



Youth Speak 2007 A Time for Action

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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 between the ages of 14 and 24.

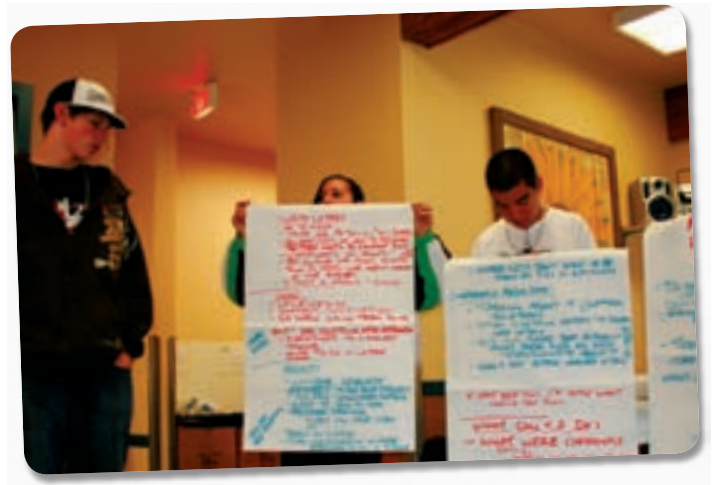


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Introduction

Because we are a youth-driven organization, engaging young people and the supportive adults who work with them is a fundamental part of the work we do at the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN). As such, we incorporate opportunities for young people to provide feedback and input into the programs and services we offer at each of our provincial Steering Committee Meetings (SCM). This ensures that what we offer is going to meet the needs of our membership.

Youth voice is also something the Network values highly. In addition to on-going internal consultation, we also provide opportunities for external agencies, including the Ministry of Children and Family Development, to consult with our membership at SCMs and through special focus groups. These sessions allow for the voice of young people in and from care to have a direct impact on initiatives relevant to their lives.

As a strong systemic advocate and direct service provider, the Network is constantly seeking ways to better engage young people; to create opportunities for youth voice; to listen to and attempt to address their needs, issues and ideas; to increase their awareness and build their capacity; to provide them with the tools and supports they need to succeed; to recognize and celebrate their accomplishments; and to bring them hope for their future!

This YouthSpeak report is meant to be a snapshot of the realities faced by young people in and from care who are involved with the FBCYICN. It is a representation - not a large-scale reflection - of the needs, issues and ideas of young people in and from care in BC today.

Therefore, it is important to note that a significant proportion of SCM #46 participants were younger / newer members and so identified needs, issues and ideas more closely related to currently being in care. Normal attendance at SCMs is generally balanced with older / longer-term members who tend to focus their needs, issues and ideas on the transition to independence and adulthood, mental health and parenting topics.

For this reason, the YouthSpeak priorities generated at SCM #46 have been supplemented with recent consultation materials incorporating the priorities identified by a broader scope of our membership.

It should also be mentioned that YouthSpeak is a starting point, not an end to a process. It is an opportunity for further discussion, increased and meaningful collaborative efforts, and shared decision-making and accountability between young people, service providers, caregivers and the community.

Acknowledgements

The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks would like to thank the following for their hard work and support throughout this YouthSpeak project...

First, we thank Sarah Watson – the FBCYICN's first Youth Participation Coordinator. Your passion for engaging and helping young people and your dedication to improving the work of this organization is the reason projects like YouthSpeak are important and successful. Thank-you for reminding us about why we do this work; for holding us accountable every step along the way; and for being an inspiration to us.

To all of the young people who participated in YouthSpeak 2007 as part of Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #46, we thank-you for your honesty and thoughtful recommendations. It is your voice that is reflected in this report.

To our guest facilitators and adult supports, we thank-you for taking the time to pass on your knowledge and experience in a youth-friendly and encouraging way. It is your contributions and support that help us move forward.

To Ayla, Summer, Nathan and Mark, our YouthSpeak-Out presenters, thank-you for your courage to step-up as representatives of the membership and for your hard work in preparing an impactful presentation to decision-makers.

To all of the YouthSpeak-Out guests, we thank-you for showing up to listen to the voices of young people and for making your own commitments to take action on the recommendations our members have made.

Thank-you to the folks at the McCreary Centre Society for helping us to develop / allowing us to borrow questions for the questionnaire component of YouthSpeak.

And a special thank-you to Sarah and Lacy for their work on the first provincial YouthSpeak in 2004 and for producing the report titled *Are You Listening? AND* to Patricia and Angie for developing the original YouthSpeak model in BC almost 10 years ago...

Be inspired to think in terms of opportunities to engage young people – not in terms of obligations to involve them. – Nicole Herbert

Project Team

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Carly
Carrissa
Chantal
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Christine
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Kevin
Kristina
Madeleine
Mark
Marylyn
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YouthSpeak-Out Special Guests:

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Ministry of Children and Family Development

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Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team

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Operation Liaison Manager

Vancouver Island Aboriginal Team

Amanda F.

FBCYICN Member



The YouthSpeak Model

YouthSpeak is an event for young people to talk about their concerns, to gain skills through workshops, and to have an opportunity to speak-out in an environment where people are listening. The event consists of time for young people to brainstorm their needs, issues and ideas; attend skill-building workshops that equip them with tools for taking action; and provides them with an opportunity to express their opinions and make recommendations to decision-makers in their lives.

Beneficial Outcomes

To Young People

YouthSpeak lets young people know that their opinions matter, that they have rights, and encourages them to speak-out in a healthy and positive way.

YouthSpeak gives young people an opportunity to inform government, organizations and other influential groups directly about what works and what doesn't work in terms of programs and services for young people.

YouthSpeak also provides young people with valuable knowledge and practical skills through information and workshops provided throughout the process. These new or improved competencies can then be used in other aspects of the young person's life including school, extra-curricular activities, work and community involvement.

YouthSpeak also provides a positive, structured and safe environment for young people to make friends, and explore their interests and talents – building their confidence and esteem.

To Service Providers

YouthSpeak provides decision-makers with an opportunity to learn first-hand information about the needs, issues and ideas of young people receiving service. This information enables government, service providers and caregivers to make programs and services for young people more responsive and effective.

To Community

YouthSpeak also provides an opportunity for young people to network with their peers and supportive adults in a healthy and positive way. This creates collaborative relationships and promotes the sharing of information and resources. It also increases the likelihood that young people will take more responsibility in their lives and communities and diminishes the negative stereotypes about young people.

Background

YouthSpeak actually evolved from two previous projects called "KidSpeak" and "Voices from Within."

KidSpeak

In 1997 the Alberta Safe Housing Society, Alberta Youth in Care and Custody Network, and the National Youth in Care Network partnered

on developing a research project called KidSpeak. These organizations hired a group of young people that were in and from care to interview youth living in care and on the streets about their experiences. The outcome of this project was a report about the experiences of youth in and from the child welfare system in Calgary. This report was sent out all over Canada to politicians, policy-makers, and front-line workers.

Stemming from this research project, an event was also held where young people involved with the child welfare system came together to share the results of the research project with other young people, service providers and decision-makers. Young people were involved in all-aspects of the event and there was even a 'talent show' component where young people expressed themselves creatively through music, singing, dancing and acting.

Voices from Within

In 1998, Ontario's Office for Child, Youth and Family Advocacy reviewed the report on KidSpeak and created their own project called Voices from Within. It was similar to KidSpeak in that it involved a survey of young people's experiences in government care. From this project, a report was written and distributed to various government offices in Ontario.

YouthSpeak

British Columbia's Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate read the KidSpeak and Voices from Within reports and decided it would be a good idea to do something similar here in BC. They began talking with the McCreary Centre Society and the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks about these projects and from those initial discussions, the decision was made to partner and build-on the original models.

Everyone involved agreed that if they were going to plan an event for young people in BC, they should have youth involved in the planning. So, a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) was created, the project was called YouthSpeak and the decision was soon made to go beyond a survey and host an event where young people could not only share but also learn.

The first YouthSpeak in BC was held at Sun Peaks Report (Kamloops area) in 1999. The Kamloops area was selected because there was an active local Youth in Care Network and high level of Ministry and community support at that time.

From this first event in BC, a YouthSpeak manual was developed as a guide to planning similar events. From the success of the first BC YouthSpeak in Kamloops, several other YouthSpeak events took place in BC. Burnaby and Cowichan Valley each co-hosted a YouthSpeak in 2000 with the FBCYICN's help, and Victoria did the same in 2001. After each YouthSpeak event, a report highlighting the needs, issues and ideas identified by participants was developed and distributed to government offices and community service providers.

[All of the YouthSpeak reports mentioned in this report are available through the FBCYICN.]

YouthSpeak 2004: Are You Listening?

In February of 2004, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks hosted the first provincial YouthSpeak as part of Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #35. Two Youth Project Staff were hired to help plan and facilitate the event. They did their research about previous YouthSpeaks as well as the Voices from Within and KidSpeak reports and discovered that although the main purpose of each project was the same – youth speaking out about their needs, issues and ideas – the processes used were different each time.

To help them organize their thoughts and desired outcomes for this YouthSpeak, the Youth Project Staff developed a diagram (*below is a modified version*):

Action	Brainstorming	Skill-Building	Presentation
Purpose	Youth identifying their needs, issues and ideas.	Youth developing the skills they need to voice and address their needs, issues and ideas.	Youth voicing their needs, issues and recommendations for action to decision-makers.

YouthSpeak 2004 – Top 5 Priorities:

1. More motivation to stay in school
2. Youth 16+ are not being taken into care
3. More support and help finding jobs
4. Instability – bouncing from home to home and worker to worker
5. “Bad-ass” stigma about foster kids

2004 Surveys

In addition to the consultation about the needs, issues and ideas of young people that was held at SCM #35 in February of 2004, the Youth Project Staff developed a series of topic-focused surveys that were administered throughout the weekend. In total, there were 5 such surveys including: General Information, Experience in Care, Rights and Advocacy, Becoming Independent, and Sexual Health.

From these mini-surveys, the following statistics were highlighted:

- 60% of youth stated that they had been abused while in care
- 67% of the cases where youth were abused in care, the abuse was reported
- 59% of youth stated that they had engaged in consensual sex before age 14
- 22% of youth did not use any type of protection the last time they had sex
- 61% of youth feel safe with their Social Worker
- 0% of youth on Independent Living, or youth who had been on Independent Living, believe that a youth at age 16 is prepared to live independently
- 33% of youth would like to stay in care past the age of 19
- 22% of youth didn't know what a Plan of Care is



Summary of the Needs, Issues and Ideas Session Are You Listening? Report (2004)

Issues of YIC YouthSpeak 2004	Similar Issues/Concerns of YIC at Past YouthSpeaks	Needs of YIC YouthSpeak 2004	Similar Needs of YIC at Past YouthSpeaks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bad-ass” stigmas about foster kids • Youth 16+ not being taken into care when needed 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotyping; not all kids who are in care are “bad” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More “emotional check-ins” (prevention – not crisis interference) • More motivation to stay in school • Need awareness • More job-finding support/assistance from workers (encouragement and assistance) • More diversity awareness and education for caregivers, workers, community, and young people • Take youth’s stories seriously and take into care if needed 	Kamloops 1999 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of contact with social worker. • Lack of personal relationship with social worker.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability: bouncing from home to home & worker to worker 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passed around too much. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The priority should be youth not money, not enough effort into the youth • Better plans for youth moving out/ education/work • More programs to help youth for free (e.g. tutors, Sylvan Learning Center) • After 19 money support • After 19 human support (1 to 1) regular weekly • Don’t shut down group homes that are needed • Don’t do “in home” care if it’s not safe for the kid “some families never get better” • No orphanages 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider child’s well being, • we’re not just a case, we’re people too. Kamloops 1999 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waste money while kids live on the street • no notice to youth. • Being treated like a number instead of a person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Worker caseloads are too big • Not having shit when you move out (e.g. furniture) • Less antagonism and gaps in system (kids shouldn’t have to find loop holes to get service) 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Workers have too large a caseload. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence allowance needs to be more • Better attitudes/relationships • Foster parents calling workers to move you over “small stuff” • More crisis services available in person (not just 1-800 #'s) 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More funding is needed • not reaching the kids that really need help.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-majority services have been cut • Lay-off’s of social workers (PT and FT) • Workers retiring early • Private/government support of foster care • Good placements shut down 	Burnaby 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPY (Services to former youth in care) • not receiving enough money for clothing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your right to be in foster care, until ready to leave • One to one counseling when you come into care • Need more semi-independent support • Need “Plan B” when independent, if it doesn’t work • More encouragement, not focusing on negative stereotypes • Suitcases to move with “garbage bags got to go” • Need more rehab, waiting lists too long 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving care before you’re ready • not ready to leave when you turn 19 years old.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living at 16 is too soon 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living, not enough information about it. Burnaby 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not taught enough before going on Independent living. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more education about organizations, rights, and opportunities • More support (human) 	Cowichan Valley 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being told of all your rights in care.

