family — need support for our communities
- Seize opportunities
- Be a kid!



## Why is this an issue?

When young people were asked what comes to mind when they think of social stigma, here are some things they had to say:

YouthSpeak	Issues And Concerns Young People Have Identified Related To The Issue Of Social Stigma
National Report Card Consultation October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't like being treated like I have the plague</li> <li>• If people keep saying it [things about youth in care], it will be that way</li> <li>• "youth in care" is an "ism" in an indirect way</li> <li>• Makes you feel that you are worthless</li> <li>• You get labels you don't want</li> <li>• You are blamed</li> <li>• Rumours that you are crazy</li> <li>• Harder to get a job</li> <li>• Youth in care can either be "perfect" or "failure"—no middle ground</li> <li>• Condescending people (eg. teachers) who don't actually know you</li> <li>• Youth in care come through so much but can't show that</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order for some youth in care to sleep over at a friend's house their friends and their friend's parents have to get a criminal record check done. This separates youth in care from other young people and it reminds them that they are different.</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2007 A Time For Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media should be more aware and cover the positives</li> <li>• Celebrate successes</li> <li>• Young people assessed on their strengths, not just "risks"</li> <li>• Treat youth as individuals, not as stereotypes; not all youth are going to waste resources</li> <li>• Youth do not want to be known as foster kids in their communities</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2004 Are You Listening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Bad-ass" stigma about foster kids</li> <li>• More encouragement, not focusing on negative stereotypes</li> </ul>
YouthSpeak 2000 (Cowichan Valley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stereotyping – not all kids who are in care are "bad"</li> <li>• Not getting respect</li> </ul>



## *What's Working*

Although social stigma has been identified as an issue, there are some things currently being done (via programs, services, awareness initiatives, etc.) to improve this. Below you will find info about some of these positive things as identified by youth and adult participants in the consultation process:

**Youth In Care Week:** Federation members said they would like to see a week dedicated to celebrating youth in and from care and MCFD listened. MCFD is exploring this recommendation and is engaging with our members to get suggestions and ideas about what this could look like.

**Programs that address or raise awareness about other stigmas** (i.e. racism, homophobia, sexism, etc) help people understand how inaccurate they are. This can help people recognize the inaccuracies of the youth in care stigma.

**IFCO (International Foster Care Organization):** This organization is the only international network dedicated to the promotion and support of family foster care all over the world. They host an international conference for youth in care delegates as well as foster parents, social workers, politicians and others every two years from all over the world

**FBCYICN's SCMs (Steering Committee Meetings):** Three times each year FBCYICN hosts weekend-long youth conferences at wilderness camps where young people and adult allies come together to network, provide direction to FBCYICN and participate in skill-building workshops and recreation, and advise external decision makers.

**FBCYICN's Youth Profile in Power Pages:** Each edition of Power Pages (the Federation's provincial magazine) features an amazing youth in care. This is an opportunity to show others the awesome and wonderful things that the young person has accomplished.

## *Recommendations*

The Federation believes that it is not only important to identify and explore the issues facing youth in care, we also need to work together to come up with key actions we can take to help improve these issues. Young people were asked to identify the key actions they felt would help reduce the issues related to social stigma. Here are their top two recommendations:

1. Add youth voice to media
2. Educate employers

Other recommendations include:

- Make people experience it themselves
- [Get on] national news
- Foster Kid Day
- Pirate Radio
- Stencils and spray paint "Don't be a jackass!"
- Strike
- Change term "stigma" as it presents a negative connotation instead of the positive one we are trying to foster

## *Summary*

The social stigma of being in care is a major concern. While there are some initiatives in place to create awareness around the realities of life in care and the amazing, unique, talented individuals that make up this population, more work needs to be done to inform the community through accurate representation in the media, supporting young people to have their voices heard, and encouraging positive networking opportunities for young people to come together and share their stories.



## CONCLUSION

There are some programs, services and initiatives currently in place that improve the well-being of BC's youth in care. Some young people are being engaged in consultations and are having their voices heard when decisions are being made. Young people have some opportunities to network and connect with resources that protect rights, promote different types of permanency, support healthy transitions and education, and help improve the stigma around being in care.

However, there is still work to be done. While there are pockets of meaningful support available to young people, this support needs to be provided consistently – no matter which social worker or agency a young person is assigned or in which region they live.

This report serves as an assessment from young people about how we're doing now, as a province, and where we should be headed. The five key areas addressed in this report have been identified repeatedly by young people over the past ten years. They've been courageous in speaking up about the most important issues affecting their well-being, and while there is some great work being done in this province to address their concerns, we have an opportunity to take their feedback and ideas to create meaningful, lasting changes that will reduce or eliminate these issues. We encourage you to find ways to take action and involve young people in creating a stronger care system.



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The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks  
FBCYICN is a youth-driven,  
provincial, non-profit organization dedicated to  
improving the lives of  
young people in and from  
government care in BC, between  
the ages of 14 and 24.