

# CONNECTING COMMUNITY TO SURREY YOUTH LEAVING CARE

## YOUTH TRANSITIONING FROM CARE INTO THE COMMUNITY

Youth who live in the care of the BC Government are considered independent when they turn 19, regardless of their readiness or ability.

Youth who “age out” of care face greater challenges in areas such as homelessness, education, employment, income, physical and mental health, justice involvement, substance use, pregnancy, parenting, and involvement with the child welfare system.

54

The number of youth in the South Fraser region (Surrey, Langley, and Delta) who aged out of government care in 2015–2016.<sup>1</sup>

59

The number of youth who are expected to age out in 2016–2017.<sup>1</sup>

## TERMS USED IN THIS FACT SHEET

### YOUTH IN CARE

A young person under the age of 19 who currently lives in a group home or foster home and receives support from the BC government or a delegated Aboriginal agency.

### YOUTH AGREEMENT

Youth Agreements are an alternative to government care for youth aged 16–18 who are homeless and unable to live with their family, but for whom a foster home or group home would not be appropriate. Youth receive financial support to live independently.

### AGING OUT/AGED OUT

Youth who reach the age of 19 and are no longer eligible for government care.

## TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

40% of 20- to 29-year-olds in Canada live with their parents.<sup>2</sup>



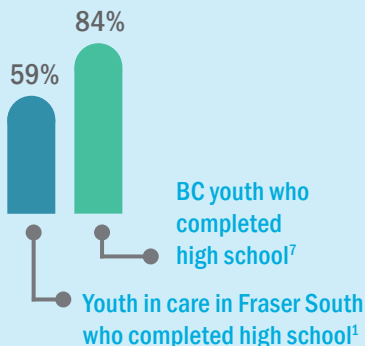
The percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds who live at home has consistently increased over the past 3 decades.<sup>3</sup>

Most parents in BC expect to support their children up to age 28, and 80% of parents with children aged 19–28 living away from home provide them with financial and other assistance.<sup>4</sup>

IN 2015, SURREY RESIDENTS ASKED FOR GREATER COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF HOW TO SUPPORT YOUTH AGING OUT OF CARE.<sup>5</sup>

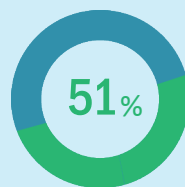
## EDUCATION

Youth in care are more likely than their peers to face challenges in their education.<sup>6</sup>

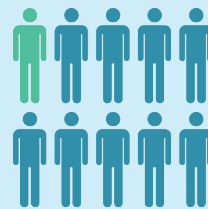


## HOUSING

In 2014, over half of homeless youth in Surrey had been in government care.<sup>8</sup>



Among these youth, 55% had at least one relative who had been in care.<sup>8</sup>



In a recent study, only 9% of former youth in care in Greater Vancouver aged 19–26 had received housing support from their family since aging out of care.<sup>6</sup>

## HELPFUL ADULTS

IN THE PAST YEAR...

30% of youth in care in Fraser South had an adult outside their family to turn to if they had a problem.<sup>9</sup>

55% of homeless youth in care in Surrey had such an adult in their lives.<sup>8</sup>

Youth in care were more likely than those not in care to have asked an adult for help, and the majority found them helpful.<sup>9</sup>

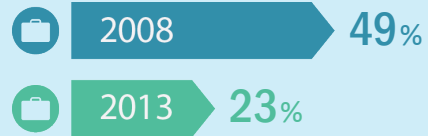
“ I have been living on a Youth Agreement for about a year now. I have no idea what I will do when I turn 19. It is pretty scary. ”

### ECONOMIC PICTURE



A study in Ontario found that increasing the age of support to youth in care would save money as former youth in care attained a better education, were less dependent on welfare, and paid more taxes.<sup>10</sup>

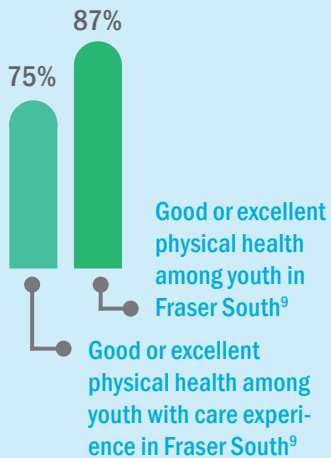
### EMPLOYMENT



The percentage of Surrey youth with recent care experience who worked at a paid job in the past year halved between 2008 and 2013.<sup>9</sup>

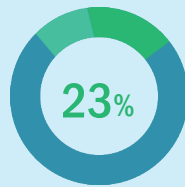
**28%** More than a quarter of local homeless youth who had been in care worked at a legal job in the past month.<sup>8</sup>

### PHYSICAL HEALTH



### MENTAL HEALTH

Nearly a quarter of Fraser South youth with care experience had a mental or emotional health condition.<sup>9</sup>



Among these youth, 39% had at least 1 condition, and 20% had 2 or more.<sup>9</sup>

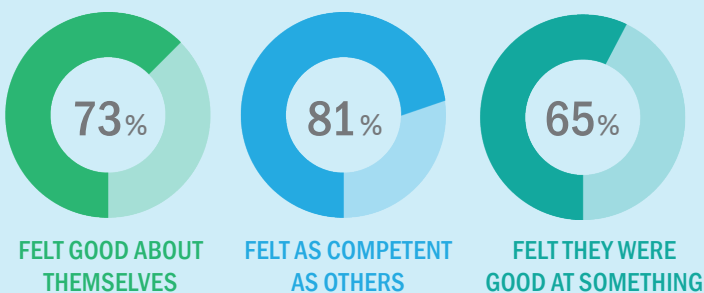
During consultations with youth in care in Surrey, youth talked about challenges to their mental health caused by past experiences of separation and trauma, compounded by changes in placements, schools, and adult relationships over which they felt they had little control. These challenges are exacerbated when they lose supports at age 19.