FBCYICN Report Card

Before highlighting the needs, issues and ideas identified by young people as part of YouthSpeak 2007, it is important to reflect on the progress being made on previous recommendations. This is part of demonstrating accountability; role modelling to other service providers; and showing young people that we didn't just listen – we took action! Below is an update on some of the work being done by the FBCYICN as it relates to all of the issues identified in YouthSpeak 2004:

Perceptions

Of the priorities mentioned previously in this report, the FBCYICN has continued to work in partnership with young people, service providers and caregivers to improve the image of young people in and from care. We've done this by creating meaningful opportunities for young people and adults to collaborate and by highlighting their gifts and accomplishments in our provincial newsletter, Power Pages. We have also recently introduced two new annual awards for young people including Outstanding Personal Achievement and Outstanding Contribution to Community. These awards will be presented as part of our annual anniversary celebration.

Skill Development & Input Opportunities

In general, at Steering Committee Meetings (SCMs) we provide a balance between consultation, skill-development and fun. In addition to our own internal consultations that guide the work of our organization, outside agencies often consult with our members about projects and policies relevant to young people in and from care. Staff and guest facilitators also provide practical skill-building workshops and relevant resources (eg. employment, parenting, communication, rights and advocacy, sexual health, etc.) and opportunities for cultural exploration (eg. pipe ceremonies). Last but not least, there are always leadership / team-building activities, optional crafting and gaming and simple networking opportunities.

Transition to Independence / Adulthood

The Federation has also initiated the province-wide Community Kits Project (CKP) which is an adaptation of the Welcoming Project for Youth in Care. As part of the Community Kits Project, the FBCYICN provides funding and project guidelines to organizations in each of the 5 MCFD Regions in BC. These organizations then engage young people to put together and distribute "Welcoming Kits" for youth coming into care and / or "Independence Kits" for young people preparing to leave care. Each organization determines the contents of their kits based on the needs identified by young people in the area (eg. culture kits, parenting kits, street youth kits, etc.). Each kit contains information about resources available to young people in the community and provides the young people with helpful / practical items (eg. hygiene items, school supplies, kitchen items, bedding, baby clothes, or gift cards to department stores where young people can select what they need).

Community Connections & Supportive Relationships

We have also been involved in the development of the Youth Transition Conferencing (YTC) Project which strives to support young people in planning for their independence and to provide them with opportunities to develop long-term connections with supportive adults. The focus of this project is to provide young people with the tools, resources and supports they need to develop appropriate life skills so they are better prepared for when they leave care and to ensure they know who they can go to for help when they need it.

Employment

The Network has also started an Employment Program that provides individualized support to young people living in the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Regions. Program participants work with the Coordinator to identify their employment goals, identify their needs and gaps, and develop their employment and life skills. The program will also provide assistance with employment-related expenses (eg. uniform, tools, training, etc.) and provide rewards for the completion of each level of each phase. In addition to participation in the program, we have created an Employment Resource Guide which is available on our website and we publish employment-related Tip Sheets in each edition of Power Pages.

Education

The FBCYICN is also working on an implementation plan for the Dream Fund, an educational scholarship fund for young people in and from care in BC. And, we have developed an Educational Resource Package (ERP) which is full of useful information about scholarships and bursaries that are available as well as tips for applying to school / for funding etc. The ERP can be downloaded from our website.

Rights & Advocacy

The Federation has also re-developed the original Know Your Rights booklet. We updated the existing information, added some new information and made it more youth-friendly. The new booklet is called Your Life – Your Rights and should be ready for distribution soon!

Staff, Members, Alumni and Board members of the Network also sit on a number of committees and participate in a variety of initiatives in an effort to advocate systemically for the needs, issues and ideas of young people in and from care in BC. This includes the following areas identified through past YouthSpeaks: Gaps in Service, Agreements with Young Adults (including Youth Agreements and Post-Majority Services), Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention (ie. getting good people to foster and making sure the good caregivers stick around), and Youth Educational Assistance Fund, etc.

And finally, we have written a number of letters to government that identify the needs, issues and ideas of our membership. In 2007, we focused this systemic advocacy on Post-Majority Services (after care support) and education.

YouthSpeak 2007: A Time for Action

Project Overview

The purpose of this project was to engage young people and provide them with an opportunity to identify their current needs, issues and ideas. This project is also a springboard for collaboration by improving existing partnerships and developing new relationships with key service providers to improve the programs and services being delivered to young people in BC. And, this project provides us with an important opportunity to reflect on the work done since previous YouthSpeaks.

To facilitate this YouthSpeak process, we adapted the McCreary Centre Society's Next Steps model. This involved a brainstorming session to identify and prioritize needs and issues, followed by more in-depth small group discussions and finally the presentation of recommendations for action. This YouthSpeak provided the overall framework for Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #46, the weekend of October 26th-28th, 2007.

Needs, Issues and Ideas

A large group consultation, small group discussions and a questionnaire are the methods that were used to collect data for this YouthSpeak process. Highlighted items from the list below represent those issues that were identified in YouthSpeak 2007 as well as one or more previous YouthSpeaks.

YouthSpeak Brainstorming

Facilitator(s): Nicole Herbert

The following list was edited only grammatically and is an un-modified representation of the Flip chart notes collected during the large group brainstorming session held at SCM #46:

- Should be more aware / involved in their plans of care (eg. coming into care, independence, aging-out of care)
- Need to provide more opportunities to explore healthy activities to allow youth to figure out who they are and to also gain skills, accountability and pride
- Need someone to help you find your way in life
- Media should be more aware and cover the positives (eg. acknowledge the foster parents that are getting awards etc.)
- Do not separate siblings in care
- More respect for the rights of youth in care (eg. visits with family and friends)
- Be an advocate for resources going towards these issues
- Celebrate successes
- Talk to the youth and involve them in developing and evaluating programs
- Some youth do not have freedom of speech
- Social workers are more interested in the foster parents than their youth
- Need tools for school (eg. computers / internet access)
- Not enough youth in care are graduating
- More help for youth leaving care
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity – appropriate placements
- When on Youth Agreements, need enough resources to live healthy
- Primer (adult sensitivity training developed by NYICN) training for all adults working with youth in care – needs to be mandatory
- Social workers do practicums in foster homes

- Recognize all the good foster parents and social workers
- More inspections and surprise visits of foster homes and group homes (eg. appropriate number of youth, accountability of workers making sure there are appropriate resources)
- More interactions between social workers and youth (more regular visits and ability to communicate) – social workers need to know where their youth are
- Young people assessed on their strengths, not just “risks”
- Services based on the needs of youth, not just what is available or what already exists
- More support for young parents to keep their kids
- No prejudice in foster homes or by foster parents
- More respect for the “lives” of youth – youth are people, not a case number
- Lots of transitional support for youth moving from home to home while in care (similar to what is done to prepare / support adoptions)
- Social workers need to listen to young people (believe them) when they say they are not happy so youth do not have to hurt themselves to get help
- Social workers and foster parents need to be aware of scholarships (eg. YEAF) so they can tell and support youth
- 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're from?)
- Life Skills! Life Skills! Life Skills! (eg. relationships, employment, need to leave care with tools)
- Sibling contact whether in or out of care and supports to make this possible
- More resources for creative solutions
- Don't give up!
- Young people need to be willing to earn stuff (give to receive) – need to be held accountable for their actions
- Opportunities to “co-parent” (foster parents and parents) working together to meet the youth's needs
- MCFD needs to be held accountable and contribute, not expect foster parents to cover all costs and do all the work to support youth in care's connections to family etc.
- More foster homes that are family-oriented (eg. don't just be a bed and meals – stop kicking youth out all day when they (foster parents) are not home)
- Treat youth as individuals, not as stereotypes (not all youth are going to waste resources)

Priorities

The following are the Top 5 issues identified through a 'dot-mocracy' system. Please note that similar topics were NOT grouped together before voting took place.

1. More inspections and surprise visits of foster homes and group homes
2. More foster homes that are family oriented
3. More respect for the “lives” of youth – youth are people, not a case number
4. Support for youth in care to see their families
5. More respect for the rights of youth in care

Small Group Discussions

Participants were broken-up into 5 smaller groups that were facilitated by FBCYICN staff and adult supports. Each group worked through the following five questions, and their un-modified responses are below:

1. Why is this an issue?
2. What is currently being done?
3. What can young people do about it?
4. What info / tools / supports do young people need to do this?
5. What can adults do about it?

Foster and Group Home Inspections

1. Why is this an issue?

- Youth can be put into abusive homes – youth are sometimes scared to say something or when they do they are not believed
- Foster parents not always doing what they are suppose to be doing
- Youth do not always know their Rights
- Youth can be neglected
- Youth not informed of what they should be receiving (lack of knowledge)
- To make sure that the basic needs of the youth are being met
- Need to know what is really happening in the home

2. What is currently being done?

- Nothing is being done this is why it is an issue
- Social workers have too heavy of a case load and not enough time to do this
- Youth are not being heard, believed or listened to

3. What can young people do?

- Speak-out
- Call-in about checking in
- Advocacy
- Tell social worker how you are feeling – express your concerns

4. What info / tools / supports do youth need to do this?

- A go to person – like a one-to-one person not necessarily a social worker
- Support services
- Resource centres and resource workers
- Knowing our Rights
- People who listen and will believe us

5. What can adults do?

- Create a check-list of what should be done in the home
- Be there for the youth – listen to them and hear them
- Advocate for youth
- Have supports for the foster parents as well as the youth – resource guides
- Have a go-to person to do the checks and report back to social workers

Family-Oriented Foster Homes

1. Why is this an issue?

- Foster parents do not have the passion for their jobs
- If foster parents have their own children they have no respect for foster children
- Money
- Youth not doing their share to contribute to bring in a family
- Restrictions of the contracts, you want to do it your way
- Not properly trained for experiences of youth – inadequate training
- Place according to what parents and family want than others – culture shock
- Availability
- Foster parents do not respect or identify with the youth

2. What is currently being done?

- SCM's – Youth Speaks
- Some foster parents “bend the rules”
- Foster parents are attaching to youth and youth to the foster parents
- Preparing for youth to be moving in and everything they come with – history development
- Foster parents providing more than the basic necessities
- Support for foster parents

3. What can young people do?

- Speak out and be heard
- Keep fighting
- Tell someone who will listen
- Work with people around you that support you and have strengths
- Youth should know their resources
- Understanding that a family cannot happen overnight
- Making the effort to do things together
- Give foster parents a chance

4. What info / tools / supports do youth need to do this?

- Emotional supports
- To be sympathized and empathized
- Proper resources
- Young mom's parenting course
- Supports for spiritual, mental, and emotional health
- No bias against youth

5. What can adults do?

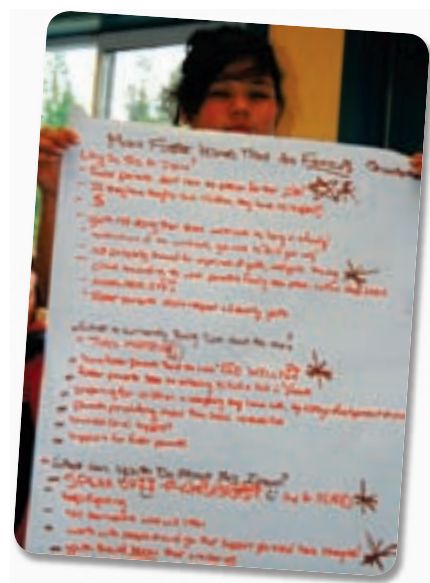
- Be here for us
- Proper training
- Have a heart

Respect for Youth in / from Care

1. Why is this an issue?
 - Too many social workers think we are a caseload
 - Do not like to be grouped or stereotyped
 - Should treat you like a youth – social workers are responsible for your life, you are their child
 - Treat as you want to be treated
 - Doesn't put a face on the issues
 - Everyone knows you are a foster kid
 - Never have time with my social worker and we do not even live in the same community
 - Youth do not want to be known as foster kids in their communities
 - Want male social workers as some youth would like same sex
2. What is currently being done?
 - Talking about it
 - Youth getting together
 - System is getting better – talking with more social workers
 - There are social workers out there that actually treat their kids like kids
 - Some social workers are passionate
 - Locals are getting involved with social workers
3. What can young people do?
 - What we are currently doing – getting together, bringing our voices together, awards and recognitions
 - Do up a list of rules for social workers on how they are suppose to treat youth in care - treated equally, treated with respect,
 - Take advantage of opportunities given to youth
 - Get social workers more involved in locals and to hear what we have to say
 - Write letters
 - Go to media
 - Youth go to social workers or social workers bosses
 - Call help-lines on how to advocate for myself
 - Find better ways to contact social workers
 - More awareness workshops on this issue
 - Be aware of your rights
 - Talk to people who are not involved in the system
4. What info / tools / supports do youth need to do this?
 - Confidence
 - Support and motivation
 - No more using term "aging out" or cutting off resources
 - Workshop
 - Advocates
 - Facts to go into a letter
5. What can adults do?
 - Listen to the youth
 - Advocate for the youth
 - Respect – no age discrimination
 - Help
 - Primer training
 - Show initiative
 - Show our discussions on paper

