

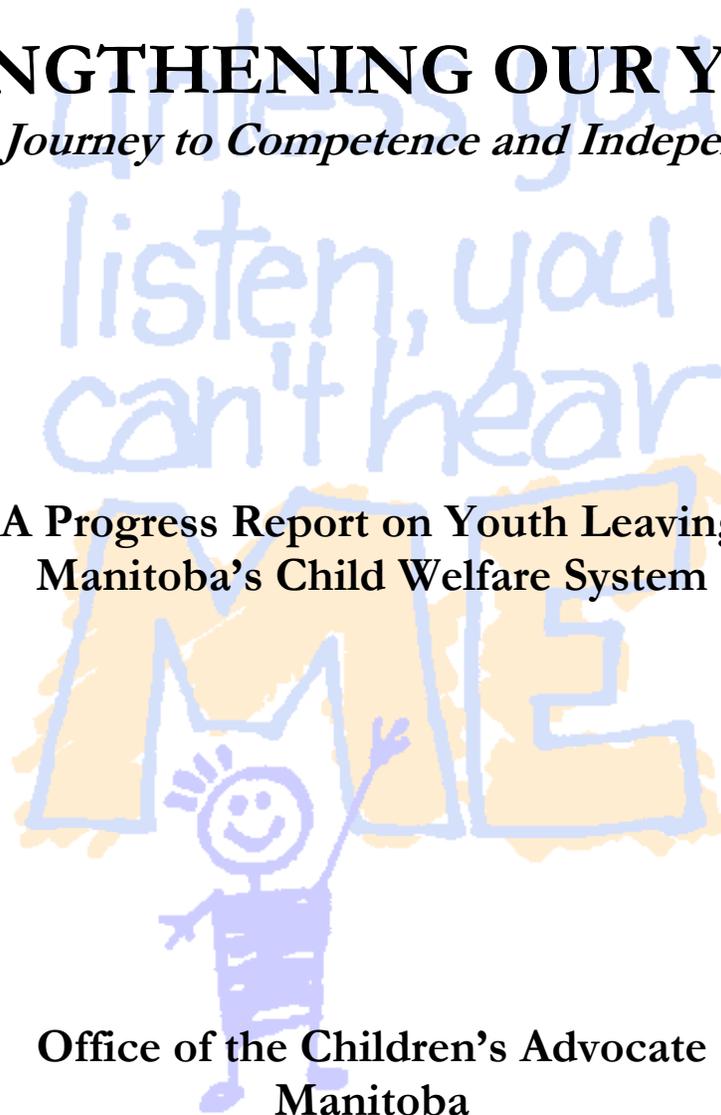
# **“STRENGTHENING OUR YOUTH”**

*Their Journey to Competence and Independence*

**A Progress Report on Youth Leaving  
Manitoba’s Child Welfare System**

**Office of the Children’s Advocate  
Manitoba**

**March 2012**



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**Information contained in this Report is based on data and facts obtained during the period from September 1, 2006 to March 31, 2011. Additional updates regarding the progress of the recommendations were added in December 2011.**

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## **Executive Summary**

In August 2010, the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) commenced a progress review of the recommendations made in an earlier report, "*Strengthening Our Youth: Their Journey to Competence and Independence*" (2006). In that report, the OCA examined the conditions facing youth in care as they transitioned out of the provincial child and family services system into adulthood. The findings in the report were not encouraging. The OCA found that many youth did not complete high school, became parents too soon, were often referred to income assistance programs and sometimes faced homelessness. These findings were consistent with the large body of similar findings both across the country and internationally. Some countries had already recognized the societal and economic impact when young people are not adequately prepared to live independently and legislated programs and services for youth beyond the age of majority to prepare and support them to become self sufficient. After a comprehensive review of local, national and international programs for youth transitioning from care, the OCA made 45 recommendations to the Department of Family Services and Labour and the Child and Family Service Authorities to improve services to youth leaving care in Manitoba.

The response from the Department of Family Services and Labour (DFSL), the arm of government responsible for services to children/youth in care was favourable. The recommendations were promptly included in the work of the Changes for Children Committee, an initiative established to address recommendations from five external reports on restructuring the child and family services system in the province. Shortly after the release of the report, funding in the amount of \$240,000 was announced. This funding was made available to the four Child and Family Service Authorities to establish "Vision Catchers", a fund for youth in care for education and career training, to develop youth engagement strategies and mentorship programs and to support increases in the number of extensions of care past the age of majority for permanent wards. Along with a continuation of funding to CFS Authorities for

mentorship programs, the DFSL announced \$2.4 million for a four year pilot project, the Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM, to provide housing, financial support and mentorship in education or employment and life skills to 25-30 youth leaving care in Winnipeg and Thompson. Along with increased staff positions, a foster home recruitment strategy, initiatives to improve educational achievement for youth in care and a province-wide suicide prevention program, the financial investment in youth over the last four years has been commendable. More recently, work groups have been established to review and revise policy and service standards and develop a training program for service providers and care givers. At the time of this review, work on the development of policy and standards for transitioning youth out of care is still in progress. Without consistent standards and program models, CFS Authorities and agencies are at different stages of program development. In this review, the OCA found different priorities and different visions for structure and configuration between the Authorities with regards to age of majority and transitioning services to youth. While this may not be alarming, the span of programs and services to youth leaving care varies significantly between Authorities/Agencies. While some youth have access to a range of services and are able to transition out of care feeling supported and prepared, other youth are still aging out of care without the support they need.

There has been a significant increase in the number of youth remaining in care past the age of majority through extensions of care and maintenance in all CFS Authorities over the last four years. While this appears to be a positive trend, reports from staff with CFS Authorities suggest that most extensions are due to additional time needed for youth to complete educational or training programs followed by a bridging between youth leaving the child welfare system and entering the supported adult services system. Extensions of care were reported less often when youth were simply not ready to live independently by the time they reached the age of majority. The provincial data collection and tracking system, which should track information on all children in care, is significantly challenged by inconsistencies in data input across the province. Without relevant data and decision making tools, assessment and case planning on behalf of

youth in care is subject to the discretion of the caseworker and supervisor. While all youth should participate in transition planning, at this time there is a significant amount of allowable discretion whether a youth qualifies for an extension of care and what the transition plan will look like. Youth that are aging out of care tend to fall into three groups; one group of youth are resilient and with support will continue their education or enter a training program and become self-sufficient adults, another group of youth have disabilities and exceptional needs and should be eligible for adult supported living programs, yet another group of youth are very likely to fall through the cracks. Youth in this group may have undiagnosed needs or have not received treatment for traumatic experiences in their lives, have experienced placement instability and don't have significant relationships in their lives. These youth may be resistant to intervention, uncooperative or simply not ready to participate in transition planning. Because of the discretionary nature of the system, these youth either age out or are discharged from the child and family services system unprepared for life as an adult. It is this group of youth that need the most intervention and support during and following their transition from care. They may not be ready to accept this while in care, and should have the right to request and receive the support they need after leaving care, and when they are struggling with the challenges of adult living. The OCA strongly supports the development of a system of post care resources in the community that offer youth who have aged out of care the opportunity to receive life skills education and access to supportive resources when they need it similar to other young adults in the community who can turn to their parents when they encounter challenges and need some help. RaY Inc. is an example of an independent community organization that provides a number of services, including food and clothing to young people without a home, between the ages of 16 and 25 years, including those who have aged out of the child and family services system.

In the course of reviewing the progress of the recommendations made in 2006, the OCA found that work on 26% of the recommendations has been completed. Progress is evident in 64% of the recommendations with more than one half showing a significant degree of progress. Four recommendations, or 10% of the total, were not

addressed as suggested by the OCA, however, an alternative action was taken or solution proposed. These recommendations related to legislative changes that would increase eligibility for extensions of care and maintenance to age 25 and include temporary wards of agencies in care until the age of majority. Alternatively, the DFSL developed a pilot project within its Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program to provide assistance, support and mentoring in education and work preparation for eligible temporary wards or youth in care under Voluntary Placement Agreements. Located in Winnipeg and Thompson, this project can accommodate up to 30 youth a year. While this pilot project has the capacity to be of assistance and support to youth transitioning from care, the absence of legislated responsibility leaves youth vulnerable to the same hardships reported by many other youth aging out of care. If their participation in the project is not successful, they are out and there is no safety net for them.

Standards outlining responsibilities for youth transitioning from care; including mandatory needs assessments and individualized transition planning, post care services, involvement of youth in transition planning, inclusion of significant adults and compliance and quality assurance still have to be completed. Training programs and a core set of life skill competencies for youth aged 15, 16, and 17 have not yet been developed. A directory of independent living programs and resources in the province is not available yet and no progress has been made in reviewing the independent living rates for youth in care and making adjustments to the living allowance offered by the Employment and Income Assistance program, with the exception of youth who are accepted into the MYTEAM project. Lastly, while additional funding has been provided to VOICES and, by application, to the four CFS Authorities, this is not considered to be adequate in meeting the recommendation that funds be available to community organizations to develop programs offering services to meet the varying needs of former youth in care. There is still much to be done, however the progress to date combined with a heightened awareness of responsibility provides reason to be optimistic that the future for youth leaving care will improve.

## **Introduction:**

This report provides an update and progress review on the recommendations in the *Strengthening Our Youth, Their Journey to Competence and Independence* report released by the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) in November 2006. The report contained 45 recommendations to the Department of Family Services and Labour (DFSL) and the four Child and Family Service Authorities; the Southern First Nations Network of Care, the Metis Child and Family Services Authority, the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Authority and the General Child and Family Services Authority calling for an improved system of legislating, developing and implementing appropriate programs and services to adequately prepare youth for transitioning out of care into adult living, including post care services until they are ready to live independently.

It has been more than five years since the initial recommendations were released. However, the OCA continues to receive complaints from community members, care providers and young people themselves about the challenges and hardships facing youth transitioning from care into adult living. Along with a review on the state of the recommendations, this report will examine the current state of services to youth aging out of care and the resources and supports available to them after they have left the child welfare system. Through a review of data and related program information, as well as consultations with representatives from the DFSL, the Child and Family Service Authorities, community organizations, youth in care or formerly in care, findings will be generated and, if necessary, additional recommendations will be made.

## **Purpose and Background:**

Every year hundreds of young people age out of the Child and Family Services (CFS) system in Manitoba because they reach the age of majority. At the age of 18 years, these youth make the transition from being in the care of a child welfare agency that has guardianship over them to living as an adult. Many questions have been raised

about the readiness and capabilities of youth in care to successfully make this transition at the arbitrary age of 18, particularly in view of the fact that this population of youth tend to be more vulnerable, disconnected from family and support systems, and facing many challenges and barriers that led to their involvement in the child welfare system in the first place.

The impetus for the initial review was the number of concerns from caregivers, service providers and youth themselves, about the poor outcomes youth faced after leaving the child and family services system at the age of majority. The review examined age of majority legislation, policies and programs in Manitoba and compared these to similar policies and statutes in three other Canadian provinces, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. It found that both the United States and the United Kingdom had responsibilities to ensure youth leave care in a planned way entrenched in legislation. In New Zealand and the Canadian provinces, youth were more likely to fall between the policy safety nets particularly in the areas of income support, housing and education. A literature review showed a consistent pattern of poor outcomes for youth leaving care including unemployment (Reilly, 2003), school drop out, homelessness, becoming a young parent and being on social assistance (Barth, 1990; Reilly, 2003; Twedde, 2005). In addition, Bodnarchuk, Patton, Reich (2006) found that over 40% of youth involved in criminal activities have been in the care of child and family services and 97% reported to using drugs several times a week. The most valuable information, however, came from the large number of service providers, managers, foster parents, residential care workers, community representatives on behalf of youth and youth preparing to age out of care and former youth in care. These interviews confirmed that youth leaving care in Manitoba faced many hardships. Most youth reported feeling unprepared for life as an adult after leaving the child and family services system. Many could not complete their education and ended up homeless or “couch surfing” at the homes of friends or family members.

## **Findings in the 2006 Review:**

In the 2006 review, several findings emerged. A common concern heard throughout the review process was that youth were not adequately prepared to manage the responsibilities of adulthood at the arbitrary age of 18, and as a result, were at risk for negative outcomes that could affect their present and future well-being. More specifically;

- Many youth in care already suffer physically and emotionally from the lack of a stable and supportive family,
- At the time they have to leave care, many youth are still trying to deal with the anger, sadness and despondence that lingers from their earlier life experiences,
- Due to the very reasons they are in care, emotional and social growth is slowed down hindering their ability to succeed in educational programs and life skills needed to secure and maintain employment, locate housing and participate in society,
- According to service providers, less than 10% of permanent wards complete high school,
- With approximately 50% of youth in care referred to the Employment and Income Assistance program, they face a future of poverty and despair,
- Youth in care do not have many of the opportunities available to youth in the general population, such as obtaining an education and having a safety net in the event things don't work out the first time.

In the last few years, additional research has contributed to a better understanding of the outcomes for youth in care after they transition to adulthood. A survey of 167 street youth in Winnipeg was conducted by the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba in the summer of 2005. Almost 45% of the youth reported that they had lived in either a group home or foster home at one point in their lives. The research found that most of the youth, 80% of the males and 71% of the females did not graduate from high school and almost all of them, approximately 97%, reported having problems at school. A high majority reported having symptoms associated with a mental health diagnosis with

major depression being the most common diagnosis with psychotic disorders followed by manic episodes and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Youth living on the streets rated their health as poor and a significant number reported being in pain to the extent that it interfered with their normal activities. An alarming 49% of the males and 65% of the females reported that they had attempted suicide (Bodnarchuk, J., Patton, D., and Riech, T. April 2006). In another study by the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba in the summer of 2007, the research team conducted interviews with 166 youth; with the average age for females 18 years and males 19 years. They found that 54% of youth interviewed reported living for some period of time in a foster home or group home. Findings in this report were consistent with those in 2005 (Patton, D., Lemaire, J., & Friesen, K. 2008).

In an earlier study on street youth in Winnipeg, Higgit, N. (2003) and her colleagues provided a forum for 12 street youth to tell their stories. Many of the youth reported that services were not accessible to them, that there were too many rules and expectations that they could not meet. Several stated that they felt they had no choice but to live on the streets because the social institutions, that were there to take care of them, rejected them. They lacked knowledge and information on what was available and how to access services. In another study, the National Secretariat on Homelessness sponsored a review of youth who had been in the care of child welfare agencies and youth homelessness in Canada. *The Pilot Study: The Child Welfare System and Homelessness among Canadian Youth*, Serge, L.; Eberle, M; Goldberg, M.; Sullivan, S. and Dudding, P. (2002) interviewed 40 young people, between the ages of 18 and 25 years, living in four major Canadian cities including Winnipeg. An apparent association was found between homelessness and youth formerly in the care of the child welfare system. The age at which a youth left care was directly linked to the likelihood of homelessness. The younger the youth, the more likely they were to experience homelessness. The study concluded that the obvious explanation was that youth were not adequately prepared for and supported in their move out of care. With child welfare responsibility ending at age of majority, the youth were unable to



“It sucked. I was left on the street with the clothes on my back”.

-former youth in care

successfully live independently in the absence of financial and emotional support from the child welfare system. If the first housing arrangement failed, there is no option to return should a youth start experiencing difficulties. The study also found that youth living on the streets had issues beyond the need for shelter. They had limited education and lacked employment skills; making it very difficult for them to find employment and even more difficult to maintain it. These youth faced many challenges in finding a sense of belonging and fitting into society.

Three other local reports provided further insight into very concerning outcomes for youth in care or leaving care:

- The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, in its report, *No Holiday from Poverty for Children in Care*, Winnipeg, Manitoba (2002) reported that youth in care, and living independently, and youth who have transitioned from the child and family services system in the province were the poorest of the poor in the province. The report found that over 50% of youth transitioning from care were referred to the Employment and Income Assistance program after they reached the age of majority.
- Skoog, Douglas and Perrault, Sharon (2001) prepared a report, *Child Protection and Criminal Involvement: an Empirical Study*, on the relationship between the experiences of male inmates in the correctional system in Manitoba and their involvement in the child welfare system. They found that 88% of the Aboriginal inmates and 63.3% of the non-Aboriginal inmates were living outside the parental home at some point between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Aboriginal inmates were not only more likely to be placed in foster care throughout their childhood years; they were also more likely to have been in a number of foster homes.
- The *Manitoba Child Death Review, Office of the Children's Advocate (September, 2006)* found that 24 children in the care of child and family services died of suicide in Manitoba between January 2003 and March 2006. Most of the

youth were between the ages of 16 and 17 years and were living in foster homes at the time.

The implications from the research findings are clear that strategies for preparing youth to leave care must focus on achieving positive outcomes for their future. While child and family services legislation provides the mandate for services to youth aging out of care, the legislation does not place specific duties upon Authorities and agencies to ensure that youth leave care in circumstances that will ensure positive outcomes for them. The DFSL and the CFS Authorities, in needing the care system to be effective, must have the vision to look ahead towards the child's future needs and the achievement of a positive exit strategy, ultimately, ensuring that young people leave care in better circumstances than they arrived.

The OCA recommendations were intended to assist by identifying factors contributing towards good practice and promoting action toward the development of quality services aimed at improving the life chances of youth leaving care in Manitoba.

### **Terms of Reference:**

This review will:

1. Assess the current state of the 45 recommendations made by the OCA in the report, "Strengthening Our Youth", *Their Journey to Competence and Independence*. The recommendations will be reviewed for progress and degree of implementation using the following criteria:
  - Completed – the recommendation or portion of the recommendation was completed in full and no further action is necessary.
  - In Progress – the recommendation is being addressed but has not been fully completed.
  - Significant Progress – the recommendation is being addressed with a significant amount of work already completed on it.
  - Ongoing - the recommendation is part of a larger context or a series of actions that are currently being addressed.
  - No Change – the recommendation has not been addressed and policy and

- practice continues as it did prior to the recommendation.
- Rejected – the recommendation was reviewed and a decision was made to reject the recommendation.
  - Other – Alternative Solutions
2. Identify progress, barriers or obstacles that may effectively impede successful implementation of some of the recommendations.
  3. Report on the current state of policy, services, programs and resources for youth aging out of the provincial child and family services system;
  4. Prepare conclusions based on the findings from the review, new or additional information obtained through the review process and the current state of services to youth aging out of the child and family services system.

### **Methodology:**

The review and analysis for this report included three phases:

#### **Information Gathering**

- i. A review of specific data on youth, between the ages of 15 to 21 years, in care of Child and Family Service Agencies in Manitoba as obtained from the Child Protection Branch from the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA).
- ii. A review of data on extensions of care obtained from the Child Protection Branch.
- iii. Collection and review of documentation related to youth transitioning from care including Annual Reports, Program Manuals, minutes of meetings, operational plans, Changes for Children reports and written information provided by the

Department of Family Services and Labour, the General Child and Family Services Authority, the Southern First Nations Network of Care, the Northern First Nations Child and Family Services Authority, the Metis Child and Family Services Authority and the Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency.

- iv. Collection and review of current literature and research studies.
  
- v. Interviews and consultations with key individuals and groups responsible for the development and administration of policies or services related to youth who will be transitioning from Agency care. Interviews were conducted with the following:
  - Representatives from the Child Protection Branch
  - Director and Coordinator of the Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project or MYTEAM.
  - Representatives from the Southern First Nations Network of Care, the Northern First Nations Authority, the General Child and Family Services Authority and the Metis Child and Family Services Authority.
  - Representatives from the Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency.
  - Coordinator of the Metis Spirit Program
  - Director of VOICES: the Youth in Care Network
  - Director and staff of RaY Inc. (Resources for Adolescent Youth)
  - Youth in care and formerly in the care of Child and Family Services.
  
- vi. A case review on the services that were provided and the outcomes for a sample of youth transitioning from care who reached the age of majority in 2009-2010.

### Information Analysis

- i. Document the results of the information gathered through document analysis and interviews.

- ii. Review findings in relation to changes in the effectiveness and quality of services delivered.
- iii. Assesses findings against relevant legislation, program standards and/or regulations.
- iv. Assess findings within the context of the recommendations in the initial report (2006).

### Results Analysis

- i. Assess the overall findings to determine changes between the initial review and the present circumstances.
- ii. Assess the overall findings to determine whether the status of the recommendations includes: completed, in progress, ongoing, no change, rejected or other.
- iii. Assess the present findings for information on obstacles or barriers to progress.
- iv. Review findings to determine how the status of the recommendation can be enhanced or improved.
- v. Formulate conclusions and prepare a report.

The status or degree of progress on meeting the recommendations will be analyzed using an adapted version of a framework developed by the Manitoba Ombudsman and used by the OCA in the update of the recommendations of the Hotel Review and Shelter Review in 2009. This framework assigns an action status to each recommendation determined by:

- whether the recommendation has been implemented in full with no further action necessary,
- whether there has been a level of progress but implementation has not been completed,

- whether the recommendation has been incorporated into work currently underway, or whether there has been no change to the recommendation or it has been rejected.
- whether an alternative action or solution followed.

**Goals:**

- 1 To review progress on the implementation of the 45 recommendations made by the OCA in the report, “Strengthening Our Youth”, *Their Journey to Competence and Independence*, dated November 2006.
2. To report on the progress and current status in the implementation of the recommendations.
3. To identify any barriers or obstacles that may impede the successful implementation of the recommendations.
4. To report on the current state of services available to youth that are aging out of the provincial child and family services system; ie. legislation, policies, standards and programs and services.
5. To prepare conclusions or suggestions as may be required following an evaluation of the previous recommendations and current state of programs and services to youth aging out of the child and family services system in Manitoba.
6. To provide a comprehensive written report on the state of progress in the implementation of the 45 recommendations.

**The Response to the Recommendations:**

The Department of Family Services and Labour (DFSL) responded promptly to the recommendations in the “*Strengthening Our Youth*”, *Their Journey to Competence and Independence*

*Independence*, report. Shortly after the release of the report in 2007, the recommendations were forwarded to the Changes for Children initiative. With an initial allocation of \$42 million in funding over a three year period, this initiative was announced in October 2006 by the Leadership Council, comprised of the Minister of Family Services and Labour and the First Nations and Metis political leadership, to begin the task of implementing 289 recommendations, including the 45 recommendations in the “*Strengthening Our Youth*”, *Their Journey to Competence and Independence*, report.

On January 10, 2007 the Minister responsible for Family Services and Corporate Affairs announced an addition of \$240,000 to support four initiatives for youth leaving care:

- a. The Vision Catchers Fund was established to encourage transitioning youth to complete high school and access post secondary education, training or other programs for skill and talent development,
- b. A Mentorship Program offered by young adults who have successfully aged out of the child welfare system to support and guide youth in making the transition,
- c. Additional funding to VOICES: Manitoba Youth in Care Network to foster youth involvement in advisory capacities, and
- d. Establishing more care extensions so youth who need to do so may remain in care until the age of 21.

### **Review and Update:**

In August 2010, the OCA commenced a progress review on the status of the recommendations using 2010/11 data available from the Child Protection Branch and the four CFS Authorities. The initial work on the progress report was completed in March 2011 and updated again in December 2011 with the most current information provided by the Child Protection Branch. The following section will explain the rationale

behind the OCA recommendations and report on the current status of progress or conclusion for each of them.

### Policy Implications

Several recommendations focused on strengthening legislation and developing policies for a consistent and accountable system of services to youth aging out of care and a continuing responsibility for them after care. These were organized under a section called policy implications. The OCA found that a majority of youth aged out of care upon reaching the age of majority in an unplanned way without adequate support to live as an adult. Once youth moved outside of the child welfare system, they were on their own. Adult service systems were rigid and bureaucratic and often regarded as unapproachable by youth who lacked the maturity and confidence to deal with these systems. Even if youth were assisted with obtaining an apartment and financial assistance before they aged out, no one was there to support them when problems arose. After losing their first apartment, many youth do not have the skill and knowledge to deal with these problems effectively. They end up losing their apartment and sometimes their financial support depending on friends and others for a place to stay and food to eat. Too often youth aging out of care become homeless. In addition, many youth age out of care without having dealt with the issues that resulted in them coming into care in the first place. These issues only advance with the stress of surviving on their own increasing the risk for substance abuse, gang involvement and suicide attempts. In the 2006 report, the OCA stated that “the lack of services for youth aging out of care is an example of a practice that creates both individual hardship and a host of ensuing problems that are preventable through the provision of adequate services”. Other jurisdictions, particularly in the United States of America and the United Kingdom have recognized this concern and developed legislation that mandates support and assistance to youth transitioning out of care well beyond the age of majority. The OCA recommended that the Department of Family Services and Labour develop and strengthen policy and legislative responsibility to ensure that youth leaving

the care of the child and family services system receive adequate preparation for adulthood and have a “safety net” through ongoing service and support after they leave care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy outlining responsibility for children in care who are reaching the age of majority and leaving care.*
  
- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy outlining responsibility for post age of majority support and assistance to youth formerly in care.*

Although provincial child and family legislation already contains a provision to extend care and maintenance to permanent wards of agencies, it was not often used. In 2006, only 71 extensions of care were approved. Following the OCA recommendations, CFS Authorities were given approval to support youth who are permanent wards of agencies to remain in care until the age of 21 through extensions of care and maintenance. By 2010, extensions of care and maintenance increased to 326.

Work on the above recommendations is currently in progress. According to information obtained from the Child Protection Branch, a work group comprised of representatives from the four CFS Authorities and the Child Protection Branch was established in 2009 to review and revise the existing Child and Family Service Standards. The Inter-Authority Standards Working Group (ASWG) is currently working on revising the section of the standards manual related to youth transitioning from care. A CFS Standards Coordinator was hired in May, 2011 to take the provincial lead on the development of CFS standards including reviewing and revising Section 1.1.3 which deals with Age of Majority and Transition Planning for youth aging out of care. In addition, the Alternative Care Sub Committee (ACS), a committee responsible to the CFS Standing Committee is tasked with the responsibility of developing a continuum of care for children and youth in the province. This includes transition planning,

independent living arrangements, after care and support to youth past the age of majority.

