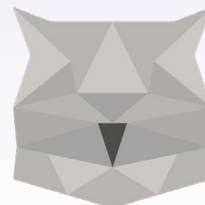


YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE IN BC:

A preliminary report



**YOUTH
RESEARCH
ACADEMY**



**McCreary
Centre Society**

YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE IN BC:

A preliminary report

McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy, 2021

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YOUTH
RESEARCH
ACADEMY

Copies of this report are available at: www.mcs.bc.ca.
For enquiries about this report, please email: mccreary@mcs.bc.ca.

We acknowledge that the McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy is located on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We also acknowledge the ancestral and continuing connection to this land of the Métis Nation.

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Thank you

Thank you to all the youth who completed a survey, and for their ongoing participation in this study. Quotes from survey participants are included throughout the report.

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KEY FINDINGS

Members of McCreary's Youth Research Academy selected the following key findings. These results are from the preliminary data collected as youth approached their transition out of government care, and approximately six months after that transition:

- Most youth preparing to transition out of government care had experienced multiple types of care placements, including almost half (48%) who had experienced three or more types of care (e.g., had been in a foster home, a group home, and on a Youth Agreement).
- Among youth preparing to transition out of care, 57% reported having at least one health condition or disability. Just over half of youth reported they experienced good or excellent physical health, while fewer rated their spiritual, mental, and emotional health that way. For example, 30% reported their mental health was good or excellent and the remainder rated it as fair or poor.
- One in five (20%) youth approaching the transition out of care often or always felt good about themselves and just over a third (34%) often or always felt cared about.
- Half of youth preparing to transition out of care reported a decrease in their access to professional supports (50%) and access to health care (50%) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, over half of those who completed a survey after April 2020 reported a decline in their relationships with friends, access to mental health care, and job stability.
- Among youth preparing to transition out of care, 71% had a care plan and 49% had a transition plan. The remaining youth were unsure if they had one of these plans or reported they did not have one.
- Most youth (77%) who were approaching the transition out of care felt prepared to live independently. However, less than half felt prepared to pay their bills/budget (43%) and find housing (43%).
- When asked to reflect on their experience leaving care, 47% of youth who had recently left care felt they had been a little or not at all prepared, while 24% felt somewhat prepared, and 29% felt quite or very prepared.

- Around two thirds (68%) of youth preparing to transition out of care felt quite or very prepared to cook healthy meals for themselves. However, food security was a challenge. For example, among youth who had recently transitioned out of care, 15% always ate 3 meals a day, and 68% went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home.
- Youth accessed a range of services and supports, and 59% of those who had transitioned out of care continued to receive care through MCFD or a Delegated Agency for a period past their 19th birthday. Also, among those who had received support, 71% identified a supportive adult who had helped them to do well at school.
- Among youth approaching the transition into independent living who had experienced trouble finding housing, 61% reported this was because they lacked support and 57% reported they could not afford a place. Among those who already lived independently, 39% reported they had not signed a tenancy agreement and 9% did not remember if they had. Also, 29% did not understand their tenancy rights/responsibilities and 10% were unsure if they understood them.
- Among youth who had recently transitioned out of care, 25% had moved at least twice in the past six months.
- Most youth (86%) preparing to transition out of care had worked at a paid job at some point, and 49% were currently working. Youth who had been employed had experienced barriers to maintaining employment including scheduling conflicts (34%), conflict with their supervisor or coworkers (31%), pay not being enough to support them (30%), and transportation challenges (30%).
- Despite the challenges young people experienced before and after leaving care, the survey results highlighted youth's strengths and resiliency. For example, among youth preparing to leave care, 95% had at least one goal for the next six months, 95% identified something they were passionate about, and 79% could name something they were good at. Many youth also shared personal accomplishments they were particularly proud of, including academic achievements, independent living skills, sobriety, and having overcoming obstacles in their life.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy (YRA) offers youth aged 16–24 with experience of the government care system the opportunity to participate in a 10-month paid employment program to learn community-based research skills. Members of the YRA are trained to conduct research projects of interest to youth in and from government care and the agencies that serve them. Since 2019, the YRA have been conducting a longitudinal study of British Columbia (BC) youth transitioning out of government care and alternatives to care (e.g., on a Youth Agreement), including youth transitioning out of the services of Delegated Agencies.

The goal of the study is to better understand the experiences of BC youth as they go through the process of transitioning out of care. The results of the study are intended to provide policy makers and service providers with up-to-date and relevant information which can identify what is working well and what is challenging for these young people, and ensure youth are supported to experience the most successful transition possible.

In 2019, members of the YRA invited key policy makers and service providers to join them in developing the survey topics for a questionnaire which would be administered to youth every six months starting approximately six months before their 19th birthday, through to their 24th birthday.

Once the YRA had gathered previously validated items and developed potential new items, the 62-item baseline survey was piloted with youth who had experience of the BC care system. The baseline survey was modified and shortened for administration at later time points to reflect the changing circumstances of young people leaving care, while keeping many of the core questions to allow for comparisons over time. The surveys were modified in Spring 2020 to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The finalized surveys were approved by the Ethics Committee of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Questions on the surveys ask about youth's background, health (including mental health and substance use), experiences in care, living situations, education, employment, money, goals, access to services and supports, strengths and needs, and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is the first report to be published from the data collected to date, and provides an analysis of baseline data provided by 107 youth who were approaching the transition out of care, as well as data from 38 youth who had transitioned out of care and completed a second survey. Data was collected between Spring 2019 and Spring 2021.

It is intended that each cohort of the YRA will create and disseminate an annual updated report which includes data collected from youth throughout their transition out of government care and into adulthood.

LIMITATIONS

Findings in this report reflect the experiences of youth who completed a survey and may not be representative of all youth transitioning out of care or an alternative to care in BC.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted participation in the study. The pandemic has also meant that some youth have remained in care beyond their 19th birthday, which has affected the methodology of the study but could have positive effects on youth's well-being and future experience transitioning out of care. The pandemic may also have affected responses to some survey questions (e.g., about access to services). The full impact of the pandemic will be considered in a later report.

ANALYSIS

The report focuses on descriptive statistics as it is intended to provide a preliminary picture of youth transitioning out of care. Future reports will include more detailed analyses and associations.



Unless noted, all statistics reported on p. 8–28 are among youth who were approaching the transition out of care, and all statistics from p. 29–36 are among those who had recently transitioned.

PROFILE OF BC YOUTH APPROACHING THE TRANSITION OUT OF GOVERNMENT CARE

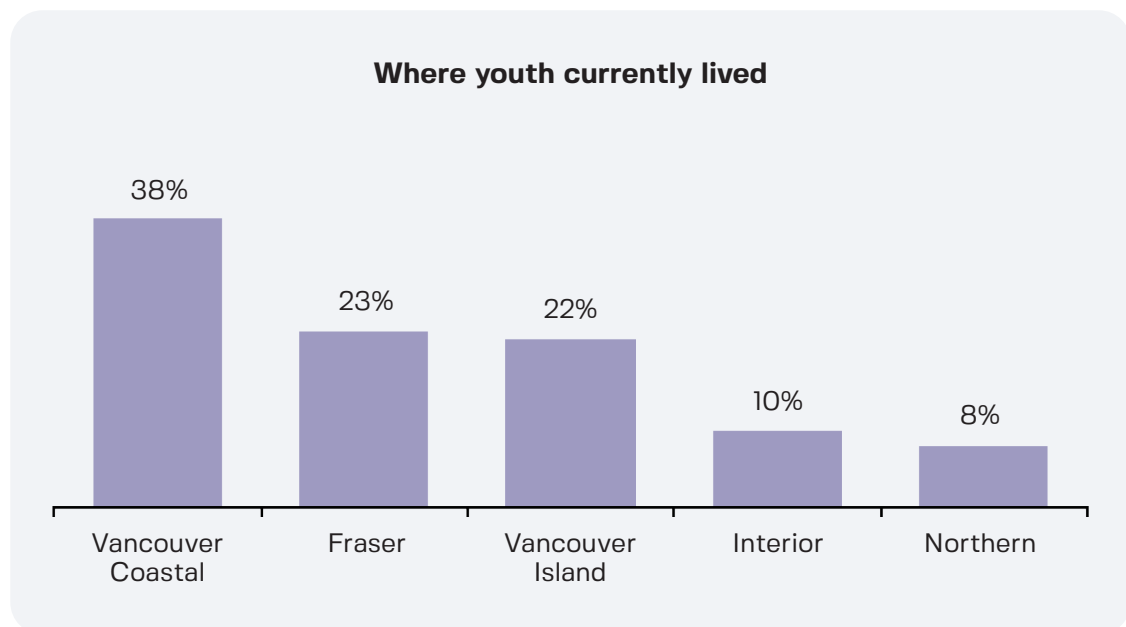
Most youth who completed a baseline survey were under 19 years of age. However, 6% had turned 19 and were still in care or an alternative to care due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of survey respondents identified as female (65%), 31% as male, and the remainder as non-binary. Youth identified with a range of different sexual orientations, including straight or mostly straight (65%), bisexual (21%), and gay or lesbian (5%).