### ACCESSING SERVICES

26% of Fraser South youth with care experience missed out on needed mental health services in the past year.<sup>9</sup>

10% of youth without care experience had done so.<sup>9</sup>

### POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH



The majority of youth in Fraser South who were currently in care usually felt good about themselves, felt as competent as other people, and could identify something they were good at.<sup>9</sup>

### PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The majority of youth in Fraser South who were currently in care envisioned only positive circumstances in their future, most commonly having a job or career, being in school, or having a family of their own.<sup>9</sup>



GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD OF FINDING EMPLOYMENT AND EARNING A LIVING WAGE.<sup>11</sup>



THE MORE SOURCES OF SUPPORT YOUTH HAVE, THE BETTER THEIR HEALTH PICTURE.<sup>12</sup>

**70%**

7 out of 10 homeless youth in Surrey who were currently in care were attending school.<sup>8</sup>

**26%**

About 1 in 4 local youth in care took part in cultural or traditional activities in the past year.<sup>9</sup>

**45%**

Fewer than half of local youth in care had an adult in their community they felt cared about them.<sup>9</sup>



## YOUTH IN CARE WITH SUPPORT REPORT BETTER OUTCOMES

### FAMILY

63% of youth in care had an adult in their family they felt they could turn to if they had a problem.

Youth who had a supportive adult in their family reported better mental and physical health. They were also less likely to have missed school in the past month, and more likely to plan to have post-secondary plans.<sup>12</sup>



*“Doing well in school can really lift you, especially when the teacher notices you are working hard and making progress.”*

49% of youth in care felt that school staff cared about them.

Youth in care who felt that teachers cared about them were more likely to report positive mental health and to envision a positive future for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

### SCHOOL

### COMMUNITY

35% of youth in care felt like a part of their community.

Youth in care who felt connected to their community were more likely to report positive mental health, including lower rates of extreme stress or despair in the past month.<sup>12</sup>

*“We need an adult to talk to for guidance, discipline, and help along the way.”*



*“Friends are really important because it’s hard to ask adults for help in case you get let down again.”*

Youth with recent care experience were more likely to have friends with prosocial attitudes than 5 years previous.

Youth with prosocial peers were less likely to have recently used substances and were more likely to plan to attend post-secondary.<sup>12</sup>

### PEERS

“ You need services to keep going. They can't just stop and expect you to be OK. What if you are not ready? What if you have unresolved issues? ”

A SURREY COMMUNITY DIALOGUE ABOUT SUPPORTING YOUTH TRANSITIONS OUT OF CARE IDENTIFIED THE NEED FOR:

- Culturally appropriate services and support for diverse youth.
- Coordination between services.
- Services that are considerate of the needs of youth in care.
- Addressing transportation challenges such as the cost and availability of public transport.
- Accessible information about Surrey's services.
- One-stop shops where youth can access different services under one roof.
- A personal advocate to help youth navigate various systems.
- More support for youth transitioning out of care to access education, employment, and housing opportunities.

YOUTH IN CARE IN SURREY ALSO RECOMMENDED:

- Extending services for young people in government care to age 25.
- Offering low-cost, youth-friendly housing locally.
- Offering financial support to help youth establish independence.
- Offering free recreational passes to allow youth to participate in extracurricular activities.
- Supporting youth to find employment, including driving them to interviews, coaching them in interview skills, and supporting them through the application process.
- Increasing access to counsellors and other ongoing social and emotional supports to help youth work through past traumas and current sources of stress.
- Increasing access to healthy, affordable food.
- Providing advocates to support youth's transition out of care as they begin to live independently.

CITATIONS

- <sup>1</sup>Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2016). [Youth in care in the Fraser South region]. Unpublished raw data.
- <sup>2</sup>Gaetz, S.A. (2014). *Coming of age: Reimagining the response to youth homelessness in Canada*. Toronto, ON: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. Retrieved from: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/comingofage>
- <sup>3</sup>Statistics Canada. (2013). *2011 Census data - Household living arrangements*. Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement>
- <sup>4</sup>Vancouver Foundation. (2014). *Fostering Change—Perceptions on the challenges facing British Columbia youth transitioning out of government care*. Vancouver, BC: Author.
- <sup>5</sup>Vancouver Foundation. (2015). *Fostering Change community conversation: Surrey, May 7<sup>th</sup> 2015*.
- <sup>6</sup>Morton, B.M. (2016). The power of community: How foster parents, teachers, and community members support academic achievement for foster youth. *J Res Child Educ*, 30(1):99-112. doi:10.1080/02568543.2015.1105334
- <sup>7</sup>Rutman, D., & Hubberstey, C. (2016). Is anybody there? Informal supports accessed and sought by youth from foster care. *Child Youth Serv Rev*;63:21-27.
- <sup>8</sup>McCreary Centre Society. 2014 Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Survey.
- <sup>9</sup>McCreary Centre Society. 2008 and 2013 BC Adolescent Health Surveys.
- <sup>10</sup>Stapleton, J., Tweddle, A., Procyk, S., Pooran, B., Doucet, R. (2012). *25 is the NEW 21: The costs and benefits of providing extended care & maintenance to Ontario youth in care until age 25*. Toronto, ON: Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Retrieved from <http://provincialadvocate.on.ca/documents/en/25istheNew21.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup>BC Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. (2014). *On their own: Examining the needs of BC youth as they leave government care*. Victoria, BC: Author.
- <sup>12</sup>Smith, A., Peled, M., Poon, C., Stewart, D., Saewyc, E., & McCreary Centre Society. (2015). *We all have a role: Building social capital among youth in care*. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.