Other post care initiatives included new funding to Authorities to create an Educational Fund which would enable youth in care, between the ages of 16 and 21 years, to access money for education and career training, and upon application, CFS Authorities are able to develop mentorship programs where former youth in care will act as “mentors” to new youth in care transitioning into independent living.

An interdepartmental protocol agreement, overseen by the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) titled, “Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community” (2008) was developed to provide a guideline for transitioning youth in school to other resources in the community. A specific guide, “Transition Planning: CFS to Adult Services” was adapted from this protocol and is available on the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA) to child and family service workers describing the procedures for identifying and referring youth to programs such as the Supported Living program, the Vocational Rehabilitative program, the Provincial Special Needs program, Community Mental Health Services, the Home Care program and the Employment and Income Assistance program.

Consistent policies, standards of practice, intersystem coordination and accountability should be the goal of work groups responsible for developing policies and protocols for case planning and service delivery to youth aging out of care. All efforts should be made to avoid and prevent a patchwork of fragmented and uncoordinated services for youth aging out of care. Concerned that a consistent standard of service is available for all youth transitioning out of care in the province, the OCA recommended that leadership for policy development rests with the DFSL.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy on youth leaving care. It should outline the responsibilities of Agencies and Authorities for services to youth leaving care including independent living*

*preparation prior to leaving care and post care services up to the age of 21 years.*

Although the Inter-Authority Standards Work Group (IASWG) continues to work on reviewing and revising the existing age of majority and transition planning standards, services to youth aging out of care are still governed by former policy. Currently, section 50(2) of the *Child and Family Services Act* legislates age of majority and transition planning for youth aging out of care. This section states that “the director, or an agency with the approval of the director, may continue to provide care and maintenance for a former permanent ward for the purpose of assisting the ward to complete the transition to independence, but not beyond the date when the former permanent ward attains the age of 21 years”. This section of the Act allows CFS agencies to apply for an extension of care on behalf of permanent wards up to the age of 21 years. CFS data indicates a significant increase in the number of extensions of care for youth who are permanent wards of CFS agencies. This legislation, however, does not apply to youth who are in care of agencies as temporary wards or through Voluntary Placement Agreements. Additional existing policies and protocols apply to youth who are permanent wards of an agency or are parenting children or have exceptional needs and are eligible for adult support programs.

The following section of the Child and Family Services Standards Manual sets out the minimum requirements of Authorities and agencies in preparing youth for independent living:

1.1.3. (9) Age of Majority Planning – the case manager ensures that a plan for a child aged 16 and older includes preparations for becoming an adult such as:

- Referral to appropriate adult services in keeping with the Manitoba Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs Reaching Age Sixteen ,
- Extension of support services and development of other support systems (for example, extended family, others),

- Assessment and development of skills for independent living.

According to the Child Protection Branch, a new standard specifically designed to explain roles and responsibilities of the Authorities and agencies is currently being developed. A section of the standard (1.4.1) will discuss provincial policies and standards regarding the placement of children in out of home care under the *Child and Family Services Act*

Policies are necessary to regulate the operations of programs and services. While a comprehensive policy on age of majority planning, transitioning from care and post care services is essential, specific findings from several studies point to the fact that youth in care are over-represented in the overall statistics on poor educational attainment. As a result, the OCA recommended that a separate policy be established specifically to outline expectations for keeping youth in care in the education system and supporting education and training until the youth reaches the age of 25. This could be accomplished through extensions of care and maintenance to youth up to the age of 25, if the youth is enrolled in higher education or working on developing work skills. This would ensure youth obtain the support needed to complete education or training goals. Similar policies are in place in parts of the United Kingdom.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy on youth leaving care, enrolled in educational or training programs. It should outline the responsibilities of Agencies and Authorities for services until the age of 25 years.*
- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour extend the maximum age eligibility for Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) from 21 to 25 years to enable youth to achieve higher education and develop work skills.*

The current legislation, *The Child and Family Services Act*, 50(2) states that extensions of care and maintenance to permanent wards can be available only up to the

age of 21. To extend services until the age of 25 years would require legislative changes. At this time, the Department of Family Services and Labour is not proceeding with legislative changes. According to the Department of Family Services and Labour, support to youth aging out of care can be achieved without extending their time in care through coordinated initiatives with other systems such as Education and Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) programs. As an alternative, the Department of Family Services and Labour, through the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) Program has implemented a four year pilot project, the Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project or MYTEAM. This interdepartmental program provides extensive support to eligible youth who are not permanent wards, but are aging out of the child and family services system. Approximately 25 – 30 youth can benefit from this initiative yearly. While this project holds a lot of promise it is still in the early stages of implementation and can only accommodate a small percentage of the total number of youth aging out of care each year. Youth aging out of care and parenting may benefit from family support services as well. Alternatively, the Department has allocated new funding in the amount of \$240,000 a year since 2007/08 to all the Authorities for three strategies to support youth leaving care and pursuing education, training and skill or talent development:

- The Youth Engagement Strategy will engage youth in care or formerly in care in the development of policies and preparation strategies for youth leaving care;
- Mentorship Programs where former youth in care work as mentors to assist and support youth transitioning from care to adulthood; and
- The Vision Catchers Fund to assist youth in care with accessing post secondary education, training, and developing talents and skills in specific areas of interest.

The Vision Catchers Fund enables eligible youth in care to access funding for educational pursuits past the age of majority until the age of 21. However, applications for funding must meet specific criteria and are subject to discretion by caseworkers and fund managers. As a result, this is not sufficient to provide a “safety net” for youth should their efforts not work out the first time. The OCA is concerned that some youth in care are not ready to pursue education and career training until they have reached

greater maturity which may not occur until they are in their 20's. Youth in care should be able to count on continuous assistance and support until they complete their educational or training goals.

During interviews with former youth in care, many reported feeling unprepared to deal with adult living. How well these youth will do and how quickly they will be able to get their lives on track, is influenced by the quality of preparation and aftercare support they receive. As a result, the OCA recommended that a consistent standard of service be available to youth regardless of what agency or Authority is responsible for their care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour ensure that policies for youth leaving care and the Extended Care and Maintenance provision is consistently applied across all Child and Family Service Authorities in the province.*

The DFSL is currently working on this recommendation. Policies regulating programs and services to youth leaving care are monitored by the Child Protection Branch (CPB) of the Department of Family Services and Labour. The Child Protection Branch reports the completion of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Framework which outlines the Child and Family Services Division concept of CQI for the four Authorities and other providers funded by the CPB. This framework operationalizes the applicable legislation, regulations and standards and evaluates Authority processes for receiving, recruiting and tracking Agency requests for extensions, and reviewing permanency plans during each 12 month time period. The Continuous Quality Improvement Framework will be used to review Authority processes including compliance with the mandate and provincial standards. This should result in the ability to monitor for consistency of services across the child and family service system.

The OCA was concerned that the Extended Care and Maintenance policy was limited to permanent wards and recommended that children/youth in care until the age

of majority under a temporary order of guardianship are equally eligible for an extension of care. Youth in care under temporary orders and voluntary placement agreements represent a significant portion of the total youth in care in the age group from 15-17. These young people should also be able to complete their education and receive support until they are ready to transition from care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour broaden the Extended Care and Maintenance provisions to include temporary wards of the province that will be in care until the age of majority.*

There has been no action taken to change the Extended Care and Maintenance policy to include youth who are temporary wards of agencies. However, through existing legislation, an application for permanent guardianship can be made on behalf of temporary wards regardless of their age. This action may be necessary to seek an extension of care and maintenance if a youth is not ready to age out of care. Otherwise, temporary wards or youth under Voluntary Placement Agreements aging out of care are eligible for the following new services developed in the last four years to support and assist them in transitioning to adulthood:

- Funding through the Vision Catchers Fund to complete high school, access post-secondary education, obtain training for a career or developing special talents or skills in areas such as art, music, sports or religious activities,
- Referral to MYTEAM,
- Referral to adult support programs, and
- Supports can be provided to eligible youth after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday through agency family support grants.

Again, the OCA is concerned that alternative strategies for youth beyond the age of 18 years do not provide them with the “safety net” that would be in place through changes to policy and legislation. Strategies for preparing young people to leave care must focus on achieving positive outcomes for their future. Authorities and agencies, to be effective, must have the vision to look ahead towards the child’s future needs and

the achievement of a positive exit strategy, ultimately ensuring that young people leave care in better circumstances than they arrived. Currently, while child welfare legislation provides the mandate for services to young people aging out of care, the provision of services in this area varies widely between Authorities and agencies. Existing legislation does not place specific duties upon agencies and relevant provincial programs to ensure that young people leave care in circumstances that will promote positive outcomes for them. In the absence of consistent practice policies and

“More programs to teach skills like budgeting, cooking, and doing a resume.”

--Former Youth in Care

standards, case planning decisions are often left to the discretion of caseworkers and supervisors to determine the level of transition planning that will be offered to young people leaving care. As a result, the OCA recommended that the Department assume responsibility for developing standards with the Authorities and provide a regulatory

function to ensure consistency in the application of these standards between all Authorities and agencies.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour, along with the four Authorities develop standards to prepare youth for leaving care and incorporate these standards as a regulatory requirement.*

The development of standards for youth transitioning from care is in progress. According to information obtained for this review, the Inter-Authority Standards Working Group (ASWG) is in the process working on a standards section related to youth transitioning out of care, including changes to timelines, to ensure service providers, caregivers and youth have the tools needed for transitioning successfully. According to the Child Protection Branch, the new standards view the child’s care plan as a continuum of care throughout his or her involvement with the child welfare system and target factors such as cognitive abilities to ensure the child moves successfully from dependence to independence. The new standards include a Transition Plan for each child to be developed prior to their 15 birthday regardless of their legal status. This transition plan will include future learning opportunities and planning for employment

readiness. The new revised 1.1.3 section of the standards manual is expected to be completed by mid-2012.

Because the service needs of youth transitioning from care cross many government departments and community organizations, the OCA envisioned a collaborative strategy with input from service providers, youth in care, community stakeholders, representatives from CFS Authorities and other provincial departments providing services to youth.

- ✓ *That a Committee, with representatives from the Department of Family Services and Housing and the Authorities, along with service providers, youth in care, or formerly in care and stakeholders, be established to develop standards for youth leaving care, including post care services. The Committee should embark on a review of national and international policies, programs and services to learn from these experiences and incorporate strategies that have proven to be effective for sustained positive outcomes.*

According to the Child Protection Branch, work is underway to develop basic CFS standards on the details that are required for Age of Majority and Transitional preparation, including post transitional checks. The four Authorities have designated representatives that include an Age of Majority Specialist, a Child in Care Specialist, a Practice Leader, and a Quality Assurance Coordinator. In addition, a Youth Representative from VOICES is working with the CFS Standards Coordinator to draft CFS standards on transition planning. In 2007, funding was made available to CFS Authorities under the Youth Engagement Strategy to improve communication with youth in care, obtain feedback on their needs and involve current and former youth in care in program and policy development. Representatives from two CFS Authorities have reported that designated staff are in the process of conducting literature reviews on effective strategies to support youth aging out of care.

Data used in the initial “Strengthening our Youth” (2006) report showed that almost 28% of youth in care, aged 15 years and over, were reported to have a disability. This information compared favourably with the study by Fuchs, Burnside, Marchenski, and Mudry (2005), which found that 33% of children in care in Manitoba on September 1, 2004 had a disability and First Nations children comprised 68.7% of children in care with disabilities. In the same study, the authors found that 17% of children in care in the province had an FASD diagnosis. CFSA data on Sept 1, 2010 indicated that 23% of youth in the age group 15-20 were reported to have a disability. However, because no data on disabilities was reported for 59% of the youth in this age group, youth with disabilities may, in fact, represent a higher percentage than stated. These youth face not only the challenge of self-sufficiency, but also how to manage their disability and navigate the obstacles and limitations posed by it. As reported by Fuchs, Burnside, Reinink & Marchenski (2010), some youth in care may have brain damage associated with FASD. This hurdle combined with frequent placement moves, difficulties in school, unrealistic expectations by others and difficulties in developing lasting relationships presents an even larger challenge requiring a greater length of time for youth with FASD to prepare for transitioning out of care. It is especially important for youth with disabilities to transition from care with the skills to manage and cope with their disability. For aboriginal youth aging out of care, a connection to their culture and history should be an essential part of transition planning. Like youth with disabilities, this group of youth has specific needs and the OCA recommended that standards for services acknowledge and reflect these differing needs.

- ✓ *That standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care provide for the diverse needs of Aboriginal youth in care, and youth with disabilities who are not eligible for adult supported living programs*

There has been a great deal of progress in new and expanded programs and services available for early diagnosis and support to children with FASD. Under the scope of the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) a provincial FASD strategy was broadened to include funding for FASD Specialist positions for all Authorities. In

September 2009, a work group was established including the Specialists to work on developing best practice and standards for services specific to children affected by FASD in the child and family services system and youth with FASD transitioning out of care. These Standards for Children with Fetal FASD were completed and became effective as of Sept 1, 2011. Through *Changes for Children* and the Manitoba Government, funding was provided to FASD Life's Journey Inc. for Spectrum Connections, a new program to provide a variety of FASD related services for youth transitioning out of CFS care and adults who are ineligible to receive funding under existing support programs.

Three other protocols have been developed and are available to agencies to assist them in planning for youth in care, including youth with disabilities who do not qualify for adult supported living programs. These include:

- Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community,
- Transition Planning: CFS to Adult Supports, and
- The Interdepartmental Protocol Agreement for Children/Youth with Severe to Profound Emotional/Behavioural Disorders.

However, consideration must be given to the fact that youth aging out of care have many different disabilities and special needs and standards should reflect on the special case planning that may be required to support these needs. According to the Child Protection Branch, the Alternative Care Sub-Committee, a committee of the Office of the Standing Committee is currently working with the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) to develop an interdepartmental protocol to assist agencies in planning and /or developing placements for children with multiple, complex needs and who may not have a permanent place to live.

Youth in care do not have the same opportunities to learn about household management and other vital adult life skills as youth who grow up living with their families. Life skills training is particularly critical for youth who have been placed in

group homes or emergency shelters. Services to assist youth in transitioning from care must be flexible to meet the varying and unique individual needs of youth. Because each youth may be in a different stage of readiness, life skills training must be flexible, repetitive and easy to follow. Most life skills training programs include instruction and opportunities to experience setting up a household, managing a household, managing money, developing assets, getting a driver's license, instruction in reproductive health and parenting as well as opportunities to learn self-confidence, personal responsibility, problem-solving, goal setting, communication and relationship development. The OCA recommended that standards support individual transition plans for each youth using a needs assessment and planning well into adult living.

- ✓ *That standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care outline a flexible and functional process for graduating from dependence to interdependence and include mandatory needs assessments; individualized transition plans and post care services.*

Currently there is a general standard indicating the requirements that transition planning occur for children expected to age out of care. The Inter-Authority Standards Work Group (IASWG) continues to work on revisions to standards for youth transitioning from care. At the same time, CFS Authorities and agencies are attempting to increase support and services to youth aging out of care. However, while there is an awareness that transition planning is a requirement, Authorities and agencies are at different stages of addressing this. Some have developed programs; others are in the planning stages and yet others are only reaching that stage. At this time, not all youth aging out of care have an opportunity to receive the preparation and support they need to be successful adults.

Through collaborative work between the Departments of Family Service and Consumer Affairs and Education, guidelines to support transitions to adult services have been simplified and included in a document for child and family service workers called, *Transition Planning: Child and Family Services to Adult Supports*. This document

provides detailed eligibility criteria and referral process as well as a review of adult support programs and services available to youth who require additional support after the age of majority. Programs and services identified in this document include the Supported Adult Living Program, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Community Mental Health Services, the Provincial Special Needs Program, the Employment and Income Assistance Program and the Home Care Program.

In addition, the four year pilot project, *the Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship, or MYTEAM*, developed by the Department of Family Services and Labour, Employment and Income Assistance Program, provides support to youth aged 16 – 21 years who are not permanent wards of the child and family services system but are transitioning from care or have already transitioned from care.

Child and family services must be diligent to ensure youth do not leave the system without at least one lifelong connection to a caring adult. Strategies that help youth review their social connections to identify caring adults who are willing and able to make a lifelong commitment as well as services to help strengthen and sustain that relationship are mandated in some states in the USA. The involvement of youth in care is essential to successful transition planning. The OCA recommended that standards should include provisions for the involvement of youth and significant people in their lives in transition planning.

✓ *That standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care have provisions for the active involvement of the youth leaving care and for the inclusion of a team of individuals significant to the youth and willing to be a part of independent living planning with the youth.*

“Many of the young people who grow up in the child-welfare system need a boost to take the next step to independence.”

Minister Gord Mackintosh  
--Family Services and Consumer Affairs.

There has been progress on this recommendation. Obtaining input from youth in care and former youth in care was a goal of the Standing Committee. In 2007, funding was made available to CFS Authorities under the Youth Engagement

Strategy to improve communication with youth in care, obtain feedback on their needs and involve current and former youth in care in program and policy development. Some Authorities currently have active youth engagement activities that are on going. Others are still developing strategies to engage youth in care. However, most Authorities have increased or improved on the services/programs that are available to youth transitioning from care.

Many youth in care or advocates of youth in care may not be aware that youth have a right to choose their Authority of service when an independent living process is in place. This regulation is found in Section 5 (1) in the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act* regulations.

5. (1) Regardless of age or legal status, a child is entitled to choose his or her own authority of service when “an independent living arrangement is being made for the child under *The Child and Family Services Act*, or the child is a parent or expectant parent to whom services are to be provided under Section 9 of *The Child and Family Services Act*.”

#### An Accountability Framework:

Most decisions involving youth in care are made by a caseworker and supervisor. In the initial review of youth aging out of care, the OCA found no measurements within the child and family services system to assess a youth’s readiness for independence, no expectations for specific documentation on how youth are being prepared for independence, and no outcome measures to evaluate how the youth is doing in independent living, or most importantly, after aging out of care. The OCA reported that “operational procedures and quality assurance standards and outcome measures are needed” and that “accountability and compliance standards should allow little room for discretion in ensuring all youth in care are adequately prepared and supported through the transition process”. A recommendation was made to develop compliance and quality assurance standards to ensure that all youth receive services for transitioning

out of care including post care support.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop compliance and quality assurance standards for services to youth leaving care, including post care services.*

The work on this recommendation is in progress. According to information provided by the Child Protection Branch, the role of the Authority Relations/Quality Assurance (ARQA) program is to plan, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the functioning of the Child and Family Services Authorities, community-based agencies and Residential Child Care Facilities. The Authority Relations/Quality Assurance Team is conducting ongoing reviews of CFS Authorities regarding compliance with the legislated mandate and provincial standards. In turn, the CFS Authorities are responsible for agencies compliance with standards and review the operations of their respective agencies as required in their legislated mandate to oversee agency functioning. Once standards and policies are developed for youth aging out of care, Authorities will have standardized criteria from which to measure service performance. The CPB reports that many of the agencies have included services to youth leaving care in their six year business plans and are developing objectives and performance indicators by which they will be able to measure program development.

Accountability for the performance of independent living programs and the outcomes and competencies achieved by youth aging out of care must be an integral part of standards for service delivery. With rising numbers of children coming into care every year, there will continue to be increasing numbers of youth also aging out of care. Better case identification and performance measures would identify specific needs, gaps in service, and increase the ability to provide services that are effective. In addition, data collection tools and measurements are useful in guiding decision making, measuring the degree to which outcomes show improvements and develop the system capacity. As a result, the OCA recommended a comprehensive tracking system for

measuring outcomes in several areas of child development for all children in care and the capacity to track youth leaving care.

- ✓ *That a comprehensive and consistent tracking system be implemented for all children in care measuring their progress in key areas of development while in care. The Canadian Looking After Children (CanLac) is an example of a nationally endorsed measurement of progress in seven key areas of development – education, health, identity, family, social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development and self-care skills.*
  
- ✓ *That a comprehensive and consistent tracking system be implemented for youth leaving care measuring their progress in preparing for independence while in care and after leaving care. The tracking system should be based on the determinants of health.*

According to the Child Protection Branch, the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA) has the capacity to track the needs of youth aging out of care. The CPB reports that Child Well-Being Windows were added to the provincial information tracking system in 2004 using the *Looking After Children* (LAC) variables as a reference. A high risk medical window was added later with the capacity to track children in care for frequency of moves, maltreatment and suicidal ideation among others. The well-being windows are to be completed for all children in care as well as for all children that were receiving services from child and family service agencies. The information collected on the well-being windows can track and measure school performance, social skills, disabilities and/or mental health conditions and health history through annual updates. The Children Protection Branch reports that the Child Well-Being Windows and the 2 \*National Outcome Measures (NOM) improvements to identify high risk indicators for children in care can be used to track readiness for leaving care and improve the

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1 National Child Welfare Outcome Indicator Matrix. McGill University Centre of Research, June 2009

transition readiness of youth and adults leaving care.. The biggest concern with this program is that it requires regular and consistent input of information in order to be useful. There have been long standing concerns about the lack of data input into the information system. For example, a request for information on youth aged 15 – 21 with disabilities for this report showed that no information was reported in this area for 59% of the youth. According to the CPB, work continues with the four Authorities to support their agencies in the use of the Child and Family Service Application as a case management tool.

The Manitoba government committed to improving the child and family services information management system in 2008. Consultations were held with child and family service workers and managers. Changes to the information system, now known as the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA) include:

“Take the time to find out what the kid really needs not just the money”

--Former Youth in Care

- the capacity to record high risk medical information for children in care, and
- the added capability to upload photos of children in care and send them through a secure channel to police when a child is missing.

There is no unified or collaborative service model involving income assistance, adult training, health, mental health and justice, among others, for youth and adults who have left care. The DFSL along with other departments provide administrative data to the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy Evaluation to conduct population level research.

CFS Authorities are developing internal youth tracking systems linked to the Child in Care Annual Reviews. The Northern First Nations Child and Family Services Authority is in the process of developing Authority specific outcomes in accordance with the “National Outcome Measures (NOM)” project developed by Nico Trocme (2009). A goal of an operational database for tracking youth transitioning from care is set for 2011. The Metis Child and Family Services Authority has developed a new Child in Care (CIC)

annual review form that reduces the amount of work to complete it. If information is already available on the CFSA child well-being screen it is auto-populated so that caseworkers will not be asked to provide the information a second time. The system also allows for an email to be sent to every worker when their CIC annual reviews are due and administrative staff follow-up with workers to ensure the forms are completed. The General Child and Family Services Authority has revised its Directors Annual Review (DAR) to expand on information collected. There is a greater focus on outcomes in areas such as education, health, employment, etc. The revised DAR is expected to be implemented in 2011.

### Cooperation and Coordination between Departments

Because youth in care issues cross several jurisdictions, six recommendations by the OCA specifically addressed the cooperation and coordination needs across government departments having responsibility for these jurisdictions. Finding affordable and accessible housing in a safe location is one of the biggest concerns that youth face. Several Winnipeg-based research studies on homelessness found an association between youth leaving care and homelessness, (Serge et al, 2002) (Higgit, N., 2003) (Bodnarchuk, J. et al, 2006). Most recently, the Winnipeg Street Health Report 2011, released by the Main Street Project, reported that 43% of the 300 participants in the study reported that they had been in the care of child and family services as a child or youth (Gessler, S., Maes, C., Skeleton, I.,2011). The first recommendation called for a joint initiative to develop housing units for youth leaving care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour, along with the Manitoba Housing Authority, develop a number of housing units in the province solely for youth leaving care.*
  - a) *Housing units should include short-term transition and emergency housing options and long-term apartments, and*
  - b) *Housing units must be affordable and located in areas that are safe*

*and in close proximity to transportation services.*

There has been some progress on this recommendation. According to information obtained from the Child Protection Branch, in September 2007 the Government of Manitoba Cross Department Coordination Initiatives (CDCI) formed a working group to examine the problem of youth homelessness, particularly as it affected youth aging out of the child and family services system. The working group included divisions and branches of the Department of Family Services and Labour including Housing Strategic Initiatives, the Manitoba Housing Authority, and the Child Protection and Community Service Delivery Branches. The CDCI completed an action plan for appropriate housing supports for youth transitioning from care in three areas of need:

- Youth participating in high school and other education programs,
- Youth requiring on going supports such as life skills training, and,
- Youth requiring intensive supports.

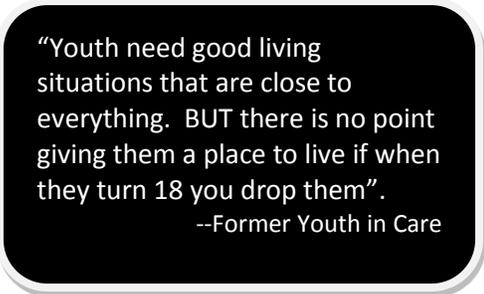
In June 2009, the *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM*, was launched. This four-year pilot project will provide housing, financial assistance, education or employment preparation and support in life skills to 25 to 30 youth yearly. A component of the MYTEAM pilot project is safe and affordable housing for participants in Winnipeg and Thompson, provided through Manitoba Housing Authority buildings or private accommodations. A participant allowance will allow flexibility for participants to sustain alternate housing in the private market after their involvement with MYTEAM ends.

The Metis Child, Family and Community Services has leased a number of apartments in different locations in the City of Winnipeg to offer independent living accommodations to youth who require additional support to make the transition to independence.

Staff with the General Child and Family Services Authority (GA), the Winnipeg Child and Family Services Branch (WCFS) and Metis Child, Family and Community Services

(MCFCS) met to discuss the housing needs for youth transitioning from care. A Creative Housing Solutions Committee made up of staff from WCFS and GA are currently working with the Manitoba Housing Authority, as well as private sector landlords, to develop a housing strategy for youth aging out of care. A recommendation, jointly supported by the General and Metis Authorities, has been submitted to the Standing Committee calling for the development of a Cross Authority Committee to work on a plan to address the specific housing needs of youth leaving care.