Around a third (34%) of participants identified as Indigenous. Among Indigenous youth, over two-thirds were First Nations (69%) and 31% were Métis. Over half of Indigenous youth (56%) could speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language (e.g., Chilcotin, Cree, Shuswap).

Twelve percent of participants had lived in Canada for less than six years and the remainder had lived here longer or were born here.

Survey respondents came from all five regions of the province, and the majority currently lived in the Lower Mainland.



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

EXPERIENCES IN GOVERNMENT CARE

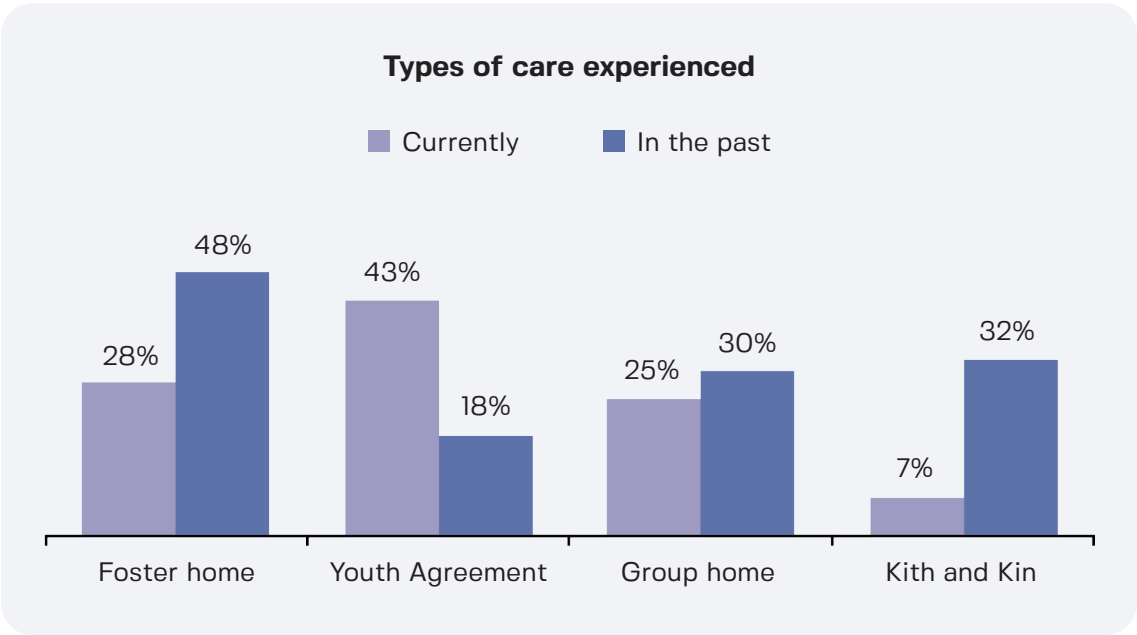
Among youth who knew where they received services from (86% of all survey respondents), the majority had been in the care of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD; 76%), 7% had received services from a Delegated Agency (e.g., Métis Nation BC, VACFSS), and the remainder had received services from both MCFD and a Delegated Agency.

Youth were asked about the different types of care and alternatives to care they may have experienced. Overall, 76% had been in foster care, 60% had been on a Youth Agreement, 54% had stayed in a group home, and 39% had been on a kith and kinship agreement. Also, 8% had been held in a custody centre.

Most youth (78%) had experienced multiple types of care placements, including 48% who had experienced at least three different types of care. For example, they had been in a foster home, group home, and on a Youth Agreement.

Six percent of youth did not know how long they had been in care. However, among those who did know, 34% had been in care for more than five years, 30% between three and five years, 23% for one or two years, and the remainder for less than a year.

A little over 8 in 10 (83%) youth indicated they currently had contact with at least one member of their biological family.



TRANSITION PLANNING



I think young people transitioning out of care need to have a living plan before moving out, so knowing how to budget and what are needs rather than wants, knowing support systems when things get tough. Showing youth how to plan things out for the month, I think is a good idea before them aging out of care. Also making sure that youth are able to find a stable job or attend school before moving out.”

All youth in government care in BC are entitled to a written care plan, which is developed within six months of their entry into care and includes input from the young person. The plan identifies the young person’s needs and goals, and how these will be addressed. Youth who are preparing to leave care should also have a transition plan which identifies their post-care plans and goals, and supports them to develop the skills necessary for independent living.

Just over 7 in 10 (71%) youth reported they had a care plan, 14% did not have one, and 14% did not know if they had a plan. Around half (49%) had a transition plan, 29% did not yet have one, and 23% did not know if they had one.

Youth were asked how prepared they felt to do various tasks related to transitioning out of care and into independent living. The majority felt prepared to live independently, whereas fewer than half felt prepared to find housing or pay their bills and budget.

Youth who felt ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very prepared’ to ... (among those who felt this was a skill they wanted or needed)

Live independently	77%
Find a job	69%
Cook healthy meals	68%
Pursue education	66%
Have a healthy romantic/sexual relationship	64%
Apply for AYA/Income assistance/ other benefits	53%
Pay their bills/budget	43%
Find housing	43%

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



We need more mental health supports for youth that runs beyond 9 AM and 4 PM. I work 25+ hours a week and cannot go to see supports offered to me often due to my work schedule. I have to book time off to be able to access the monetary support my youth agreement gives me.”

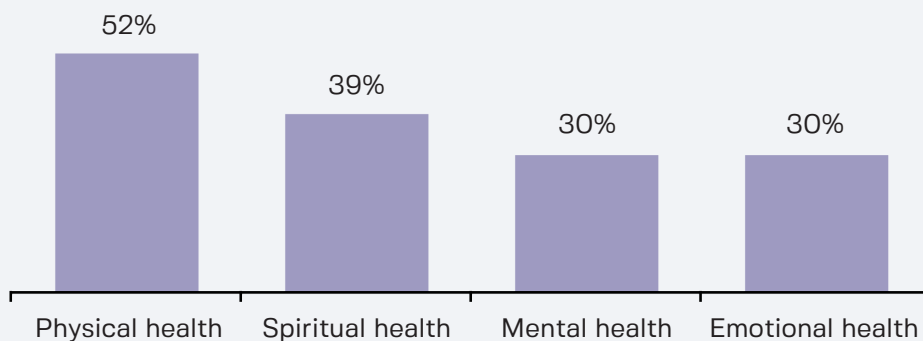
Just over half of youth reported they experienced good or excellent physical health, while fewer rated their spiritual, mental, and emotional health that way.

