

YouthSpeak 2009

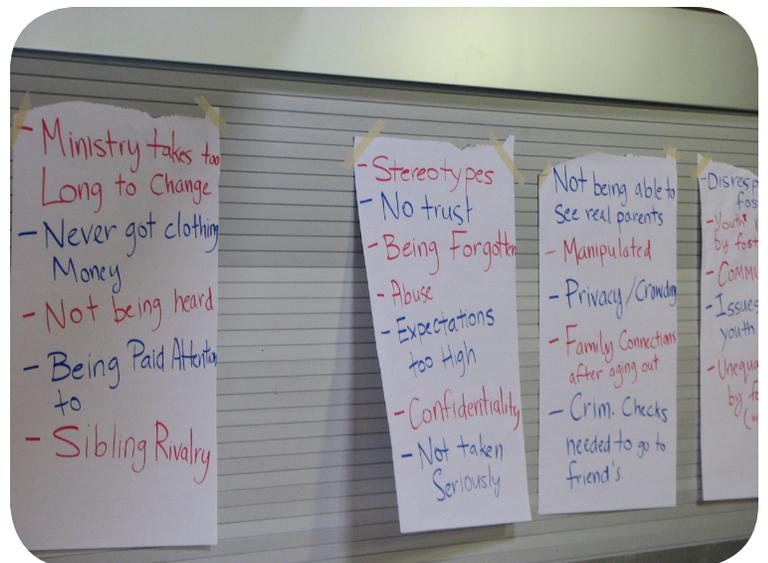
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The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of young people in and from government care between the ages of 14 and 24.

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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.

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.

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

–Nicole Herbert

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...

To Nathan and Colby for your leadership in facilitating YouthSpeak 2009.

To all of the young people who participated in YouthSpeak 2009 as part of Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #50, we thank-you for your honesty and thoughtful recommendations. It is your voice that is reflected in this report.

To our 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 Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth, for listening to what young people had to say and committing to bring their voices forward in her work.

AND last but not least, to Patricia and Angie for developing the original YouthSpeak model in BC 10 years ago...

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YouthSpeak Participants & Special Guests

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Annie
Bobbie
Cara
Cassie
Chantai
Chris
Cody
Colby
Dallas
Dan
Daryl
Davina
Desarae
Jason
Jessy
Jodi
Josh
Josh

Kane
Kayla
Kris
Megan
Michael
Micheal
Miranda
Nathan
Nicole
Olivia
Peter
Raphael
Robert
Sabrina
Samantha
Sarah
Tashana
Trevor
Vanessa
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Alumni (>25):

Aaron Chew
Christina Kontzamanis
Curtis Hyde
Curtis Volke
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Adult Supports:

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Dawn Johnson
Gaye Smith
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The YouthSpeak Model – Beneficial Outcomes

Over the years YouthSpeak has looked a little bit different each time but at the foundation lies one key principle:

It is an opportunity to find out about the needs, issues, and ideas of youth in/from government care and make recommendations to address these needs.

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 about what works and what doesn't work in terms of programs and services for young people.

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 services. 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.



The YouthSpeak Model – 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 Resort (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.

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. From this YouthSpeak a report titled: Are You Listening? was released and highlighted the needs of youth in/from care

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



In October 2007, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks hosted another provincial YouthSpeak as part of Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #46. 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. 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) were presented by the four young people at a YouthSpeak-Out event in November 2007.

YouthSpeak 2007 - Top 5 Priorities:

1

Foster Homes

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

4

Education

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

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)

5

Transition to Independence / Adulthood

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

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)

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

Project Overview

The purpose of this project was to engage young people at a provincial level and provide them with an opportunity to identify their current needs, issues and ideas. At Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) #50, two youth members were invited to facilitate this process using the adapted McCreary Centre Society's Next Steps model. It involved a brainstorming session to identify and prioritize the current needs and issues of youth in/ from care, followed by more in-depth small group discussions on the top 5 priorities, and finally a presentation from each discussion group. The information collected through the YouthSpeak process helps to set the agenda for the advocacy work of the Federation and encourages our partners to examine and adjust if necessary the programs and services they offer to our members.