In the initial review of youth aging out of the CFS system, the OCA found that almost one-half of youth in care were referred to the Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program for on-going financial support after the age of majority. While youth with disabilities readily meet the eligibility criteria, this is not the case for all youth in care. If a youth does not have a diagnosed disability, he or she is subjected to rigid orientation procedures, participation requirements and job search expectations. Many youth aging out of care are unable to follow these rigid expectations due to trauma, mental health issues or personal limitations. They are at risk of losing financial benefits and becoming homeless. The OCA concluded that the rigid criteria for entry to the EIA system was incompatible with the capacity of many youth leaving care and recommended a flexible program with supportive and helpful practices to engage the youth and assist them in becoming productive adults.



“Youth need good living situations that are close to everything. BUT there is no point giving them a place to live if when they turn 18 you drop them”.  
--Former Youth in Care

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour, create a program within its Employment and Income Assistance Program, with flexible and supportive admission rules and expectations, providing counseling, guidance and emotional support to former youth in care, to engage them in planning for a career. It is essential that the program is responsive to*

*issues of youth development, youth engagement and the varying needs of this special population group.*

There has been progress on this recommendation. As previously mentioned, in June 2009, an investment of \$2.4 million was announced for a pilot project to help youth transition from care to independent living. The *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project*, or MYTEAM, was developed under the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) Program to support youth who are leaving care or recently left care and are enrolled in EIA. Youth between the ages of 16 and 21 years, who meet the eligibility criteria for EIA and are willing to participate in education, and/or an employment training program, participate in work experience programs, work with a mentor, and make a minimum of a one year commitment to remain in the program are eligible. Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. has been selected to deliver the program in Winnipeg and will provide services to 20-22 participants per year, and Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Center has been selected to deliver the project in Thompson, and will provide services to 5-8 participants per year. MYTEAM is a four year pilot project. While it is a step in the right direction, the program has eligibility criteria and can only accommodate 30 youth a year.

The high rate of mobility between foster care, group homes and emergency placements has been documented in the OCA report *Emergency Placements for Children in Manitoba's Child Welfare System* (March 2009). For children in care, a change of placement is often combined with a change in schools. The OCA called for further research into this and a report on reducing school moves for children because of placement changes. Poor educational outcomes for youth transitioning from care are well documented in research (Rutman, 2005; Reily, 2003). According to the *Manitoba Child Health Atlas (2004)* over 70% of Manitoba youth graduate from high school. Data on youth in care indicates that less than 45% complete high school (Bodnarchuk, J., Patton, D., & Rieck, T. 2006). Geenen and Powers (2006) suggest that although school success is an important factor for all children to achieve positive adult outcomes, it may be even more important for adolescents in care, who often have little else to draw on

when transitioning into adulthood. There is still limited information on educational achievement specifically for youth who are in care in Manitoba. A recent report by Brownell, M., Roos, N., MacWilliam, L., Leclair, L., Ekuma, O., and Fransoo, R. (2010), looked at the outcome of failing to complete high school for a group of youth considered to be in the high-risk category. Risk factors were identified as i) family was receiving income assistance, ii) youth born to teen mothers, and iii) youth whose family had been involved with the child welfare system. Of youth with one risk factor, 41 to 57 per cent failed to complete high school, youth with two of the risk factors failed to complete high school ranging from 61.5 to 71.7 per cent of the time and youth with all three risk factors had the poorest outcomes; 84 per cent did not complete high school, compared with only 18 per cent of youths with none of the risk factors. Although this study did not particularly identify youth living in care, it is well known and understood that the majority of youth in care fall into at least one of the same risk factors. Additionally, aboriginal youth in Manitoba have lower educational achievement than non-aboriginal Manitobans (Mendelson, 2006a; 2006b). Forty-three percent of aboriginal people aged 20 -24 reported having less than high school education compared to 16 percent for Canada as a whole. The gap is huge with aboriginal children comprising over 80% of the child in care population in Manitoba, immediate action to improve this statistic is critical.

In the initial report on youth aging out of the child and family services system, the OCA reported that “most youth in care age out at 18 which is the age that other youth in the general population are completing high school and making plans for post-secondary education”. The arbitrary age of 18 makes no sense if the goal is for the youth to complete high school. As a result, the OCA recommended policies regarding school moves due to placement changes and policies for supporting youth to complete high school.

- ✓ *That the Departments of Family Services and Labour and Dept. of Education, Citizenship and Youth develop a policy paper on reducing school moves due to placement changes, supporting youth in care to*

*complete high school and improving academic outcomes for children in care.*

- ✓ *That the Departments of Family Services and Housing and Dept. of Education, Citizenship and Youth launch a review of the poor education outcomes for children in care and make recommendations on improving these outcomes.*

There has been progress in this area. The Child Protection Branch reports that a new initiative request (Improving Education Success and Graduation Rates for Children in Care) was submitted for consideration by the Department of Family Services and Labour in November 2009 for 2010/11 and again for 2011/12. Areas for action included a literature review, comprehensive assessment, training for caregivers, protocols between child and family services and education (school divisions), priority access to quality early learning programs, development of pre-transition and post-transition programs, ensuring stability in placements for children in care, and hiring educational specialists within Authorities.

In 2010, each Authority received funding to contract Educational Specialist positions with the goal to help enable better educational outcomes for children in care. In March 2011, the Metis and General Authorities had hired staff to fill these positions. The Educational Specialists provide consultation and support to CFS agencies in the areas of schooling for children involved in the child welfare system and act as a liaison between CFS and the educational system to develop better ways for supporting children in care. Specific activities include:

- Working with the school system to develop better protocols for supporting children in care who change schools,
- Working with the school system to develop better protocols for specialized programs such as early start programs, reading programs and transition programs,
- Exploring local and national models of schooling or school programming that

would improve school attendance,

- Exploring local and national models for providing special education that would improve outcomes for children in care with special needs,
- Developing outcomes measures related to school attendance and school performance for children in care,
- Working with schools to develop materials and/or training programs that increase communication between schools and the child welfare system, and
- Consulting and liaising with local child welfare agencies regarding children in care with unique concerns within the school system.

In 2008, the *Bridging to Adulthood: a Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community*, document was completed replacing the former protocol, *Manitoba Transition Planning Process Support Guidelines for Students with Special Needs Reaching Age 16 (1999)*. The new document strengthens protocols related to a coordinated service approach by identifying the role of education and child and family services and recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach covering “vocational skills, social skills, independent living, health, daily living skills and academic knowledge”. It encourages a “person-centered” plan involving key people to develop a transition plan that meets specific student needs.

In May 2008 Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth introduced the *Bright Futures Fund*. Through this program, funding is available to community-based groups to work in partnership with schools to provide students with a variety of supports including tutoring, increased family involvement in schools, mentoring, goal-setting, career exploration and bursaries to assist them with high school completion. In Winnipeg, Bright Futures is a community-based mentorship and outreach program that supports low-income students living in the Elwick – Watson community in the Seven Oaks School Division. According to the Bright Futures Annual Report for 2009-2010, 92 students in grades 9 and 10 participated in the program with 70% of the students on target for graduating high school. In 2010-11, the Manitoba government will be investing \$3 million in *the Bright Futures Fund* to support programs aimed at improving

high school graduation rates and increasing access to post secondary education for disadvantaged and low income students. There are no reports available to discern how many youth in care are benefiting from involvement in this program.

In the first review of youth aging out of care, the OCA found that youth were involved concurrently with several different systems, such as health, justice, mental health, education, etc., but that communication between the systems on behalf of youth was absent. The OCA stressed that “cooperation and coordination must occur across jurisdictions for successful outcomes” and recommended that relevant departments of government work jointly to research health and mental health needs of homeless youth, as several studies on homelessness strongly suggest that almost one-half of homeless youth had been in the care of the child and family service system at one time.



- ✓ *That the Departments of Family Services and Labour, Dept. of Education, Citizenship and Youth, Health and Healthy Living launch an exploratory research initiative on the health and mental health needs of street-involved youth.*

There has been progress on this recommendation. The Child Welfare Inter-Sectoral Committee (CWIC) was established by Standing Committee in 2008 to promote better collaboration and integration of services between systems. Membership in the committee includes senior representatives from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Healthy Child Manitoba, the Department of Family Services and Labour, the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Healthy Living. In 2009 the CWIC developed work plans for coordination and integration of services in four areas: healthy child development, services to youth with complex medical needs, addictions and children’s mental health

and suicide prevention. The work plans have been approved and implementation started in 2010.

Concerned about the large numbers of youth with high needs aging out of the CFS system, the OCA recommended that Manitoba Healthy Living develop programs that would address the mental health and well-being needs of these youth.

- ✓ *That Manitoba Healthy Living extends its Healthy Adolescent Development Strategy to address the needs of youth in care and former youth in care.*

Progress on this recommendation has been made. To address youth mental health issues, a provincial committee was established to develop a framework for suicide prevention. The Committee reviewed data on suicide and self inflicted injuries, best practice literature, inquest recommendations and other suicide prevention strategies. In 2006, the report, *A Framework for Suicide Prevention Planning in Manitoba*, was completed establishing a model for a province wide Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (YSPS). *Reclaiming Hope* was announced in 2009 with a commitment of \$8 million over 4 years to help prevent youth suicide, improve access to mental health care and provide hope and opportunity to young people. This collaborative strategy includes funding from Changes for Children and Healthy Child Manitoba. The goal of the strategy is to prevent youth suicide and suicide-related thoughts and behaviours through teaching healthy individual coping strategies and providing enhanced family, social and community supports through prevention training, leadership development and identification of suicide-related issues as well as additional funding for crisis stabilization services. According to information provided by the DFSL, on October 21, 2010, the following initiatives were underway under the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (YSPS):

- Youth Subcommittees of Regional Suicide Prevention Committees. These committees are led by Regional Health Authorities (RHA) across the province.

The committees have prepared work plans for suicide prevention related activities for their geographic areas.

- Communities that Care (CTC). This is an evidence-based program that guides communities to use advances from prevention science to plan their own prevention efforts.
- Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre (WASAC) North. This program implements youth sport and recreation leadership programs and cultural events to a select group of Aboriginal communities.
- Life Skills Training (LST). This is an evidence-based drug abuse prevention program offered in schools to children in grades 2-4.
- Roots/Seeds of Empathy. Currently implemented in over 200 schools in the province, this program teaches non-violent peer group interactions to pre-school and school aged children to Grade 8.
- Signs of Suicide (SOS). A partnership between the DFSL and WRA's, this program focuses on decreasing youth suicide and self-injury by increasing knowledge of depression and teaching intervention strategies.
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). This program helps early identification of the signs and symptoms of mental health problems and encourages helping strategies.
- Teen Talk North. Through this initiative, Teen Talk, a program offered by Klinik Community Health Centre has provided a series of workshops on suicide prevention in schools in northern Manitoba.

- Discharge Protocols and Resources. Research on discharge protocols and standards related to at-risk youth seen in emergency departments.
- Crisis and Treatment Services for Youth in the North. Funding for a youth crisis stabilization unit in Thompson with on-site treatment, a mobile crisis component and Telehealth capacity.
- Enhanced Telehealth Capacity for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Consultation to the North. This initiative is a pilot project with four First Nations communities to receive regular child and adolescent mental health and psychiatric consultations via Telehealth, delivered by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) through the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC).
- Enhanced Training for Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinicians in the North. This is a training program for wellness workers, mental health workers and other service providers in Aboriginal communities.
- Trauma Training for Service Providers. Training modules delivered by Klinik Community Health Centre.
- Bereavement Support. Through a Service Purchase Agreement with SPEAK Inc. and Klinik to provide suicide bereavement support.
- Suicidality, Para-suicidality and Prevention in the Youth Justice Population. This is a WRHA data mining project using Department of Justice data to identify risk factors youth suicidality and para-suicidality among youth who are in the justice population.

### Preparing Service Providers and Caregivers

Five recommendations called for the DFSL to take a leadership role in the development of training programs for service providers and caregivers in preparing youth to transition from care. This includes developing life skills competencies for youth at different age points and ensuring that supportive connections with caring adults are in place for all youth transitioning from care. Social Workers, foster parents and youth care workers would benefit from learning strategies for instructing and guiding youth in skill development that prepares them for adult living, including optimizing decision-making, teaching problem-solving skills and maximizing opportunities for personal growth. The OCA recommended training programs for service and care providers.

"I was moving in with a Proctor who helped me with budgeting".

--Former Youth in Care

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop training programs for Social Workers, Support Workers and Youth Care Workers on preparing youth for transitioning from care.*

There has been some progress on this recommendation. All recommendations related to training programs for service providers and caregivers were referred to the Joint Training Team (JTT). This group is composed of training coordinators from all Authorities as well as the DFSL and reports to the Child and Family Services Standing Committee. The JTT is responsible for establishing and maintaining a training initiative to develop a qualified, culturally competent workforce for child and family services. Its function includes developing, coordinating, implementing and evaluating training activities for service providers and foster parents in the child and family services system. A work group, Preparing Youth in Care for Independent Living Training Program was established in 2011. Chaired by the Manager of Training, Child Protection Branch, along with representatives from the four Authorities, the Departments of Education, School Division Student Services Administration, the Manitoba Foster Family Network, Community Living disABILITY Services, Employment and Income assistance and VOICES: The Child in Care Network, this group is working on developing a training program that will include tools and resources, as well as standards and protocols on

transition planning. According to the Child Protection Branch, the target date for the training program to be completed is September 2013.

The OCA recommended that training on age of majority planning and transitioning out of care be housed within the Competency-Based Training Program as a separate module for service providers and care givers.

- ✓ *That the Competency-Based Training (CBT) program includes a module on preparing youth in care for independent living.*

As indicated above, there is progress on this recommendation. The Preparing Youth in Care for Independent Living Training Program Working Group is chaired by the Manager of Training, Child Protection Branch, who is also responsible for the CFS Competency-Based Training Program. The training program on age of majority and transitioning out of care is intended for the Competency-Based Training program.

Currently, a module in the Youth Care Worker Competency-Based Training Program, Core 803: Family Focused Practice provides some training on permanency planning including independent living. This is by no means comprehensive at this time. The content information in this module reads as follows:

“Working with families, not only with youth, is a value which is woven throughout the competency-based training modules. The concepts of family preservation, family-centred practice, and empowerment of families are addressed in this module. The impact of separation, attachment, and placement is explored. The development of care, treatment and permanency plans through all the potential stages of intervention will be addressed.”

The initial review contained a comparative analysis of services and programs for youth leaving care in several international jurisdictions. There is considerable

information on transition program models with advances, based on best practice principles and using life skill competencies for youth beginning at the age of 15. The OCA recommended leadership in developing a set of life skill competencies for youth from 15 years until they reach the age of majority and funding to the Manitoba Foster Family Network (MFFN) for training foster parents in preparing youth for independent living.

- ✓ *That the Child Protection and Support Branch, or designate, develop a core set of life skill competencies for youth aged 15 years, 16 years, 17 years and the age of majority. These competencies should provide guidance to caregivers in developing appropriate life skill activities with youth at each age level.*

Although work has started on the development of standards and training on age of majority and transition planning for youth aging out of care, it is in the early stages and too soon to determine whether there will be a set of life skill competencies for youth. As indicated previously two initiatives are currently in progress which may lead to the development of a core set of life skill competencies for all youth in care. Work is currently underway on developing new standards for age of majority and transitioning from care that view the care needs of children on a continuum throughout their involvement in the child welfare system and a work group has been established to develop a training program for service providers and care givers on preparing youth in care for independent living.

- ✓ *That the Manitoba Foster Family Network (MFFN) receive funding to develop training programs for foster parents to assist youth in care with achieving life skill competencies and preparing for independent living.*

According to information obtained from the Child Protection Branch, in February 2010, the Department of Family Services and Labour approved \$75,000 in funding to the Manitoba Foster Family Network (MFFN) for training. One of the goals of the MFFN is to assist in the development and delivery of a province-wide comprehensive

competency-based training program for foster parents. The MFFN is represented in the work group that is working on the Preparing Youth in Care for Independent Living Training Program.

The initial review of youth aging out of care found that most youth leaving care were not aware of VOICES; the Manitoba Youth in Care Network. VOICES is a youth-driven organization with a membership of youth in care or formerly in care, that provides public awareness, support, encouragement and advocacy for youth as they transition from care to independence and adulthood. The OCA recommended that CFS Authorities and agencies review their current practice of informing youth in care about VOICES and ensure that information material is available at all placement resources and agency offices.

- ✓ *That Authorities and Agencies ensure that all youth in care are aware of VOICES, Manitoba Youth in Care Network by providing information material to all new admissions and having information brochures available at all agency offices and placement resources.*

The Child Protection Branch assisted with re-printings of the VOICES handbook for youth in care, which is provided to agencies for distribution. In addition, the Child Protection Branch reports that excerpts in Part III under Requirements and Standards, in the *Child Care Facilities Standards Manual* are currently under revision to include “child care facilities should ensure youth in care (ages 14-18) are provided with information about VOICES”.

VOICES is represented in the Youth Engagement Strategy. This initiative by the DFSL provided funding to all CFS Authorities to engage youth preparing to leave care and those who recently left care in consultations with the goal to gain further understanding of the needs of youth transitioning from care.

## Independent Living Preparation for all Youth Leaving Care

Independent living preparation for children in care should begin from the time they enter care. It should not be regarded as a separate activity in the last few months a youth remains in care. To participate as an adult in society youth in care need to master skills for self-directed living. Teaching these skills should be incorporated into the day-to-day practice of social workers, foster parents, youth workers, teachers and others in regular contact with the youth. The gradual acquisition of these skills needs to be incorporated into the care plans for each child.

“My concern is now for those leaving care and being left with no money to secure what they need. I was left in such a bad state that it was very hard for me to be happy with the system. They took me out of a bad home, put me in another bad home and then pushed me out the door when I turned 18.”

--Former Youth in Care

The OCA made ten recommendations to the Child and Family Service Authorities and agencies, as well as the Department of Family Services and Labour on the design and development of a broader system of knowledge and skills based on best practice principles and a systemic process of program development including changes to the existing system to better able to implement and manage the recommended changes. These recommendations called for a practice model that ensures a transition plan is developed with each youth transitioning from care, with the participation of the youth, by the time the youth reaches the age of 16. The transition plan should describe the services the youth is receiving toward becoming self-sufficient and productive including competencies and connections in such areas as education, career choices, physical and mental health, housing, key relationships, resources and expertise in basic life skills.

- ✓ *That Authorities and Agencies review their case management practices to ensure that all youth in care, at the age of 15, have a transition plan for leaving care. This plan should contain an assessment of the youth's needs, a plan for acquiring life skills, time frames and goals for independent living.*

- ✓ *That Authorities and Agencies develop a practice standard that involves youth, upon reaching the age of 15, to participate with the case worker in developing a transition plan for independence from care.*

At present, work is underway on revisions to the existing standards. According to the Child Protection Branch, the new revisions will include care plans for children based on a continuum of care throughout their involvement in the child welfare system. This will include transition plans for all children in care, regardless of their legal status, by the time they reach their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday and include provisions for future planning such as outlining learning opportunities, planning for employment readiness, etc. The new revised standards are expected to be completed by mid-2012. Until these are completed, casework practice is still guided by the former standards of service. However, there appears to be a significant change in the level of awareness of issues facing youth aging out of care and an effort to increase the level of preparation and support. This is evident by the rise in the number of extensions of care and maintenance by all CFS Authorities over the years. According to data available to the Child Protection Centre, there has been a 75% increase in the number of extensions of care in the four year period from 2007 – 2011.

Yet another area where progress is evident is the effort made to include youth in the planning and development of services and plans for youth transitioning from care. Through the Youth Engagement Strategy, the Department of Family Services and Labour committed funding of \$240,000 a year for three years to all CFS Authorities to develop strategies to organized opportunities for youth in care, or former youth in care, to provide information on their needs in preparing for transitions to adult life. As a result, Authorities and agencies are better informed about the needs of youth aging out of care. However, in the absence of a consistent practice policy, individual case planning decisions continue to be at the discretion of the caseworker and supervisor to determine whether a youth will be involved in developing a transition plan or eligible for an extension of care.

When a child is in care, his or her care plan should include educational stability and a plan for educational achievement. Children in care need guidance at an early age to plan and prepare for high school graduation and career options. The OCA recommended that educational achievement should be included in the services provided to children in care through practice standards for service providers and caregivers. Additionally, children in care should have assistance and support to participate at their fullest potential in the learning process.

- ✓ *That Authorities and Agencies develop a practice standard that promotes educational achievement as a priority for children in care, and support this by providing practical assistance such as educational assessments, tutoring, counseling, learning aids and tools and assistance with learning.*

Revisions to the former standards are currently in progress. Term funding has been made available to all Authorities to hire Education Specialists who will, among other tasks, review the educational needs of children in care and develop a better understanding of the issues behind poor educational achievement. All agencies have discretionary opportunities to assist youth in the learning process through tutoring, counseling and/or learning aids.

Without lifelong connections to caring adults in their lives, youth are often left vulnerable to a host of adverse situations. Drapeau, S., Saint-Jacques, M., Lépine, R., Begin, G., & Bernard, M. (2007) looked at factors that contributed to resilience among youth in care. Directly linked to resilience was a relationship with at least one caring adult in a child's life. Resilient youth had an increased sense of self worth and were able to distance themselves from risk. However, opportunities for assisting youth in establishing lifelong connections are often neglected in child welfare case planning (Collins et al, 2008) and outside the scope of the child and family services system after youth age out of care. A lifelong connection is about having an enduring relationship that is safe and meant to last a lifetime. This may include full family membership or not.

The OCA recommended that reconnections with family and/or significant adults in a youth's life became an integral part of casework practice.

- ✓ *That Authorities and Agencies develop a practice standard that promotes reconnections with biological and extended family, former foster parents or other significant persons in the life of the youth. Every effort should be made to ensure that youth leaving care have a support system.*

According to the Child Protection Branch, the current standards are being revised to

“Reconnect youth with their families when they are older”

---Youth in Care

include a Care Plan that clearly outlines the need for the child's family of origin and community that the child identifies with to be an important part of the child's care plan. The same standard (1.1.3) reinforces the need for a strong network of people during and after transition planning.

At least one Child and Family Service Agency has a program to help youth establish a lifelong connection as they transition from care. The Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency (MCFCSA) offers a program, “*Life Long Connections*” to assist permanent wards of the Agency to establish connections with “at least one caring, committed adult in their lives”.

Child and Family Services Standard 1.1.2(8) *Contact with Parents of Permanent Wards* states that “*at least once a year, the case manager attempts to contact the parents or former guardians of a permanent ward to assess the potential for reunification or re-involvement when this is in the best interests of the child and contact is possible.*” The challenge to this standard is that making these reconnections is still, for the most part, the responsibility of child and family service workers and subject to worker discretion, time-lines and opportunity to work toward making connections on behalf of youth. This could be improved though enhanced coordination of this standard across the child and family service system, training and manageable workloads.

Because providing quality services to youth transitioning from care requires time, the OCA questioned whether it was possible to expect this from already over worked

child and family service providers. As a result, it was recommended that the DFSL increase funding to reduce the workload of Social Workers to enable them to have time in direct service activities with youth in care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour increase funding to reduce the workload of Social Workers enabling them to increase time in direct service work with youth in care.*

According to the 2010 Progress Report of the Changes for Children initiative, a total of 231 front-line positions, or positions that provide supports to front-line workers, have been added to the child and family services system in Manitoba. In addition, the Harmonized Federal-Provincial Funding Model was announced in July 2010. This model is the result of a joint process between the Province and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to develop a harmonized funding formula for Child and Family Services in Manitoba. The funding model addresses workload concerns with funding providing one social worker for every 25 protection cases and child in care cases and one social worker for every 20 prevention cases. Funding is also provided for one Supervisor for each six front line social workers. This new funding model will provide funding for approximately 125 FTE front line workers. Subsequent years will provide additional resources as agency prevention services expand.

In the initial review of youth aging out of care, the OCA spoke with youth about their experiences aging out of the child and family services system and living independently as adults. Many young people reported feeling unprepared for independence and that the abrupt loss of supports at a critical transitional period in their lives had adverse effects on their ability to complete high school and get off financial assistance. They noted the need for services that gradually reduce structure and teach skills for independent living. The OCA recommended funding for the CFS Authorities to develop independent living programs for all youth leaving care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour provide funding to Authorities to develop independent living programs for youth leaving care.*

Since 2006, several initiatives have been funded by the DFSL to improve independent living preparation and transition services for youth in care:

- The Youth Engagement Strategy. In 2007, Changes for Children provided funding to all CFS Authorities for a youth engagement strategy aimed at creating opportunities for youth to share their experiences and insight that could influence planning and policy development as well as practice to improve services to youth transitioning from care.
- Vision Catchers Fund. This fund was established in 2007 to assist youth in care to pursue education and career opportunities.
- FASD Specialists. In 2008, as part of the Manitoba FASD Strategy, funding for FASD Specialists was provided to all CFS Authorities. The Specialists provide consultations, develop strategies and programs, and advocate for and evaluate services provided to children and youth with FASD, including youth aging out of care.
- Education Outcome Specialists. One year term funding has been made available to all Authorities to hire Educational Specialists to improve education outcomes for children and youth in care.
- Mentorship Project. Funding was made available to Authorities, based on submitted plans for age of majority initiatives in three areas: mentoring, development and engagement. Authorities are at different stages of implementation of these initiatives from some agencies providing this service and others not at all. Some authorities have not submitted plans for age of majority initiatives because of different priorities.