Over half (57%) reported they had at least one health condition or disability. The most common were a mental health condition (47%), followed by long-term or chronic medical condition (18%), substance use addiction (18%), and learning disability (17%; they could mark all that applied). Fewer youth reported they had a physical or sensory disability. Among youth with a health condition or disability, 65% reported it got in the way of doing activities

other youth their age did, such as playing sports, getting together with friends, and school activities.

Around 6 in 10 (61%) youth had needed medical help because they were physically sick or hurt in the past six months. Among those who needed medical help, 31% did not get the help they needed. Similarly, 64% needed help for their mental health in the six months before completing the survey. Among those who needed help for their mental health, 43% did not get the help they needed.

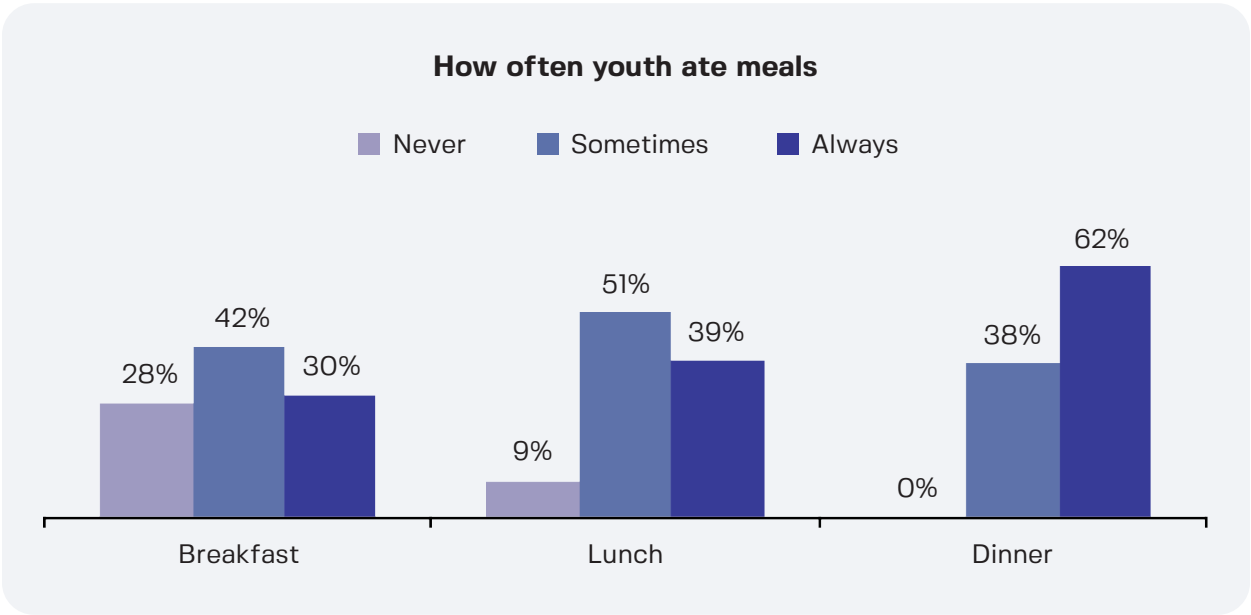
Rated their health as good or excellent



Nutrition

Youth were asked how often they ate meals during the day. One in five (20%) reported they always ate three meals a day. All youth ate dinner at least sometimes but around 1 in 10 never ate lunch and over a quarter never ate breakfast.

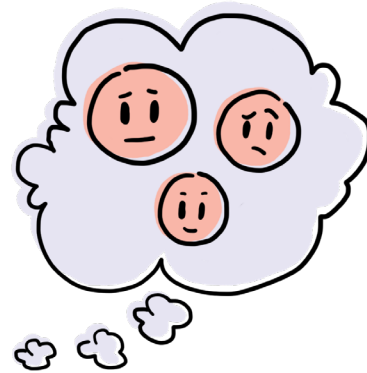
Over half of youth (54%) went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food, including 11% who often or always went to bed hungry. Youth on a Youth Agreement were the most likely to go to bed hungry at least sometimes (65%).



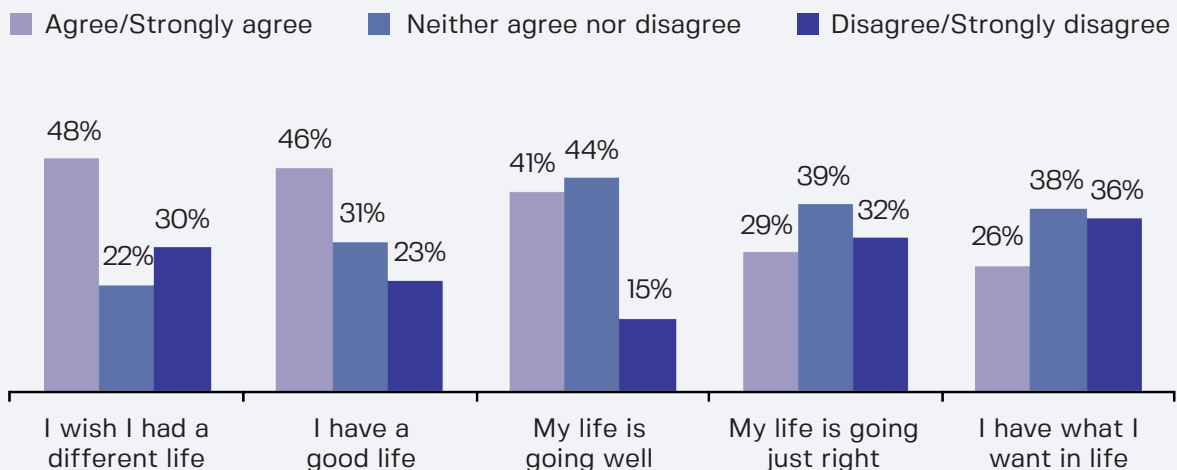
Note: Percentages for 'Lunch' do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Satisfaction with life

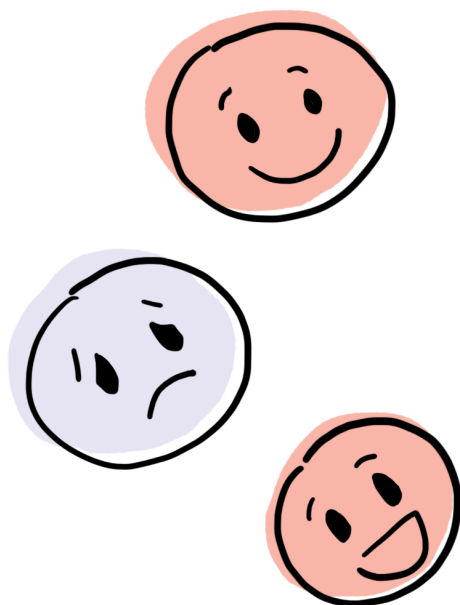
The survey asked youth to rate their quality of life. Almost half wished they had a different life, while around a quarter felt like they had what they wanted in life.



Life satisfaction ratings



Youth were asked about their experiences with a range of emotions and feelings. At least half of youth often or always felt stressed and anxious, and similar percentages felt safe and grateful.



Youth who often or always felt ...

Stressed	59%
Safe	57%
Grateful	54%
Anxious	51%
Lonely	38%
Cared about	34%
Frustrated	31%
Hopeful	30%
Happy	29%
Sad	26%
Angry	24%
Scared	21%
Good about themselves	20%



I live on my own very sufficiently and I'm happy with who I have around me and I'm proud to show how strong I am and that no matter how bad things have been in the past I am who I am because of it and I'm proud of that."

SUBSTANCE USE

Youth had used a range of substances in the past six months, most commonly alcohol and cannabis.