YouthSpeak Brainstorm

Facilitator(s): Nathan and Colby

The participants started this session off by brainstorming what the Issues and Needs they are facing that directly impact themselves and other Youth in Care. The following list was edited only grammatically and is an unmodified representation of the flip chart notes collected during the large group brainstorming session held at SCM #50:

Disrespect by Foster Parents
Money (allocated to young person)
Communication
Unequal treatment
Issues with other youth in foster homes
Stereotypes of youth in care
No trust
"Forgotten"
Abuse (all)
Expectations are too high
Confidentially breeches
Not getting taken seriously
MCFD too long to change
Not being heard / listened too
Never got clothing money
Never being paid attention too
Sibling rivalry (between foster children and biological children)
Not being able to see real parents
Manipulation
No privacy (over-crowded homes)
No family connections
Having friends have to have a Criminal Records Check
Invading privacy
Restrictions on recreation
Personal restrictions
Being "dumped" off
Religion forced on or not being able to practice own religion / culture
19 is scary
Double standards

Top 5 Priorities

After the brainstorming session the youth were asked to pick 5 Issues that were most important to them. This was done through as 'dot-mocracy' system. Please note that similar topics were NOT grouped together before voting took place. The Top Five Issues picked by the participants were:



1

19 is scary

2

No trust

3

Criminal Record Check required to go to friends

5

Ministry takes too long to change

4

Abuse

Small Group Discussions

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

1 19 is Scary

Why is this an issue?

- Not prepared
- Loss of support
- Money (lack of or cut off)
- Inconsistent preparation for leaving care
- Lack of resources after 19
- More responsibility
- Emotional and Mental stress
- Not enough support for people in corrections
- Loneliness / abandonment
- Hard to keep family contacts
- Professional relationships

What can young people do?

- Prepare
- Save money
- Understand your future goals
- School
- Living
- Family
- Plan
- Network
- Use your voice
- Take action

What can Service Providers do?

- Prepare your goals early
- Life skill training opportunities
- Youth Agreements
- Earlier engagement by foster parents and social workers
- Community driven support
- Long term support
- Personal support
- Peer support
- Have more support people
- More places should provide more help
- Counselling

What is currently being done?

- Youth Counsellors
- AYA
- FBCYICN
- In some places / areas it is being done (getting help to age out) but more youth need the help

What should the Youth in Care Networks do?

- Life skills assessment / training checklist
- Budgeting
- Bills
- Grocery shopping
- Cleaning
- Scheduling
- Money Management
- Cooking
- Relationship skills – with people in power positions
- Communication
- Job readiness
- Rights – employee, tenant



2 No Trust

Why is this an issue?

Because you do something once, they think you will do it again
 Scared of being hurt
 Lack of relationship
 Alternative motives
 Upfront, beat around the bush
 Don't judge a book by its cover
 Because you do not feel stable, moved around a lot, can not get to know caregivers
 No stability
 Scary to meet new people
 Previous experiences of trusting and being disappointed
 Not comfy around new people
 Stolen stuff
 Blamed for something you did not do

What can young people do?

Speak up – be vocal – do not bottle it
 Recognizing trust in self
 Trust yourself
 Self confidence
 If you don't trust yourself you may be passive and let things slide
 Get out of your comfort zone
 Take a chance
 Counselling
 Tell someone or ask someone for help
 Make educated decisions



What can Service Providers do?

No "back burner" attitudes
 Take you seriously
 Time relevance
 Honesty
 Respectful
 Honourable with promises
 Clear and consistent list of programs
 Realistic
 Bring consistency for young people
 Talk equally to you
 Open up to us
 Realize it takes awhile to trust

What is currently being done?

Counseling
 Personal boundaries
 Transition period
 Education training (experience)
 Spirituality and cultural awareness
 Nothing

What should the Youth in Care Networks do?

Advocate
 Active listening
 Hear what is wanted
 Continue SCMs and things that build trust and self esteem for individuals
 Systemic advocacy
 Policy improvement
 Sharing your stories
 Boundaries
 Alumni sharing
 2 sided relationships
 Be real
 We can trust the FBCYICN

3 Criminal Records Check to go to friends (CRS's on Friends and their parents)

Why is this an issue?

Separates you from the other kids
Reminds you that you are different
Lose friendships
Safety
Its not normal
Too frequent
Time issue
Isolated
Making negative choices to get passed the rule
Feel abandoned
Fear the parent not wanting checks done
Even if they do not have a criminal records
doesn't mean they are safe and vice versa
Don't want other to know they are in care

What can young people do?

Stick it to the man
(social workers)
Suggesting another
process
Complaint report
You can have your friends
stay at your house

What can Service Providers do?

Routine check-ups
Meet friends
Foster parents can do the
check
Creating a safety plan
for when you are on an
overnight trip

What can the Youth in Care Networks do?