“Help kids find resources they can connect to when they leave care, help with job hunting and extend support for six more months”

--Former Youth in Care

- Age of Majority Specialists. Two Authorities have created new positions to focus directly on policy, services and programs for youth transitioning from care.
- Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy “Reclaiming Hope”. This province-wide program was established in 2009 to provide services that involve early identification of suicide-related thoughts and behaviours and availability of resources and support to prevent youth suicide. This program is available in several locations of the province.
- The Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship (MYTEAM) program. This 4-year pilot program will offer a range of services such as housing, educational support, financial assistance, employment placement and mentorship to 25 -30 youth a year, who are not permanent wards but are transitioning from care into independent living.

During the initial review, the OCA found that a large number of youth between the ages of 15 and 18 years experienced significant mobility in placements with many having multiple moves. An increase in the number of specialized foster home for youth over the age of 15 preparing for independent living was recommended.

- ✓ *That Authorities and Agencies increase the number of specialized foster homes for youth over the age of 15 preparing for independent living.*

There has been progress in addressing this recommendation. In November 2006 the DFSL and the CFS Authorities launched the *Circle of Care*, a province-wide foster home recruitment campaign. According to information provided by the Child Protection Branch, as of March 2010, this strategy has resulted in a net increase of 3251 new foster care bed spaces in the province with priority given to new bed spaces for high needs children, sibling groups and hard to place youth. The process of resource development is ongoing. However, according to CFSA data, 56% of youth in the 15-17

age group and 51% of youth in the 18-21 age were living in foster homes or places of safety with families on Sept 1, 2010.

With an increase in specialized foster homes for older youth, the OCA recommended that foster parents receive training on assisting youth in preparing for independent living and adequate compensation for this work.

- ✓ *That foster parents, caring for youth preparing for independent living, are provided with a clear description of responsibilities and attend training in strategies and methods for effective independent living preparation.*
  
- ✓ *That foster parents caring for youth preparing for independent living be paid an increased per diem rate, established through a review of responsibilities, training expectations and the needs of the youth preparing to leave care.*

Changes for Children established the *Foster Parent Training and Curricula Design Team (FPTCDT)* in 2008 to work on a training curriculum for foster parents. The Child Protection Branch reports that this team is currently working on developing a competency based training package for foster parents which will include training in transitioning youth out of care. The outcome will be a standardized provincial training program for all foster parents. According to information from interviews with Authority staff, the curriculum will include strategies for developing independent living skills at appropriate stages throughout the youth's journey through care. Once this is available a measure will be in place to match the actual needs of a youth with an appropriately skilled placement and lend to the standardization of special rates allowing the foster parent to be equitably and adequately compensated for their skills and experience.

The OCA advocated for the availability of a wide range of services and options for youth transitioning from care.

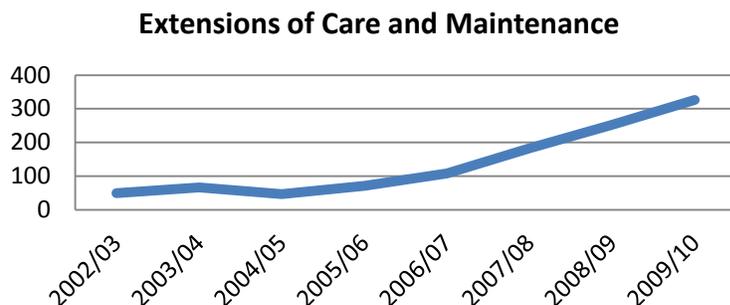
- ✓ *That Authorities review the transition plans for youth in care aged 15 and over and based on the identified needs, develop a range appropriate independent living services or programs to ensure successful transitions to adulthood.*

Through the Director’s Annual Reviews for Children in Care, data should be collected and reviewed annually. Most CFS Authorities have strengthened the data collection process to ensure these reviews are completed in a timely fashion. Progress has been made in increasing the number of independent living services and programs for youth transitioning from care but there is no consistency between CFS Authorities and agencies in the programs and services available to youth aging out of care. Youth transitioning from the care of some agencies experience significant improvements in the services and resources available to them, while youth aging out of care from other agencies may not see any changes. In addition to the programs and resources provided through Changes for Children, a range of services and programs, developed by CFS Authorities and agencies, to support youth aging out of care were in place at the time of this report. With regular new developments in 26 child and family service agencies in the province, this list is not at all comprehensive. Some of the changes include:

- Extensions of Care and Maintenance. There has been a significant increase in extensions of care and maintenance in the last several years by all four CFS Authorities suggesting a common trend in keeping youth in care past the age of majority. According to data obtained from the Child Protection Branch, the number of active extensions of care at fiscal year end (March 31<sup>st</sup>) have risen as follows over the last eight years:

2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
49	66	47	71	108	183	253	326

Figure 1: Extensions of Care and Maintenance 2003 - 2010



This number has further risen from 326 extensions on March 31, 2010 to 405 extensions on Sept. 1, 2010. The lengths of extensions vary depending on how much additional time a youth must remain in care. According to information obtained from interviews with Authority staff, most care and maintenance extensions are approved for youth in the process of completing an education program, referred to adult supported living but the application has not yet been processed, or the youth is not ready to live independently. The third category represents a significant recognition that not all youth are ready for independence at the age of majority.

- Volunteer Mentorships. The WCFS and MCFCS Agencies manage a program using trained volunteers to provide mentorship and resources to youth living independently. No information is available from other agencies.
- Age of Majority Specialists. The Northern First Nations Child and Family Services Authority filled this position in May 2010. The Age of Majority Specialist is in the process of developing Authority specific standards for agencies to follow in preparing youth for aging out of care and living independently. An Aging out of Care program is available in the community of Pukatawagan. The General Child and Family Services Authority hired an Age of Majority Specialist in the fall of 2010. The Age of Majority Specialist leads the youth engagement team and works with agencies to develop resources and training programs for youth transitioning from care.

- Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) Team. The General Child and Family Services Authority hired two former youth in care to lead youth engagement activities across the province. They remain an active part of the team working toward developing a sustainable mentorship program. With the recent addition of an Age of Majority Specialist, the YES team is involved in several activities to involve youth including establishing a youth advisory council, organizing youth forums, and planning a youth retreat.
- Skills for Life Programs. The Metis Child and Family Services Authority, through the MCFCS operates a Skills for Life program using staffed positions to structure learning opportunities and provide one to one support services to youth moving into independent living arrangements. The General Child and Family Services Authority with the WCFS implemented a pilot Skills for Life program. This program, developed by T. McNaughton-Wright and B. Wright, assists youth in preparing for independence through a readiness assessment, skill acquisition and practice time to master skills needed to transition to independence. After an initial pilot and based on feedback, the GA has commissioned a revised version of this program.
- RAILS Program. This is a supported independent living program with 24 hour access to staff, operated by the MCFCS. This program assists youth with housing, education or work experience and life skill training and overall support while they reside on their own.
- SASH Program- Youth Outreach Workers. Also offered by the MCFCS, this program provides outreach services to high risk youth who are engaged in “at risk” behaviours that may negatively impact their well-being.
- The Metis Spirit Program. This is a post age of majority program offered by the MCFCS with funding from the Manitoba Metis Federation. This program

provides 24 hour access and support to all youth who have aged out of care with the Agency.

- Independent Living Case Workers. At least three agencies responsible to the Southern First Nations Network of Care; the Southeast Child and Family Services, Sagkeeng Child and Family Services and Anishinaabe Child and Family Services, have caseworkers that carry a specialized caseload of youth that are transitioning from care or living independently.
- Brandon Transitioning Out Committee. Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba established this committee with representatives from nine organizations in the community. This committee screens referrals of youth involved with multi-agencies, assess the needs, determines relevant agency involvement and ensures an effective transition planning process.

In the initial review of youth aging out of care, the OCA found that a number of community organizations offered programs and services that would benefit youth aging out of care, including residential placement facilities, community groups and several child and family service agencies. However, information on this was not readily available so some of these programs could be accessed for youth. It was recommended that the DFSH take a leadership role in developing a directory of independent living programs and resources in the province.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a directory of independent living programs and resources in the province.*

The Child Protection Branch reports that a process has started to develop a directory of independent living programs and resources in the province. A request has been made to residential care facilities to provide the Branch with a list of Independent Living Services. This list will remain ongoing and be updated as information changes and should be available to agencies through the Child and Family Services Application

(CFSA). In addition, the Manitoba Services and Supports Directory is a searchable listing of services, programs and organizations throughout Manitoba related to health and education and other resources relevant to youth are transitioning to independence.

### Favouring Positive Outcomes

Young people who were in care of child and family service agencies are over represented nationally in statistics on homelessness, poor educational attainment, unemployment, dependency on social welfare, involvement in the criminal justice system and young parenthood. Many young people are discharged from care into poverty and hardship. Adequate preparation, a relationship with a caring adult, and the availability of resources that support youth after leaving care are associated with more positive outcomes. The OCA made eight recommendations to the Department of Family Services and Labour, the Child and Family Services Authorities and Child and Family Service Agencies for improving positive outcomes for youth transitioning from care in Manitoba. The first recommendation called for a review of the independent living rate provided to youth in care but living on their own.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour work with the Social Planning Council to establish a Committee to review the independent living rates for youth in care and, based on a review of actual living costs, adjust the living allowance in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee.*

There have been no changes in this area. The DFSL reported that the Alternative Care Sub Committee (ACS) is tasked with developing a continuum of care which will include transition planning, independent living arrangements, after care and supports beyond the age of majority. Meanwhile, although there may be some variations to the \*independent living rate, for the most part it is currently set as follows:

- Room and Board arrangement \$ 639.75 monthly<sup>3</sup>
- Single youth in an apartment \$ 725.61 “
- Youth with one child \$1 007.20 “
- Youth with two children \$1,216.00 “

In the initial review, the OCA spoke with youth who claimed that their living allowance was reduced after leaving care. With the reduced living allowance from the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program, youth reported that they could no longer afford the apartments found for them while they were in care. After losing their apartments, many youth could not find another place to live. The OCA recommended that financial assistance should be comparable between the child and family services and EIA and consistent until the youth reaches the age of 21 or becomes employed

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour, through the Employment and Income Assistance Program, provide the same adjusted living allowance to youth leaving care until the youth is able to earn a comparable or better living allowance through employment or the youth reaches the age of 21 years.*

The Department of Family Services and Labour, through the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program initiated a pilot project meant to harmonize services and supports to youth aging out of care and eligible for the EIA program. MYTEAM is still in the implementation stage, but when operational will provide a comprehensive range of supportive services. The limitation is that this is a four year pilot project that can only accommodate up to 22 youth in Winnipeg and 8 in Thompson. The youth in the program will receive an adjusted EIA rate in order to maintain their living accommodations after completing the program.

For the most part, independent living allowances for youth aging out of care continue to be higher than the amount of financial assistance available through the

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\*information obtained from the Metis Child, Family and Community Service Agency

Employment and Income Assistance Program for a single youth over the age of majority. Unless a young person qualifies for income assistance due to a disability, the monthly independent living allowance through child and family service agencies is \$84.75 more each month if a young person is living in a room and board arrangement and \$170.61 more if living in an apartment.

- **Single, childless, General Assistance (seeking work)**

Rent (private rental, including fuel and utilities) \$285

Basic necessities \$195

Job Seekers Allowance \$25

Manitoba Shelter Benefit \$50

Total **\$555**

- **Single, childless, Disability (not employed)**

Rent (private rental, including fuel and utilities) \$285

Basic necessities \$331.40

Income Assistance for Persons with Disabilities benefit \$105

Manitoba Shelter Benefit \$50

Total **\$771.40**

\*Information retrieved from [http://www.ombudsman.mb.ca/pdf/2010-05-26\\_EIA\\_Report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.mb.ca/pdf/2010-05-26_EIA_Report_2010.pdf)

Living on income assistance guarantees a bleak future for young people. The OCA recommended that the DFSL provide financial incentives, in addition to educational support, to encourage youth leaving care to pursue further education and/or vocational training.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour introduce financial incentives to enable youth in care to pursue higher education or training. This can include tuition waivers, education vouchers, bursaries, grants or loans.*

In 2007/08, funding was provided to each CFS Authority to establish the “Vision Catchers” Fund to provide financial assistance to youth in care to “develop their strengths, maximize their potential and pursue career inspirations”. This initiative provides funding to youth aged 16-21 who are in care and wish to continue their education, to participate in specialized study, purchase supplies needed to pursue a career, purchase job search assistance, attend technical training or an apprenticeship program. In the past year, the General Child and Family Services Authority provided funding to 21 youth and the Northern Child and Family Services Authority to 15 youth. Information was not available for the other two Authorities.

Several other scholarships and bursaries are available to youth in care.

- Keith Cooper Scholarships. Scholarships are available to young people who have been in care to pursue education. The scholarship committee awards one or more scholarships totaling \$7500 and recipients may reapply for additional scholarships to complete a university, technical or vocational program.
- The Ken Dryden Scholarship. Scholarships are available to youth in/from care across Canada. The Ken Dryden scholarship is 80% of the annual tuition and fees, up to a maximum of \$3,000. It is renewable for 4 years.
- The Marymound Bursary Program. This fund is open to young people who have received services from Marymound for at least six months.
- The VOICES Scholarship Program. This program offers two scholarships: the VOICES bursary, which is valued up to \$1,000.00, and is available to all youth in/from care across Manitoba; and the Peter D. Curry Memorial Scholarship, six \$2,000 scholarships available to youth in/from care who have lived in certain Winnipeg areas. In addition to the financial aspect of these awards, the

recipients are invited to monthly get-togethers for peer support and encouragement, and a dinner. New applicants must be under the age of 30.

- Scotia Stay in School Awards. This program was originally established in Ontario with the Children’s Aid Society and began to expand to other areas of Canada in 2007. It offers three types of awards:

a). Stay in school awards. This award encourages students to complete high school by offering a combination of \$50 cash and a \$200 Canada Savings Bond,

b). Graduation awards. This award is available to students in Grades 8 – 12 and consists of a \$50 cash award for graduation and a \$100 Canada Savings Bond for graduating from Grade 12, and

c). Leap to Learning Tutoring. This initiative was established to support educationally at risk children and youth in meeting their academic goals.

- Miracle Fund. The CBIC Children’s Miracle Fund was established in 1999 to provide opportunities and supports to children, youth and families serviced by child and family services. The purpose is to enhance opportunities through a grant of \$250 for basic necessities, cultural events, health and well being activities, music lessons, sports or recreational activities and travel costs to special events with extended family members.

Youth in care need to know in advance what educational options are available to them. They need to see that attending university can be a realistic choice for them. The OCA recommended that education funds should be started for all children in care. The Canada Learning Bond is designed to help with the cost of post secondary education. Children eligible for the National Child Benefit are eligible for this, including children in care.

- ✓ *Education funds should be started for all children in care with those born after 2003 eligible for the Canada Learning Bond.*

There has been some progress on this recommendation. All Child and Family Service regions and agencies responsible to the General Child and Family Services Authority have agreed to initiate the process of applying for Canada Learning Bonds for children born before 2003 who are permanent wards. A process has been developed for submitting applications and ensuring that these funds will be available to children who have been in care. No information is available on the status of this recommendation in other Authorities.

To ensure that all youth who require shelter and support are able to receive it when needed, the OCA recommended that the All Nations Coordinated Response (ANCR) Agency, the designated Intake agency for the City of Winnipeg, review its admission policies and allow all youth under the age of 18 to enter care if in need of shelter and support.

- ✓ *That the Authorities review the admission to care standards at ANCR, the designated Intake Agency in Winnipeg, to allow for the admission of youth under the age of 18, in need of shelter and support.*

Work on this recommendation has been completed. The Independent Youth Skills (IYS) Program is an initiative at ANCR, particularly developed to assist youth aged 16 - 17 who are in need of assistance and support. This time limited program (90 days) is part of the Family Enhancement Differential Response for CFS and provides referrals to the provincial Employment and Income Assistance program, life skills training and recreational support.

According to data obtained from the ANCR Annual Report for 2009-2010, a total of 124 youth received services through this program between April 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010. A total of 61 independent living files were open; 11 were transferred to other

agencies and 18 were closed throughout the year. The rest remain open. In addition, a total of 39 young people were referred to the IYS Life Skills Group where 28 completed the life skills training program and 53 youth were referred to the provincial Employment and Income Assistance Program.

To ensure that placement beds were available for older youth, the OCA recommended an increase to the number of transitional and emergency bed spaces in the province for older youth.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour provide funding to increase the number of transitional and emergency bed spaces in the province for youth under the age of majority.*

Work on this recommendation has been completed. Through the Changes for Children Hotel Reduction Strategy each Authority was provided funds for foster home recruitment positions. Priority was given to creating new bed spaces for high needs children, sibling groups, and hard to place youth. In addition to an increase in the amount of foster bed spaces, group homes were developed in Winnipeg, Thompson, Dauphin, and Swan River that can be used as emergency bed spaces. In addition, Jizhaabwiing is an emergency and short term assessment facility in Winnipeg developed to meet the transition care needs of youth. According to Child Protection Branch reports, as of March 2011, there are 11,938 bed spaces available for children in care.

Aging out of care should be a gradual and flexible process based on levels of maturity and skill development. However, for the most part, youth in care leave when they reach the age of majority unless they are eligible for an extension of care and maintenance. They are expected, without family assistance to live independently, attend school, move into further education, training or employment and, in some cases become a parent, all at the same time. For most young people becoming independent is a gradual process that takes two to three years and many young people who leave

home return at least once. Youth leaving care need the same level of emotional support when they encounter problems navigating the complicated systems of adult living. Emotional support can be as simple as providing encouragement, suggestions or support when it is needed. The OCA recommended that the DFSL provide funding for the development of after care programs for youth who have aged out of care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour establish a fund for aftercare services to former youth in care. This funding should be available to community organizations to develop programs offering services to meet the varying needs of former youth in care.*

As an alternative, the Department of Family Services and Labour provided annual funding of \$120,000 to CFS Authorities to develop initiatives to increase support to youth aging out of care in three areas: mentoring, development and engagement. Some Authorities are developing mentorship programs where former youth in care will provide support to other youth preparing for transitioning from care. The Mentorship Program has been slow to develop. Some planning is in progress but still in the early stages of development. The General Child and Family Services Authority has hired two youth engagement staff who are mentoring some youth in care and the MCFCS has both staff and volunteer mentors working with youth aging out of care. Unfortunately, this funding is only available to CFS Authorities and not to community organizations who can develop services and programs offering support to former youth in care.

VOICES: Manitoba Youth in Care Network is an organization with a membership made up of youth in care and former youth in care, that raises awareness about issues facing youth in care, teaches youth in care about their rights and links them to scholarship opportunities. Because this organization is already providing services to youth in care, the OCA recommended that VOICES receive funding to increase their work in developing peer support programs for youth leaving care.

- ✓ *That the Department of Family Services and Labour increase funding to VOICES-Manitoba Youth in Care Network to develop a peer support program, that is, matching former youth in care with those who are preparing to leave care for support, mentoring and role modeling.*

According to information provided by the DFSL, VOICES received additional funding in 2007/2008 (\$20k); which has since been incorporated in its annual grant. Through this increase in funding, VOICES has been able to increase its capacity to provide outreach services and raise awareness by public workshops and through hosting SYSTEM KIDS, a weekly radio show on CFUW that airs Thursdays at 5pm. In 2010, VOICES held a five day workshop called MASSIVE (Multimedia Advocacy, Sacred Stories, Innovative Voices Experience). The goal of MASSIVE is to provide a forum for youth to express themselves and develop a sense of community.

### **Synopsis:**

The 45 recommendations made by the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) in its report, *"Strengthening Our Youth: Their Journey to Competence and Independence"* (2006) were reviewed for progress and implementation. The findings from the review were very encouraging. The Department of Family Services and Labour, along with the four CFS Authorities, have taken measures to address every one of the recommendations. The results have already improved the capacity of the child welfare system in the province to enhance services and resources to youth aging out of the care. Work on 12 recommendations, or 26% of the total recommendations has been completed. Progress is evident on another 29 recommendations, or 64% of the total. In more than half of these recommendations, the degree of progress has been significant. Four recommendations, or 10% of the total, were not addressed as suggested by the OCA, however, an alternative action was taken or solution proposed. In summary, the response to the OCA recommendations has been commendable and has already resulted in remarkable improvements to the child and family service system that will

benefit all children in care, especially those who will be transitioning into adulthood while in care.

One of the most significant developments is the increased awareness of the hardships faced by youth in care when discharged without proper planning and preparation. The prompt response by the Department of Family Services and Labour, through additional funding allocations, has been instrumental in supporting and encouraging system-wide changes that promote positive outcomes for youth aging out of care. As a result, the child and family services system is in a better position to encourage success when a young person is ready to live independently. This is particularly evident in the increase of extensions of care and maintenance to allow youth to remain in care past the age of majority so they can complete their education and develop the skills needed to live independently. Recent data from the Child and Family Services Branch shows a 75% increase in the number of extensions of care in the last four years. Other developments include opportunities for youth in care and former youth in care to participate in planning and program development including mentorship opportunities. A significant number of new resources have been developed or expanded including programs for children and youth with FASD, a mental health/suicide prevention strategy and protocols to encourage educational achievement. New Specialist positions have been added to the system to promote development and improve outcomes for children in care. A foster care recruitment strategy ensures additional bed spaces for youth over the age of 15 and a fund has been established for youth in care to access money for education, career development and/or the pursuit of special interests and talents.

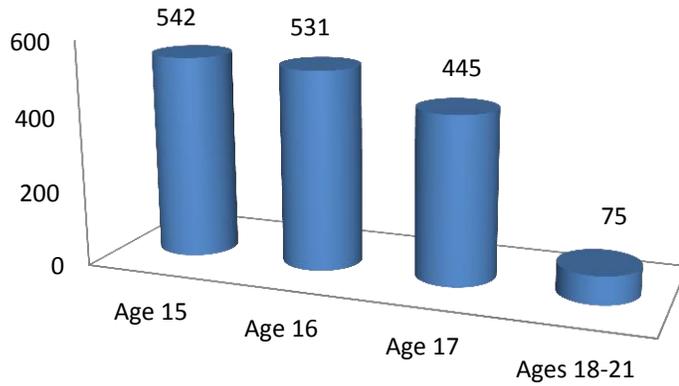
Work is currently in progress on revisions to standards including those affecting age of majority planning and transitioning out of care. Once the work is completed, policies aimed at ensuring compliance and consistency in service delivery between all Authorities can be implemented. Other work groups are in the process of developing training programs for service providers and care givers (foster parents) on preparing youth for independent living.

The response to some of the recommendations resulted in alternative actions or solutions. The OCA recommended legislative changes that would allow the extended care and maintenance provisions to apply to youth who are temporary wards of an agency, as well as permanent wards, until the age of 25 years. Rather than proceeding with legislative changes, the Child Protection Branch and the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program developed an initiative, the *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM*, that would enable eligible youth who are not permanent wards of an agency to benefit from financial assistance, education or training opportunities and other services to support independent living. This pilot project can accommodate a total of 30 youth in a year. While this initiative appears promising, it is a four year pilot project and can only accommodate a small percentage of the total number of youth who are not permanent wards that age out of care every year. This alternative is not a viable replacement for legislated programs and services that ensure youth are provided with assistance and support until they are ready to live independently.

### **Who are the Youth Aging Out of Care?:**

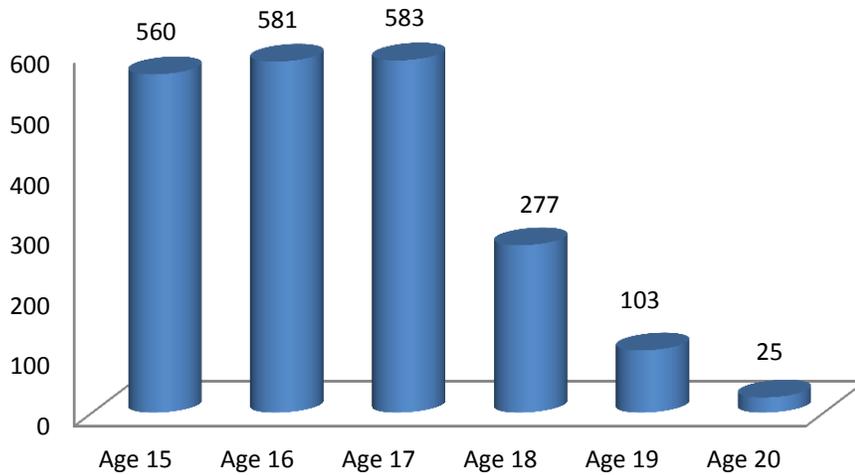
Data on children in care in Manitoba was obtained from the Manitoba Child and Family Services Application (CFSA). This data is current as of Sept 1, 2010. When the OCA carried out its first review of youth aging out of care, there were 1593 youth in care between the ages of 15 and 21 years on Sept 1, 2006.

**Figure 2: Youth Aging Out in 2006**



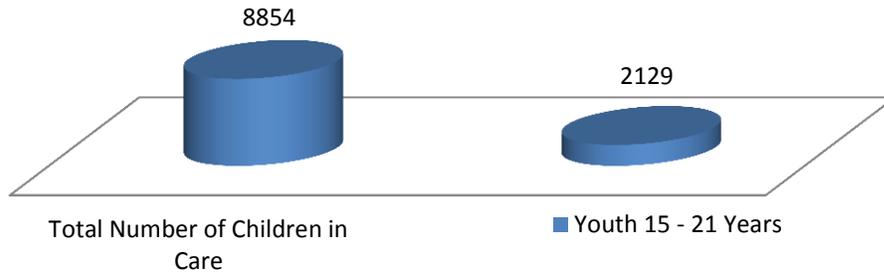
Data for Sept 1, 2010 indicates that the total number of youth in this age group is now 2129.

**Figure 3: Youth Aging Out in 2010**



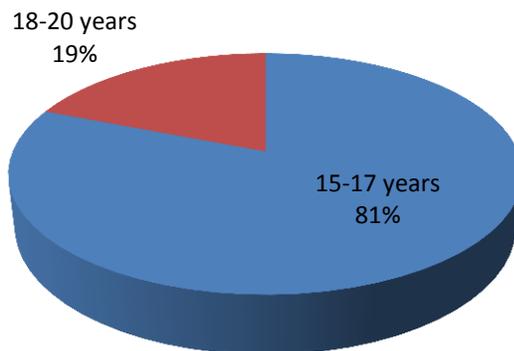
With a total of 8854 children/youth in care on Sept 1, 2010, youth in this age group represent 24% of the total population of children/youth in care.