Substances youth used in the past six months	
Alcohol	63%
Cannabis	51%
Prescription pills without a doctor's consent	18%
Mushrooms	17%
Cocaine	13%
Ecstasy/MDMA	13%
Hallucinogens	12%
More of their own prescription medication than prescribed	11%
Amphetamines, crystal meth	8%
Inhalants	6%

Note: The percentages for 'Ketamine, GHB' and 'Heroin' are not releasable due to the risk of deductive disclosure.
Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Half of youth (50%) used cannabis in the month before taking the survey, including 18% who used it daily. Youth were also asked on how many days in the past week they had consumed two or more drinks of alcohol—22% had at least a couple of drinks on one or two days that week, and 12% did so on three or more days.

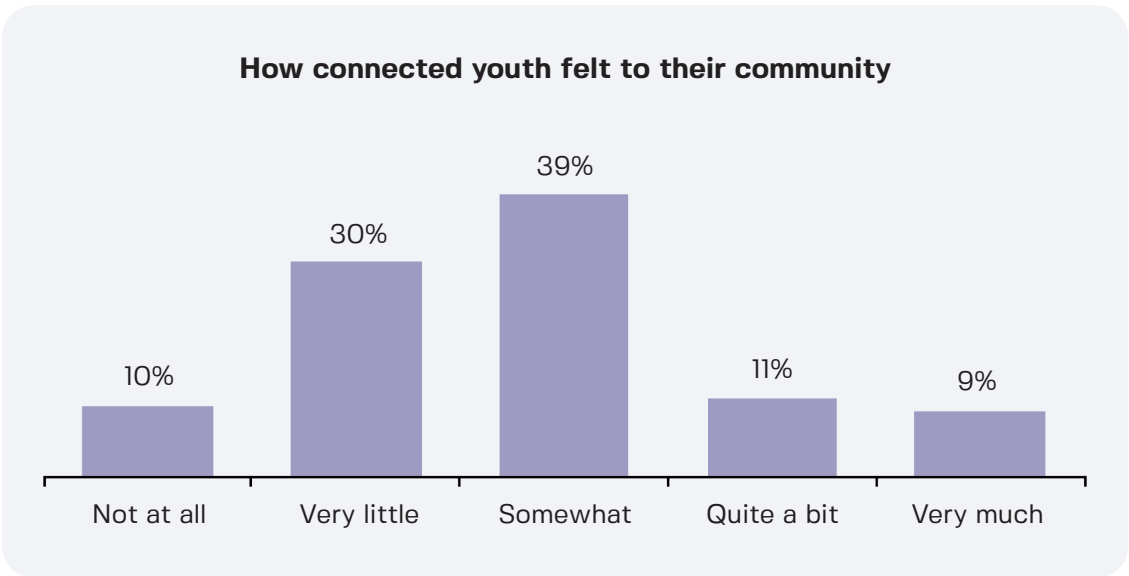
COMMUNITY AND EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

Around 1 in 5 youth felt quite a bit or very connected to their community.

Most youth (88%) participated in at least one type of extracurricular activity (e.g., sports, volunteering, and clubs or groups) in the past six months, including 62% who did so at least weekly.

The most common activities youth took part in on a weekly basis were sports or physical activities (33%) and art, drama, singing, or music (32%). Fewer youth participated at least weekly in cultural or traditional activities (13%), clubs or groups (13%), volunteering for honoraria (12%), and volunteering without honoraria (9%).

About a quarter (24%) of youth reported that they often or always felt connected to nature.



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



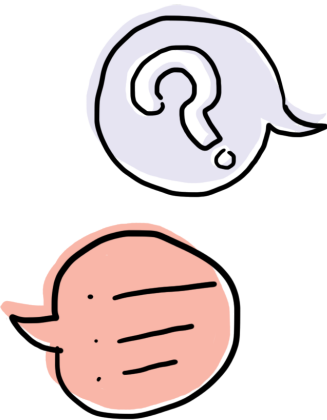
ADULT, PEER, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

The majority of youth (90%) felt they had at least one adult in their life who cared about them. Most also had an adult who helped with school or college work (74%), making and getting to appointments (70%), applying for school or jobs (69%), and finding housing (67%).

Most youth (87%) felt that if they were having a really good or really bad day, they had someone in their life they could connect with. Specifically, 51% felt like they could talk to another youth, 48% could talk to an adult they knew socially (e.g., friend’s parent), and 36% could talk to an adult they met through services (e.g., counsellor, social worker).

Nearly all youth (96%) had at least one close friend, including 50% who had three or more close friends. The majority (60%) had at least one close friend with current or previous government care experience, including 20% who had three or more close friends with care experience.

Youth had asked a range of different people for help in the past six months, and most found the experience to be helpful.



People whom youth approached for help and found helpful in the past six months		
	Asked for help	Found helpful (among those who asked for help)
Friend/partner	87%	95%
Family member	75%	70%
Youth worker	74%	85%
Social worker	71%	72%
Housing support worker	61%	81%
Family member of friend/partner	53%	77%
Probation officer	24%	54%

Youth were asked about a range of resources and services they may have accessed in the past six months. Most youth had accessed at least one resource, whereas 18% reported they had not needed to access them, and 38% had needed resources but had not accessed them. Most youth who accessed the resources found them helpful.

In April 2020, a question about accessing mental health resources and services was added to the survey. Since April 2020, 61% of youth had accessed mental health resources, and 79% of these youth found it helpful.

Resources and services youth accessed in the past six months		
	Accessed	Found helpful (among those who accessed)
Education support	50%	90%
Services to get identification (ID)	48%	92%
Youth employment programs/supports	43%	84%
Youth drop-in centre	42%	86%
Other life skills support	31%	91%
Online supports	29%	90%
Cultural supports	18%	84%
Alcohol and drug counselling/rehab	14%	80%



HOUSING EXPERIENCES

Youth had lived in various types of accommodations throughout their life, and had most commonly stayed at a relative's home and a foster or group home.

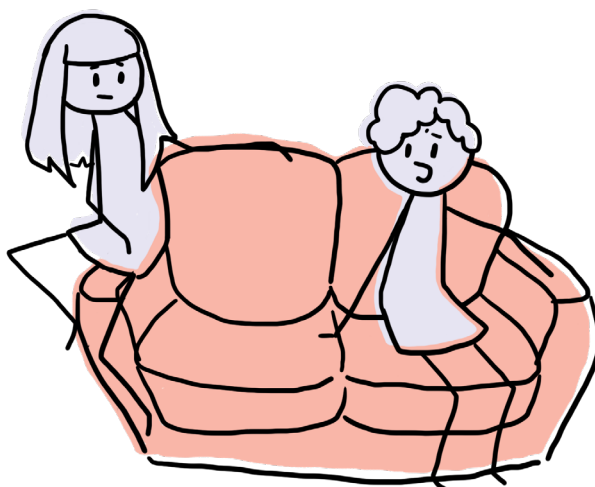
Where youth have ever lived	
Parent's or another relative's home	87%
Foster home or group home	83%
Alone or with roommates	59%
Market rental	43%
Couch surfing	40%
Safe house, shelter, or transition house	39%
On the street	30%
SRO/Hotel	23%
BC Housing	22%
Substance use or mental health treatment program	19%
Other	14%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

At the time they completed a survey, youth were most commonly currently living alone or with roommates (39%), in a foster home or group home (38%), a market rental (e.g., basement suite, own apartment; 23%), a relative's home (11%), and in a BC Housing accommodation (7%). Some were also currently living in a Single Room Occupancy hotel (SRO); substance use or mental health treatment program; safe house, shelter, or transition house; or on the street.