Supporting Youth in Care to See Family

1. Why is this an issue?
 - Isolated by not seeing family
 - Need to know you still have a family
 - Need to strengthen identities
 - Birth rights
 - Social reasons
 - Genetics
 - Heritage
 - Culture
 - Connections
2. What is currently being done?
 - Co-parenting
 - Youth showing that they need contact with families
 - There is emphasis being done to keep youth and families together to be more stable
 - Some foster parents are assisting / encouraging youth to keep their parents involved
3. What can youth do?
 - Know their rights
 - Advocate
 - Contact social worker
 - More communication
4. What info / tools / supports do youth need to do this?
 - Knowing Rights
 - Asking if youth want to connect with family
 - Social workers to facilitate meetings / relationships
 - Resources and learning how to access them
5. What can adults do?
 - Educate youth
 - Make people aware of this issue
 - Help youth find and access resources
 - Say it straight



Respecting the Rights of Youth in Care

1. Why is this an issue?
 - Social workers think all youth are the same / stereotype youth
 - Youth kept in the dark about their rights
 - Adults are worried this will result in more work if youth know their rights
 - Some social workers do not know about the Rights booklets
 - Social workers not able to communicate with youth
 - Social workers not trained properly
 - Lack of youth friendly publications on rights
 - Rights booklets are out of date
 - Social workers have no respect for youth
 - Rights are not respected or enforced
 - Taking too long to update the Rights booklets
2. What is currently being done?
 - Network consulted youth about updating the Rights Booklets
 - Nothing
3. What can youth do?
 - Talk to social worker and get rights booklet
 - Be your own advocate
 - Awareness campaign
 - Post rights on Facebook / MySpace
 - Tell other youth
 - Ensure rights are being respected – work on enforcing them
 - Use technology to raise awareness
4. What info / tools / supports do youth need to do this?
 - Post the rights of youth in every foster home and social workers office
 - Have the Rights laminated and put into youth's rooms and common areas of homes
 - Supports for enforcing the rights
 - Should not get punished for standing up for your rights
 - Speaking out at schools
5. What can adults do?
 - Need to respect youth knowing their rights
 - Need to help to support and enforce rights
 - Need to be aware of the rights
 - Don't come down on the youth for trying to enforce their rights
 - Be respectful
 - Support youth before, during and after enforcing their rights



YouthSpeak 2007 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed using previous survey questions (YouthSpeak 2004 & Needs Assessment Project) and in consultation with the McCreary Centre Society (MCS) in hopes of creating a better opportunity for comparison between young people in and from care as well as “mainstream” young people not involved with the child welfare system (eg. respondents of MCS Adolescent Health Surveys).

Unfortunately, only 11 questionnaires were returned so the sample is small.

Below are responses from the 2007 YouthSpeak Questionnaire. These specific points were selected from the overall results to highlight themes identified through consultation and on-going discussions with the Network's membership over the past couple of years.

[The full list of results from the Questionnaire can be found in the appendix section of this report.]

About You

- Respondent ages included: 1 – 15 year old, 1 – 16 year old, 4 – 17 year olds, 1 – 18 year old, 1 – 20 year old, 1 – 21 year old and 1 – 23 year old.
- 60% of respondents identified themselves as Aboriginal, 30% identified themselves as Caucasian and one respondent identified them self as “Afro-American”.
- Respondents represented the following communities in BC: Burnaby, Duncan, Lillooet, Maple Ridge, Merritt, Powell River, Prince Rupert, Surrey and Vancouver.
- Of the 9 respondents who answered the question, 6 don't practice a religion, 1 considers them self Christian, another identified them self as practicing “Wicca” and a third believes in “Karma.”

Care Experience

- Of the 11 respondents, 4 identified them self as “Currently in Care – Continuing Custody Order / Permanent Ward”; 2 chose the “Currently in Care – Temporary Custody Order / Temporary Ward” option; and 5 said “I was in care”. Of this 5, one identified that they are now on a Youth Agreement.
- Although two people chose not to answer this question, the majority of the respondents said they had been / was in care for more than 9 years. Two respondents had been in care for less than one year and others said they had been in care for 10, 12, 12 ½, 14, 15 and 17 years.
- Of the respondents, one had been in 8 placements, two had been in 7 placements, one had been in 6 placements, one had been in 4 placements, two had been in 3 placements, one had been in 2 placements, one had only been in 1 placement, and two couldn't remember how many placements they had been in.
- Similarly, many respondents reported having had a relatively high number of social workers throughout their time in care. One young person said they had 10 workers, one had 5, 4 had had 3 workers, two had 2 and two couldn't remember how many workers they had had in their life.
- Four respondents reported seeing their social worker (in-person) “regularly” (2 times per month or more), three reported “often” (1 time per month), two said “sometimes” (1 time every three to six months),

- and one reported “rarely” (1 time every six months to a year).
- Plan of Care responses were split rather widely. 5 Respondents said they “have or had a Plan of Care” while two said they had not and 4 checked the “what is a Plan of Care?” option.
- In terms of having “control over [their] own life and decisions made about [their] life while in care” 1 respondent replied “never”, only 1 replied “always” and 8 replied either “most of the time” or “sometimes.”

Rights & Advocacy

- 10 young people responded to the questions about rights and advocacy. Of these 10, seven said they “know / did know their rights in care” and the remaining three did not.
- Three respondents know what to do if their rights are violated while three do not know what to do and four are unsure about what to do if their rights are violated.
- 60% of respondents said “there is someone in my community who I trust to advocate for me” while the remaining 30% said no or they were unsure if there is someone they can go to for advocacy help. One respondent said “I am fine advocating for myself but if I needed, the FBCYICN is a valuable resource.”
- Of those respondents who are somewhat aware of the Representative for Children and Youth (the Rep), 4 said they “learned about the Representative for Children and Youth from the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks” and 1 identified having learned about the Rep through the Rep’s office directly.

Family & Friends

- Although ALL respondents said they “have a supportive adult outside the family [they] can talk to if [they] have a serious problem”, only 6 said they “have an adult IN [their] family they can talk to” and 3 said they do not have a family member to go to when they “have a serious problem”.
- When asked about friendship, respondents said their “friends would be upset if [they]” Beat someone up – 5, got pregnant or got someone pregnant – 5, used marijuana – 4, got drunk – 2, got arrested – 5, carried a weapon for protection – 6, dropped out of school – 6.

Independence

- Although 6 respondents “believe that at the age of 16, young people are prepared to live independently”; 3 feel they are not:
 - “no, not responsible”
 - “depends on the student’s skill, knowledge and maturity level”
 - “yes, it could also help teach them life skills”
 - “depends on the youth” & “some are and some are not”
 - “not emotionally, cognitively, or have enough life skills”
 - “no, still learning”
 - “no, don’t have the maturity to be independent”
- 5 respondents said they would “like / have liked to stay in care” past the age of 19:
 - 20 – “I believe I need another year.”
 - 21 – “It’s a good age to finish off getting your shit together.”
 - 24 – “I would have liked more support while I’m in school to help with life skills.”
 - 24 – “It’s when I wouldn’t need any more help.”
 - 21 – “The more time you have, the more you can learn.”

- Included in the “support system” of respondents are: Friends – 6, non-profit organizations – 6, foster family – 5, biological family – 3, MCFD – 2, Teachers – 2, and Counsellor – 1.

Involvement in School & Community

- More than half of respondents “take part in extra-curricular activities each week”.
- When asked “what kinds of things are you really good at?” respondents identified: sports – 4, art – 3, writing – 3, singing – 2, theatre – 2, music – 2, dancing – 1, and photography – 1. Note: some respondents identified more than one activity.
- 90% of respondents said “yes” they had helped others without pay in the past 12 months.

Parenting

Note: All of the respondents answered “no” to being a parent and therefore, did not fill out any of the questions under the parenting section of this questionnaire.

Health & Well-Being

- Of the 10 respondents, 6 said they “do not have a health condition or disability that keeps [them] from doing some things that other kids [their] age do”. Two said they have a “physical disability” and two mentioned “a mental or emotional condition”.
- Just under half of respondents admit to using marijuana during the past 30 days.
- Just over half of participants say they haven’t had 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row during the past 30 days.
- More than half of respondents say they smoke “occasionally” or “every day”.
- Although only 4 young people responded to the question, respondents identified that they have been “told by a health professional that [they] have” the following: depression – 4, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) – 3, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – 2, a learning disability – 1, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD / ADHD) – 1 or additional problems – 1. Note: some respondents identified multiple labels. When asked to comment about these diagnosis, respondents said:
 - “I have an invisible mental health condition that I can hide very well that hasn’t been dealt with”
- When asked if “there is anything you would like to change about yourself or your life?” half of the respondents said “no” while the other half said “yes” and said they “know where to go to get help” with the comments they made below:
 - “thinking pattern”
 - “change my emotional level”
 - “weight”

[The full YouthSpeak Questionnaire and responses are available in the Appendix section of this report.]

Skill Development

A series of one hour skill-building workshops were offered during SCM #46 and grouped together to provide participants with options based on areas of experience / confidence (eg. communication skills, information / resources, and life skills) and in a progressive order (ie. basic level of learning first then more complex). These two daytime blocks were followed by a block of one hour evening sessions focused on consultation options for on-going input into the organization's programs and services (ie. maintaining the "youth-driven" aspect of our mandate).

Block A Sessions:

Communications 101

Facilitator: Minda Chittenden

In this session the participants learned what communication is and what types of communication there are. Communication is the passing of a message from one person to another and this can be done by verbal communication (communicating with words) or by non-verbal communication (communicating by the senses – sight, smell, sound, touch or taste. Body language and facial expressions are also forms of non-verbal communication). *[For more information, see SCM #46 Session Notes in the Appendix of this report.]*

Rights & Advocacy

Facilitator: Melanie Mark

In this workshop Melanie discussed the concept of rights and the various pieces of legislation that protect these rights (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). A particular focus was on that of section 70 as identified under provincial legislation through the B.C. Child, Family and Community Service Act. Because this SCM had a particular focus on "Youth Voice", this workshop was free flowing, allowing for open discussion and examples of rights violations for youth in care. The latter part of the workshop focused on ways in which youth can self advocate or who they can turn to for assistance/support. *[For more information on Rights and Advocacy, please contact the Representative for Children and Youth (see Appendix)]*

Goal-Setting

Facilitator: Tatiana Sean

In this session the participants learned the basic principles of goal-setting. The participants learned about both the SMART principle (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) and the WARP principle (Write down your goals; Assess where you are at; Reward yourself for meeting your goals; and Put your goals into positive language). *[For more information about goal-setting, contact our Employment Program Coordinator at employment@fbcyicn.ca]*

Block B Sessions:

Public Speaking

Facilitator: Nicole Herbert

At the start of this workshop the participants brainstormed their fears about public speaking and then went through some basic steps to effective public speaking. The participants then broke into small groups, picked a topic and presented for about 1 minute to the larger group. *[For more information, see SCM #46 Session Notes in the Appendix of this report]*

Making a Complaint

Facilitator: Ed Berry

In this session participants learned about MCFD's complaints process and discussed how to make appropriate complaints when they feel their rights are not being respected or their needs are not being met. *[For more information about making a formal complaint, go to www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/complaints/process_youth.htm]*

Proposal Writing

Facilitator: Alix Sales

In this session participants learned about how to write a basic project proposal. We used the "Youth in Care Hair Care Project" idea to demonstrate how to take an idea and make it happen. To start, participants were asked to work with their team to put the project idea (goal) into one clear sentence. Then each team worked through 6 questions: what, where, why, who, how and when? The workshop went through things to consider for each question (for example, how to do a timeline). Other advice was to keep positive, embrace change, keep it simple, be passionate and have fun. By the end of the workshop we had developed a great project proposal! *[For more information about proposal writing, contact our Director of Programs at nicole_herbert@fbcyicn.ca]*

Block C Sessions:

Rights of Young Parents

Facilitator: Minda Chittenden

In this workshop we discussed the rights of all young parents (outlined in the UN Rights of the Child) as well as specific rights of young people in care which are listed in Section 70 of BC's Child, Family and Community Service Act. Everyone was reminded that parents have the following responsibilities:

- Keep their children safe
- Take care of their child's physical and emotional needs
- Get medical care for their child
- Protect their children from abuse
- Not abandon or neglect their child

The group then talked about the definitions of abuse and neglect and discussed the laws around spanking. Participants also talked about "duty to report" and what parents can do when they are struggling to meet the needs of their children. Last the group was consulted about what additional areas around parents would be helpful in a workshop about the rights of parents. *[For more information, see SCM #46 Session Notes in the Appendix of this report]*

Culture Consultation

Facilitator: Brionne Asham

In this session, participants discussed their thoughts, experiences and ideas about culture and spirituality. They shared their own definitions of culture, talked about how it relates to them, some of the challenges they've faced while in care and some practical and creative suggestions about how the Network can make a difference. At the end of the session, 4 young people volunteered to help staff plan cultural activities for future SCMs. *[For more information, see SCM #46 Session Notes in the Appendix of this report]*



Employment Consultation

Facilitator: Tatiana Sean

This consultation started off by gathering information about the participant's employment status and how it affects their motivation to participate in an employment program. Many of the participants felt that employment programs showed them the tools related to employment but did not give them enough support to learn. The participants also had an opportunity to provide feedback on the Employment to Freedom Program and its 4 phases. *[For more information, see SCM #46 Session Notes in the Appendix of this report]*

Additional Sessions:

Member Engagement Consultation

Facilitator: Yvonne Andrews

As an organization we needed to look at what was working and what was not in the terms of member engagement within the organization. The Network hired Yvonne Andrews to consult with members, adult allies, staff and board members to gather as much feedback and input on how we currently engage members and how we can improve on the meaningful engagement of our members in the future. After Jocelyn gave a brief description of recent changes (ie, discontinuation of Leadership Council) and how we got here. Yvonne described the consultation process so far and where the process was going. She then had the participants break off into 4 groups to discuss what meaningful engagement means, what it looks like, what the barriers are and how can we improve? *[For more information, see SCM #46 Session Notes in the Appendix of this report]*



YouthSpeak-Out

Facilitator: Nicole Herbert

On November 14th, 2007 the Network will be hosting the Speak-Out part of YouthSpeak 2007, which will be held at our office from 12-3pm. This is an opportunity for a small group of our members to speak-out to decision makers about the needs, issues and ideas identified at SCM #46. The Network is looking for 5 youth (1 from each region) to come and speak-out to decision makers. The criteria to participate in this event are:

- Need to be available all-day on November 13th and November 14th, 2007
- Willing to speak in front of a group of people (up to 30 adults)
- Need to be available by email and phone between now and November 13th to work with staff and prepare for the presentation



Preparation Day: Tuesday November 13th

After the SCM, the goal was to select one young person to represent each of MCFD's 5 regions, from the list of volunteers generated at the YouthSpeak. Unfortunately, because of availability and communication issues, only 4 young people were able to commit to participating in the YouthSpeak-Out. Those four young people represented the Vancouver Coastal Region, the Vancouver Island Region and the North Region.