Figure 4: Youth Aged 15 – 21 as Compared to the Total Number of Children in Care.



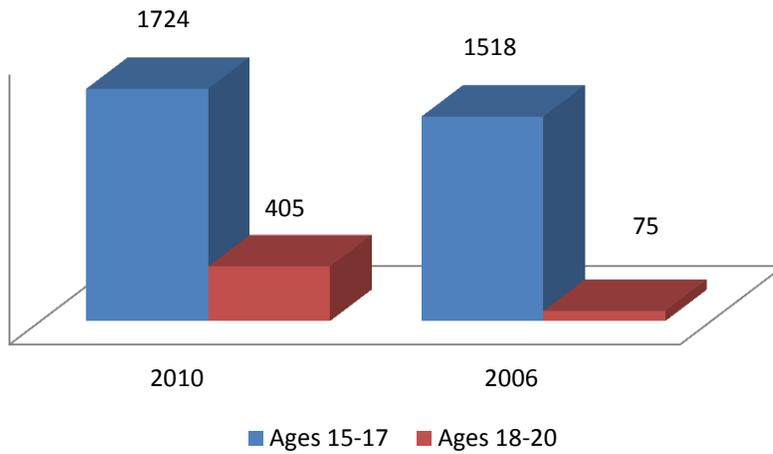
Two age groups define the population of youth in this part of the report; those who will be aging out of care (15-17) and those who remain in care past the age of majority under an extension of care and maintenance (18-21).

Figure 5: Youth Distinguished by Age Group



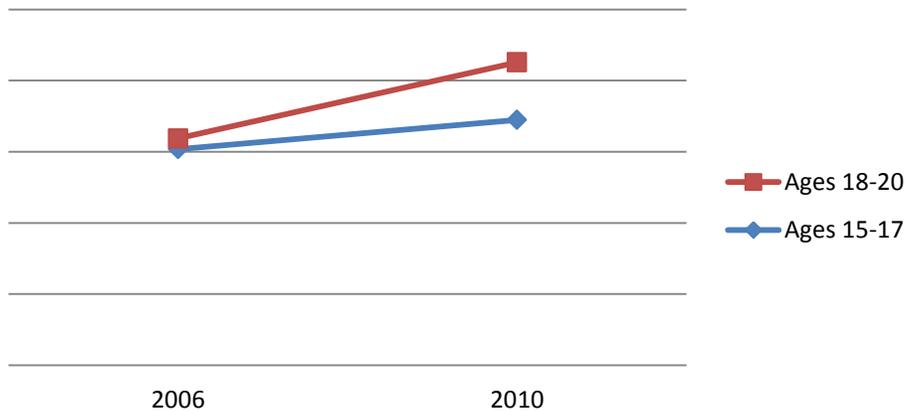
A comparison of data for the same age groups between Sept 1, 2006 and Sept 1, 2010 reflects an increase of 526 youth in the last four years. Comparison data used in the initial *“Strengthening Our Youth”: Their Journey to Competence and Independence* report was obtained from CFSA for Sept 1, 2006.

**Figure 6: Comparison of Youth in Care by Age Groups between Sept 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 and Sept 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006**



The increase during this four year time period appears to be more significant for youth in the age group from 18-20 years. A total of 330 more youth in this age group were in care on Sept 1, 2010. This compares to 206 more youth in care in the age group from 15 -17 years.

**Figure 7: Comparative Increase by Age Group**



These findings show that the number of youth in care past the age of majority is increasing at a much higher rate than in the younger age category suggesting that Child and Family Service Agencies are caring for youth past the age of majority through

extensions of care and maintenance. While youth in the age group 15 to 17 years increased by 206, the increase in the number of youth in the older age group was almost 5x higher than in 2006.

### Cultural Affiliation

Of the total number of youth in care between the ages of 15 and 21 years, the majority identified as Aboriginal (77%) with the largest number having treaty status. Approximately 20% of the youth identified as non-Aboriginal and cultural affiliation for 3% of the youth was not determined.

**Figure 8: Cultural Affiliation: Youth in Care Sept 1, 2010**

Age	Inuit	Metis	Non-Status	Non-Aboriginal	Not Determined	Status/Treaty	Total
15	3	51	22	109	15	360	560
16	2	65	21	112	17	364	581
17	3	76	20	137	17	330	583
18	1	30	11	44	6	185	277
19	2	10	2	16	3	70	103
20		1	1	5		18	25
	<b>11</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>1327</b>	<b>2129</b>

**Figure 9: Cultural Affiliation: Youth in Care Sept 1, 2006**

Age	Inuit	Metis	Non-Status	Non-Aboriginal	Not Determined	Status/Treaty	Total
15	0	66	17	132	32	295	542
16	1	65	16	142	29	278	531
17	2	50	19	125	14	235	445
18-20	1	9	3	11	2	49	75
	<b>4</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>1593</b>

A comparison of the data on cultural affiliation between 2006 and 2010, suggests an overall increase of 536 youth in the age group from 15 – 21 years. However, the most

significant increase is in the number of First Nations youth with treaty status. A total of 470 more youth with treaty status in this age group are now in care.

### Legal Status

In the age group from 15-17 years, the majority of youth (1009) are permanent wards of an Agency either through the court system or through a voluntary surrender of guardianship agreement with a parent. The legal status for another 30 youth is still before the court system. Another 109 youth are temporary wards. The legal status of 86 youth shows that they are still under apprehension and 317 youth are in care under a Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) which means that their guardians have legal responsibility for the youth although they are cared for by a child and family services agency. A total of 319 youth have reached the age of majority but are in Transitional Planning, that is, they are in care through an extension of care and maintenance. No legal status has been reported for a significant 259 youth because the information was not entered on CFSA.

**Figure 10: Legal Status Youth in Care Sept 1, 2010**

Age	Apprehension	PW: VSG	PW: Court	Petition for Further Order	TW	Transitional Planning	VPA	Not Entered	Total
15	31	38	277	12	41		97	65	560
16	23	37	302	12	34		107	66	581
17	26	38	307	6	33	1	105	57	583
18	6				1	215	7	48	277
19						80	1	22	103
20						23		2	25
	<b>86</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>2129</b>

According to the *Manitoba Child and Family Services Act (1985)*, extensions of care and maintenance are only available to permanent wards. As a result, only 57% of youth in this age group may be eligible for an extension of care. The remaining youth will age out of care without the option of an extension of care.

A total of 405 youth remain in care past the age of majority. The data indicates a status of Transitional Planning for 319 youth. Information for the remaining youth is not entered, therefore, it is uncertain whether they are in care or not. When a youth reaches the age of majority, meets the eligibility criteria, and is granted an extension, the legal status should be upgraded to Transitional Planning. As evident in the information on legal status, changes are not being entered on the database consistently and some youth still appear to be in care under temporary guardianship orders or voluntary placement agreements after the age of majority. This is more a reflection of the information system not being updated than actual facts.

#### Youth in Care by CFS Authority and Agency

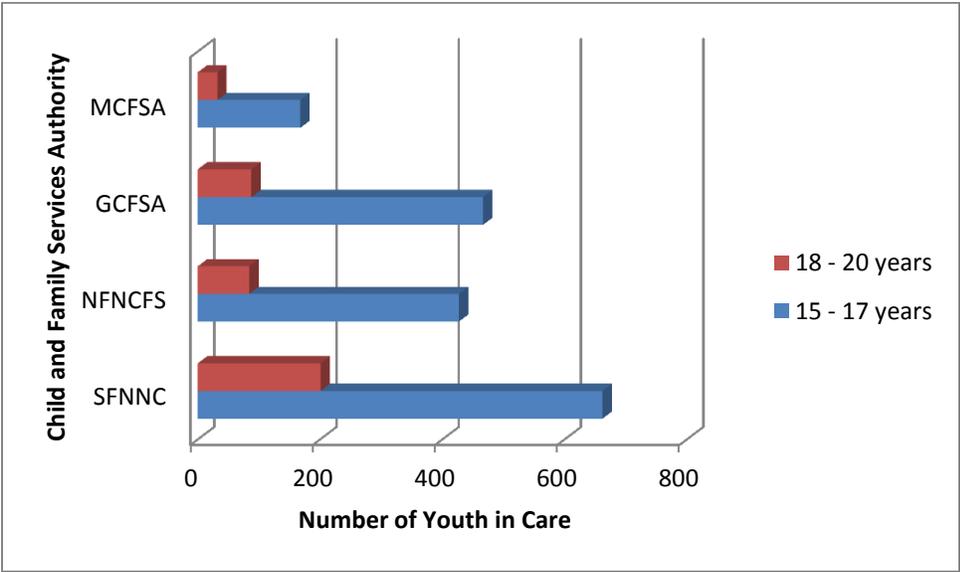
Of the 2129 youth, the majority are in the care of Agencies responsible to the Southern First Nations Network of Care. This Authority oversees services to 662 youth aged 15 -17 years and 201 youth aged 18 to 20 years. The General Child and Family Services Authority has the second largest group of youth in the care of Agencies and Departments that it oversees. There are 467 youth aged 15-17 and 88 youth aged 18 – 20. The First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority follows closely with 427 youth aged 15-17 and 84 youth aged 18-20 in care of Agencies responsible to that Authority. The Metis Child, Family and Community Agency, along with the Metis Child and Family Services Authority, has 168 youth aged 15-17 and 32 youth aged 18-20 in care. As Figure 7 indicates, extensions of care are evident at all CFS Agencies.

Figure 11: Distribution of Youth in Care by CFS Authority and Agency

								Total
Authority	Agency	15	16	17	18	19	20	
<b>First Nations North</b>	Awasis Agency of Northern MB.	36	45	38	9	4		132
	Cree Nation C & F Caring	37	41	27	16	7	1	129
	Island Lake First Nations FS	18	17	13	8	1		57
	Kinosao Sipi Minisowin	27	24	18	13	9	1	92
	Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation	22	28	23	11	4		88
	Opaskwayak Cree Nation	2	7	4				13
<b>First Nations North Total</b>		<b>142</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>511</b>
<b>First Nations South</b>	Animikii Ozoson	12	14	12	15	6		59
	Anishinaabe CFS	35	18	28	23	11	5	120
	Dakota Ojibway CFS	33	33	24	17	3	2	112
	Intertribal CFS	6	9	10	7	4	1	37
	Peguis CFS	11	11	12	12	7		53
	Sagkeeng CFS	17	18	17	8	4	1	65
	Southeast CFS	69	69	73	28	8	4	251
	West Region CFS	31	34	30	17	3	4	119
	Sandy Bay CFS	13	10	10	8	2	1	44
CF ANCR		1	2				3	
<b>First Nations South Total</b>		<b>227</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>863</b>
<b>General Authority</b>	CFS Central Manitoba	7	12	9	4			32
	CFS Western Manitoba	7	13	12	11	3	2	48
	Churchill CFS	1	1	4	2	1		9
	Eastman Region CFS	15	20	29	9	5		78
	Interlake Region CFS	13	6	3	1			23
	Jewish Child & Family Service	6	2	2	1			11
	Northern Region CFS	4	3	4	1	1		13
	Parkland Region CFS	1	1	1				3
	Winnipeg CFS Branch	91	85	115	33	11	3	338
<b>General Authority Total</b>		<b>145</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>555</b>
<b>Metis Authority</b>	Metis CFCS	46	59	63	23	9		200
<b>Metis Authority Total</b>		<b>46</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>200</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>560</b>	<b>581</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2129</b>

Compared to its total youth in care population (aged 15-21), each CFS Authority appears to have a fairly proportionate ratio of youth in the 18-20 age group suggesting that CFS Authorities are equally approving extensions of care to a similar percentage of youth reaching the age of majority. Approximately 16% of youth remain in care of Agencies responsible to the Metis Child and Family Services Authority, the General Child and Family Services Authority and the First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority after the age of majority. 23% of youth are in care of Agencies responsible to the Southern First Nations Network of Care after reaching the age of majority.

**Figure 12: Distribution by Age and Authority**

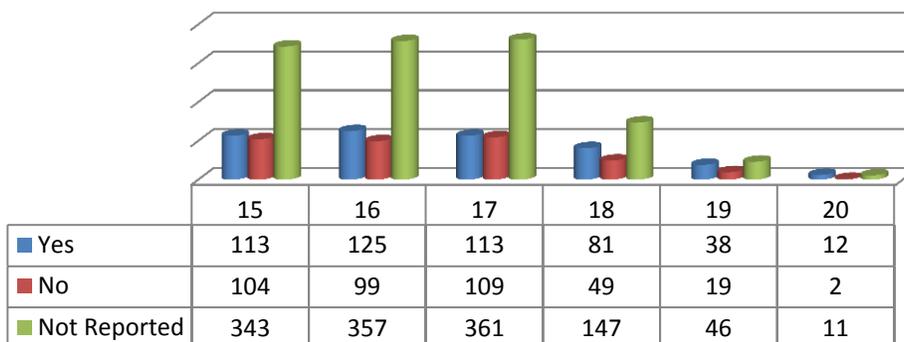


Youth in Care with Disabilities:

The provincial Child and Family Services Information system has been tracking disabilities since 1995 through a process that generates a “yes” or “no” response. The available data indicates the presence of a disability for 356 youth in the age group from

15-17 and 131 youth in the 18-20 age group. In the latter age group, disabilities were noted for 32% of the youth. Unfortunately, for the majority of youth, there was no entry at all to indicate whether the youth had a disability or not. As a result, it is not possible to make many conclusions from this data about youth with disabilities aging out of care.

Figure 13: Age by Disability

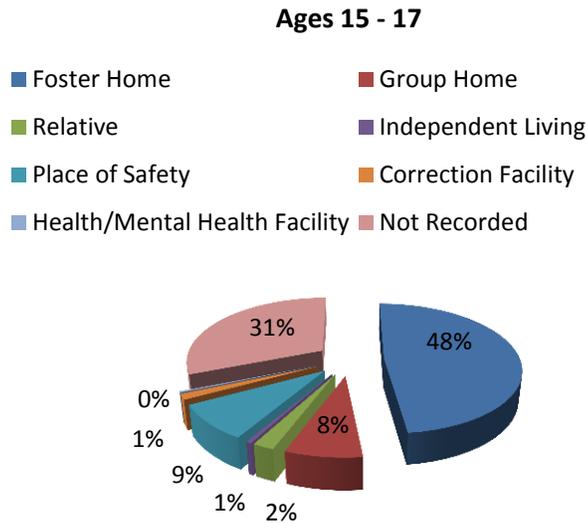


However, other research suggests that a significant number of children/youth in care may have a disability. (Green, Powers, Hogansen, & Pittman, 2007; Fuchs, Burnside, Marchenski, and Mudry, 2005)

#### Placements/Living Arrangements:

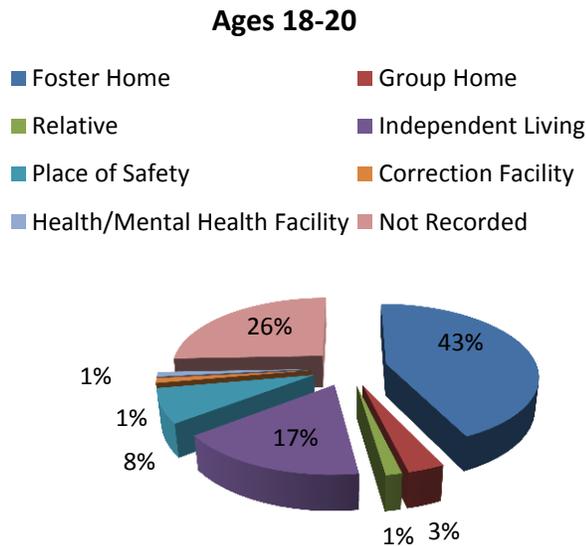
The majority of youth between the ages of 15-17 live in a foster home. While some foster homes are specialized, with paid staff, they tend to have a lower staff-youth ratio and account for 48% of all placement options for youth in this age group. 9% of youth live in a Place of Safety arrangement and 8% live in a group home or residential facility. The remaining youth either live with a relative, or a correctional or mental health facility. Only 1% of youth in this age group live independently. No placement information is available for 31% of the youth.

**Figure 14: Placement Options: 15-17 Age Group**



Similarly, 43% of youth between the ages of 18-20 live in a foster home. 8% live in a Place of Safety arrangement and another 2 % either live with a relative or in a correctional or mental health facility. Three per cent live in group homes or residential facility. Only 17% of youth in this age group live independently. No placement information is available for 26% of the youth.

**Figure 15: Placement Options 18-20 Age Group**



Youth aging out of care represent almost one quarter (24%) of the total number of children in care in the province and this number is growing. According to Child and Family Service Application data, there were 526 more youth in care over the age of 15 in 2010 than four years earlier. Larger proportions of youth are staying in care past the age of majority through extensions of care and maintenance. Compared to data for 2006, 5x as many youth over the age of majority were in care in 2010. Most of the youth aging out of care identified as Aboriginal (77%) and almost one half are permanent wards. More than one half of the youth; 58% of the 15-17 age group and 53% of the 18-20 age group, live in a foster home, a place of safety or with a relative. Only 1% of youth between the ages of 15-17 live independently and 17% of youth between the ages of 18-20 live independently. It would be expected that more youth in the latter age group lived independently. The accuracy of this information is questionable as no placement information was reported for 31% of the youth in the 15-17 age group and 26% of youth in the 18-20 age group.

### **From the VOICES of Youth in Care or Formerly in Care:**

The Office of the Children's Advocate believes that the thoughts and feelings of youth are best represented through the youth themselves in their own words. Three methods were used to hear the VOICES of youth in care or formerly in care.

1. Four youth, formerly in care, receiving post care services from the Metis Spirit Program participated in a group forum,
2. Five youth, formerly in care, frequenting the Resources for Adolescent Youth (RaY) program participated in individual interviews,
3. Eight youth in care, or formerly in care, responded to a Survey on the VOICES: Manitoba Youth in Care Network web-site.

Each youth was asked to complete a questionnaire or respond to questions from the

questionnaire. Youth participating in an interview or the group forum were given an honourarium in the form of a gift card as appreciation for their time and input. The OCA is grateful to all youth who participated in this review.

Demographic Information

The demographic composition of the youth was as follows:

Gender

Male	Female
2	15

Age Distribution

17	18	20	21	23	24	25	26
3	3	4	1	1	1	2	2

Legal Status When in Care

Permanent Ward	Temporary Ward	Unknown
14	1	2

Living Arrangements

Room & Board	Living with Roommate	Own Apartment	Staying with Friends	Living with Family	Emergency Shelter
	3	7	5	2	

What has your experience been finding a place to live?

All the youth expressed that they had difficulty finding a place to live. Many reported staying in the homes of friends because they were unable to locate a suitable place to live. Several youth stated that accommodations were “expensive and in bad areas” and that they needed references which they did not have. Two young people reported that they had located an apartment while in CFS but when the agency stopped paying rent they had to move out because they could no longer afford the rent. Another youth stated that she was not prepared for the pressure from friends to stay with her when she

had an apartment. This resulted in an eviction and she has not had a place to live since then. Many shared the same sentiments, “it was hard living on my own, trying to survive with my own money and not being in control of my own self”. One youth has been searching for a place to live for six months and cannot find one that is affordable and in a safe area.

How many moves have you had since leaving CFS?

1-2	3-5	5-7	Over 8	No Answer
2	4	5	4	2

What types of living situations are needed for youth aging out of care?

“CFS should have apartment buildings to provide for youth and open to youth transitioning on welfare”. (3 youth)

“Housing complex which doesn’t have bed bugs”.

“Good living situations that are close to everything. BUT there is no point giving them a place if when they turn 18 you drop them”.

“The budget is too low. It forces people to live in violent areas of the City. I don’t go out at night”.

Education/Employment: Are you presently....

Attending School	Working	Both	Neither
4	2	3	8

What is your source of financial support?

- Three young people reported actively searching for employment.
- One youth was supporting herself in school through student loans, awards and scholarships.
- One youth is being supported by her family.
- Three young people were receiving income assistance.
- Five young people were working full time.

- Two young people stated they were supporting themselves through “hustling” activities.

Connection to Family/Significant Adult

Do you have someone you can talk to when you are feeling down?

My Social Worker/Support Worker	Friends	Relatives	VOICES: MB Youth in Care Network	Former Youth Care Worker	Nobody
3	6	4	1	1	2

Do you have contact with your family?

Yes	No
12	5

If youth had contact with their family, it was most often once a month or every two months. Only two youth reported more frequent contact.

Relationship with Child and Family Service

How did your Caseworker/Agency help prepare you for Independent Living?

One youth reported that her foster mother prepared her by teaching her life skills and finding an apartment for her. Three youth were involved with a “Skills for Life” Worker through the MCFCS. They were also receiving post care services from the Metis Spirit Program. Another youth reported that “they talked to me about it, told me how it was gonna be and how budgeting would be hard”. Some youth had positive experiences with their caseworker, “xxxxxx was an amazing social worker. She was caring, warm, energetic and never yelled or got mad at me if I made a mistake” and “she referred me to an independent living program where I learned life skills”. Yet another youth reported that “they got me a bed, household items, food and got me ready to be on my own”. A couple young people did not feel that they received any assistance to prepare for independent living, “they didn’t; just dropped me off, said good luck so I couch surfed till

I found a place”. “My social worker didn’t really help, my placement agency helped out a lot”.

### Preparation for Independent Living

Do you or did you feel prepared for Independent Living?

Yes	No
8	9

Please explain how you feel or felt about moving out of care into independent living?

“I am very mature for my age so I thought and dreamed of being on my own”.

“I think that they should teach you more in your placement; like cooking, shopping and budgeting”.

“I wanted the excitement, independence and freedom.”

“I was happier not living in the foster home but as soon as I turned 18, CFS stopped paying my rent and I was left with nothing.”

“I was moving in with a Proctor who helped me with budgeting”.

“It sucked. I was left on the street with the clothes on my back”.

“They asked questions, but my say did not matter”.

“I felt relieved and not trapped.”

“Scared, but I knew there would be support. It was nerve-wrecking. I got an extension and finished school”

Did you attend a Life Skills Group?

Yes	No
4	13

Were you involved in developing an independent living plan for yourself?

Yes	No
8	9

In your opinion, what services are needed to prepare young people moving out of care?

“Life skills group for those who are not mature.”

“Places to help you get food or pay your bills, rent”. “Extensions of Care”.

“Life skills group”. “At the time, I couldn’t relate to the content. No one did any follow-up. I couldn’t understand the process. There was no direction”.

“Cooking, budgeting, setting up a bank account.”

“More programs to teach skills.”

“Housing, treatment programs for addictions, education and employment preparation, financial assistance, counselling and preparation in basic life skills”.

“Job search and budgeting”.

“Mentorship, budget classes, life skills and health”.

“Budgeting, shopping, cleaning”.

“Support systems like friends and family”.

“Housing, food services, medical records, clothing services, schooling programs”.

“Decent living accommodations. Reference letters. Adequate start up money. Choices”.

After Care

What services or resources were there for you when you needed help after leaving care?

Several young people reported that they were referred to EIA for income assistance after leaving care. They also used the services of food banks. Other resources reported were friends, family, former foster family, school staff, probation officer and Ray Inc.

What are, or continue to be, your biggest concerns about being a youth in care managing in the adult world? Do you have any recommendations for other youth who will be leaving the CFS system?

“Kids should not move around so much in foster care”

“Keep siblings together”

“Too many rules to follow. Keep expectations clear”

“Transportation is too expensive. Can’t work far away because can’t get there”

“This survey is making me mad. It is making me remember how it was to transition out of care when I was trying to forget”.

“More counselling and support money for food and household items”

“My concern is now for those leaving care and being left with no money to secure what they need. I was left in such a bad state that it was very hard for me to be happy with the system. They took me out of a bad home, put me in another bad home and then pushed me out the door when I turned 18.”

“Reconnect youth with their families when they are older”

“Take the time to find out what the kid really needs not just on the money”

“Help kids find resources they can connect to when they leave care, help with job hunting and extend support for six more months”

“My fears are to be in debt or not able to pay my bills. Try to find a support system, find a group you can keep in contact for as long as you can. Keep your friends close for support. Keep active, volunteer and complete your goals”

“Find a job before aging out”

From the words of youth aging out of care comes greater insight into the obstacles that make the transition process to adulthood difficult. Many of the youth who participated in this review aged out of care during a time when few resources were allocated to the attention of youth in care, despite their high needs. The result was poor

outcomes for educational achievement and increased likelihood of homelessness and financial dependency. In the last four years resources to support youth transitioning out of care have improved and the future for youth aging out of care in the province should

“Kids should not move around so much in foster care”

“I was happier not living in the foster home but as soon as I turned 18, CFS stopped paying my rent and I was left with nothing.”

--Former Youth in Care

be brighter. However, legislation must follow to create a “safety net” for young people as they transition to adult living and establish guidelines for transition planning. Supporting youth in care toward successful transitions into adult living is an investment in their future and society in general. Child and family services has a responsibility to connect youth with community resources and mentors, encourage family and other significant connections and provide opportunities for youth to have practical experiences such as learning to drive and to hold a job. Youth

aging out of care should have an educational plan and viable options for career development including an education account. Planning for transition should begin at admission to care by adequately supporting foster homes to decrease disruptions in placements and establishing life long connections.