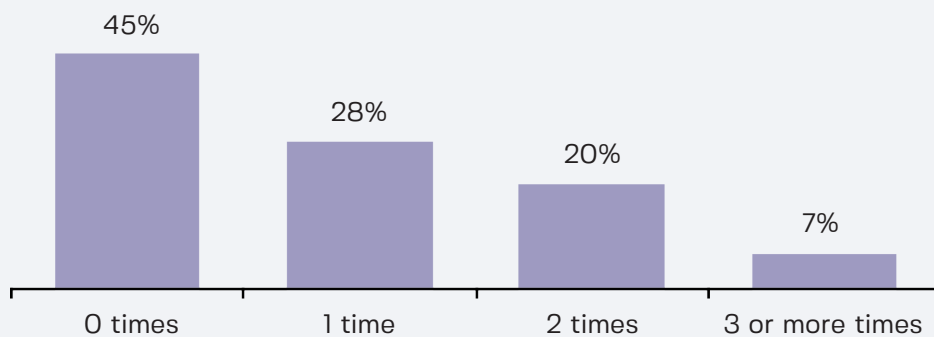
Youth were asked who they currently lived with most of the time. They most commonly lived with a foster family (33%); alone (22%); a friend, partner, or roommate (21%); adults not related to them (19%); children not related to them (14%); biological family (12%); and with pets (11%). A few youth also reported living with their own child/children or an adoptive family.

Overall, 44% had taken part in a youth housing program. Among these youth, 61% were currently in a youth housing program.



Over half (55%) had moved in the past six months, and 27% had moved at least twice.

How many times youth moved in the past six months



As a youth who has been on my own for almost 2 and a half years, the budget that is in place for rent is very out dated. I think it is important that if we want youth to thrive, we need to give them the budget to do it."

I want to finish my first year [at college] with good grades and hopefully move out into my own house."



Three quarters (75%) of youth felt quite or very safe where they were currently living. However, 13% did not feel safe where they lived.

Around three quarters (74%) of youth had experienced difficulties finding housing at some point, most commonly because of a lack of support and because they could not afford it.

Most commonly reported reasons youth had trouble finding housing (among those who had trouble finding housing)

Lack of support	61%
Couldn't afford it	57%
Shortage of safe and affordable housing	49%
Discrimination	36%
Mental health or substance use challenges	27%
Didn't want to live with roommate(s)	25%
Couldn't find a roommate to live with	24%
Couldn't find housing in the community they wanted to live in	24%
On Social Assistance	15%
Have a pet	13%

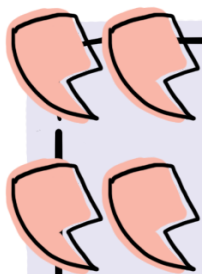
Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among those who had lived in rented accommodation, 39% had not signed a tenancy agreement when they moved to their current accommodation, and 9% did not remember whether they had signed one. Also, 51% had not completed a Condition Inspection report with their landlord, and 14% did not remember if they had.

Around 6 in 10 (61%) youth felt they understood their tenancy rights and responsibilities, while 29% did not understand their rights, and the remainder were unsure if they understood.



EDUCATION

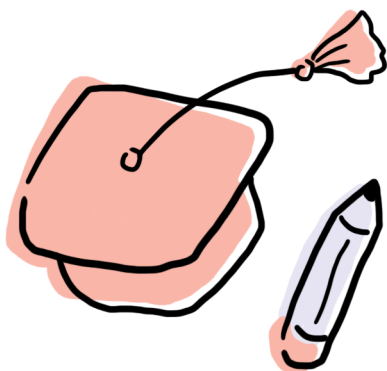


I am most proud of graduating high school and applying and upgrading my courses at university without the help of parents, and doing so while having a lot going on in my life.”

I'm proud that I am the first in my family to graduate high school and go to college right away.”

Just under half (46%) of youth were currently enrolled in high school or an equivalent, and 24% were in post-secondary education. Among those not attending school, 61% reported they stopped going to school once they finished high school, and 32% stopped before graduating from high school.

Most youth (79%) had experienced challenges to graduating from high school. Among these youth, challenges included mental health or substance use challenges (64%), not getting enough support in school (63%), not getting enough support outside of school (60%), changing schools (34%), being bullied (29%), and other health challenges (20%).



Youth were asked about the types of supports that helped them do well at school. Among those who had experienced support, the most commonly endorsed support was having supportive adults at school (71%). Youth who identified helpful supports also reported benefiting from being able to work at their own pace (60%), having supportive adults outside of school (51%), having teachers or other staff who noticed if they did not attend school (47%), learning good study habits (43%), peer support (40%), and not changing schools (31%).

Youth were asked if they were aware that Adult Basic Education was available for free in BC. Around half (52%) reported they knew this, including 17% who had accessed it. They were also asked whether they knew about the tuition waiver program for former youth in care. Just under two thirds (64%) were aware of the program, including 8% who had received a tuition waiver, and 7% who had applied but had not received a tuition waiver.

EMPLOYMENT

Most youth (86%) had worked at a paid job at some point, and 49% were currently working. Among those currently working at a paid job, 43% worked 20 or more hours a week, 41% worked 5 to 19 hours, and 16% worked less than 5 hours a week. Among those not currently working, 72% were looking for work.

Most youth (89%) had looked for a job at some point, and 19% of these youth reported they had not experienced challenges to getting a job. However, the majority had experienced barriers to finding employment.

Barriers youth experienced to finding employment (among those who had looked for a job)

Worried a job would get in the way of school or other things	43%
Didn't have the required education level or job skills	39%
Mental health, substance use, or other health challenges	35%
Didn't have transportation	31%
Had no one to help me apply for a job	21%
Government funding restrictions (PWD, IA, YA, AYA, etc.)	9%

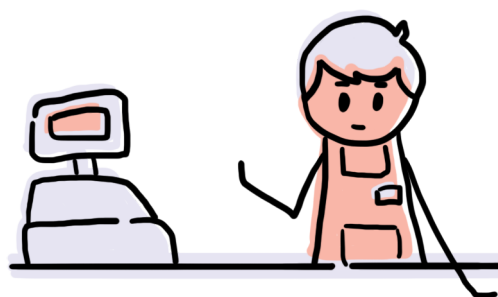
Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Youth who had ever been employed reported a range of challenges to keeping a job.

Barriers youth experienced to maintaining employment (among those who had been employed)

Scheduling conflicts	34%
Conflict with my supervisor or coworkers	31%
The pay wasn't enough to support me	30%
Transportation challenges	30%
Didn't know who to talk to if I needed help or advice	23%
Mental health, substance use, or other health challenges	22%
Didn't know my employee rights	16%
It wasn't what I had expected	15%
Discrimination	14%

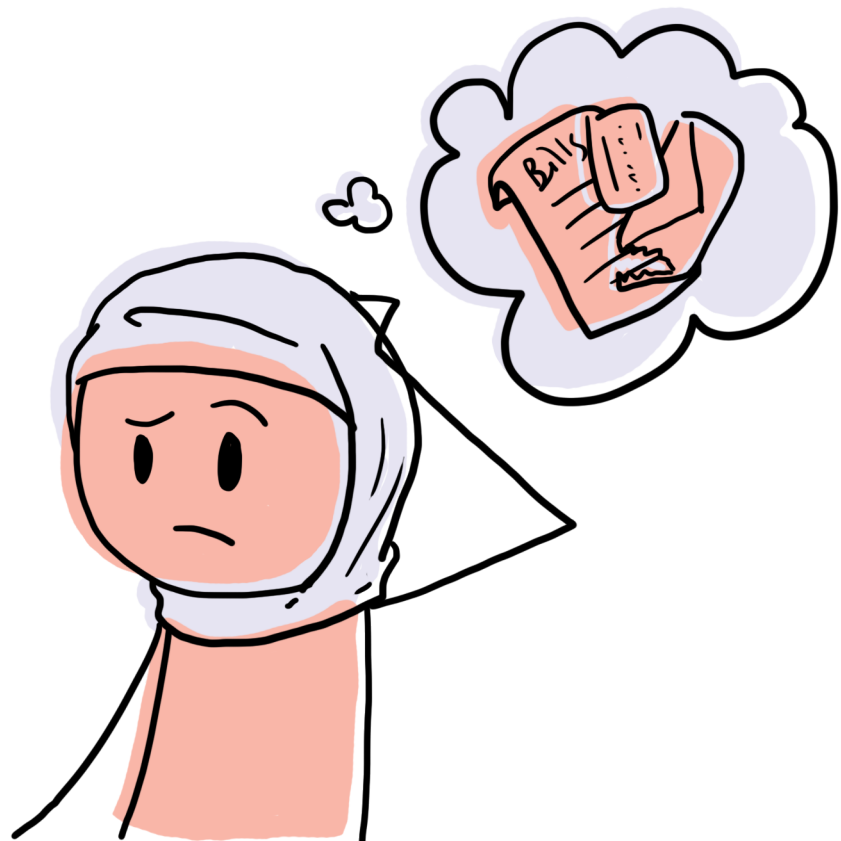
Note: Youth could mark all that applied.