These four young people came together for a full day on November 13th, to plan their presentation. Their day began with a meeting with the FBCYICN Director of Programs who provided them all with background information from previous YouthSpeaks, notes from the 2007 YouthSpeak, recent documents about the needs, issues and ideas identified by members, and an outline of the agenda for the YouthSpeak-Out event. We also spent some time talking about the who the Special Guests or "listeners" would be and discussed some guidelines in terms of ensuring that they appropriately represent their peers.

The four young people then asked if they could work on their own to come up with their ideas for the presentation which they later presented to the staff team for feedback. One of the significant decisions they made was to change the order of the priorities to make them "flow" from one topic to another more naturally. They worked as a group all-day to determine what points they would make from the notes (ie. SCM brainstorming & background info) and decided each presenter would also introduce them self and share a bit about their care experience to provide the "human factor" to the information that would be presented. By the end of the day, they had all of their parts worked out; they had created an ice-breaker activity to lead-off their presentation and engage the guests and had prepared most of their flip chart and other materials.

Youth & Decision-Makers: Wednesday November 14th

As guests arrived, staff and YouthSpeak presenters encouraged them to help themselves to snacks while everyone chatted informally. To get the formal part of the YouthSpeak-Out started, the FBCYICN Executive Director facilitated a round of introductions and gave a brief description of FBCYICN programs and services. The Director of Programs followed this with a brief description of the YouthSpeak model and process. Below is the YouthSpeak-Out agenda:

YouthSpeak-Out Agenda

12pm-12:30pm *FBCYICN Office Tour & Light Refreshments*
 12:30pm-12:50pm *Introductions*
 12:50pm-1pm *FBCYICN Orientation*
 1pm-2pm *YouthSpeak-Out Presentation*
 2pm-2:45pm *Action Statements*
 2:45pm-3pm *Next Steps, Acknowledgments & Wrap-Up*

Post-it Activity: Special Guests "Speak-Out"

Next, the YouthSpeak-Out presenters asked guests to shout out words that represent the challenges facing young people in and from care. These words were written on post-its and put up on the wall to represent the vast and varied barriers and struggles experienced by youth leaving care:

- Funding for education
- Stability
- Cultural awareness
- Spiritual connectedness
- Pushed out of care too early
- Being heard
- Transitions
- Resources
- Natural family involvement
- Sports and leisure
- Responsibilities
- Participation
- Respect
- Just support
- Bonding
- Stigma
- Permanency
- Health
- Honesty
- Involvement
- Discrimination
- Loneliness
- Lack of communication
- Isolation
- Comprehensive plans of care
- Stereotypes
- Individuals
- Inclusiveness
- Fun
- Influence
- Identity
- Rights
- Continuity
- Acceptance
- Stable social workers
- Choices

Presenting the Priorities

The YouthSpeak-Out presenters did an excellent job of highlighting the priorities identified by their peers at YouthSpeak! In addition to sharing a little bit about who they are and how long they were in care as part of their individual introductions, each of them also added relevant personal experiences when providing examples of why the issues presented are important. This provided a much-needed "human factor" to the presentation and had a strong and positive impact on the "listeners".

To ensure more of the needs / issues identified by participants at the YouthSpeak could be shared with decision-makers, the items were grouped together and the 'dot-mocracy' votes re-tallied. The resulting priorities (inclusive of the original top 5 areas – highlighted) that were presented by the four young people are below:

1. Foster Homes

- a. Family oriented (23)
- b. Surprise inspections (15)
- c. Culturally appropriate (8)
- d. No prejudice (5)

2. Family Connections

- a. Support for youth in care to see family (21)
- b. Right of youth in care to visit family (15)
- c. Don't separate siblings in care (12)

3. Respect for Youth in Care

- a. Youth in care are people – not numbers (14)
- b. Treat youth in care as individuals – not stereotypes (9)
- c. Assess youth in care on strengths – not “risks” (5)

4. Education

- a. Youth in care need tools for school (eg. computer/internet access) (9)
- b. Not enough youth in care graduate (9)

5. Transition to Independence /Adulthood

- a. Help for youth in care leaving care (5)

Action Statements

The following are notes from the action statements made by special guests at the YouthSpeak-Out. Although these action statements were often presented more like organization updates (ie. what people are already doing), we were pleased that so many influential representatives were positively impacted by the presentation and made a commitment to continue to work with the FBCYICN to ensure that the needs, issues and ideas of young people in and from care are heard, respected and acted-upon. *(The notes are in point-form to prevent mis-quoting those who spoke on behalf of their organizations. The notes are also listed in the order that people spoke.)*

Jocelyn Helland

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

- Will be compiling the list of concerns for a report
- Supporting young people
- Follow-up with adults who are present
- Provide a forum for adults and youth
- Take all this information and integrate it into our business plan (business plan will be completed spring 2008)
- More youth engagement
- Alumni Strategy – involvement with members

Tom Christensen

Ministry of Children and Family Development

- Leaving with more questions about what is happening to youth in care
- Good to hear directly from the youth to know what is happening to them
- Stability is a consistent problem - what are the barriers to end this?
- Will be pursuing discussions with staff and the recurring themes presented today and look at why these keep coming up and what we can do about them
- Would like a opportunity to sit with the 4 youth speakers to talk deeper with them
- Has benefited from this and think MCFD staff would / will benefit also

Gary Mavis

Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents

- Adults need to be impacted over and over again until they final get it
- Involve Culturally appropriate schooling / teachings for foster parents
- Not enough Aboriginal foster homes
- Education program that is culturally sensitive – add on specific nations culture and educate non-aboriginal families

- Set up Advisory Council and would like to have a youth as a member of this
- Expand and support Aboriginal groups throughout the province
- YTC – have committed staff member and will continue to do so
- Will continue to work in partnership with other agencies

Ellaine Ashby

BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations

- Working with FBCYICN, PGT, FAFP on idea forums for foster parents – how to help YIC finish school
- Get donations of computers, money for educational assessments
- Receive donations to send youth to camps
- Gift cards for youth leaving care
- Committed to continuing process of supporting YIC

Michelle Fortin

Federation of Child and Family Services

- YIC issues remain a focus with our Board of Directors – will be bringing this information back to them
- These issues keep coming back and are remaining present
- Would like to give FBCYICN time to present at our Feb meeting
- Will be staying in close contact with the FBCYICN
- Awarded FBCYICN with the Award of Excellence

Kathy Berggren-Clive

Representative for Children and Youth

- Hear these concerns on a day to day basis
- Not enough YIC are graduating – report on Education went out and are still focused on this issue, very passionate about this
- Youth Voice in decision making – key focus of office
- Help youth find voice and advocates
- Supporting youth in all communities
- This will help better inform the Reps office on what is happening out there
- Create more awareness about the UN Convention of Rights
- Working on the effectiveness of the Appeals process
- More staff to advocate individually

Adrienne Montani

First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

- Firstcall Coalition meeting will focus on YouthSpeak – would like FBCYICN to attend this to talk about the issues
- Will email final report to all of First Call's contacts
- Will help to strengthen youth voice

Marilyn Hedlund

Ministry of Children and Family Development

- Liked the practical solutions the youth provided
- Wished every social worker could hear what the youth had to say
- Use final report as a tool – will be sharing it with Regional managers
- Give report to researchers and policy makers
- Will work on priorities and issues with staff

Bruce Parisian

Vancouver Island Aboriginal Team

- These issues are basic needs that everyone should be getting
- Youth need to be part of the decisions that affect youth
- Every child has these rights
- Need to engage youth in the process of changing this

Tom Weber

Ministry of Children and Family Development

- Permission slips – supporting foster parents and giving them more control about signing permission slips (only on Island right now)
– will share this information with other regions

Ed Berry

Public Guardian and Trustee of BC

- Raise youth participation awareness within the PGT
- Send some of their staff to the FBCYICN to work (sub-con) also benefits the staff of PGT to get more awareness
- Provide and will keep providing on-going support at the SCM's - funding youth, hospitality support, adult support, workshops, etc
- Promoting Rights of youth in care and continuing to respect the rights of youth in care
- Get involved in training social workers

Stan Williams

Ministry of Children and Family Development

- Provincial Youth Advisory Council
- Engage young people in decision making
- Developing a relationship with the FBCYICN – would like to engage YAC
- Youth Engagement is a way of being

Sandy Cooke

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

- True to being a provincial organization
- Get a larger voice
- Partnerships are important



Next Steps

If YouthSpeak is only the beginning – what next? How do we collectively take what was said and do something about it? How do we further engage young people in moving forward and making change? How do we ensure their voices are not lost and their courage to speak-out is not forgotten?

The Network has started by taking an honest look at the work we do and how we do it. In September of 2007, we hired an External Consultant to ask our staff, our Board, our adult allies and most importantly our young people about their experiences of the Network. We've asked them to tell us what we do well and what we need to do better. We've asked them for their ideas about our programs and services and how we can better engage them and provide them with a more meaningful experience.

Our first recommendation for YOU is to ask yourself and the young people you serve the same questions.

And now that the Member Engagement Report is complete, it's time to take action. We will start by continuing to make time at Steering Committee Meetings and other events to further discuss the needs, issues and ideas of our membership. We will work with our members to determine our organization's priorities and to provide them with opportunities to develop the skills they need to advocate for their needs and take on leadership roles within our organization and their communities.

We will also commit to at least one action item on all five priority areas identified by the 2007 YouthSpeak-Out. On the right is a template for action that we will be incorporating into our business plan.

Our second recommendation is for you to freely use our template as a guide for action for your own organization or work.

We will be following-up with each decision-maker who made an action statement at the YouthSpeak-Out to see what progress has been made and how we can work together to improve the lives of young people in and from care in BC.

In addition to those who participated in the YouthSpeak-Out, we will also distribute this report to other decision-makers across the province, including those not only directly involved with the child welfare system, but also those who provide (or should provide) broader services to young people in and from care (eg. health, education, justice, etc.).

If you're interested in being part of the solution, please contact:

Jocelyn Helland, *Executive Director*
 Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
 Direct: 604.527.7769
 Jocelyn_Helland@fbcyicn.ca

2007 YouthSpeak-Out Priority Area	FBCYICN Action Item
1. Foster Homes	We will work with Foster Parent Education Framework team in re-writing the education curriculum for foster parents to incorporate learning points around respect, dignity and rights of youth in care into the training.
2. Family Connectedness	We will find out more about the current experiences of youth in remaining connected to their family, what opportunities or resources are available to them to keep family connections, communicate this information back to young people and, where needed, advocate for change.
3. Respect for Youth in Care	We will complete the Rights Book and look for opportunities to educate young people and the adults in their lives on the rights of youth in care.
4. Education	We will support the meaningful work currently being done in the area of education for youth in care, and find ways to ensure young people's voices are directly heard in this process.
5. Transition to Independence	We will expand our Transitions program to provide additional support to young people leaving care.



Appendix

Commonly Used Terms

FBCYICN / Federation / Network

These terms are used interchangeably in reference to the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks.

Youth / Young Person / Member

These terms are used to describe young people between the ages of 14 and 24 who are involved with the FBCYICN and are, or have been, in government care.