## **Understanding Adolescence**

An understanding of adolescent development and the context of their behavior is essential to the process of developing services and programs for them. Oritz, A. (2004) describes adolescence as a time where youth fluctuate between a need for security and a desire to be independent from the very people and institutions that have provided them with this security. Youth interviewed in a separate study were eager to leave the constraints of being in care but were clearly not ready for the hardship of their post-care reality. (Turk, J., 2009). Indecision, impulsiveness and rebelliousness are all normal teenage traits, which, unfortunately, can have devastating consequences for youth aging out of care. It is important to recognize these traits as a normal part of

development at this stage and not interpret them as resistance or take them as a personal attack. Adults supporting youth must not be deterred even though the behaviour may try to alienate those adults who care the most about the well-being of the youth. Research on adolescent brain development provides additional context for understanding adolescent behavior. The frontal lobe of the brain is responsible for the brain's most advanced functions, including planning, impulse control, anticipation of consequences and abstract thinking. A UCLA study found that the frontal lobe of the brain undergoes far more changes during adolescence than at any other stage in life. It is also the last part of the brain to fully develop, meaning that even though adolescents are fully capable in other areas, they cannot reason as well as adults. In order to compensate for this, adolescents often rely on emotional parts of the brain. (Sowell, E.R., Thompson, P.M., Holmes, C.J., Jernigan, T.L., & Toga, A.W., 1999)

### **Findings:**

A report on findings must take into consideration the standards society has for youth in the general population and this must be balanced with the services available to youth in care. When children are removed voluntarily, or through enforcement, from their home and family, it is expected that they will be provided with the highest quality substitutional care and treatment planning. Children in care have the right to expect a high level of care and it is the responsibility of the child and family services system to ensure that substitutional care is equal to or better than the level of care the child was receiving prior to entry into the child and family services system. Equally important is the body of knowledge, through which a general acceptance of principles has been established and embodied in statutes. Findings are made in response to developments in keeping with provincial child and family service standards, other provincial legislated policies and acceptable "best practice" in child and family services at this time. The definition of best practice is intended to include what is done or should be done when comparing it to acceptable knowledge within the profession of child welfare at similar times in any Canadian jurisdiction. Accepted best practice is constantly adjusting to

new ideas and research on an international level.

The recommendations contained in the initial OCA report were extensive calling for a new vision of youth aging out of care and changes to legislation, development of policies specific to youth transitioning from care and a set of service standards that set out basic expectations for the delivery of services to youth aging out of care, including early preparation, instruction in life skills, opportunities to practice life skills and establishing connections with family or significant caring adults prior to aging out of care. The OCA called for collaborative and intersectoral program development in the areas of housing, education and mental health services and strategies to ensure that youth were not being discharged from care unprepared to manage adult living. Training programs for caregivers and service providers were recommended as well as effective information and tracking systems with the capacity to identify trends and learn from our experiences for constant, on-going improvement in services provided to youth. A number of recommendations focused on system wide legislative changes including keeping youth in care past the age of majority until they are ready to transition and providing after care support to them as long as it is required or until the age of 25. The basic premise behind the recommendations was that youth in care should not be discharged into the community unprepared and into a life of hardship.

A total of 45 recommendations were made to the DFSL and the Child and Family Service Authorities in the *Strengthening Our Youth, Their Journey to Competence and Independence* report released by the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) in November 2006. The Minister of Family Services and Labour responded immediately by announcing an initial commitment of \$240,000 to support four initiatives for youth leaving care. The recommendations were submitted to the *Changes for Children* initiative and included in the work plan to address 289 recommendations from five external reviews of the child and family services system.

In August 2010, the OCA called for a progress review on the state of the recommendations. Forty-five recommendations were reviewed in this report. A detailed status report on the recommendations can be found in Appendix I.

The response to the OCA recommendations was favourable and in the four years since the first report was released, significant improvements have occurred in the child and family services system to involve and support youth aging out of care. Additionally, youth transitioning from care will benefit from the addition of new initiatives and improved resources through the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) and the Department of Education.

#### Increased Funding to CFS Authorities

- Funding was provided to all four CFS Authorities to establish the “Vision Catchers” fund to provide financial incentives to youth in care for higher education or training,
- Funding was provided to all four CFS Authorities for new staff positions to work on increasing the number of transitional and emergency bed spaces in the province for youth,
- Funding was provided to all four CFS Authorities for the development of youth engagement and mentorship programs for youth who age out of care,
- In 2008, as part of the Manitoba FASD Strategy, funding for FASD Specialists was provided to all CFS Authorities.
- In 2010, through Changes for Children, funding was provided to all CFS Authorities for a one-year pilot project to create Education Specialist positions with the goal to help enable better educational outcomes for children in care.

- Increased funding to VOICES: the Manitoba Youth in Care Network for additional programs and services to youth in care,

### New or Enhanced Intersectoral Programs

- In 2008, the *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community*, document was completed replacing the former protocol, *Manitoba Transition Planning Process Support Guidelines for Students with Special Needs Reaching Age 16 (1999)*. The new document strengthens protocols related to a coordinated service approach by identifying the role of education and family services and requires school transition plans to reflect the specific needs of youth.
- Guidelines for transitioning youth in care to adult services have been simplified. The document, *Transition Planning: Child and Family Services to Adult Supports* provides detailed eligibility criteria and referral process as well as a review of adult support programs and services available to youth who require additional support after the age of majority. Programs and services identified in this document include the Supported Adult Living Program, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Community Mental Health Services, the Provincial Special Needs Program, the Employment and Income Assistance Program and the Home Care Program.
- A province wide youth suicide prevention strategy, *Reclaiming Hope*, was established in 2009. This collaborative strategy includes funding from *Changes for Children* and Manitoba Healthy Living.
- The *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM*, was developed under the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) Program to support youth who are leaving care or recently left care and are enrolled in EIA.

## Policies and Standards

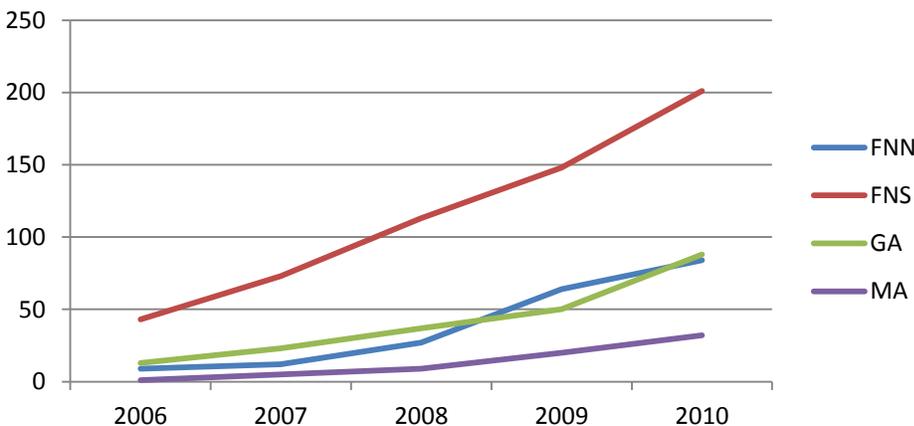
In the initial OCA report, several recommendations related to the development of policy and standards directing the provision of services to youth aging out of care. At the time of this review, work is still in progress on developing and revising policies or standards for services to youth transitioning from care. The Inter-Authority Standards Work Group (ASWG) is currently working on a standards section related to youth transitioning from care with a goal to complete this in by mid-2012.

Although there is considerable progress in realizing the recommendations, no new policies and standards are in place yet to ensure a practice shift in the child and family services system towards consistent service delivery methods. Current practice allows prioritization of services based on the level of risk and youth tend to be considered less at risk than younger children because it is assumed that they would be more able to remove themselves from a dangerous situation. However, as the large body of research data suggests, youth are at considerable risk when leaving the child welfare system. The OCA recommended legislated changes to increase responsibility for youth in care up to the age of 25, and include temporary wards and youth in care under voluntary placement agreements, in the eligibility criteria for extensions of care and maintenance. More must be done to ensure youth aging out of care receive the required preparation even when circumstances do not favour this. Because there is an extensive body of literature and research findings available in this area, the OCA recommended that an intersectoral committee be established to review policies, services and programs for youth in other jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions have the benefit of years of experience in this area. Investing in youth aging out of care to ensure that they are productive, self-sufficient adults is a movement toward prevention of future dependency on service systems. Countries like the USA have recognized this and have legislated services to youth transitioning from care for this very reason.

## Extensions of Care

Extensions of care and maintenance have increased significantly over the last four years with over 5x as many youth in care past the age of majority in September 2010 (405) as there were in September 2006 (75). All CFS Authorities have relatively equal ratios of youth in care past the age of majority. Unfortunately, there are no clear criteria for extensions and no means to review decision making around application for extensions. These decisions are part of a discretionary process involving the caseworker and the supervisor. According to staff from all four CFS Authorities, 100% of applications for extensions are being approved and the majority of extensions involve youth who are on waiting lists for adult services followed by youth who are enrolled in educational programs.

**Figure 16: Increase in Extensions by Authority**



Extensions of care are less likely to occur for youth who are struggling, refusing to cooperate and engaging in negative activities. Yet, it is these youth who need aging out preparation and planning the most as their outcomes are more certain to be negative. For this reason, the OCA is concerned that youth who need independent living preparation and support the most may not be getting it and are being discharged too soon to have a chance to succeed. There are aging out programs in other countries that recognize youth may not be ready to engage in transition planning at the time they

age out of care and allow them to return for assistance and support at a time when they are more ready, much like youth in the general population who live with their families. Ensuring these services are available to youth when they are ready to take advantage of them would require collaborative relationships with other community organizations and the availability of funding for former youth in care when needed.

The OCA recommended extending care and maintenance provisions to youth who are temporary wards of agencies similar to that available to permanent wards. The DFSL proposed an alternative solution within the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program. While MYTEAM offers assistance and support to youth who are not eligible for extensions of care, the OCA is not satisfied that this alternative will provide youth with the “safety net” that may be needed if things do not work out. Youth need the security of a system that will support them even when things don’t work out and encourage them to try again.

This review has found that over one half of youth in extended care (53%) live in foster homes, places of safety or with a family member. These youth are in the age group from 18 – 20. This information raises questions about the transitional planning in place to assist youth in independent living preparations.

### Tracking and Information Systems

The effectiveness of the current child and family services information system, in collecting meaningful information on youth aging out of care including outcome data that can be used for assessment and program development, is challenged by inconsistent input of data. The OCA attempted to access child in care file information on a randomly selected group of youth, where care has been extended, using the CFSA system. This exercise was not successful as child specific data on CFSA was either missing or not updated or the files were closed because transitional planning was not indicated. The province-wide information system has too many limitations to make it an effective tool

for maintaining up to date information on youth leaving care. In the absence of an effective province-wide information and child tracking system, all four Authorities have developed their own systems for tracking children in care and youth where care has been extended. Some Authorities are using technology that maximizes data collection and reduces the amount of data entry work required of child and family service caseworkers. However, the responsibility for a province-wide information system to collect comparable and consistent data across the child and family services system should remain with the Child and Family Services Division.

### Collaborative Planning for Youth Aging Out of Care

- The Child Welfare Inter-Sectoral Committee (CWIC) was established by Standing Committee in 2008 to promote better collaboration and integration of services between systems. Membership in the committee includes senior representatives from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Healthy Child Manitoba, the Department of Family Services and Labour, the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Healthy Living. In 2009 CWIC developed work plans for coordination and integration of services in four areas: healthy child development, services to youth with complex medical needs, addictions and children’s mental health and suicide prevention. The work plans have been approved and implementation started in 2010.
- The *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM*, is an initiative of the Employment and Income Assistance Program, the Child Protection Branch and Manitoba Housing. This four-year pilot project will provide housing, financial assistance, education or employment preparation and support in life skills to youth aged 16-21 who are not permanent wards of a child and family service agency.
- A Creative Housing Solutions Committee made up of staff from the WCFS and

GA are currently working with the Manitoba Housing Authority, as well as private sector landlords, to develop a housing strategy for youth aging out of care. A recommendation, jointly supported by the General and Metis Authorities, has been submitted to the Standing Committee calling for the development of a Cross Authority Committee to work on a plan to address the specific housing needs of youth leaving care.

### Preparing Service Providers and Caregivers

All recommendations related to training programs for service providers and caregivers were referred to the Joint Training Team (JTT). The JTT is composed of training coordinators from all Authorities as well as the Department of Family Services and Labour and reports to the Child and Family Services Standing Committee. In 2011, the Preparing Youth in Care for Independent Living Training Program Working Group was established with representatives from all Authorities, the Manitoba Foster Family Network, VOICES: the Manitoba Youth in Care Network, other community organizations and government departments. This work group is tasked with developing training programs on age of majority and transition planning for youth aging out of care. The work of this group is still in the early stages of completion. The OCA suggests that this work group consider assuming the task of developing life skill competencies for youth as part of the training package. These life skill competencies should include the knowledge and skill youth should have at different age points. For example, by age 16 all youth in care should have a bank account. The work group is expected to have the training package completed by 2013.

### New Child and Family Service Programs and Initiatives

The favourable response by the DFSL to the recommendations of the OCA report (2006) and the allocation of funds from Changes for Children to CFS Authorities has

resulted in the development of several new and promising programs and restructuring initiatives to strengthen the continuum of services to children and youth in care. These tend to fall into one of three categories; CFS Authority initiatives, Authority-specific initiatives, and Agency-specific initiatives. The information provided below is by no means extensive and many excellent programs may not be included because information was not available at the time of this report. The OCA apologizes for this.

a) CFS Authority initiatives include programs/services and initiatives consistently offered across the province.

- Funding for youth engagement activities allowed all four Authorities to meet with youth in care, and former youth in care, and gather their ideas and suggestions for identifying needs and improving services when young people age out of care.
- All Authorities increased the number of foster care spaces for older youth.
- All Authorities increased the number of direct service staff or staff that support direct services.
- FASD Specialist positions are available in all CFS Authorities to assist with planning for youth with FASD.
- Through “Vision Catcher” funding, each Authority has established a fund to assist youth in care to continue into education or training programs or other areas of career/personal development.
- Funding for two Education Outcome Specialists was provided to all Authorities. At the time of this report, only two Authorities have hired for this position.

b) Authority-specific initiatives reflect programs and services provided by specific Authorities and agencies responsible to that Authority. There are considerable differences between Authorities in the level of progress in this area. While some Authorities have programs in place, others have not yet reached the planning stage. Some Authorities are prioritizing planning and policy development while others are already restructuring or implementing programs and services.

- The Northern First Nations Child and Family Services Authority hired an Age of Majority Specialist in May 2010. This position is currently developing a tracking database and Agency-specific standards for youth transitioning from care. This Authority has a significant number of youth in care with severe medical needs.
  - Several agencies responsible to the Southern First Nations Network of Care have restructured, or are in the process of restructuring, to deliver specialized case management services to youth aging out of care. Independent Living Case Managers will specialize in services to youth transitioning from care
  - The General Child and Family Services Authority also hired an Age of Majority Specialist in 2010 and two former youth in care were hired in 2009 to develop the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) team. This team has organized youth retreats, celebrations for youth aging out of care and is providing some mentorship to youth aging out of care. The Authority participates on a committee looking at housing options for youth in care and has piloted a “Skills for Life” project in Winnipeg.
  - The Metis Child and Family Services Authority works closely with the Metis Child, Family and Community Services (MCFCS) agency in supporting a number of programs and initiatives for youth aging out of care.
- c) Agency-specific initiatives reflect programs and services available only from that agency.
- Intertribal Child and Family Services is currently delivering a workplace enhancement skills training program for youth ages 15-17. Building Foundations for Life is a life skills program to assist youth with this vital transitional phase of their lives.
  - The Independent Youth Skills (IYS) Program is a new program at ANCR for youth ages 16 -17 who are transitioning to independence.

- Cree Nation Child and Family Caring Agency provides an independent living program in Pukatawagan and in The Pas.
- Opaskwayak Cree Nation Child & Family Services is currently developing a system of placements for youth who will be transitioning out of care.
- Winnipeg Child and Family Services (WCFS) piloted a “Skills for Life” project with the General Child and Family Services Authority and youth in care, foster parents and service providers. Feedback from the pilot project called for some modifications to the program and this process is currently underway.
- The WCFS offers a program using trained volunteers to provide mentorship and resources to youth living independently.
- All Child and Family Service regions and agencies responsible to the General Child and Family Services Authority have agreed to initiate the process of applying for Canada Learning Bonds for children born before 2003 who are permanent wards.
- The MCFCS has programs offering individual support and life skills training to support youth transitioning from care. The Skills for Life program offers one to one support to youth transitioning from care and includes a structured group component where youth can learn skills to transition successfully to adult living. The group includes former youth in care who share their experiences living on their own. The Life Long Connections Program assists youth in care with developing relationships with family members or other caring significant adults in their lives.
- The MCFCS Agencies offers a program using trained volunteers to provide mentorship and resources to youth living independently.

### Post Care Services/Mentorship Programs

There are still few post care support services available to the majority of youth aging out of care in Manitoba. Some youth may be eligible for adult service programs. A

specific guide for CFS Workers, “Transition Planning: CFS to Adult Services” was adapted from the “Bridging to Adulthood” protocol and is available on the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA). This hand book is a simple to follow guide for Child and Family Service Caseworkers on the process of identifying and referring youth to programs such as the Supported Living program, the Vocational Rehabilitative program, the Provincial Special Needs program, Community Mental Health Services, the Home Care program and the Employment and Income Assistance program.

In January 2007, the DFSL announced funding for a mentorship program offered by young adults who have successfully aged out of the child welfare system to provide support and guidance to new youth who will be aging out. Funding was available to CFS Authorities upon submission of an approved plan for a mentorship program. The program is slow to get off the ground. According to information from the General Child and Family Services Authority, youth participating in youth engagement activities favoured a program that would match former youth in care with youth preparing to age out. However, issues of screening, incentives, training, matching and role definition are still to be worked out. General Child and Family Services Authority staff met in January 2011 with agency staff and the Metis Spirit Program Coordinator to address issues in common. The next meeting was schedule for March 2011.

Only one Authority has moved forward with post care services. The *Metis Spirit Program* is funded by the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) and operated by MCFCS. This program provides post care assistance and support to youth transitioning from the Metis Child, Family and Community Services. This program provides 24-hour telephone access, monthly focus and support groups and opportunities to participate in celebrations and special events.

### Former Youth in Care

The majority of young people who aged out of the child and family services system shared the same concerns. It was a difficult process and they did not feel prepared for

adult living. Affordable and safe housing and financial concerns were the issues most frequently identified by the youth. Many reported difficulty finding a place to live and were staying with friends. Almost one half of the youth who participated in the review moved at least 7 times after leaving care. Several young people reported that they lost the accommodations they were living in after aging out of care because the rent was no longer affordable after enrollment in the Employment and Income Assistance program. The majority of young people recommended that child and family services provide housing where the youth can live after leaving care. They had other recommendations for the child and family services system as well. The young people wanted to see life skills training available to all youth and offered over and over again if the youth is not ready to complete it the first time. They didn't want adults to give up on them because they seemed disinterested. They wanted to be connected to their families and have resources that they can go to when things got difficult. All of the youth participating in this survey were connected to supportive organizations, such as VOICES: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network, the MCFCS and Resources for Youth (RaY) and depended on them for support and assistance.

One of the biggest obstacles for many youth aging out of care is that of locating suitable living accommodations where they may be able to remain after they leave care. The difference in financial rates between the Child and Family Services system and the Employment and Income Assistance program is significant enough that youth are not able to maintain the standard of living they were set up in while under child and family services. Furthermore, CFS always submits the rental payments. When youth are transferred to EIA, this becomes a responsibility they are not familiar with. Similarly, while in the CFS system, youth receive support in dealing with issues around housing, relationships, conflicts, etc. When this is no longer available to them, they have no one else to turn to. Unless they are eligible for supportive adult programs, these young people are very much isolated and alone. As a result, it is not unusual that the transition plan established while they were with child and family services falls apart and the youth find themselves without a place to live. The Resources for Adolescent Youth (RaY Inc.) works with hundreds of youth between the ages of 16 and 25 who are without a home. Many of the youth report having been in the care of the child and family services

system. Now these youth turn to RaY Inc. for assistance and support. This organization offers basic needs services to youth without a home such as meals, free laundry facilities, showers, clothing and toiletries, in addition to a drop-in centre, outreach services, counseling and referrals to mental health and addiction programs.

### Recommendations Yet to be Addressed

Although 26% of the recommendations in the report, “Strengthening Our Youth: Their Journey to Competence and Independence” (2006) have been completed and considerable progress has been made in 64% of the recommendations, there are still some recommendations or parts of recommendations that have yet to be addressed. These include:

- Standards outlining responsibilities of the DFSL, and the CFS Authorities for services to youth transitioning from care.
- The Extended Care and Maintenance policy has not been changed to extend care up to the age of 25 years and include youth who are temporary wards until the age of majority.
- Standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care have not yet been completed. This includes standards for services to Aboriginal youth in care and youth with disabilities leaving care, standards regarding mandatory needs assessments and individualized transition plans, standards regarding post care services, standards for involvement of youth in transition planning, standards for the inclusion of significant adults in transition planning, and standards for compliance and quality assurance.
- Training programs for Foster Parents, Social Workers, Support Workers and Youth Care Workers on preparing youth for transitioning from care have not yet been developed.

- A core set of life skill competencies for youth aged 15 years; 16 years, 17 years and the age of majority have not yet been developed.
- A directory specifically for independent living programs and resources in the province is not available yet.
- No progress has been made in reviewing the independent living rates for youth in care and making adjustments to the living allowance with the exception of youth accepted into the MYTEAM program.
- While additional funding was made available to VOICES, and upon application, to the four CFS Authorities, this is not considered to adequately meet the intent of the recommendation that funding be available to community organizations to develop programs offering services to meet the varying needs of former youth in care.

## **Conclusions**

The OCA report, *Strengthening Our Youth: Their Journey to Competence and Independence* (2006), along with a number of other recent reports on the hardships and negative outcomes facing youth aging out of care, has raised the visibility of this group of children in care and impelled greater attention and responsibility on the child and family services system to invest in the futures of youth aging out of care. In the past four years, there has been additional money allocated to the child and family services system specifically for enhancing the services and resources available to youth aging out of care. Foster care spaces have increased for older youth and additional staff positions have been added to the child and family services system. In addition, funding was provided to Authorities in order to develop youth engagement initiatives, a fund was established to assist some youth in care in continuing with their education or career

goals and funding was available to CFS Authorities to develop mentorship programs. Broader collaborative programs will also benefit some youth aging out of care. MYTEAM appears to have a lot of potential for improving outcomes for a small number of youth aging out of care, who are not permanent wards of an agency. A province-wide suicide prevention program should benefit youth in care who contend with mental health issues arising from their traumatic pasts. On the surface this looks very promising. However, missing is an overall vision and a coordinated, systemic plan for achieving positive outcomes and success for youth as they leave care. The current system of providing services to youth leaving care varies widely between Authorities and agencies and, in the absence of policy and standards, issues related to oversight, accountability and consistency of services may prevent youth leaving care from receiving the services they are entitled to.

Yet, several new initiatives show promise. Organizational changes in some agencies have led to the development of teams of caseworkers who work only with youth aging out of care. This should result in a more specialized and consistent method of service delivery to youth in the care of those agencies. A move toward youth-led transition planning with accurate assessments of need and realistic goals for self sufficiency will surely be more effective than the sink-or-swim approach that has characterized transition planning in the past. Similarly, programs matching adult mentors with youth living independently to provide instruction in life skills and guidance when problems are encountered can only be beneficial. These new programs and service delivery methods have advanced services to youth aging out of care. However, they continue to operate in the context of a service model that concentrates on providing services to youth before they leave the child and family services system. Although it has been found repeatedly that most youth are not ready to live independently when they reach the age of majority even under the best of circumstances, child and family service agencies have neither the mandate nor funding at this time to provide services to youth after they leave care. Without adequate support, the outcomes for youth leaving care are not favourable. Adult programs may provide financial support but are not easy to navigate and end up distancing youth

rather than supporting them. Given the impact of poor outcomes for youth who age out of the system, it is in the best interests of society to continue supporting youth as they transition to adulthood, not unlike the support families provide young adults who are not in care. Some jurisdictions are beginning to address this issue. In British Columbia, although guardianship expires when youth reach the age of 18, an additional 24 months of financial assistance and support can be accessed between the ages of 19 and 24 years to continue education programs, get job training or participate in rehabilitative programs. Youth are eligible for support for 6 months at a time for a cumulative period of up to 24 months. In Nova Scotia, permanent wards are eligible for the Educational Bursary Program until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. This program covers the cost of tuition, text books and related expenses as well as provides financial support. In addition, an extension to the Education Bursary Program allows former permanent wards who left care before their 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays to return and apply to receive support and funding to continue studies until their 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. In Alberta, permanent wards are eligible for financial support for training and education up to 20 years of age, as well as funding for accommodations and basic necessities up to 22 years of age. In New Brunswick, support for youth enrolled in educational programs, or if they are not self-sufficient by reason of physical, mental or emotional ability, is available after the age of majority. These provinces are putting into practice what has already been learned in the USA and some parts of the United Kingdom, where cost-benefit analysis have revealed the true costs when youth become strong, independent and self-sufficient members of society and promote this through legislation and funding to community organizations, as a part of a coordinated system of services to support and mentor young people living on their own. In Winnipeg, RaY Inc., an organization funded through federal and provincial initiatives and through the private sector, has been providing a safe place for young people without a home to eat, shower, do laundry and participate in other programs. Many of the youth seek advice, advocacy and a referral to community organizations or government departments.

A memorandum was posted at RaY Inc. asking young people who had aged out of the child and family services system to voluntarily sign up if they wanted to participate in

this review by talking about their aging out of care experiences. A total of 16 young people signed up, but only 5 made it to interviews. These young people would not benefit from a fund to further their education or participate in youth engagement activities, or work with an adult mentor. Their daily focus was on surviving. Youth who are traumatized from years of abuse and neglect may not be able to concentrate on transition planning. These youth need to heal before they can move forward. If healing did not occur while in care, these youth are not ready to leave care when they reach the age of majority. Transition planning, including extensions of care are just as important for youth to heal from trauma, as they are for continuation of education programs and entrance into supported adult living programs. All youth in care have the right to expect a consistent level of service and support to meet their actual needs at different stages of transition across Authorities.