FINANCIAL SITUATION

Most youth (88%) had at least one source of money, including income from a legal job (43%), a Youth Agreement (36%), their family (24%), a youth program (11%), honoraria (11%), illegal activity (5%), and a bursary or scholarship (5%). Some youth also indicated receiving money through Income Assistance, a Child Tax Benefit, the Youth Educational Assistance Fund, Employment Insurance, Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits, or an allowance.

The majority of youth (84%) had a bank account. However, 17% of youth with a bank account reported that their account was inactive. Also, 18% were currently in debt and 4% were unsure whether they were in debt. Among youth who were in debt, 48% owed money to a friend or family member and 28% had unpaid bills. Other types of debt included credit card debt, student loans, owing money to a loan agency, fines, and overdraft fees (youth could mark all that applied).



EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Please give us youth workers past the age of 19 even if it's just until we get a vaccine for coronavirus, my youth worker has been so helpful throughout quarantine."

The COVID-19 pandemic began a little less than a year into this study. In April 2020, questions were added to the survey to capture the impact of the pandemic on the lives of youth transitioning out of care. Over half of those who completed a survey from April 2020 onwards reported a decline in their relationships with friends, access to mental health care, and job stability.

Youth who reported a decline in ... (as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic)

Relationships with friends	57%
Access to mental health care	55%
Job stability	53%
Access to professional supports	50%
Access to health care	50%
Access to a phone and data plan	43%
Relationships with biological family	40%
Financial support/stability	40%
Housing stability	37%
Use of a food bank or donated food	37%
Access to Internet and Wi-Fi	27%

Youth were also asked a qualitative question about ways the COVID-19 pandemic has affected them. Most responses reflected challenges with mental health and experiences of isolation.

Examples of impact from the COVID-19 pandemic

"I can't get together with my friends."

"I couldn't study very well because it was online."

"My mental health has dropped and my anxiety has risen more."

"Made me extremely depressed and feel hopeless, I just feel dysphoric."

"The Internet has played a more important role in my life."



STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCY

The majority of youth (95%) who completed a survey wrote about something they were passionate about. Their passions included art, cooking, helping others, playing sports, music, and specific academic subjects such as math or science.

Most youth (79%) could name something they were really good at. Skills included art, cooking, sports, gaming, supporting others, making people laugh, photography, academics, and writing.

The majority of respondents (95%) had set at least one goal for themselves for the next six months, including in areas such as school, health and well-being, finding new housing, learning to drive, and finding employment.

Examples of youth's goals for the next six months

"Continue living and buy a mattress. I have been sleeping on the floor/on an air mattress for the past 4 months. I would also like to get my N driver's license."

"Establish a normal, stable routine again."

"Get a part time job, continue exercising and maintaining a healthy, balanced diet."

"Get my N driver's license; and have good mental health."

"Graduate from high school, get a job, find housing, learn to cook better, get my N, taxes and budgeting."

"My goal is to stay in a healthy relationship, finish school and get a job."

"Start being active—working out, participating more in gym. Not forgetting homework. Trying harder at school—paying more attention."

"To be better prepared to age out of foster care."

"Work on mental health and physical health and be happy."



Among those with goals, 45% experienced challenges to achieving their goals. Challenges included their mental health, lack of support, financial challenges, and difficulties finding a job.

Youth were also asked about what they were most proud of. Many responses were focused on personal accomplishments, academic achievements, and overcoming obstacles.

Examples of what youth were most proud of

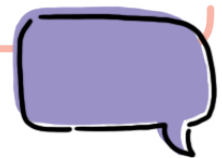
"Being a female First Nations youth who is going to graduate!!!"

"Being able to understand myself, and remain strong in moments I feel it's unlikely."

"Currently finishing Grade 12 after dropping out."

"Graduating from high school and getting principal's list for the first time this year, enjoying photography, got to meet new people, getting my driver's license L and soon N."

"Graduating. Doing better in school and wanting to continue with my education. Doing better with my mental health."



SUPPORTING YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

One of the final survey questions asked how young people transitioning out of care could be better supported. Youth had a range of suggestions for resources and services which could be available to youth both before and after they left care.



Examples of suggestions for how young people transitioning out of care can be better supported

“Better support from social workers and making sure that there is a plan in place for when you age out.”

“Have a worker they’re comfortable with walk them through it thoroughly and go over their rights and tenant rights.”

“I feel that youth keeping their youth worker months after they turn 19 would be helpful. They would still transition to AYA or to paying their own way but having the support of a youth worker would be extremely beneficial.”

“If welfare supported more money for rent because I currently am on a youth agreement that pays my rent which is more than welfare will pay when I’m 19.”

“More funding support once out of foster care.”

“More housing programs for youth.”

“There needs to be more support after you turn 19. I understand that AYA is financial support, but the fact that if you are 18 years and 364 days old, you have access to plenty of services, but if you are one day older (19) all of a sudden you lose a whole plethora of services just because of a number.”

“We need youth workers past the age of 19. the biggest challenge for me when it comes to aging out will be losing my youth worker.”

“Young people should have more supports in place for when we turn 19. Maybe give us a transition worker for the 3–6 months who checks in on us and helps us with budgeting and grocery shopping and to teach how to apply for cable/Wi-Fi and hydro.”



YOUTH WHO HAD RECENTLY TRANSITIONED OUT OF CARE

To date, 38 youth have completed a survey since transitioning out of care. The profile of youth who completed a post-transition survey was similar to those who completed a survey prior to leaving care in terms of gender identity, sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, geographical location, and care experience.

AGREEMENTS WITH YOUNG ADULTS

Youth who were in care or an alternative to care (such as a Youth Agreement) may be eligible for the Agreements with a Young Adult (AYA) program. The program provides eligible youth up to \$1,250 per month while they are attending school or job training, or a rehabilitation, mental health, or life skills program. Around half (53%) of those who had transitioned out of care had accessed the AYA program.



TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE PROCESS

Reflecting back on the process of transitioning out of care, 47% felt they were only a little or not at all prepared for the transition, 24% felt they were somewhat prepared, and 29% felt they were quite or very prepared.

Among those who responded after the onset of the pandemic, 59% continued to receive care through MCFD or a Delegated Agency for a period past their 19th birthday but have since transitioned out of care.

Around 4 in 5 (79%) youth who had transitioned out of care had contact with at least one member of their biological family since their transition out.

Examples of how prepared youth felt they were to transition out of care

"I didn't get very much support from my social worker and I lost my youth worker, therefore, I didn't have much support during the transition period. I was only a bit prepared because I was used to doing things on my own."

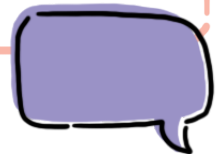
"I feel I was somewhat prepared. I had been on a Youth Agreement, which I had been living alone and learning lots. I feel I could have been more prepared and learned more about taxes and other real-life skills that I didn't really have access to."

"I felt a bit prepared but definitely was not fully prepared."

"I haven't been taught anything about being an adult and would like help or resources."