Set up a support group
Make some recommendations to the Ministry
about changing the rules
Connect with the systemic issues
Figure out alternatives with members

What is currently being done?

Nothing to our knowledge



4

Abuse

(Neglect, Psychological, physical, sexual, mental)

Why is this an issue?

- Against stature of rights "isms"
- Dangerous / damaging
- Cyclical
- Against rights and freedoms
- Psychologically damaging
- Immoral
- Breakdowns
- Think you are worthless
- Confusion / disorientation / frustration
- Self-esteem
- Socially unacceptable
- Creates barriers
- Attachment issues
- Not known / hidden
- Ripple effect
- Lack of accountability
- Developmental problems
- Care workers do not have enough resources

What is currently being done?

- Advocates office
- Kids helpline
- Councillors
- FBCYICN
- CAPP
- Crime Stoppers
- Yellow Ribbon Campaign
- Rights Booklets
- Pink (bullying)
- Social Marketing (ads)
- Programs / media
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Shelters
- Covenant House
- Half-way Houses
- Peer Support Programs
- Friends / Family
- Training
- Empowerment



What can Service Providers do?

- More peer support
- Active listening / supporting communication
- More surprise home visits
- Sensitivity training
- Be able to talk about it / say "abuse"
- Foster providers "check-out" better and have more training
- Knowing the community better
- More safe houses
- Value youth perspective as much as an adults

What can young people do?

- Buddy systems
- Support each other / Together we are not alone
- Know your Rights
- Stand up to the Ministry
- Youth education service providers and community
- Get involved
- Show social worker what is going on
- Document abuse
- Use support programs out there
- Recruiting new support workers
- empowerment

What can the Youth in Care Networks do?

- Support youth through the process
- Invite social workers to get involved
- More projects
- Provide resources / programs
- Theatre Troop
- Be visible in the case plan / advocate
- Power pages on abuse
- Interpreter
- Random check-ins

5 Ministry Takes too Long to Change

Why is this an issue?

Rights book took way to long to get out
Social workers do not answer calls
Important life decisions (i.e.: braces take way to long)
You reach out for help and have to go on a waitlist
Interchange between systems (MCFD and Mental Health)

What can young people do?

Bring forward to MCFD
Use our voices
Call the complaints line
Be aware of human neglect

What can Service Providers do?

Make sure MCFD does what they say they are going to do

What is currently being done?

Youth are being engaged – COR

What can the Youth in Care Networks do?

Overwhelm the complaints office so they can pay more attention to youth issues
Pay attention to local community issues around youth
We need to work with MCFD
Policy meetings – have young people attend the meetings to educate MCFD staff



Taking Action

YouthSpeaks provide us with great insight into the wisdom and experiences of youth in/from care. They tell a story about the needs, issues, and ideas these young people have and how we can all work together to make change happen. The Federation and its members are committed to taking actions that honor the voices of these young people and strive to create lasting change. Below are some of the initiatives, programs, and partnerships that we are or have worked on to ensure that the needs/issues/ideas being identified through YouthSpeaks are being addressed.

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

After Care Petition – One of our youth members wrote a letter to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) urging them to ensure young people are being provided with adequate supports and resources during their transition from care. For more information or to sign the petition being circulated please check out her Facebook group “After Care in B.C.”.

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

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

Permanency Project – The Federation in partnership with First Call are working together to raise awareness, understanding, and actions that will help improve family or family-like connections for youth in/from care. We are currently drafting a background report that explores this and provides a foundation for youth and adults to gather together at a roundtable we will be hosting this year.

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

Next Steps

These are just a few examples of some of the work being done to honor the voices of young people and although we are making great progress there is still much more to be done. What are you doing or what could you be doing to help?

The Network will continue to ensure its work reflects the needs, issues, and ideas of youth in/ from care and commits to collaborate with young people and community partners to take collective action to address them.

If you are inspired, have an idea, or would like to tell us more about the actions you are already taking, please contact:

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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, group 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

Building Relationships

Activity Book or Facilitators Guide
(2008)

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
Adoptive Families Association of BC

YouthSpeak 2007 – A Time for Action

Final Report of the YouthSpeak Project
(February 2008)

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Are You Listening?

Final Report of the YouthSpeak Project
(March 2004)

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Meeting Minutes

Steering Committee Meeting #50
(February 2009)

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

Next Steps

Facilitators Guide

The McCreary Centre Society