This review has provided an opportunity to obtain a current perspective on services and programs that support youth transitioning from care in Manitoba. The results are encouraging as a significant amount of funding has been directed toward improving services and programs for youth aging out of care. However, as work continues on implementing changes and making improvements to the existing system, the goal has to be that all youth leave the child and family services system as prepared as possible for the future. Policy statements and service standards have not yet caught up to programs and services that have been developed in the last four years in this area. The OCA found inconsistencies among Authorities in service plans and program and resource availability. Currently youth aging out of care in some agencies receive more services than youth aging out of care in other agencies. All youth leaving care require effective preparation based on actual needs and the availability of supportive resources as needed until they are able to successfully live as adults. Policy statements and service standards must promote consistency and coordination across Authorities.

Supporting youth after they leave the care of the child and family services system has been a recurring theme in this report because of the body of evidence that links poor outcomes and a life of hardship with the lack of adequate and effective preparation for adult living. For many young people the transition into independence is sudden and

they often enter adult life with little or no connection to community or family, little or no financial support and few skills to master the challenges of living independently. Many young people are not ready for independence at the age of majority. They leave care alone with few places to go where they can get the support and assistance they require. After care programs and resources are needed so youth leaving care can access the support and services they require when they are ready to utilize these services, much like youth in the general population who can turn to their family when things are not working out. The OCA supports the development of a system of resources in the community that provide support and services to youth after they have aged out of care, and guide them into educational and career training programs when they are ready to succeed, rather than expecting them to be ready when they reach the age of majority. On a broader level, assisting youth to become stable and productive citizens would produce greater benefits to society than supporting youth when they do not succeed.

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## APPENDIX 1

### **A Status Report on the Recommendations made by the Office of the Children's Advocate in the "Strengthening Our Youth" *Their Journey to Competence and Independence* Report (2006).**

#### **Review Process:**

The recommendations were reviewed for progress and degree of implementation using the following criteria:

- Completed – the recommendation or portion of the recommendation was completed in full and no further action is necessary.
- In Progress – the recommendation is being addressed but has not been fully completed.
- Significant Progress – the recommendation is being addressed with a significant amount of work already completed on it.
- Ongoing - the recommendation is part of a larger context or a series of actions that are currently being addressed.
- No Change – the recommendation has not been addressed and policy and practice continues as it did prior to the recommendation.
- Rejected – the recommendation was reviewed and a decision was made to reject the recommendation.
- Other – Alternative Solutions

#### **Policy Implications**

1. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy outlining responsibility for children in care who are reaching the age of majority and leaving care.

**Action:**                      **Significant Progress**

**Response:**                      **The Department of Family Services and Labour accepted the recommendations made by the OCA in the 2006 report, "Strengthening Our Youth" *Their Journey to Competence and Independence* Report" and included them in the work assigned to the *Changes for Children* initiative. This initiative, responsible to the Child and Family Services Standing Committee, is tasked with addressing a total of 289 recommendations from five external reviews of the child and family services system. The recommendations in the "Strengthening Our Youth" report were combined with those**

for improving the foster care system and organized under the theme, “Strengthening Foster Care and Services to Youth”. Since then, significant progress has been made in developing policies and protocols related to youth aging out of care.

- i. The Inter-Authority Standards Working Group (ASWG) is currently working on a standards section related to youth transitioning out of care.
- ii. On May 30, 2011 the CPB hired a CFS Standards Coordinator who is taking the provincial lead on the development of CFS standards including revisions to Section 1.1.3, which deals with Age of Majority and Transition Planning for youth aging out of care.
- iii. An interdepartmental protocol agreement overseen by the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) titled, “Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community” (2008) has been developed to provide a guideline for transitioning youth in care to other resources in the community. This protocol is expected to be referenced in the new CFS standards for Transition Planning.
- iv. A specific guide for CFS Workers, “Transition Planning: CFS to Adult Services” was adapted from the “Bridging to Adulthood” protocol and is available on the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA). This hand book is a simple to follow guide for Child and Family Service Caseworkers on the process of identifying and referring youth to programs such as the Supported Living program, the Vocational Rehabilitative program, the Provincial Special Needs program, Community Mental Health Services, the Home Care program and the Employment and Income Assistance program.

2. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy outlining responsibility for post age of majority support and assistance to youth formerly in care.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** In section 50(2) of the *Child and Family Services Act*, “the director, or an agency with the approval of the director, may

continue to provide care and maintenance for a former permanent ward for the purpose of assisting the ward to complete the transition to independence, but not beyond the date when the former permanent ward attains the age of 21 years". This section of the Act allows CFS agencies to apply for an extension of care on behalf of permanent wards up to the age of 21 years. CFS data indicates a significant increase in the number of extensions of care for youth who are permanent wards of CFS agencies. Current policies supporting youth aging out of care, who are not permanent wards of an agency, only apply to those who are parenting or have exceptional needs and are eligible for adult support programs. Currently work is underway to review and revise the existing age of majority and transition planning standards. In addition, there is an increased awareness and recognition that youth require support and services past the age of majority. At least one CFS agency is providing post care support services to youth who have aged out.

3. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy on youth leaving care. It should outline the responsibilities of Agencies and Authorities for services to youth leaving care including independent living preparation prior to leaving care and post care services up to the age of 21 years.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** According to the Child Protection Branch, a new standard specifically designed to explain roles and responsibilities of the Authorities and agencies is currently being developed. A section of the standard (1.4.1) will discuss provincial policies and standards regarding the placement of children in out of home care under the *Child and Family Services Act*. The standard is expected to be completed in 2012. In the meantime, the following section of the Child and Family Services Standards continues to set the requirements of agencies in preparing youth for independent living:

1.1.3. (9) Age of Majority Planning – the case manager ensures that a plan for a child aged 16 and older includes preparations for becoming an adult such as:

- Referral to appropriate adult services in keeping with the Manitoba Transition Planning Process Support Guidelines for Students with Special Needs Reaching Age Sixteen ,
- Extension of support services and development of other support systems (for example, extended family, others),
- Assessment and development of skills for independent living.

4. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a policy on youth leaving care enrolled in educational or training programs. It should outline the responsibilities of Agencies and Authorities for services until the age of 25 years.

**Action:** Other. Alternative action without legislated changes to provide services to age 25.

**Response:** The *Child and Family Services Act*, 50(2) states that extended care and maintenance to permanent wards is available only up to the age of 21 years. To extend services until the age of 25 years would require legislative changes. At this time, the Department of Family Services and Labour is not proceeding with legislative changes. However, the Department has allocated new funding in the amount of \$240,000 a year since 2007/08 to all the Authorities for three strategies to support youth leaving care and pursuing education, training and skill or talent development:

- The Youth Engagement Strategy will engage youth in care or formerly in care in the development of policies and preparation strategies for youth leaving care;
- Mentorship Programs where former youth in care work as mentors to assist and support youth transition from care to adulthood; and
- The Vision Catchers Fund to assist youth in care with accessing post secondary education, training, and developing talents and skills in specific areas of interest.

The new strategies enable eligible youth in care to access support and funding for educational pursuits well past the age of majority.

In addition, the Department of Family Services and Labour has provided funding to all the CFS Authorities to hire Education Outcome Specialists to liaise with School Divisions and work toward improving educational outcomes for children in care.

5. That the Department of Family Services and Labour extend the maximum age eligibility for Extended Care and Maintenance from 21 years to 25 years, to enable youth to achieve higher education and develop work skills.

**Action:** Other. Alternative solution without legislated changes to extend care and maintenance to age 25.

**Response:** According to the Department of Family Services and Labour, to extend services until the age of 25 years would require legislative changes and the Department is not proceeding with legislative changes at this time. As an alternative, the Department of Family Services and Labour, through the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) Program has implemented the MYTEAM initiative; an interdepartmental program that provides extensive support to eligible youth who are not permanent wards, but are aging out of the child and family services system. Approximately 25 – 30 youth can benefit from this initiative yearly. Youth aging out of care and parenting may benefit from additional family support services as well. In addition, as indicated in the response to the previous recommendation the Department has allocated new funding in the amount of \$240,000 a year since 2007/08 to all the Authorities for three strategies to support youth leaving care and pursuing education, training and skill or talent development

6. That the Department of Family Services and Labour ensure that the policies for youth leaving care and the Extended Care and Maintenance provision is consistently applied across all Child and Family Service Authorities in the province.

**Action:** Significant Progress

**Response:** The Child Protection Branch reports the completion of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Framework which outlines the Child and Family Services Division concept of CQI for the four Authorities and other providers funded by the CPB. This framework operationalizes the applicable legislation, regulations and standards and evaluates Authority processes for receiving, recruiting and tracking Agency requests for extensions, and reviewing permanency plans during each 12 month time period. The Continuous Quality Improvement Framework will be used to review Authority processes including compliance with the mandate and provincial standards. The CPB is in the process of developing and revising standards for transition planning for children in care.

7. That the Department of Family Services and Labour broaden the Extended Care and Maintenance provisions to include temporary wards of the province that will be in care until the age of majority.

**Action:** Other. Alternative actions to extend services to temporary wards.

**Response:** Current legislation only allows extensions of care and maintenance to youth who are permanent wards. However, existing legislation allows for agencies to apply to the courts for permanent guardianship of temporary wards under the age of 18 if there is reason to warrant this action.

Temporary wards aging out of care are eligible for the following services to support and assist them in transitioning to adulthood:

- Funding through the Vision Catchers Fund to complete high school, access post-secondary education, obtain training for a career or developing special talents or skills in areas such as art, music, sports or religious activities,
- Referral to MYTEAM,
- Referral to adult support programs, and
- Supports can be provided to youth after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday through agency family support grants.

8. That the Department of Family Services and Labour, along with the four Authorities develop standards to prepare youth for leaving care and incorporate these standards as a regulatory requirement.

**Action:** Significant Progress

**Response:** A work group comprised of representatives from the four Authorities and the Child Protection Branch was established in 2009 to review and make changes to the existing Child and Family Service Standards. The Inter-Authority Standards Working Group (ASWG) is currently working on a standards section related to youth transitioning out of care, including changes to timelines, to ensure service providers, care givers and youth have the tools needed for transitioning successfully. According to the Child Protection Branch, the new standards view the child's care plan as a continuum of care throughout his or her involvement with the child welfare system and target factors such as cognitive abilities to ensure the child moves successfully from dependence to independence. The new standards include a Transition Plan for each child to be developed prior to their 15 birthday regardless of their legal status. This transition plan will include future learning opportunities and planning for

**employment readiness. The new revised 1.1.3 section of the standards manual is expected to be completed by mid-2012.**

9. That a Committee with representatives from the Department of Family Services and Labour and the Authorities, along with service providers, youth in care, or formerly in care and stakeholders, be established to develop standards for youth leaving care, including post care services. The Committee should embark on a review of national and international policies, programs and services to learn from these experiences and incorporate strategies that have proven to be effective for sustained positive outcomes.

**Action: Significant Progress**

**Response: According to the Child Protection Branch, work is underway to develop basic CFS standards on the details that are required for Age of Majority and Transitional preparation, including post transitional checks. The four Authorities have designated representatives that include an Age of Majority Specialist, a Child in Care Specialist, a Practice Leader, and a Quality Assurance Coordinator. In addition, a Youth Representative from VOICES is working with the CFS Standards Coordinator to draft CFS standards on transition planning.**

**In 2007, funding was made available to CFS Authorities under the Youth Engagement Strategy to improve communication with youth in care, obtain feedback on their needs and involve current and former youth in care in program and policy development.**

10. That standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care provide for the diverse needs of Aboriginal youth in care and youth with disabilities that are not eligible for adult supported living programs.

**Action: Completed**

**Response: Under the scope of the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) a provincial FASD strategy was broadened to include funding for FASD Specialist positions for all Authorities. In September 2009, a work group was established including the Specialists to work on developing best practice and standards for services specific to children affected by FASD in the child and family services system and youth with FASD transitioning out of care. These Standards for Children with Fetal FASD were**

completed and effective as of Sept 1, 2011. Three other protocols have been developed that serve as tools available to agencies to assist them in planning for youth in care, including youth with disabilities who do not qualify for adult supported living programs. These include:

- **Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community,**
- **Transition Planning: CFS to Adult Supports, and**
- **The Interdepartmental Protocol Agreement for Children/Youth with Severe to Profound Emotional/Behavioural Disorders.**

The Alternative Care Sub-Committee is currently working with the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) to develop an interdepartmental protocol to assist agencies in planning and /or developing placements for children with multiple, complex needs and who may not have a permanent place to live.

Through *Changes for Children* and the Manitoba Government, funding was provided to FASD Life's Journey Inc. for Spectrum Connections, a new program to provide a variety of FASD related services for youth transitioning out of CFS care and adults who are ineligible to receive funding under existing support programs.

11. That standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care outline a flexible and functional process for graduating from dependence to interdependence and include mandatory needs assessments individualized transition plans and post care services.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** Currently there is a general standard indicating the requirements that transition planning occur for children expected to age out of care. The Inter-Authority Standards Work Group (IASWG) continues to work on the development of standards for youth transitioning from care.

Guidelines to support transitions to adult services have been simplified and included in a document for child and family service workers called, *Transition Planning: Child and Family Services to Adult Supports*. This document provides detailed eligibility criteria and referral process as well as a review of adult support programs and services available to youth who

require additional support after the age of majority. Programs and services identified in this document include the Supported Adult Living Program, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Community Mental Health Services, the Provincial Special Needs Program, the Employment and Income Assistance Program and the Home Care Program.

In addition, a 4 year pilot project developed by the Department of Family Services and Labour, Employment and Income Assistance Program, provides support to youth aged 16 – 21 years who are not permanent wards of the child and family services system but are transitioning from care or have already transitioned from care. The *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship*, MYTEAM, offers financial assistance, supportive housing, educational assistance, employment preparation and mentorship. The pilot project will support 25 – 30 youth each year.

12. That standards for services to prepare youth for leaving care have provisions for the active involvement of the youth leaving care and for the inclusion of a team of individuals significant to the youth and willing to be a part of independent living planning with the youth.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** The Inter-Authority Standards Work Group (IASWG) continues to work on standards for youth transitioning from care.

Section 5 (1) in the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act* enables youth to choose the Authority they would like to receive independent living services from;

5 (1) Regardless of age or legal status, a child is entitled to choose his or her own authority of service when

- a) An independent living arrangement is being made for the child under *The Child and Family Services Act*, or
- b) The child is a parent or expectant parent to whom services are to be provided under Section 9 of *The Child and Family Services Act*.

In 2007, funding was made available to CFS Authorities under the Youth Engagement Strategy to improve communication with youth in care, obtain feedback on their needs and involve current and former youth in care in program and policy development. Some Authorities currently have active youth engagement activities that are on going. Others are still

developing strategies to engage youth in care. However, most Authorities have increased or improved on the services/programs available to youth leaving care.

Agencies responsible to the General Authority have implemented the “Signs of Safety” program which encourages involvement of family and other support networks in the assessment and planning for children/youth in care.

### **An Accountability Framework:**

13. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop compliance and quality assurance standards for services to youth leaving care, including post care services.

**Action:**                    **Significant Progress**

**Response:**            **According to information obtained from the Child Protection Branch, the role of the Quality Assurance program, often referred to as the Authority Relations/Quality Assurance (ARQA) program is to plan, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the functioning of the Child and Family Services Authorities, community-based agencies and Residential Child Care Facilities. The Authority Relations/Quality Assurance Team is conducting ongoing reviews of CFS Authorities regarding compliance with the legislated mandate and provincial standards. In turn, the CFS Authorities are responsible for agencies’ compliance with standards and review the operations of their respective agencies as required in their legislated mandate to oversee agency functioning. Once standards and policies are developed for youth aging out of care, Authorities will have standardized criteria from which to measure service performance. The CPB reports that many of the agencies have included services to youth leaving care in their five year business plans and are developing objectives and performance indicators by which they will be able to measure program development.**

14. That a comprehensive and consistent tracking system be implemented for all children in care measuring their progress in key areas of development while in care. The Canadian Looking After Children (CanLac) is an example of a nationally endorsed measurement of progress in seven key areas of development – education,

health, identity, family, social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development and self-care skills.

**Action: Significant Progress**

**Response:** The Child Protection Branch advises that Child Well-Being Windows were added to the provincial information tracking system in 2004 using the *Looking After Children* (LAC) variables as a reference. A high risk medical window was added later with the capacity to track children in care for frequency of moves, maltreatment and suicidal ideation among others. The well-being windows are to be completed for all children in care as well as for all children that were receiving services from child and family service agencies. The information collected on the well-being windows can track and measure school performance, social skills, disabilities and/or mental health conditions and health history through annual updates. The biggest concern with this program is that it requires regular and consistent input of information in order to be useful. There have been long standing concerns about the lack of data input into the information system. For example, a request for information on youth aged 15 – 21 with disabilities for this report showed that no information was reported in this area for 59% of the youth. According to the CPB, work continues with the four Authorities to support their agencies in the use of the Child and Family Service Application as a case management tool.

The Manitoba government made a commitment to improve the child and family services information management system in 2008. Consultations were held with child and family service workers and managers. Changes to the information system, now known as the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA) include:

- the capacity to record high risk medical information for children in care, and
- added capability to upload photos of children in care and send them through a secure channel to police if a child is missing.

15. That a comprehensive and consistent tracking system be implemented for youth leaving care measuring their progress in preparation for independence while in care and after leaving care. The tracking system should be based on the determinants of health.

**Action: Competed**

**Response: According to the Children Protection Branch, the Child Well-Being Windows and the National Outcome Measures (NOM) improvements to identify high risk indicators for children in care can be used to track readiness for leaving care and improve the transition readiness of youth and adults leaving care. There is no unified or collaborative service model involving income assistance, adult training, health, mental health and justice, among others, for youth and adults who have left care. The DFSCA along with other departments provide administrative data to the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy Evaluation to conduct population level research.**

**CFS Authorities are developing internal youth tracking systems linked to the Child in Care Annual Reviews. The Northern Authority has undertaken to develop Authority specific outcomes in accordance with the “National Outcome Measures (NOM)” project developed by \*Nico Trocme in 2009. A goal of an operational database for tracking youth transitioning from care is set for May 2011. The Metis Authority has developed a new Child in Care (CIC) annual review form that reduces the amount of work to complete it. If information is already available on the CFSA child well-being screen it is auto-populated so that caseworkers will not be asked to provide the information a second time. The system also allows for an email to be sent to every worker when their CIC annual reviews are due and administrative staff follow-up with workers to ensure the forms are completed. The General Authority has revised its Directors Annual Review (DAR) to expand on information collected. There is a greater focus on outcomes in areas such as education, health, employment, etc. The revised DAR is expected to be implemented in April 2011. Agencies responsible to the Southern Authority continue to work on a five-year plan.**

**\*National Child Welfare Outcome Indicator Matrix  
McGill University Centre of Research, June 2009**

### **Cooperation and Coordination between Departments**

16. That the Department of Family Services and Labour, along with the MB Housing Authority, develop a number of housing units in the province solely for youth leaving care.

- a). these should include short-term transition and emergency housing options and long term apartments, and
- b). housing units must be affordable and located in areas that are safe and in close proximity to transportation services.

**Action:**           **Significant Progress**

**Response:**       **According to CPB reports, the Government of Manitoba Cross Department Coordination Initiatives (CDCI) formed a work group in 2009 to examine the problem of youth homelessness, particularly as it affected youth aging out of the child and family services system. The work group included divisions and branches of the Department of Family Services and Labour including Housing Strategic Initiatives, the Manitoba Housing Authority, and the Child Protection and Community Service Delivery Branches. The CDCI completed an action plan for appropriate housing supports for youth transitioning from care in three areas of need:**

- **Youth participating in high school and other education programs,**
- **Youth requiring on going supports such as life skills training, and,**
- **Youth requiring intensive supports.**

**In June 2009, the *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM*, was launched. This four-year pilot project will provide housing, financial assistance, education or employment preparation and support in life skills to 25 to 30 youth in Winnipeg and Thompson between the ages of 16 – 21 years who are aging out of the child welfare system but are not eligible for an extension of care and maintenance because they are not permanent wards of the province. A component of the MYTEAM pilot project is safe and affordable housing for participants in Winnipeg and Thompson, provided through Manitoba Housing Authority buildings or private accommodations. A participant allowance will allow flexibility for participants to sustain alternate housing in the private market after their involvement with MYTEAM ends.**

**The Metis Child, Family and Community Services has leased a number of apartments in different locations in the City of Winnipeg to offer independent living accommodations to youth who require additional support to make the transition to independence.**

**Staff with the General Authority (GA), the Winnipeg Child and Family Services Branch (WCFS) and the Metis Child, Family and Community Services (MCFCS) has met to discuss the housing needs for youth transitioning from care. A Creative Housing Solutions Committee made up of staff from the WCFS and GA are currently working with the Manitoba Housing Authority, as well as private sector landlords, to develop a housing strategy for youth aging out of care. A recommendation, jointly supported by the General and Metis Authorities, has been submitted to the Standing Committee calling for the development of a Cross Authority Committee to work on a plan to address the specific housing needs of youth leaving care.**

17. That the Department of Family Services and Labour create a program within its Employment and Income Assistance Program with flexible and supportive admission rules and expectations, providing counseling, guidance and emotional support to former youth in care, to engage them in career planning. It is essential that the program is responsive to issues of youth development, youth engagement and the varying needs of this special population group.

**Action: Significant Progress**

**Response: The *Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance Mentorship project, or MYTEAM*, was developed as a pilot project with funding from the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) *Rewarding Work* initiative to support youth who are leaving care or recently left care and are enrolled in EIA. Led by the Child Protection Branch, this program provides support and integrated service delivery to Youth between the ages of 16 and 21 years, who meet the eligibility criteria for EIA and are willing to participate in education, and/or an employment training program, work with a mentor, and make a minimum one year commitment to remain in the program. Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. has been selected to deliver the program in Winnipeg and will target 20-22 participants per year, and Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Center has been selected to deliver the project in Thompson, and will target between 5-8 participants per year.**

18. That the Department of Family Services and Labour and Dept of Education, Citizenship and Youth develop a policy paper on reducing school moves due to placement changes, supporting youth in care to complete high school and improving academic outcomes for children in care.

**Action:** Significant Progress

**Response:** The Child Protection Branch reports that a new initiative request (Improving Education Success and Graduation Rates for Children in Care) has been submitted for consideration by the Department of Family Services and Labour in November 2009 for 2010/11 and again for 2011/12. Areas for action include a literature review, comprehensive assessment, training for caregivers, protocols between child and family services and education (school divisions), priority access to quality early learning programs, development of pre-transition and post-transition programs, ensuring stability in placements for children in care, and hiring educational specialists within Authorities.

Each Authority received funding to contract Educational Specialist positions with the goal to help enable better educational outcomes for children in care. The Educational Specialists provide consultation and support to CFS agencies in the areas of schooling for children involved in the child welfare system and act as a liaison between CFS and the educational system to develop better ways for support children in care. Specific activities include:

- Working with the school system to develop better protocols for supporting children in care who change schools,
- Working with the school system to develop better protocols for specialized programs such as early start programs, reading programs and transition programs,
- Exploring local and national models of schooling or school programming that would improve school attendance,
- Exploring local and national models for providing special education that would improve outcomes for children in care with special needs,
- Developing outcomes measures related to school attendance and school performance for children in care,
- Working with schools to develop materials and/or training programs that increase communication between schools and the child welfare system, and
- Consulting and liaising with local child welfare agencies regarding children in care with unique concerns within the school system.

In 2008, the *Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for*

***Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community***, document was completed replacing the former protocol, ***Manitoba Transition Planning Process Support Guidelines for Students with Special Needs Reaching Age 16 (1999)***. The new document strengthens protocols related to a coordinated service approach by identifying the role of education and family services and recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach covering “vocational skills, social skills, independent living, health, daily living skills and academic knowledge”. It encourages a “person-centered” plan involving key people to develop a transition plan that meets specific student needs.

19. That the Department of Family Services and Labour and Dept of Education, Citizenship and Youth launch a review of the poor education outcomes for youth in care and make recommendations for improving these outcomes.

**Action:**                   **Significant Progress**

**Response:**           **In May 2008 Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth introduced the Bright Futures Fund which augments an existing \$8 million fund available for education related initiatives. Bright Futures is available to community-based groups to work with partnership schools to provide students with a variety of supports including tutoring, increased family involvement in schools, mentoring, goal-setting, career exploration and bursaries.**

**According to information provided by the Child Protection Branch, a new initiative request (Improving Education Success and Graduation Rates for Children in Care) was submitted to Standing Committee in 2009. This initiative calls for a literature review, comprehensive assessment, training for caregivers, protocols between child and family service agencies and education divisions, priority access to quality early learning programs, development of pre-transition and post transition programs, ensuring stability in placements of children in care and hiring educational specialists within Authorities.**

**In 2010, through *Changes for Children*, funding was provided to all CFS Authorities for a one-year pilot project to create Education Specialist positions with the goal to help enable better educational outcomes for children in care. In March 2011, the Metis and General Authorities have hired staff to fill**

**these positions. It is expected that Education Specialists will work with school divisions to develop better protocols for supporting children in care who change schools, explore local and national models of school programming to improve attendance, develop outcome measures related to school attendance and school performance for children in care, and liaise between child welfare agencies and school systems regarding children in care with unique concerns and special needs.**

**According to the Child Protection Branch, work has been initiated on rewriting the 2002 *Guidelines for School Registration on Students in Care of Child Welfare Agencies*. An HCMO led work group with representatives from the CFS Division, CFS Authorities, Department of Education (and other stakeholders to be determined), have begun work on developing the new protocol, tentatively titled, *Joint Educational Planning and Support for Children and Youth in Care: Intersectoral Guidelines*.**

20. That the Department of Family Services and Labour, the Dept of Education, Citizenship and Youth and Manitoba Health and Healthy Living launch an exploratory research initiative on the health and mental health needs of street involved youth.