"My last foster home helped me with the equipment I needed to live on my own, and my social worker helped me out as much as she could, she was extremely passionate about her job which made it easier for me to connect with her and work well."

"My social worker stopped speaking to me 6 months before I aged out of care. I was still on a Youth Agreement during those 6 months."



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Most youth who had transitioned out of care rated their physical health as good or excellent (63%), 56% rated their spiritual health this positively, and fewer youth rated their mental health (40%) and emotional health (31%) as good or excellent.

In the past six months, 57% needed medical help because they were physically sick or hurt. Among these youth, 80% got the help they needed. In contrast, 69% felt they needed mental health services in the past six months, and 42% got the help they needed.

In the past six months youth had accessed health care at a variety of places, including a walk-in clinic (47%), counsellor (45%), family doctor (42%), dentist (42%), emergency room (ER; 42%), youth clinic (29%), and nurse (29%).

Nutrition

Fifteen percent of youth who had transitioned out of care always ate three meals a day. A majority (68%) always ate dinner, while 35% always ate lunch, and 27% always ate breakfast.

Arounds two thirds (68%) went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home.



LIVING SITUATION

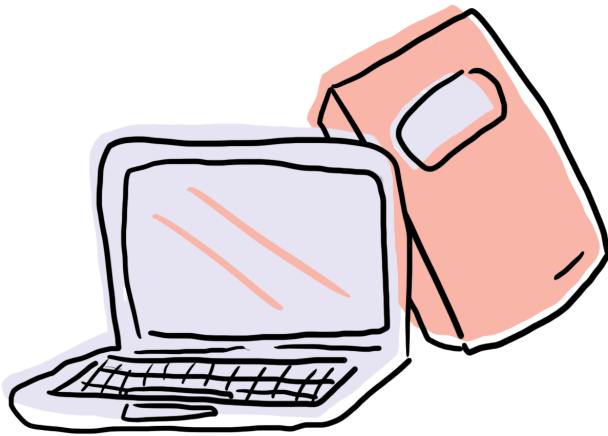
Most youth who had recently transitioned out of care had moved in the past six months, including 25% who moved at least twice. At the time they completed the survey, most were living alone or with roommates (57%) and/or in a market rental (33%). The remainder were living with relatives, in BC Housing, in an SRO/Hotel, in a substance use or mental health treatment program, and/or were couch surfing. Overall, 70% felt quite or very safe where they were currently living.

Sixteen percent of youth who had transitioned out of care indicated they had not experienced trouble finding housing. Among those who had experienced challenges, reasons included a shortage of safe and affordable housing (70%), being unable to afford a place (67%), a lack of support (63%), being unable to find roommates (33%), discrimination (33%), mental health or substance use challenges (30%), not wanting to live with roommates (26%), and not finding housing in the community they wanted to live in (22%). Some also indicated not being able to find housing because they were on social assistance, had a bad credit rating, or because they had a pet.



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Most youth who had transitioned out of care were in either education or employment, including 16% who were exclusively working, 46% who were exclusively in school, and 25% who were both working and enrolled in school. Also, 38% had accessed Adult Basic Education (for high school courses) at some point.



FINANCIAL SITUATION

Overall, 41% of youth were working at a paid job. Among those who were employed, 39% worked 20 or more hours a week. Among those not working, 58% were looking for a job.

A little over half (53%) of youth who had recently transitioned out of care were in debt. Among those in debt, reasons included a credit card debt (47%), owing money to a friend or family member (41%), and unpaid bills (35%). Other reasons included student loans, owing money to a loan agency, a fine (e.g., for transit evasion), and overdraft fees.



ACCESS TO SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Reflecting the pattern prior to the transition out of care, most respondents (82%) felt like they had had someone they could talk to if they were having a really good or really bad day. Specifically, 55% could talk to an adult they knew socially, 46% to an adult they met through services, and 42% to another youth.

The majority (91%) reported they had been connected to service providers or staff prior to transitioning out of care. Among those youth, 63% had stayed connected to these service providers or staff.

In the past six months, youth had accessed a range of services, including nearly two thirds who had accessed education support. Most youth found the services they accessed helpful.

**Resources and services youth accessed in the past six months
(among those who had recently transitioned out of care)**

	Accessed	Found helpful (among those who accessed)
Education support	65%	86%
Youth employment programs/ supports	53%	72%
Services to get identification (ID)	52%	65%
Youth drop-in centre	47%	75%
AYA life skills	46%	93%
Other life skills support	38%	100%
Cultural supports	38%	62%
Online supports	32%	82%
Alcohol & Drug counselling/rehab	21%	86%

Since April 2020 (when the question was added to the survey), 37% of youth who had recently transitioned out of care had accessed mental health resources in the past six months, and 86% of these youth found it helpful.

Youth were asked an open-ended question about any other supports or services they felt they currently needed. Most responses suggested mental health supports.

**Examples of supports or services youth felt they currently needed
(among those who had transitioned out of care in the past year)**

“Mental health and eating supports.”

“Mental health support, housing support, educational support.”

“Mental health supports.”

“A psychologist, counsellor, or therapist.”



STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCY

About three quarters (76%) of youth who had recently transitioned out of care had at least one goal for themselves for the next six months. These included goals related to education, employment, and stable housing.

Examples of goals youth had for the next six months (among those who had transitioned out of care in the past year)

“Do well in school.”

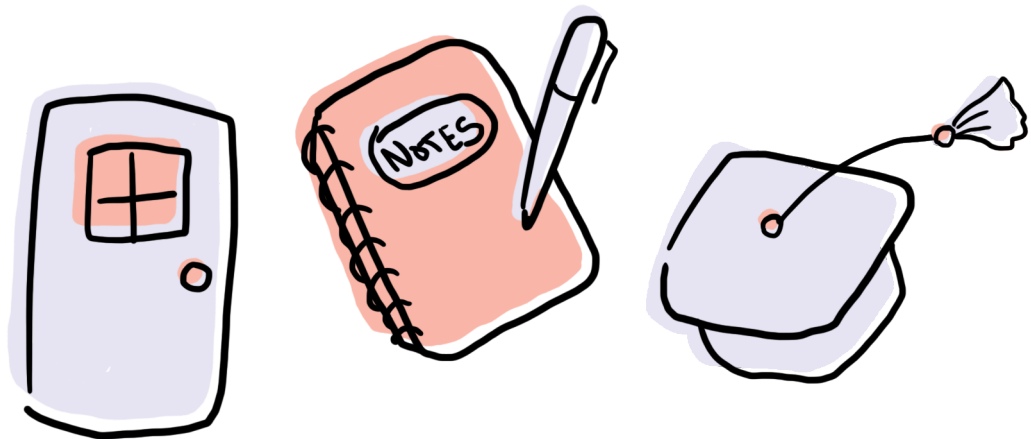
“Find a job I’ll enjoy, get my own place.”

“Graduate from high school.”

“I hope to continue doing what I am now to maintain healthy living.”

“I hope to find a stable job to change my financial situation a little.”

“Work hard to make money and learn more.”



SUPPORTING YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

As with the survey youth completed prior to transitioning out of care, participants were asked to provide suggestions about how young people could be better supported through the transition process. Their suggestions were similar to the first survey and included the need for continuity of supports beyond their 19th birthday, and assistance with housing, budgeting, and accessing mental health services.



Examples of suggestions for how young people transitioning out of care can be better supported (among those who had transitioned out of care in the past year)

“Follow-up with kids who age out. Have transition housing options for people who age out.”

“Have your social worker for at least one more year after aging out of care.”

“I think sitting down and creating a realistic budget plan for when you age out, and what to expect in your local housing market if you’re planning on moving out on your own would’ve been a lot more helpful in the long run.”

“More continuous support, better services in place to prevent falling through the cracks, housing and job supports, having someone to check up on you every so often for well-being.”