Alumni

This term refers to someone who has left government care. For the purpose of the work of the FBCYICN, this refers to young people who have aged-out of care (ie. are over the age of 19).

Government Care

This term includes young people who are or have been in foster homes, groups homes, Kith and Kin Placements (ie. in the home of a relative), youth custody centres, residential mental health facilities, residential treatment facilities and on Youth Agreements.

References

Are You Listening?

Final Report of the YouthSpeak Project
(March 2004)
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Meeting Minutes

Steering Committee Meeting #46
(October 2007)
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Event Notes

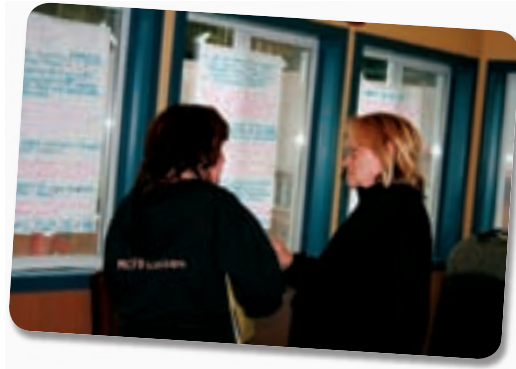
YouthSpeak-Out
(November 2007)
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Next Steps

Facilitators Guide
The McCreary Centre Society

Resources

For more information about the Youth in Care Network or any of the agencies that participated in this YouthSpeak process, please visit the websites listed below. We encourage YOU to find out more about the programs and services offered through these organizations and to get actively involved in advocating for these service providers to better address the needs, issues and ideas of young people.



Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN)
www.fbcyicn.ca

Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca

MCFD Youth Services
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/index.htm

MCFD Child & Youth Mental Health Services
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/mh_publications/cymh_youth_brochure.pdf

MCFD Youth Advisory Council (YAC)
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/youth_council.htm

Representative for Children and Youth, British Columbia (The Rep)
www.rcybc.ca

Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia (PGT)
www.trustee.bc.ca

British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA)
www.bcfosterparents.ca

Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents (FAFP)
www.fafp.ca

Federation of Child and Family Services (FCFS)
www.fcfs.bc.ca

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (First Call)
www.firstcallbc.org

Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS)
www.vacfss.com

Vancouver Coastal Aboriginal Planning Committee (VCAPC)
www.vcapc.ca

Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team (VIATT)
www.viatt.ca

The McCreary Centre Society (MCS)
www.mcs.bc.ca

Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #46 – Session Notes

Here are some tips to become better listeners:

Communication 101: Professional Communication

The group was asked “What is Communication?” and Matt explained that it is “passing a message from one person to another.” We then discussed:

- Communicating with words is **VERBAL COMMUNICATION**.
- Communicating without words is **NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**.
Non verbal communication can happen through any of the senses – sight, sounds, smell, touch or taste. Body language and facial expressions are forms of nonverbal communication.
- Communication tools – Technology that we use to communicate (eg. email, phones, etc.) For example: we communicate verbally and non-verbally over the phone. The phone is a communication tool, not a type of communication.

Some basic tips for communicating verbally and nonverbally are:

Verbal Communication:

- Speaking slowly and clearly will make it easier for people to understand you. For instance imagine yourself in a professional setting, you would not want to talk like this would you? You would want to speak clearly and slowly. If you leave a message for someone with their receptionist or on an answering machine, you need to speak clearly so that they can hear who called and get your phone number.
- Repeating words can also be irritating to a listener. Words such as ‘um’, ‘like’ and ‘you know’ are common words that people repeat. It can be hard to break yourself of the habit of saying them but try! Get a friend to listen to you speak and tell you what words you repeat. Breaking this habit will make you instantly sound more professional.
- Remember to speak loud enough. Do not mumble.
- Do not swear or use jargon. And if someone uses jargon or acronyms that you don’t know, don’t be afraid to ask what they mean.

Nonverbal Communication: Body Language

- Hand movements – Good hand gestures can make your story clear but too many can be distracting. Fidgety hand movements can be distracting and shaking hands should be firm and not wobbly.
- Body posture – Sitting up straight indicates you are paying attention and interested. Slouching makes you look lazy and disinterested.
- Positioning of personal space – Be careful not to invade people’s personal space. In the workplace you should always give a person about 2-3 feet until you know what their comfort level is. It is okay to lean forward but don’t get too close.
- Eye contact – This means to look at the other person’s eyes as they speak to you and not out the window, at the floor, etc. It is important to make eye contact but not to stare. If someone does not look you in the eye it can be interpreted as if they are lying, disinterested or lacking confidence.
- Facial expressions – Emotions can be shown in the eyes, mouth, and head movements.

- Prepare to listen – Remove distractions. Good listening means being willing to turn off the TV, close a door, stop reading or returning emails.
- Give the speaker your full attention, and let them know they are getting it.
- Keep an open body posture – Don’t cross legs or your arms as this indicates that you aren’t very open to hearing what the person has to say.
- Show the other person that you want to hear them. Look at them. Nod when you agree, ask them to explain further if you don’t understand. Listen to understand them and their words rather than just waiting for your turn.
- Put the person at ease. Give them space and time to speak. How we look at them, how we stand or sit, makes a huge difference – Relax, and help them to relax as well.
- Stop talking – You can’t listen when you’re talking.
- Don’t interrupt – Give the person time to say what he or she wants to say. Be patient.
- Some people take longer to find the right word, to make a point or clarify an issue. Give the speaker time to get it all out before you jump in with your reply.
- Concentrate on what is being said – Maintain eye contact and focus your attention on the speaker’s words, ideas and feelings.
- Listen to how something is said – Pay close attention to the speaker’s tone of voice, facial expressions and emotions.
- Wait before you think about how you will answer – If you are thinking about how you will respond while the speaker is still talking, you have stopped listening.
- Don’t jump to conclusions or argue mentally – If you are doing this, you are tuning out what is being said and concentrating instead on your own thoughts and feelings.
- Be very slow to disagree, criticize or argue. Even if you disagree, let them have their point of view.
- Evaluate the facts and evidence, not the speaker – Don’t allow your personal feelings about the speaker to influence what you are hearing. Put yourself “in their shoes.”
- Watch your own emotions. If what they are saying creates an emotional response in you, be extra careful to listen well, with attention to the intent and full meaning of their words. When we are angry, frightened or upset, we often miss critical parts of what is being said to us.
- Empathize with the other person. Especially if they are telling you something personal or painful, or something you intensely disagree with, take a moment to stand in their shoes, to look at the situation from their point of view.
- Ask questions. Ask the speaker to clarify, to say more, give an example, or explain further. It will help them speak more precisely and it will help you hear and understand them more accurately. For example, “I want to make sure that I understood you correctly so can I ask a question about what you have just told me?” It is best to wait until the speaker has finished speaking before asking too many questions.
- Paraphrase (use your own words) – This is also called “parroting” because you repeat words. For example: “I think I heard you say that your friends are really important to you, is that right?”

Rights & Advocacy

Unfortunately, no notes were available from this session.

Goal-Setting

We picked top issues that youth identified in the youth speak session. I explained to the group how they were going to learn the basic principles of goal setting and how to use this as a tool to goal set around the issues that they identified. I explained what goal setting was including reviewing a couple of principles (SMART and WARP). The SMART principle is that goals need to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed. The WARP principle is Write down your goals, assess where you are at, reward yourself for meeting your goals and put your goals into positive language. We also reviewed the difference between short and long term goals. Each youth was given tip sheets on both of these principles as well as a notebook to write out their goals. They were given a goal setting worksheet as well to write down their final goals. Youth then were given about 30 minutes to set goals for themselves. I worked with each participant to help them use the principles of goal setting to set realistic, specific goals. We wrapped up by checking in and during the time that they were setting goals we talked about some examples of goals that met the SMART Principle.

Public Speaking

The group started by identifying their fears about public speaking which included:

- Forgetting what to say
- Choking
- People not liking me or what I have to say
- Repeating things
- Fidgeting
- People not paying attention

Participants were then asked to share their observations of Nicole (Facilitator)'s public speaking / facilitation in terms of what they like and don't like about it. Participants were then encouraged to do more of the things they like about other speakers / facilitators, and less of what they don't like about others.

Next participants went through the following steps to public speaking:

- TOPIC – know the facts – make sure you know what you are talking about and why
- TARGET(S) – know who you're presenting to – know what you want your audience to get out of your presentation
- TOOLS – know what tools / resources are appropriate for your audience – visual aids / hand-out materials and resources provided should be appropriate to the age and experience of your audience
- TEST – know your flow – practice speaking out loud to yourself and then to someone else to make sure it all makes sense and sounds as natural as possible
- TALK – know you've done the work – be confident in yourself and go for it!
- TRUTH – know what worked well and what you can improve on by asking for feedback and being honest with yourself

Participants were split into groups of three and pick a topic from the YouthSpeak brainstorming list developed earlier in the day. Groups were given a few minutes to think about their topic and figure out what is important about it. Participants were also told that each member of their group would have to speak to the large group during their presentation.

Each group then had only 1 minute to report back to the large group about their topic. After each group presented, participants were reminded to think about what they liked about the presentation and what they would do differently.

Making a Complaint

Unfortunately, no notes were available from this session.

Proposal Writing

Unfortunately, no notes were available from this session.

Rights of Young Parents

Young parents in the Network requested that FBCYICN create a workshop to help young parents (in and from care) learn their rights. This Saturday evening SCM workshop was a consultation with young parents about what they would like to learn from this workshop.

In the workshop we discussed the rights of all young people (outlined in the UN Rights of the Child) as well as the specific rights of young people in care which are listed in Section 70 of BC's Child, Family and Community Service Act. Everyone was reminded that THEIR CHILD HAS THE SAME RIGHTS. By law all parents must:

- Keep children safe
- Take care of their child's physical and emotional needs
- Get medical care for their child
- Protect them from abuse
- Not abandon or neglect their child

If a parent does not feel they can fulfill these commitments they must seek help as soon as possible to find a way that they can meet their child's needs. We discussed the meanings of neglect, abuse and the laws on spanking:

Neglect is when parents do not meet the basic needs of their children. They don't give their child enough clothes, or the right clothes for the weather conditions. Or the child does not have enough food, medical care or emotional support and affection. Leaving a child alone at home or in a car can also be seen as neglect.

Abuse can include physically hurting a child, sexual abuse or emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is when a parent's behaviour is emotionally hurtful to a child. This can happen when a parent constantly criticises a child or does not give them the affection or attention they need. Sometime children live in a home where they are not abused BUT they witness their parents hurting each other and this can frighten a child and be considered emotional abuse.

Spanking: It is NOT illegal to spank your children BUT if you do spank them be prepared that someone may report you to the Ministry. Sometimes the line between discipline and abuse is hard to see. It is abuse to hit a child with an object (belt, stick) or to hit a child hard enough to leave a mark. In Feb 2004, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld a parent's right to spank but set the following strict guidelines:

- Parent must use an open hand not a closed fist or object
- Cannot spank a child under two years old
- Cannot spank a teenager
- Cannot slap or hit a child in the face or head.
- Spanking must be brief and without physically harm to the child

We discussed that all citizens have a 'duty to report' any abuse or neglect that they witness. Therefore if someone in your life feels you are neglecting your child they are required by law to report it to MCFD.

Lastly I asked the group what other topics they would like to include in the workshop. Suggestions from the group included:

- How can parents change their behaviour to prevent being reported to MCFD
- What to do if parents are reported to MCFD, parents' during the assessment and how to work towards a positive outcome for your child.
- How to get help (advocate, lawyer, etc.)
- Rights in a common law relationship
- The rights of the father pre-birth, after birth
- Parent and child's rights to medical services
- Different kinds of parental custody and child support arrangements
- Rights to benefits
- Rights to employment and a place to live.
- Grandparent rights

The group seemed content with any/all of these options and seemed most interested in knowing how to prevent MCFD from checking on them and what to do if they do. Participants were encouraged to send any further ideas to: Nicole Herbert, Director of Programs at nicole_herbert@fbcyicn.ca.

Culture Consultation

In this session, participants discussed their thoughts, experiences and ideas about culture and spirituality. Below are the notes from the session:

What is Culture?

- Series of beliefs held by a group of people
- A group of people from the same tribe
- A way of life
- A "grey" area meaning something different to different people (eg. tribe, group of society)
- Shared beliefs (eg. religious beliefs / spiritual practices)
- Changes / adapts constantly over time
- Lots of youth are turning to alternatives (eg. Wicca)
- Culture is about a group – spirituality is about an individual
- The culture of youth is very media and technology driven – it is like a brand name and takes from us instead of giving to us because we can't find ourselves (eg. dance culture used to be powwow – now it's just "grinding")
- Beliefs in teachings, symbolism and higher power but not necessarily in "God"

Why is Culture Important?

- Follow the ancestors
- Strength deep in our soul
- Helps us define who we are and it's a place or movement to belong to
- Where we came from and helps guide us to who we want to be
- What you put in is what you get out of it
- Insight into ancestors' beliefs and helps us to figure out why we do things and who we are
- If you don't know where you're from – you can't know who you are
- You can understand and value culture without practicing it
- Practicing culture / spirituality brings balance to my life

What are the barriers to you / young people participating in cultural activities?