“More resources such as housing, mental health, and employment programs. It’s important for trusted adults such as social workers and youth workers to inform youth about these resources as well.”

“There should be more follow-ups.”



CONCLUSION

This is the first report from a youth-led longitudinal study about youth transitioning out of government care or an alternative to care in British Columbia. The report presents preliminary findings from surveys completed by youth in the months either side of their transition out of care and highlights the challenges and supports young people experience, as well as their internal strengths and resiliency.

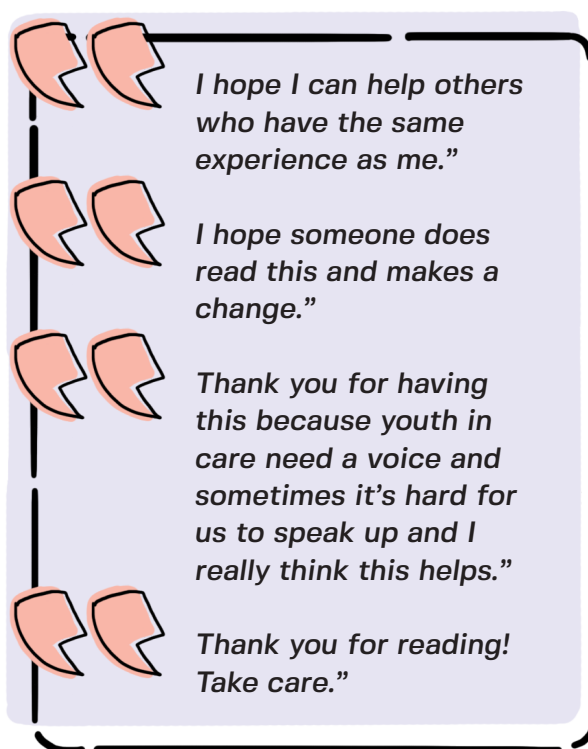
Challenges youth experienced include struggles with mental health, accessing mental health services, experiencing multiple types of care placements, unstable living conditions, and the disruption of changing schools. However, youth also experienced a variety of supports and accessed a variety of helpful services.

The results showed that as they approached the transition out of care, many youth did not feel prepared in key areas such as bill paying and finding housing, and did not report they had a care plan or transition plan. This suggests more support is needed to improve youth's readiness for transitioning out of care.

Data collection for this study has been hindered by COVID-19 and the pandemic also appears to have taken a toll on the young people participating in the study. For example, at least half reported declines in relationships with friends, access to mental health care, access to professional supports, and/or access to health care. Qualitative comments also noted that many felt isolated and were experiencing challenges to their mental health as a result of the pandemic.

Many youth reported they participated in the study because they wanted to contribute to improving the process for youth transitioning out of care and shared their suggestions for how young people can be better supported. It is hoped that this report will be used by service providers and adult allies to identify what supports are working well and where improvements can be made.

This study will continue through 2023 and future reports will be able to go beyond this initial snapshot to present more comprehensive analysis of the data, as the number of youth participating and completing follow-up surveys increases.



To learn more about the survey or to participate, please visit mcs.bc.ca/youth_transitioning_out_of_care_study.

McCREARY RESOURCES

Reports

Supports in the Spotlight

This report was produced by the Youth Research Academy using data from the 2013 and 2018 BC Adolescent Health Surveys (BC AHS) to identify protective factors that can support youth in and from government care to achieve positive health and well-being. Download the report at mcs.bc.ca/pdf/supports_in_the_spotlight.pdf.

Balance and Connection in BC:

The health and well-being of our youth

This report shares provincial findings of the 2018 BC AHS, which was completed by 38,015 Grade 7–12 students in schools across British Columbia. The report is available for download at mcs.bc.ca/pdf/balance_and_connection.pdf.

Grants

The Trevor Coburn Memorial Grants

are available to BC youth (up to age 29) wanting to carry out projects to support BC youth facing barriers, including youth with experience of homelessness, substance use challenges, and government care experience. For more information or to apply visit mcs.bc.ca/trevor_coburn_memorial_grants.

Youth Action Grants (YAGs) were created by McCreary's Youth Advisory & Action Council (YAC) to provide BC youth (ages 12–19) the opportunity to deliver a project to improve youth health in their school or community. For more information or to apply visit mcs.bc.ca/youth_action_grants.

Presentations and workshops

The PowerPoint to accompany this report is available at mcs.bc.ca/transition_out_of_care_preliminary_presentation.

Balance and Connection in BC Next Steps

Workshop Toolkit provides a workshop template to share findings from the 2018 BC AHS with youth. It includes an introduction to the results, activities to learn about risk and protective factors, and discussion questions to explore youth health in youth's school or community. An accompanying PowerPoint is also available. The toolkit and PowerPoint is available at mcs.bc.ca/next_steps. McCreary staff are also available to deliver the curriculum through interactive online or in-person workshops.

YOUTH RESOURCES

Crisis services/Need someone to talk to

Kids Help Phone (24/7)
Live chat www.kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-668-6868

Crisis Centre (24/7)
1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE)

Youth Space Live Chat
www.youthspace.ca | Text 1-778-783-0177

Youth in BC Live Chat
www.youthinbc.com

The KUU-US Crisis Line Society
(Indigenous; 24/7)
www.kuu-uscrisisline.ca | 250-723-2040

Indigenous supports

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
www.bcaafc.com | 250-388-5522

Métis Nation BC
www.mnbc.ca | 1-800-940-1150

Health

BC Mental Health Crisis Line
24/7 suicide prevention hotline.
www.crisislines.bc.ca | 1-800-784-2433

Medical advice from a nurse (24/7) Dial 811

Options for Sexual Health (OPT)
Free and confidential sexual health resource
www.optionsforsexualhealth.org | 1-800-739-7367

Housing

BC Housing/Housing Registry
Provides subsidized housing options.
Application: housingapplication.bchousing.org/olf/faces/welcome
604-433-2218 | 1-800-257-7756

Employment

WorkBC
A provincial government employment program.
www.workbc.ca | 250-952-6914
1-877-952-6914

Finances

Public Guardians and Trustee (PGT)
Assists youth transitioning out of care with their finances.
www.trustee.bc.ca | 604-775-3480

Education

Youth Educational Assistance Fund for Former Youth in Care (YEAFF)
Provides grants of up to \$5,500 per year to youth from government care (age 19–24) in education.
www.studentaidbc.ca/explore/grants-scholarships/youth-educational-assistance-fund-former-youth-care

Provincial Tuition Waiver Program
Provides post-secondary tuition for former youth in care (age 19–26).
www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/post-secondary-education/pay-for-school/provincial-tuition-waiver-program

Transitioning out of government care

AgedOut.com

A website for youth and young adults in and from government care in BC.

Agreements with Youth Adults (AYA)

(Can apply early if going to university)
Provides financial support to youth who have previously been in foster care or had a Youth Agreement to help cover expenses such as housing and vocational programs.
www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/teens-in-foster-care/agreements-with-young-adults

Multiple services

(e.g., education, employment, housing, support)

The Foundry

Youth health and wellness services and supports.
www.foundrybc.ca | Locations across BC

John Howard Society

Assists youth who have come into, or are at risk of being in, conflict with the law.
www.johnhowardbc.ca | 604-872-5651
Locations across BC

Wellness together Canada

Wellness Together Canada was created in response to an unprecedented rise in mental health and substance use concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with funding from the Government of Canada. services range from basic wellness information, to one-on-one sessions with a counsellor, to participating in a community of support.
www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA

Advocacy or complaints

Office of the Representative for Children and Youth

Supports youth and families dealing with the provincial child and youth welfare system.
www.rcybc.ca | 1-800-476-3933

BC Government Ombudsman

If you think a provincial government ministry, local government, or other provincial public authority has treated you unfairly, they may be able to help.
www.bcombudsperson.ca | 1 800-567-3247



YOUTH
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