- Living in lots of group homes it seemed like everyone had to be the same – there weren't many opportunities to explore your own identity
- Not given a choice about beliefs and not knowing what else is out there

What can the Network do to help?

- Make more diverse opportunities available
- Let youth know they have a right to freedom of belief
- Provide opportunities to explore their own culture and alternatives
- Make resources available to youth who want to explore
- Help youth who want to seek things out (eg. go with them)
- Let foster parents know their religion isn't always the same as the youth's and they must help the youth find what they want to explore
- Brining in religious leaders could be intimidating or seem like a "sales pitch"
- Bring information and support youth to connect with them – make sure safe contacts are available (ie. check them out first)
- Steer youth who are in religious or spiritual conflict to appropriate resources
- Connect youth to appropriate youth groups to explore interests and share experiences
- Cross-cultural learning is important
- Pastoral Counsellors should be able to assist young people in exploring any of the major religions without prejudice / bias
- Host cultural events – bring a mixture of cultural things (indigenous beliefs and practices)
- Heritage Fairs / cultural festivals – bring info about your own culture to share with the rest of the group (eg. food, music, dance, art, etc.)
- Make sure cultural stuff is open to everyone
- Post info about cultural activities in communities across BC on the FBCYICN website
- Host talking circles about how culture impacts current events



Employment Consultation

We started with getting information from the youth about where they are at with employment by asking them the following questions:

- Are you employed? If yes, what helped you to become employed?
- If not, why not? What do you think could help you become employed?
- Where do you see yourself in the future?
- What could help you get there?
- What would make you want to drop-out of an employment program?
- What are some incentives (rewards) we could offer to encourage you to get involved in our employment program? How about to stay involved?

Responses:

- About half of the participants were employed at the time of this session
- Many found employment programs showed them tools but did not offer the support they needed
- Having information about the specific aspects of the program was important
- Some felt that testimonials of other participants may motivate young people to get involved

Next we looked at each phase (*See Summary of Phases information on the right*) and answered the following questions about each phase:

- What do you think overall of the phase?
- Are the tasks for each level adequate? Any other skills or activities that you think we should add to that level?
- Does that level seem fair – fair demonstration of the skills to move on?

Some participants felt the phases looked good but they had a hard time giving input as they had not been through the program. Those that have participated in the program felt they had a better understanding of the program and what they could personally get out of it. They felt offering gift cards as incentives was a great way to motivate youth to participate.



Summary of Employment to Freedom Program Phases:

Phase One

Level 1

- Orientation to network
- Employment assessment (What do you want to work on?)
- Goal setting
- Social Insurance Number (SIN)
- Employment wish list

Level 2

- Orientation to other resources
- Self awareness
- Life skills

Phase Two

Level 1

- Communication Skills (i.e. professional email)
- Motivation (How motivated are you?)
- Resumé and Cover letters
- Job Searches (where to look)

Level 2

- Introduction to career building
- Self Assessment
- Identifying career paths
- Finding information related to career paths

Phase Three

Level 1

- Job interviews (What to wear)
- Mock job interviews (practicing job interview skills)

Level 2

- Job interviews (more practice)
- Career info interviews
- Mock interviewers with actual employers

Phase Four

Level 1

- Work experience (find a place to do some)
- Work Habits (how to keep a job)
- Self Awareness

Level 2

- Self assessment (next level)
- Goal setting (next level– i.e. time management, organization skills, communication / interpersonal skills, conflict resolution and stress management).

Member Engagement

As an organization we needed to look at what was working and what wasn't in terms of member engagement within the organization. The Network hired Yvonne Andrews to evaluate member engagement through consultation with members, staff, Board and adult allies. Yve had participants break into the following 4 groups to discuss member engagement:

Group 1: 24 years old and older (ie. Alumni)

What is meaningful youth engagement?

- Involving youth in topics and discussions
- Decision-making in a non-token environment
- Using appropriate language
- Safe settings
- Support – alleviate barriers so youth can carefully participate
- Make safe and secure
- Need to know youth voice is being heard
- Explain what is fully going on so youth can understand everything that is happening
- Helping with advocacy when needed
- Peer support
- Consulting, brainstorming, problem-solving
- Actually listening to the youth
- Working together as a team (adults, youth, peers, etc.)
- Need to feel comfortable
- Background information on everything that is going on

What types of meaningful engagement opportunities does the Network currently provide?

- Steering Committee Meetings (SCMs)
- Responses to questions
- Staff positions
- Presentations and workshops
- Youth supporting each other
- Volunteer positions
- Alumni strategy
- Help connect youth with people who can help them

What are some of the barriers to meaningful engagement? What prevents youth from becoming and staying involved?

- Travel
- Time and commitment
- Location of office
- Scheduling
- Staffing
- Individual support
- Not all youth are connecting with staff
 - Feel intimidated
 - Not enough staff
 - Overwhelming
- Boundaries and limits
- Language
- Not youth-friendly enough
- Finances
- Staying involved – support and so much change in life that it is hard or scary to stay connected to one thing
- Youth also have a responsibility to stay connected too
- Transitioning

- Hard for staff to keep track of where youth are (eg. moving, life, address changes, etc.)
- How to engage youth who have a hard time engaging with others
- Hard to get shy and intimidated youth to have their say
- Knowledge of the Network
- Communication

How can we motivate and maintain youth engagement at the Network?

- Need more levels of leadership
- More training
- Staff need to take up the offer when youth want to volunteer or help out
- SCMs – ask youth what types of workshops they would like to see
- Like having option or workshops to choose from at SCM instead of being forced to attend ones that they have no interest in
- Branch out with the membership – reach out to detention centres, homeless
- Need to do more presentations and get the word out there

Group 2: 14 – 16 year olds

What is meaningful youth engagement?

- SCMs
- Volunteerism
- Helping out in other communities so youth do not feel so isolated
- Youth doing stuff in their own communities

What types of meaningful engagement opportunities does the Network currently provide?

- Getting together
- Chance to learn skills in a safe environment
- Education
- Meeting new people
- Youth feel free to talk freely
- Immediate acceptance
- Staff are helping and having fun with the youth
- Good balance of fun and education at SCMs

What are some of the barriers to meaningful engagement? What prevents youth from becoming and staying involved?

- At SCMs not all workshops and activities are interesting to all youth
 - Dances are boring
 - Need more structure
- Need more hands-on workshops at SCMs
- Youth have little time with jobs and school
- Geography and living out of town
- Office hours

How can we motivate and maintain youth engagement at the Network?

- Need sex education workshops
- Paintball
- Hockey
- Stress relief workshops
- Anger management
- Better board games
- Drama and improve ice-breakers
- Coffee house and talent show
- Mail us opportunities
- Do a proper summer camp

Group 3: 19 – 23 year olds

What is meaningful youth engagement?

- Taking part in making change
- Have your voice heard and knowing it will go somewhere
- Having an impact on decisions people are making
- Having youth actively involved instead of “this is what we researched and this is what youth want” – we need to be involved and heard
- Not just a few youth but ALL youth involved
- 100% commitment
- Working together
- Being brave enough to put the past behind you and work at being committed to make a change
- What types of meaningful engagement opportunities does the Network currently provide?
- SCMs and SCM workshops
- Bringing the right people to talk to – people that can take your feedback further than others
- Youth that have kept in touch with the Network for a long period of time (Alumni)
- Get support with problems
- Locals could benefit from knowing what other locals are doing
- SCMs and locals are a huge part
- Youth project staff
- Opportunities outside of SCMs (eg. World Forum, B4, etc.)
- Provide knowledge for me
- Emails get sent out when we are not at meetings
- Employment opportunities
- Network makes phones available – there is always someone available to talk when you need it

What are some of the barriers to meaningful engagement? What prevents youth from becoming and staying involved?

- Lose all interest because we are not being heard and keep hearing the same stuff and no action is being done
- Youth not caring to make a difference in their own life
- Lots of young moms right now
- Lots of youth working – no time
- No address to have information sent to
- No phone
- Lack of awareness about the Network
- Youth don't feel they have the confidence to contribute even if they have lots to say
- If you give people the opportunity to make an excuse, then youth make excuses
- If the onus was put on a youth, there would be fewer barriers
- If we can get through this, we can get through anything as an organization
- May feel like your problems are not good enough – feel others will not understand
- Work long hours and do not have extra energy or time to be involved
- Transportation
- I cannot get hold of anyone when I call 75% of the time – office doors are locked when I have dropped by, and this doesn't make a new member want to stay involved
- Need better marketing

- Main barrier is the YIC do not care and are not being motivated to stay involved – kids in my town couldn't care less and don't care to make a difference – they care more about drugs than anything else
- People do not know how to speak and put it together – need to have more workshops like public speaking to help youth express themselves through words
- Most of what is said has already been said – maybe youth don't know how to get a hold of the Network because Social Workers and youth workers do not know about it
- Need to break stereotypes about YIC
- I felt abandoned by my family and stopped caring
- Everyone does drugs and you don't have to care
- I was iffy about coming to an SCM – need to have more explanation about the opportunities and the cool people
- Too much drama at SCMs

How can we motivate and maintain youth engagement at the Network?

- Money
- Internet access
- More commercials and media
- More speaking out about the Network
- Pay as you go cell phones for members
- Food
- Word of mouth – going to other youth and telling them about the awesome SCMs
- Hassle the youth
- Summer camps
- More choices of workshops
- More choices at free time
- Information should be posted at every foster home and group home
- More awareness

Group 4: 16 – 19 year olds

What is meaningful youth engagement?

- A blend of ideas and values from past to present
- Working together to make positive changes and progression without regression
- Good communication (eg. facebook, email, phone, foster parents, text messages, mail, social workers, etc.)
- Leadership council
- Supporting youth with incentives
- Meetings once a month
- Having meetings in different locations
- Training
- Everyone being aware of opportunities
- Commitment

What types of meaningful engagement opportunities does the Network currently provide?

- SCMs
- Other meetings and conferences
- Power Pages

What are some of the barriers to meaningful engagement? What prevents youth from becoming and staying involved?

- Contact a larger group of youth – not just a few
- Ask for input on types of workshops being held
- Email is not always the best type of communication for some of us
- Transportation
- Time – school, work, etc.
- Trying to develop locals in communities
- Some youth are excluded from SCMs as there are not enough beds
- Need more involvement and more youth – increase the number of youth attending an SCM (and staff) for more involvement

How can we motivate and maintain youth engagement at the Network?

- More meetings with youth in similar situations
- Facebook
- More information to Social Workers
- Youth groups
- More choices at SCMs
- Incentives to come in
- Fun things



2007 YouthSpeak Questionnaire Responses

The 2007 YouthSpeak Questionnaire included the following topic areas and responses:

About You

- For the majority of respondents, this was the first YouthSpeak they had ever participated in but it was not their first SCM.
- Respondent ages included: 1 – 15 year old, 1 – 16 year old, 4 – 17 year olds, 1 – 18 year old, 1 – 20 year old, 1 – 21 year old and 1 – 23 year old.
- 60% of respondents identified themselves as Aboriginal, 30% identified themselves as Caucasian and one respondent identified them self as “Afro-American.”
- Slightly more than half of respondents were female.
- 64% of respondents identified themselves as Heterosexual (straight) while 2 identified as “Bisexual”, 1 identified as “Homosexual” and 1 identified as “Two-Spirited”.
- Respondents represented the following communities in BC: Burnaby, Duncan, Lillooet, Maple Ridge, Merritt, Powell River, Prince Rupert, Surrey and Vancouver. The majority of these young people do not currently live in the city or town they were born in.
- Of the 9 respondents who answered the question, 6 don’t practice a religion, 1 considers them self Christian, another identified them self as practicing “Wicca” and a third believes in “Karma.”

Care Experience

- Of the 11 respondents, 4 identified them self as “Currently in Care – Continuing Custody Order/Permanent Ward”; 2 chose the “Currently in Care – Temporary Custody Order/Temporary Ward” option; and 5 said “I was in care”. Of this 5, one identified that they are now on a Youth Agreement.
- Although two people chose not to answer this question, the majority of the respondents said they have been / was in care for more than 9 years. Two respondents had been in care for less than one year and others said they had been in care for 10, 12, 12 ½, 14, 15 and 17 years.
- Of the respondents, one had been in 8 placements, two had been in 7 placements, one had been in 6 placements, one had been in 4 placements, two had been in 3 placements, one had been in 2 placements, one had only been in 1 placement, and two couldn’t remember how many placements they had been in.
- Similarly, many respondents reported having had a relatively high number of social workers throughout their time in care. One young person said they had 10 workers, one had 5, 4 had had 3 workers, two had 2 and two couldn’t remember how many workers they had had in their life.
- Four respondents reported seeing their social worker (in-person) “regularly” (2 times per month or more), three reported “often” (1 time per month), two said “sometimes” (1 time every three to six months), and one reported “rarely” (1 time every six months to a year).
- Plan of Care responses were split rather widely. 5 Respondents said they “have or had a Plan of Care” while two said they had not and 4 checked the “what is a Plan of Care?” option.
- On a more positive note, 7 respondents believe their social worker “cares about me and works in my best interests.” Two respondents felt their worker only cares about them “sometimes” and said “it depends” and “she doesn’t get me.” Only two respondents feel their workers don’t care.
- In terms of having “control over (their) own life and decisions made about (their) life while in care” 1 respondent replied “never”, only 1 replied “always” and 8 replied either “most of the time” or “sometimes.”

Rights & Advocacy

- 10 young people responded to the questions about rights and advocacy. Of these 10, seven said they “know / did know their rights in care” and the remaining three did not.
- When asked “where” they learned about their rights in care (check all that apply), respondents mentioned the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, MCFD Social Worker, Other Youth Worker and Foster Parent of Group Home Staff. Three respondents said they “didn’t learn about rights”.
- All but one respondent said “no” or “unsure” – about being informed on how to make a formal complaint while in care.
- Three respondents know what to do if their rights are violated while three do not know what to do and four are unsure about what to do if their rights are violated.
- Access to programs like counselling, culture and recreation is / was available to 6 respondents and only “somewhat” available to 4 respondents.
- One respondent out of seven who said they “know what advocacy is” admitted that they “know what it is but can’t describe it”, while three respondents identified that they don’t know what advocacy is.
- 60% of respondents said “there is someone in my community who I trust to advocate for me” while the remaining 30% said no or they were unsure if there is someone they can go to for advocacy help. One respondent said “I am fine advocating for myself but if I needed, the FBCYICN is a valuable resource.”
- Only 1 respondent “know(s) what the Representative for Children and Youth in” while 3 said they don’t know and 5 are unsure. Two did not respond to this question.
- Of those respondents who are somewhat aware of the Representative for Children and Youth (the Rep), 4 said they “learned about the Representative for Children and Youth from the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks” and 1 identified having learned about the Rep through the Rep’s office directly.
- When asked about whether or not they had been “discriminated against in the past year”. Six respondents said “no”, 2 said they were “unsure” and 2 said “yes”. One respondent also noted that “sometimes, but some people don’t realize it.”
- Because so few respondents said yes to having been discriminated against, only three answered the follow-up question. Two said the discrimination was because of “race or skin colour” while one said it was because of “lifestyle or reputation”.

Family & Friends

- Although ALL respondents said they “have a supportive adult outside the family (they) can talk to if (they) have a serious problem”, only 6 said they “have an adult IN (their) family they can talk to” and 3 said they do not have a family member to go to when they “have a serious problem.”
- Two respondents answered “a lot”, and six answered “medium” when asked “how much do you feel that people in your family understand you?” The majority of respondents however answered “medium.”
- Respondents provided similar responses to the question “how much do you feel that your family pays attention to you?” 8 answered “medium”, 1 answered “a lot” and 1 answered “they ignored me until I was 20.”
- When it came to how much fun young people have with their family, one respondent said “a lot”, two said “we don’t have fun together” and seven said “medium”.

- The following two questions asked “how close do you feel to your mother and father?” Unfortunately, the questions don’t specify foster or birth parents and therefore, the responses are mixed. Three respondents feel “very close” to their mother while two feel a “medium” connection and five said “not close”. One respondent mentioned that they “don’t have a foster dad and are not in contact with their dad” while 3 others said “not close”, 4 said they have a “medium” connection and 2 feel “very close” to their father.
- When asked about friendship, respondents said their “friends would be upset if (they)” Beat someone up – 5, got pregnant or got someone pregnant – 5, used marijuana – 4, got drunk – 2, got arrested – 5, carried a weapon for protection – 6, dropped out of school – 6.

Independence

- Of the 10 respondents who answered this question, 100% said they were never “on Semi-Independent Living while in care.”
- Six respondents said they had never been “on Independent Living while in care” while 4 said “yes” they had been on Independent Living.”
- Although 6 respondents “believe that at the age of 16, young people are prepared to live independently” and only 3 feel they are not.
 - “no, not responsible”
 - “depends on the student’s skill, knowledge and maturity level”
 - “yes, it could also help teach them life skills”
 - “depends on the youth”
 - “I would like to be on semi-independent living because I was ready to do so”
 - “not emotionally, cognitively, or have enough life skills”
 - “no, still learning”
 - “no, don’t have the maturity to be independent”
 - “some are and some are not”
 - “I came out at the right age for me”
- 5 respondents said they would “like / have liked to stay in care” past the age of 19.
 - 20 - “I believe I need another year.”
 - 21 - “It’s a good age to finish off getting your shit together.”
 - 24 - “I would have liked more support while I’m in school to help with life skills.”
 - 24 - “It’s when I wouldn’t need any more help.”
 - 21 - “The more time you have, the more you can learn.”
- The majority of respondents said they “have a support system that helps (them) with (their) independence”. Two said “no” and one was “unsure.”
- Included in the “support system” of respondents are: Friends – 6, non-profit organizations – 6, foster family – 5, biological family – 3, MCFD – 2, Teachers – 2, and Counsellor – 1.
- Half of respondents say they “know how to make a budget that works” for them while the remaining half answered “no” or “unsure.”

Involvement in School & Community

- Three respondents have completed “some College / University / Trade Program Courses”, three have completed “Grade 12”, two have completed “Grade 11” and two have completed “Grade 10”.
- All respondents said they are “currently attending school”.
- Half answered “yes” and half answered “medium” when asked if they “like school”.
- 50% of respondents “feel like they belong when (they) are at school” while 4 answered “medium” and one said “no”.

- The majority of respondents feel their teachers care about them “a lot” while only 30% said “medium” or “not much”.
- With the exception of one respondent who said “often”, 90% of respondents said “not often” when asked “how often (they) have trouble getting along with (their) teachers”.
- All but two respondents said “yes” they feel safe at school.
- In terms of grades achieved by respondents, the majority said they get “mostly B’s” and “mostly C’s”. One student answered “mostly A’s” while none answered “mostly D’s” or “mostly F’s”.
- More than half of respondents “take part in extra-curricular activities each week” including: sports with a coach – 3, art, drama or music lessons – 3, community or religious groups – 3, dance or aerobic classes – 2, gym – 1. Note: some respondents participate in more than one of the activities mentioned above.
- When asked “what kinds of things are you really good at?” respondents identified: sports – 4, art – 3, writing – 3, singing – 2, theatre – 2, music – 2, dancing – 1, and photography – 1. Note: some respondents identified more than one activity.
- 90% of respondents said “yes” they had helped others without pay in the past 12 months.

Parenting

Note: All of the respondents answered “no” to being a parent and therefore, did not fill out any of the questions under the parenting section of this questionnaire.

Health & Well-Being

- Of the 10 respondents, 6 said they “do not have a health condition or disability that keeps (them) from doing some things that other kids (their) age do”. Two said they have a “physical disability” and two mentioned “a mental or emotional condition”.
- When asked if “can other people tell that you have a health condition or disability?” four respondents answered “sometimes”.
- Only one respondent says they take medications “daily” while one said “when I need them” and two said “rarely / never”.
- In terms of absenteeism from school, the majority of respondents “rarely / never” miss school and only 1 respondent said “sometimes”.
- Just under half of respondents admit to using marijuana during the past 30 days. However, those who admit to using marijuana report using it “1 or 2 times”, “10 to 19 times” and “40 or more times”.
- Just over half of participants say they haven’t had 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row during the past 30 days. However, those who admit to using alcohol say they have had 5 or more drinks in a row on “1 to 2 days” and “10 to 19 days” of the past 30.
- More than half of respondents say they smoke “occasionally” or “every day”.
- Although only 4 young people responded to the question, respondents identified that they have been “told by a health professional that (they) have” the following: depression – 4, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) – 3, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – 2, a learning disability – 1, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD / ADHD) – 1 or additional problems – 1. Note: some respondents identified multiple labels. When asked to comment about these diagnosis, respondents said:
 - “questionable”
 - “I have an invisible mental health condition that I can hide very well that hasn’t been dealt with”

- When asked if “there is anything you would like to change about yourself or your life?” half of the respondents said “no” while the other half said “yes” and said they “know where to go to get help” with the comments they made below:
 - “that I could be famous”
 - “thinking pattern”
 - “change my emotional level”
 - “weight”



2007 YouthSpeak Questionnaire

About You

Is this your first YouthSpeak?

- Yes
- No

Is this your first Steering Committee Meeting (SCM)?

- Yes
- No

What is your age?

What is your ethnicity?

- Caucasian
- Aboriginal
- Métis
- Asian
- East Indian
- Not sure
- Other:

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

What is your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual (straight)
- Bisexual
- Homosexual
- Two-Spirited
- Questioning

What city or town do you currently live in?

What city or town were you born in?

What Religion or Culture do you practice, if any?

Care Experience

Care Status: (please check all that apply)

Note: "Care" refers to foster homes, group homes, youth custody centres, residential programs (eg. mental health / addictions), Kith & Kin Agreements (ie. in the home of a relative), and Youth Agreements.

- Currently in Care (Continuing Custody Order / Permanent Ward)
- Currently in Care (Temporary Custody Order / Temporary Ward)
- Was in care for ___ years and / or ___ months in total
- Have never been in care
- Feel that I should have been in care
- Here to facilitate a workshop

I have been in care or was in care for ___ months or ___ years.

I have lived in ___ number of placements.

I have had ___ social workers.

I have or had a plan of care...

- Yes
- No
- What is a plan of care?

I see my current Social Worker or saw my last social worker (in-person)...

- Regularly (2 X month or more)
- Often (1 X month)
- Sometimes (1 X every 3-6 months)
- Rarely (1 X every 6 months-year)
- I have never met my Social Worker in person
- I don't have / have never had a Social Worker

I feel my Social Worker cares about me and works in my best interests...

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes (please describe):

I have or had control over my life and the decisions made about my life while in care...

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Rights & Advocacy

I know my rights as a youth in care or did know my rights as a youth in care...

- Yes
- No
- Non applicable

If yes, I learned about my rights as a youth in care from (check all that apply)...

- MCFD Social Worker
- Other Youth Worker
- Foster Parent or Group Home Staff
- Representative for Children and Youth (formerly the Child and Youth Officer or the Child, Youth & Family Advocate)
- Federation on BC Youth in Care Networks
- Other young person
- Other (please describe):
- Didn't learn about rights

I have been or was informed on how to make a formal complaint while in care...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I know what to do if my rights are violated...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I have / had access to programs (eg. counseling, culture and recreation) while in care...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I know what advocacy is...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

There is someone in my community who I trust to advocate for me...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I know what The Representative for Children and Youth is...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I learned about the Representative for Children and Youth from (check all that apply)...

- MCFD Social Worker
- Other Youth Worker
- Foster Parent or Group Home Staff
- Representative for Children and Youth (formerly the Child and Youth Officer or the Child, Youth & Family Advocate)
- Federation on BC Youth in Care Networks
- Other young person
- Other (please describe):
- I don't know about the Representative for Children and Youth

Were you discriminated against in the past year?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If yes, was it because of:

- Race or skin colour
- Sexual orientation
- Physical appearance
- Lifestyle or reputation

Family and Friends

Do you have an adult in your family you can talk to if you have a serious problem?

- Yes
- No

Do you have a supportive adult outside the family you can talk to if you have a serious problem?

- Yes
- No

How much do you feel that people in your family understand you?

- A lot
- Medium
- They don't understand me

How much do you feel that your family pays attention to you?

- A lot
- Medium
- They don't pay attention to me

How much do you feel that you and your family have fun together?

- A lot
- Medium
- We don't have fun together

How close do you feel to your mother?

- Very close
- Medium
- Not close

How close do you feel to your father?

- Very close
- Medium
- Not close

Would your friends be upset if you:

- Beat someone up
- Got pregnant or got someone pregnant
- Used marijuana
- Got drunk
- Got arrested
- Carried a weapon for protection
- Dropped out of school

Independence

Are you or were you ever on Semi-Independent Living while in care?

Note: "Semi-Independent Living" is when you have a separate suite in a foster home or when you pay room and board to live in a foster home.

- Yes
- No

Are you or were you ever on Independent Living while in care?

Note: "Independent Living" is when you are still in care (ie. under 19), have your own place (eg. suite or apartment) but the majority of your daily living expenses (eg. rent, food, transportation) are covered by MCFD.

- Yes
- No

I believe that at the age of 16, young people are prepared to live independently...

- Yes
 - No
- Why?

I would like / have liked to stay in care until I am / was ____ years old
Because

I have a support system that helps me with my independence...

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If yes, my support system includes (please check all that apply)...

- Biological Family
- Non-profit organizations
- MCFD
- Foster family
- Teachers
- Counsellor
- Friends
- Other(s):

I know how to make a budget that works for me...

Note: Budgets that work are those that enable you to consistently pay all your bills and expenses on time, and allow you to feed yourself and any children you might have.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

What is the highest grade you have completed?

- Less than Grade 9
- Grade 9
- Grade 10
- Grade 11
- Grade 12
- Some College / University or Trade Program Courses
- Trade Program Certificate(s)
- College Diploma or University Degree

Are you currently attending school?

- Yes
- No

Do you like school?

- Yes
- Medium
- No

Do you feel like you belong when you are at school?

- Yes
- Medium
- No

How much do you feel your teachers care about you?

- A lot
- Medium
- Not much

Since school started this year, how often have you had trouble getting along with your teachers?

- Not often
- Medium
- Often

Do you feel safe at school?

- Yes
- Medium
- No

What kinds of grades do you mostly get in school (think last year and this year):

- Mostly As
- Mostly Bs
- Mostly Cs
- Mostly Ds and Fs

Do you take part in extra-curricular activities each week?

- Yes
- No

If so, what kinds of activities:

- Sports with a coach
- Dance or aerobic classes
- Art, drama or music lessons
- Community or religious groups
- Other (please explain):

What kinds of things are you really good at?

In the past 12 months, did you help others without pay?

- Yes
- No

Parenting

Are you a parent?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If you are currently pregnant / expecting how old will you be when your child is born?

How old were you when you had your first child?

How many children do you have?

- Currently pregnant / expecting
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

What are your biggest challenges as a parent?

Are you receiving any help?

If so, what help (support / services) are you receiving and from who (family, friend, service provider)?

Have you accessed any Ministry of Children and Family development programs or had assistance from MCFD?

If so, what was your experience?

Is there anything that prevents you from accessing MCFD Supports?

Health & Well-Being

Do you have a health condition or disability that keeps you from doing some things that other kids your age do (eg. school activities, sports, getting together with friends)? *(Mark one answer only)*

- No
- Yes, a physical disability
- Yes, a long term illness
- Yes, a mental or emotional condition
- Yes, overweight or underweight

Can other people tell that you have a health condition or disability?

- I do not have a health condition or disability
- Never
- Sometimes
- Always

How often do you take medications?

- I do not have a health condition or disability
- Rarely/never
- Daily
- When I need them

How often do you miss school because of your health condition or disability?

- I do not have a health condition or disability
- Rarely/never
- Sometimes
- A lot

During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana (pot, grass)?

- 0 times
- 1 or 2 times
- 3 to 9 times
- 10 to 19 times
- 20 to 39 times
- 40 or more times

During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is , within a couple of hours?

- 0 days
- 1 days
- 2 days
- 3 to 5 days
- 6 to 9 days
- 10 to 19 days
- 20 or more days

At the present time, you smoke cigarettes...

- Not at all
- Occasionally
- Every day

Have you ever been told by a health professional that you had any of the following:

- A learning disability
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrom (FAS)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD / ADD)
- Depression
- Addiction problems
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Do you have any comments you would like to make on this diagnosis?

Is there anything that you would like to change about yourself or your life?

- No
 - Yes
- If yes, what?

Do you know where to go to get help with that?

- Yes
- No

If not, please come and speak to an FBCYICN team member about it so we can see if there is some way we can help.





Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks

"by coming together, we are not alone"

www.fbcyicn.ca

Honourable Tom Christensen
Minister of Children and Family Development
PO Box 9057
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC, V8W 9E2

May 23rd, 2007

Dear Minister Christensen:

Your office has been expecting a letter from our organization outlining the needs, issues and ideas for change that young people have around what happens when youth age out of the foster care system. Unfortunately this is not that letter. We would like to apologize for the delay in getting that letter to you but acknowledge that meaningful youth engagement takes time. As word of this letter to MCFD reached our youth membership, more and more young people have wanted to be involved in the process of this letter's creation and have their voices heard.

We plan to utilize our up-coming Steering Committee Meeting (SCM #45), to be held from June 1st to June 3rd, to gather more input from our membership for the letter. Our SCMs are conferences where young people in and from care, between the ages of 14 and 24, get together from all over BC to discuss issues that affect them. We feel broader youth involvement in this particular process is vital to a better understanding of these issues and hope you feel the same.

Thank-you again for taking the time to come to our office and meet with us. We hope it was the first of many such opportunities to engage with you and the Ministry and look forward to working with you in the future. We anticipate sending the letter to you by mid-June. If you have any questions or comments in the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Sarah Watson
Youth Participation Coordinator
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

cc. Jocelyn Helland, Executive Director
cc. Nicole Herbert, Director of Programs



Ref: 167334

OCT 01 2007

Sarah Watson
Youth Participation Coordinator
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
55 8th St
New Westminster BC V3M 3N7

Dear Ms. Watson:

Thank you for your thorough and insightful letter of August 15, 2007, outlining the challenging transition issues that young people in and from care have been experiencing in British Columbia.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks staff and members for meeting with me recently and engaging in very open and honest discussions with respect to the realities that young people face while they are in care, when they are preparing to leave care and what happens once they have left care. You are a remarkable group of young people and I appreciate you taking the time to prepare such a detailed and thoughtful follow up response to our meeting.

Many important issues are raised in your letter: supporting the education of children and youth in care; increasing services and supports to prepare young people for leaving care; addressing the current limitations of the Youth Education Assistance Fund; and re-establishing a Post Majority Services program. Each of these topics will be the subject of further discussion with the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks and young people in and from care throughout the province as we take steps to improve the service areas you highlighted.

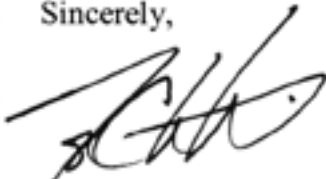
I am pleased to advise you that the Federation's sustained advocacy for the reinstatement of Post Majority Services has not gone unheard. We are now in the initial stages of planning for the development of a new program, "Agreements With Young Adults", for youth in and from care and on youth agreements. The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks has been identified as one of our key informants and will be the first external partner the ministry consults with on the design and development of this new program. I understand that members of the Child Welfare Policy team have scheduled a meeting with your organization to begin the discussions. The suggestions you have already put forward in your letter are an excellent starting place and I anticipate that more ideas will be generated throughout the program and policy development process that will take place over the next few months.

.../2

We recognize and value the knowledge, insight and ideas that the Federation will bring to the discussions, and view the inclusion of young people throughout the program development process as essential for the successful completion of this work.

Once again, Sarah, thank you and all the young people who participated in the preparation of this informative letter. I look forward to future meetings with youth in and from care and to seeing plans for the new "Agreements with Young Adults" services being prepared collaboratively with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Christensen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Christensen
Minister

pc: Jocelyn Helland, Executive Director
Nicole Herbert, Director of Programs

Post Majority Services Brainstorm

Thursday September 6th, 2007
1pm – 3pm @ FBCYICN

Participants: Raven W, Thalia M, Winona W, Lacy MD (by phone),
Sarah Watson & Nicole Herbert

There are four types of needs related to young people's transition from care:

1. Life skills development (eg. cooking, cleaning, finances, relationships, etc.)
2. Continuation of existing services (eg. counseling)
3. New resources (eg. education)
4. Planning and support in navigating systems (eg. support worker)

LIFE SKILLS

- There should be mandatory assessment of life skills every 6 months, starting at the age of 16 to determine whether or not a young person is adequately prepared to leave care. This would increase accountability of both MCFD and the young person... If a youth wants to go on independent living, they need to demonstrate they have made the effort to develop the appropriate skills – this will increase their chances of success. And if MCFD wants to terminate care of a young person (for any reason), they need to demonstrate that they have taken the necessary steps to prepare the young person to be successfully independent (or show they have attempted to provide appropriate opportunities to the young person). This assessment process should involve the young person, their worker(s) and their caregivers to ensure it is an effective process.
- For those young people who for whatever reason did not learn some of the basic life skills while in care, those courses should be made available to them after care when they feel they are ready to learn (eg. cooking, budgeting, taxes, etc.).
- Need to figure out how to educate youth in care about the importance of life skills so they understand why they need to learn certain things before they leave care. Need to help youth understand how they can apply those life skills in their own lives.
- Need to provide more opportunities for young people from care to get together and support each other while learning valuable life skills (ie. Alumni groups). This would include regular social activities and encouraging alumni to join other positive groups to normalize their experiences and expand their learning and support networks.
- Need to create 'mentoring' opportunities for young people from care so they can surround themselves with healthy role models and develop appropriate relationships with other adults (not necessarily from care).
- Need former youth in care or cool allies to teach current youth in care life skills so they trust the information.
- May need to provide incentives / honorariums to young people in order to get them to participate in life skills programs.
- Young people need to be taught how to identify when they need help and how to ask for it / access it.

- Don't give young people their inheritance when they turn 19 unless they demonstrate how it fits into their 'after care' financial plan (eg. house, school, car, etc.). Too many young people just end up wasting their money and having nothing when they really need it.

HEALTH / MENTAL HEALTH

- MCFD should continue to cover extended medical and dental (eg. getting wisdom teeth removed, eye exams and glasses, prescriptions, etc.) up to the age of 25. This could be dependent on the young person demonstrating that they are following the plan that they developed with their worker prior to leaving care and / or be dependent on the youth continuing with their education.
- Young people should be able to access health / mental health services for at least 4 years between the ages of 19 and 30. Too many young people are pressured and rushed to independence and don't know what they need so they often waste too much time and can't access services later when they realize they need them.
- If you have a disability while in care, you should be able to take all of the resources and tools you had while in care when you leave care and / or get new ones when you leave care (until the age of 25). This should include: prescription coverage, wheelchairs, special fixtures or appliances for the home, counseling services, etc.
- MCFD needs to be better educated about the importance of the continuation of care required by young people. This means it's important to understand (and be able to work with the youth on) the issue of continuation of medications even when a young person seems to have stabilized. There also needs to be more awareness about "Plan G". And, there needs to be more understanding about the stigma young people often feel about having to be on medication.
- The health system (in general) needs to be better educated about the needs and issues of young people from care so they are more sensitive and treat young people more appropriately.
- The health system needs to be more open-minded about the definition of 'family' and understand that for some, family includes un-related support people. These un-related supports should be entitled to the same access to information and visitation in medical situations. They should also be able to advocate on the young person's behalf when necessary.
- MCFD should ensure that all young people have their own family doctor when they leave care so they can continue to see this doctor. The family doctor should not change with each placement – more effort should go into continuity when it comes to medical / dental care for young people.
- Within MCFD, the health system and the community, there needs to be more awareness about the health and mental health services / resources available to young people / young adults. There should also be more education while young people are still in the system about health and mental health issues so young people can develop a better understanding of some of their issues, develop better coping strategies for managing their conditions, and are aware of the resources available to them in and when they leave care.
- There should be a hotline specifically for alumni of care to call when they need support and / or an advocate so they don't feel

isolated or alone when they don't have any family or appropriate friends to turn to.

- Public health nurses / nutritionists should educate young people about nutrition and food-related health issues as well as tips for managing those issues. This should include alternatives to medication (eg. naturopathy) and these services / resources should be available to young people even after they leave care.

EDUCATION

- New PSM services should be at least the same as the old services plus some additional. 2 years of service is not enough – there should be 4 years available.
- Should be able to get services / support through to a degree, not just a diploma.
- Many young people need time to transition from care to independence before even thinking about post-secondary education (ie. some young people may need a year or two to figure things out before they are ready to go to school).
- Some people have fewer classes each semester which means it will take them longer to complete their program (eg. it takes some people 3 years to complete a 2 year program). This is especially true for those young people who have to work while going to school to support themselves and / or their kids.
- Financial support should also be available for those who need to finish high school (ie. get their grade 12) even after they turn 19. Perhaps PMS could be set-up like accessing money through Aboriginal bands: once accepted to a school, apply to band for money (school tuition, supplies and living allowance) and receive funding until they complete the program. If going to school full-time, you can apply for full funding (including living allowance) and if going to school part-time, you can apply for tuition and supplies only.
- MCFD should also pay for 'assessment' fees for students with disabilities (eg. dyslexia or physical disabilities) and assist with the costs / resources associated with the student's special needs (eg. tutoring, computers, special equipment, transportation, daycare, etc.) – MCFD needs to support these young people to succeed.

EMPLOYMENT

- There should be internships within MCFD and other relevant Ministries for young people who are leaving / have left care.
- There should be more job fairs and positions available for young people from care.
- Young people need to be better educated about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to disclosing their special needs to employers etc. They also need to be better educated about navigating employment standards, having appropriate boundaries for their safety and putting supports in place for themselves in employment situations. (For example, to set up a bank account, you are generally asked for your mother's maiden name – this could be unknown or a trigger for a young person from care. They need to know how to provide a reasonable alternative and deal with the trigger. They also need to be informed about ensuring they have emergency contacts in place on their cell phones and in their medical files.) Young people need to know they do NOT have to put themselves into dangerous situations just to have a job!

TRANSITION SUPPORT

- As young people prepare to leave care, they should have a worker who helps them develop an 'after care' plan. As long as you are demonstrating that you are working on your plan, you should be able to continue to access resources and support from MCFD (up to age 25).
- Young people should be able to continue to talk with their (social) workers after they leave care if they want to.
- Young people need life-long connections to people who know them and care about them. They need to know there is someone out there that they can call when they need family / friends but don't have any that they can go to. This person should also be able to advocate for them when necessary (eg. medical situations).