**Action: Significant Progress**

**Response: The Child Welfare Inter-Sectoral Committee (CWIC) was established by Standing Committee in 2008 to promote better collaboration and integration of services between systems. Membership in the committee includes senior representatives from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Healthy Child Manitoba, the Department of Family Services and Labour, the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Healthy Living. In 2009 CWIC developed work plans for coordination and integration of services in four areas: healthy child development, services to youth with complex medical needs, addictions and children's mental health and suicide prevention. The work plans have been approved and implementation started in 2010.**

**A provincial committee was established to develop a framework for suicide prevention. The Committee reviewed data on suicide and self inflicted injuries, best practice**

literature, inquest recommendations and other suicide prevention strategies. In 2006, the report, *A Framework for Suicide Prevention Planning in Manitoba*, was completed and formed a foundation for further development in this area.

A province wide youth suicide prevention strategy, *Reclaiming Hope*, was established in 2009. This collaborative strategy includes funding from *Changes for Children* and Manitoba Healthy Living. The goal of the strategy is to prevent youth suicide and suicide-related thoughts and behaviours through teaching healthy individual coping strategies and providing enhanced family, social and community supports. The strategy calls for the development of community based suicide prevention training, leadership development and identification of suicide-related issues as well as additional funding for crisis stabilization services.

In a follow-up to their 2005 study, the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba produced another report on street youth called *Still Without Shelter: A Description of Issues Faced by Street Youth in Winnipeg in 2007*. This report provides an extensive look at the issue of homeless youth in Winnipeg.

21. That Manitoba Healthy Living extends its Healthy Adolescent Development Strategy to address the needs of youth in care and former youth in care.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** In addition to their lead role in the development and implementation of *Reclaiming Hope: Manitoba's Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy*, Manitoba FASD Strategy and the Bridging to Adulthood Protocol, the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) has launched several initiatives and programs in the last three years that could benefit all youth, including:

- Youth Subcommittees of Regional Suicide Prevention Committees. These committees are led by Regional Health Authorities (RHA) across the province. The committees have prepared work plans for suicide prevention related activities for their geographic areas.
- Communities that Care (CTC). This is an evidence-based program that guides communities to use advances from prevention science to plan their own prevention efforts.
- Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre (WASAC) North. This program implements youth sport and

recreation leadership programs and cultural events to a select group of Aboriginal communities.

- **Life Skills Training (LST)**. This is an evidence-based drug abuse prevention program offered in schools to children in grades 2-4.
- **Roots/Seeds of Empathy**. Currently implemented in over 200 schools in the province, this program teaches non-violent peer group interactions to pre-school and school aged children to Grade 8.
- **Signs of Suicide (SOS)**. A partnership between the DFSCA and WRA's, this program focuses on decreasing youth suicide and self-injury by increasing knowledge of depression and teaching intervention strategies.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)**. This program helps early identification of the signs and symptoms of mental health problems and encourages helping strategies.
- **Teen Talk North**. Through this initiative, Teen Talk, a program offered by Klinik Community Health Centre has provided a series of workshops on suicide prevention in schools in northern Manitoba.
- **Discharge Protocols and Resources**. Research on discharge protocols and standards related to at-risk youth seen in emergency departments.
- **Crisis and Treatment Services for Youth in the North**. Funding for a youth crisis stabilization unit in Thompson with on-site treatment, a mobile crisis component and Telehealth capacity.
- **Enhanced Telehealth Capacity for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Consultation to the North**. This initiative is a pilot project with four First Nations communities to receive regular child and adolescent mental health and psychiatric consultations via Telehealth, delivered by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) through the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC).
- **Enhanced Training for Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinicians in the North**. This is a training program for wellness workers, mental health workers and other service providers in Aboriginal communities.
- **Trauma Training for Service Providers**. Training modules delivered by Klinik Community Health Centre.

- **Bereavement Support.** Through a Service Purchase Agreement with SPEAK Inc. and Klinik to provide suicide bereavement support.
- **Suicidality, Para-suicidality and Prevention in the Youth Justice Population.** This is a WRHA data mining project using Department of Justice data to identify risk factors youth suicidality and para-suicidality among youth who are in the justice population.

### **Preparing Service Providers and Caregivers**

22. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop training programs for Social Workers, Support Workers and Youth Care Workers on preparing youth for transitioning from care.

**Action:** Significant Progress

**Response:** The recommendations related to training programs for service providers and caregivers were referred to the Joint Training Unit (JTU). The JTU is composed of training coordinators from all Authorities as well as the Department of Family Services and Labour and reports to the Child and Family Services Standing Committee. The JTU is responsible for establishing and maintaining a training initiative to develop a qualified, culturally competent workforce for child and family services. Its functions also include developing, coordinating, implementing and evaluating training activities for staff and foster families in the child and family services system. A Preparing Youth in Care for Independent Living Training Program Working Group, chaired by the Manager of Training, Child Protection Branch, along with representation from the four Authorities, Department of Education, School Division Student Services Administration, Manitoba Foster Family Network, Community Living disABILITY Services, Employment and Income Assistance and VOICES: The Child in Care Network. This group is working on developing a training program that will include tools and resources that can be individualized and are portable for use by youth, caregivers and service providers on preparing youth in care for independent living. The training will incorporate CFS standards and protocols on transitional planning. According to the CPB, the target date for the training program to be completed is September 2013.

23. That the Competency-Based Training Program includes a module on preparing youth in care for independent living.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** A module in the Youth Care Worker competency based training program, Core 803: Family Focused Practice provides some training on permanency planning including independent living. This is by no means comprehensive at this time. The content in this module includes:  
“Working with families, not only with youth, is a value which is woven throughout the competency-based training modules. The concepts of family preservation, family-centred practice, and empowerment of families are addressed in this module. The impact of separation, attachment, and placement is explored. The development of care, treatment and permanency plans through all the potential stages of intervention will be addressed.”

A Preparing Youth in Care for Independent Living Training Program Working Group, chaired by the Manager of Training, Child Protection Branch, responsible for the CFS Competency-Based Training Program, along with representatives from the four Authorities, Department of Education, School Division Student Services Administration, Manitoba Foster Family Network, Community Living disABILITY Services, Employment and Income Assistance and VOICES has been established to work on developing a training program that will include tools and resources that can be individualized and are portable for use by youth, caregivers and service providers on preparing youth in care for independent living. The training will incorporate CFS standards and protocols on transitional planning and is expected to be completed by September 2013.

24. That the Child Protection Branch, or designate, develop a core set of life skill competencies for youth aged 15 years, 16 years, 17 years and the age of majority. These competencies should provide guidance to caregivers in developing appropriate life skill activities with youth at each age level.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** Two initiatives are currently in progress which may lead to the development of a core set of life skill competencies for all

youth in care.

- Work is currently underway on developing new standards for age of majority and transitioning from care that view the care needs of children on a continuum throughout their involvement in the child welfare system.
- A work group has been established to develop a training program for service providers and care givers on preparing youth in care for independent living.

The document, *Transition Planning: Child and Family Services to Adult Supports* was circulated to Authorities in 2008 and contains guidelines to assist CFS staff in referring youth with disabilities to adults support programs.

25. That the Manitoba Foster Family Network receive funding to develop training programs for foster parents to assist youth in care with achieving life skill competencies and preparing for independent living.

**Action: Completed**

**Response:** According to information obtained from the Child Protection Branch, in February 2010, the Department of Family Services and Labour approved \$75,000 in funding to the Manitoba Foster Family Network (MFFN) for training. One of the goals of the MFFN is to assist in the development and delivery of a province-wide comprehensive competency-based training program for foster parents. The MFFN is represented in the work group that is working on developing a training program on preparing youth in care for independent living.

26. That Authorities and Agencies ensure that all youth in care are aware of VOICES, Manitoba Youth in Care Network by providing information material to all new admissions and having information brochures available at all agency offices and placement resources.

**Action: Completed**

**Response:** The Child Protection Branch supported a re-printing of VOICES youth in care handbook which is provided to agencies for distribution to new and existing children in care.

In addition, excerpts in Part III Requirements and Standards, in the *Child Care Facilities Standards Manual* are currently under revision with Communications to include “child care facilities

should ensure youth in care (ages 14 -18) are provided with information about VOICES”.

VOICES is represented in the Youth Engagement Strategy. This initiative by the DFSCA provided funding to all CFS Authorities to engage youth preparing to leave care and those who recently left care in consultations with the goal to gain further understanding of the needs of youth transitioning from care.

### **Independent Living Preparation for all Youth Leaving Care**

27. That Authorities and Agencies review their case management practices to ensure that all youth in care, at the age of 15, have a transition plan for leaving care. This plan should contain an assessment of the youth’s needs, a plan for acquiring life skills, time frames and goals for independent living.

**Action: Significant Progress**

**Response: Currently there is a general standard indicating the requirements that transition planning occur for children expected to age out of care. Revisions to the basic standards will view care plans for children as a continuum of care throughout the child’s involvement in the child welfare system. The care plan process will include the child, caregivers and other stakeholders on an ongoing basis. Prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> birthday of a child in care, regardless of their legal status, an age of majority or transition plan must be in place as part of the care plan. This transitional piece includes provisions for exploring and defining future learning opportunities and planning for employment readiness. The new revised standards are expected to be completed by mid 2012.**

**According to reports from Authorities and agencies, VOICES and youth in care or formerly in care, there is a significant movement in child and family services practice to improve services to youth aging out of care. Across the system, there is recognition that youth cannot be discharged from care without a plan and this is evident in the significant increase in the number of extensions of care and maintenance by all CFS Authorities in the last three years. A request for extensions of care and maintenance reflect that transitional planning is occurring.**

**Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba established a committee called the “Brandon Transitioning Out Committee” with representatives from nine organizations in the community. This committee screens referrals of youth involved with multi-agencies, assess the needs, determines relevant agency involvement and ensures an effective transition planning process.**

28. That Authorities and Agencies develop a practice standard that involves youth, upon reaching the age of 15, to participate with the case worker in developing a transition plan for independence from care.

**Action: Complete**

**Response: The present practice is that CFS caseworkers are expected to involve youth in the preparation of plans for transition to independence. Youth are involved in transition planning for the purpose of obtaining extensions of care and in various programs offered by agencies and in the MYTEAM initiative offered by the DFSCA. Work currently underway to revise the existing standards is expected to reinforce that a transition plan should be in place for all children in care by the time they reach the age of 15 years.**

29. That Authorities and Agencies develop a practice standard that promotes educational achievement as a priority for children in care, and support this by providing practical assistance such as educational assessments, tutoring, counseling, learning aids and tools and assistance with learning.

**Action: In Progress**

**Response: According to the Child Protection Branch, a new initiative request (Improving Education Success and Graduation Rates for Children in Care) was submitted to Standing Committee in November 2009, for 2010/11 and again for 2011/12. This initiative calls for a literature review, comprehensive assessment, training for caregivers, protocols between child and family service agencies and education divisions, priority access to quality early learning programs, development of pre-transition and post transition programs, ensuring stability in placements of children in care and hiring educational specialists within Authorities.**

Each Authority received funding to contract Educational Specialist positions with the goal to help enable better educational outcomes for children in care. The Educational Specialists provide consultation and support to CFS agencies in the areas of schooling for children involved in the child welfare system and act as a liaison between CFS and the educational system to develop better ways for support children in care.

Work has been initiated on rewriting the 2002 *Guidelines for School Registration for Students in Child Welfare Agencies*. An Healthy Child Manitoba Office led working group with representatives from the CFS Division, CFS Authorities, Department of Education, etc. have begun work on developing the new protocol, tentatively titled *Joint Education Planning and Support for Children and Youth in Care: Intersectoral Guidelines*.

In May 2008 Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth introduced the Bright Futures Fund which augments an existing \$8 million fund available for education related initiatives. Bright Futures is available to community-based groups to work with partnership schools to provide students with a variety of supports including tutoring, increased family involvement in schools, mentoring, goal-setting, career exploration and bursaries.

30. That Authorities and Agencies develop a practice standard that promotes reconnections with biological and extended family, former foster parents or other significant persons in the life of the youth. Every effort should be made to ensure that youth leaving care have a support system.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** Child and Family Services Standard 1.1.2(8) *Contact with Parents of Permanent Wards* states that “at least once a year, the case manager attempts to connect the parents or former guardians or a permanent ward to assess the potential for reunification or re-involvement when this is in the best interests of the child and contact is possible.”

According to the Child Protection Branch, the current standards are being revised to include a Care Plan that clearly outlines the need for the child’s family of origin and community that the child identifies with to be an important part

of the child's care plan. The same standard (1.1.3) reinforces the need for a strong network of people during and after transition planning.

The Metis Child, Family and Community Services Agency (MCFCSA) offers a program, "*Life Long Connections*" to assist permanent wards of the Agency to establish connections with "at least one caring, committed adult in their lives".

31. That the Department of Family Services and Labour increase funding to reduce workload for CFS Workers enabling them to increase time in direct service work with youth in care.

**Action: Complete**

**Response: As reported in the 2010 progress report of the *Changes for Children* initiative, a total of 231 front-line positions or positions that provide supports to front-line workers have been added to the child and family services system in Manitoba.**

The Harmonized Federal-Provincial Funding Model was announced in July 2010. This model is the result of a joint process between the Province and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to develop a harmonized funding formula for Child and Family Services in Manitoba. The funding model addresses workload concerns with funding providing one social worker for every 25 protection cases and child in care cases and one social worker for every 20 prevention cases. Funding is also provided for one Supervisor for each six front line social workers. This new funding model will provide funding for approximately 125 FTE front line workers. Subsequent years will provide additional resources as agency prevention services expand.

32. That the Department of Family Services and Labour provide funding to Authorities to develop independent living programs for youth leaving care.

**Action: Complete**

**Response: Since 2006, several initiatives have been funded by the DFSCA through the *Changes for Children* initiative to improve independent living preparation and transitioning out services for youth in care:**

- **The Youth Engagement Strategy.** In 2007, *Changes for Children* provided funding to all CFS Authorities for a youth engagement strategy aimed at creating opportunities for youth to share their experiences and insight that could influence planning and policy development as well as practice to improve services to youth transitioning from care.
- **Vision Catchers Fund.** This fund was established in 2007 to assist youth in care to pursue education and career opportunities.
- **FASD Specialists.** In 2008, as part of the Manitoba FASD Strategy, funding for FASD Specialists was provided to all CFS Authorities. The Specialists provide consultations, develop strategies and programs, and advocate for and evaluate services provided to children and youth with FASD, including youth aging out of care.
- **Education Outcome Specialists.** One year term funding has been made available to all Authorities to hire educational specialists to improve the education outcomes for children and youth in care.
- **Mentorship Project.** Funding was made available to Authorities, based on submitted plans for age of majority initiatives in three areas: mentoring, development and engagement. Authorities are at different stages of implementation of these initiatives from some agencies providing this service and others not at all. Some authorities have not submitted plans for age of majority initiatives because of different priorities.
- **Age of Majority Specialists.** Two Authorities have created new positions to focus directly on policy, services and programs for youth transitioning from care.
- **Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy “Reclaiming Hope”.** This province-wide program was established in 2009 to provide services that involve early identification of suicide-related thoughts and behaviours and availability of resources and support to prevent youth suicide. This program is available in several locations of the province.
- **The Manitoba Youth Transitional Employment Assistance**

**Mentorship (MYTEAM) program. This 4-year pilot program will offer a range of services such as housing, educational support, financial assistance, employment placement and mentorship to 25 -30 youth a year, who are not permanent wards but are transitioning from care into independent living.**

33. That Authorities and Agencies increase the number of specialized foster homes for youth over the age of 15 preparing for independent living.

**Action: Significant Progress**

**Response: In November 2006 the DFSCA and the CFS Authorities launched the *Circle of Care*, a province-wide foster home recruitment campaign. According to information provided by the Child Protection Branch, as of March 2010, this strategy has resulted in a net increase of 3251 new foster care bed spaces in the province with priority given to new bed spaces for high needs children, sibling groups and hard to place youth. The DFSCA supported this campaign through the provision of 19 staff positions housed at the Authorities and a province-wide media campaign.**

**The process of resource development is ongoing. According to CFSA data, 56% of youth in the 15-17 age group and 51% of youth in the 18-21 age live in a foster home or a place of safety.**

34. That foster parents, caring for youth preparing for independent living, are provided with a clear description of responsibilities and attend training in strategies and methods for effective independent living preparation.

**Action: In Progress**

**Response: *Changes for Children* established the *Foster Parent Training and Curriculum Design Team (FPTCDT)* in 2008 to work on a training curriculum for foster parents. This team is currently working on developing a competency based training package for foster parents which will include training in transitioning children/youth out of care.**

35. That foster parents caring for youth preparing for independent living be paid an increased per diem rate, established through a review of responsibilities, training

expectations and the needs of the youth preparing to leave care.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** The Child Protection Branch reports that a Child Maintenance Working Group has been developed to look at how funding for children in care is allocated.

*The Foster Parent Training and Curriculum Design Team (FPTCDT)* continues to work on a training package for foster parents. Once this is available a measure will be in place to match the actual needs of a youth with an appropriately skilled placement. This may lend to the standardization of special rates allowing the foster parent to be equitably and adequately compensated for their skills and experience.

36. That Authorities review the transition plans for youth in care aged 16 and over and based on the identified needs, develop a range of appropriate independent living services or programs to ensure successful transitions to adulthood.

**Action:** Significant Progress

**Response:** In addition to the programs and resources provided through *Changes for Children*, several Authority specific and agency specific programs are available to support youth aging out of care. With programs developing in 28 child and family service agencies in the province, this list is not at all comprehensive.

- **Extensions of Care and Maintenance.** All CFS Authorities report an increase in the number of extensions of care and maintenance every year. Youth are staying in care beyond the age of majority. According to the DFSCA new extensions have been approved as follows:

- i. 173 in the 2007/08 fiscal year,
- ii. 233 in the 2008/09 fiscal year, and
- iii. 326 in the 2009/10 fiscal year

Most care and maintenance extensions result when a youth is in the process of completing an education program, has been referred to adult supported living but the application has not yet been processed, or the youth is not ready to live independently. The third category represents a significant recognition that not all youth are ready for independence at the age of majority.

- **Volunteer Mentorships.** The WCFS and MCFCS Agencies

manage a program using trained volunteers to provide mentorship and resources to youth living independently. No information is available from other agencies.

- **Northern Authority Age of Majority Specialist.** The Northern Authority filled this position in May 2010. The Age of Majority Specialist is in the process of developing Authority specific standards for agencies to follow in preparing youth for aging out of care and living independently. An Aging out of Care program is available in the community of Pukatawagan.
- **General Authority Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) Team.** The GA hired two former youth in care to lead youth engagement activities across the province. They remain an active part of the team working toward developing a sustainable mentorship program. With the recent addition of an Age of Majority Specialist, the YES team is involved in several activities to involve youth including establishing a youth advisory council, organizing youth forums, and planning a youth retreat.
- **“Skills for Life”.** The General Authority is involved in a program, implemented at the WCFS called “Skills for Life”. This program, developed by T. McNaughton-Wright and B. Wright, assists youth in preparing for independence through a readiness assessment, skill acquisition and practice time to master skills needed to transition to independence. After an initial pilot and based on feedback, the GA has commissioned a revised version of this program.
- **RAILS Program.** This is a supported independent living program with 24 hour access to staff, operating with the MCFCS. This program assists youth with housing, education or work experience and life skill training and overall support while they reside on their own.
- **Skills for Life Program.** Offered by the MCFCS, this program provides support, assistance, education and training for youth in the development of life skills necessary to transition successfully into adulthood.
- **SASH Program- Youth Outreach Workers.** Also offered by the MCFCS, this program provided outreach services to

high risk youth who are engaged in “at risk” behaviours that may negatively impact their well-being.

- **The Metis Spirit Program.** This is a post age of majority program offered by the MCFCS with funding from the Manitoba Metis Federation. This program provides 24 hour access and support to all youth who have aged out of care with the Agency.
- **Independent Living Case Workers.** At least two agencies responsible to the Southern First Nations Network of Care; the Southeast Child and Family Services and Anishinabe Child and Family Services, have caseworkers that carry a specialized caseload of youth that are transitioning from care or living independently.

37. That the Department of Family Services and Labour develop a directory of independent living programs and resources in the province.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** The Child Protection Branch reports that a process has started to develop a directory of independent living programs and resources in the province. A request has been made to residential care facilities to provide the Branch with a list of Independent Living Services. This list will remain ongoing and be updated as information changes and should be available to agencies through the Child and Family Services Application (CFSA).

In addition, the Manitoba Services and Supports Directory is a searchable listing of services, programs and organizations throughout Manitoba related to health and education and other resources relevant to youth are transitioning to independence.

The Transitional Training Intersectoral Committee is currently developing a training package on the key elements of the planning process for transition partners, to increase consistency in transition planning, services and supports.

### **Favouring Positive Outcomes**

38. That the Department of Family Services and Labour work with the Social Planning Council to establish a Committee to review the independent living rates for youth in care and, based on a review of actual living costs, adjust the living allowance in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee.

**Action: In Progress**

**Response: Additional work is required to address the basic level of independent living funding provided to youth without special needs.**

**While there may be some variations between Authorities, the basic independent living rates are as follows:**

- **Room and Board arrangement** **\$ 639.75 monthly**
- **Single youth in an apartment** **\$ 725.61 “**
- **Youth with one child** **\$1 007.20 “**
- **Youth with two children** **\$1,216.00 “**

**Youth eligible for special needs funding within the child maintenance criteria can obtain additional supports such as support workers, therapy and academic support.**

39. That the Department of Family Services and Labour, through the Employment and Income Assistance Program, provide the same adjusted living allowance to youth leaving care until the youth is able to earn a comparable or better living allowance through employment or the youth reaches the age of 21 years.

**Action: Completed**

**Response: The Child Protection Branch and the Employment and Income Assistance Program collaboratively initiated a pilot project, MYTEAM, for youth ranging in age from 16 to 21, who are aging out of the child welfare system as temporary wards or under a Voluntary Placement Agreement. This project offers direct financial assistance, supportive housing, educational assistance, employment placements and child care if necessary to approximately 25 – 30 youth a year in Winnipeg and Thompson. Participants will be enrolled on EIA to access funds for shelter, food and personal care. EIA is willing to work with participants and coordinate Service Plans with those from MYTEAM, and allow the participant allowance as unearned income to supplement funds from EIA.**

40. That the Department of Family Services and Labour introduce financial incentives to enable youth in care to pursue higher education or training. This can include tuition waivers, education vouchers, bursaries, grants or loans.

**Action: Completed**

**Response: In 2007/08, funding was made available to each Authority to establish the “Vision Catchers” Fund.**

**Several other scholarships and bursaries are available to youth in care.**

- **Vision Catchers Fund.** This fund was created to assist youth in care to develop their strengths, maximize potential and pursue career aspirations. Funding is available to support youth ages 16-21 who are currently in care in specialized study, purchasing supplies needed to pursue a career, job search assistance, attending technical training or an apprenticeship program.
- **Keith Cooper Scholarships.** Scholarships are available to young people who have been in care to pursue education. The scholarship committee awards one or more scholarships totaling \$7500 and recipients may reapply for additional scholarships to complete a university, technical or vocational program.
- **The Marymount Bursary Program.** This fund is open to young people who have received services from Marymount for at least six months.
- **The Ken Dryden Scholarship.** Scholarships are available to youth in/from care across Canada. The Ken Dryden scholarship is 80% of the annual tuition and fees, up to a maximum of \$3,000. It is renewable for 4 years.
- **The VOICES Scholarship Program.** This program offers two scholarships: the VOICES bursary, which is valued up to \$1,000.00, and is available to all youth in/from care across Manitoba; and the Peter D. Curry Memorial Scholarship, six \$2,000 scholarships available to youth in/from care who have lived in certain Winnipeg areas. In addition to the financial aspect of these awards, the recipients are invited to monthly get-togethers for peer support and encouragement, and a dinner. New applicants must be under the age of 30.

- **Scotia Stay in School Awards.** This program was originally established in Ontario with the Children’s Aid Society and began to expand to other areas of Canada in 2007. It offers three types of awards:
  - i. **Stay in school awards.** This award encourages students to complete high school by offered a combination of \$50 cash and a \$200 Canada Savings Bond,
  - ii. **Graduation awards.** This award is available to students in Grades 8 – 12 and consists of a \$50 cash award for graduation and a \$100 Canada Savings Bond for graduating from Grade 12, and
  - iii. **Leap to Learning Tutoring.** This initiative was established to support educationally at risk children and youth in meeting their academic goals.
  
- **Miracle Fund.** The CBIC Children’s Miracle Fund was established in 1999 to provide opportunities and supports to children, youth and families serviced by child and family services. The purpose is to enhance opportunities through a grant of \$250 for basic necessities, cultural events, health and well being activities, music lessons, sports or recreational activities and travel costs to special events with extended family members.

41. Education funds should be started for all children in care with those born after 2003 eligible for the Canada Learning Bond.

**Action:** In Progress

**Response:** According to reports from the General Child and Family Service Authority, all Child and Family Service regions and agencies responsible to that Authority have agreed to initiate the process of applying for Canada Learning Bonds for children born before 2003 who are permanent wards. A process has developed for submitting applications and ensuring that these funds will be available to children who have been in care.

42. That the Authorities review the admission to care statistics at ANCR Intake Services to allow for the admission of youth under the age of 18, in need of shelter and support.

**Action: Completed**

**Response:** The Independent Youth Skills (IYS) Program at ANCR provides training for youth ages 16 -17 who are transitioning to independence. This time limited program (90 days) is part of the Family Enhancement Differential Response for CFS and provides referrals to the provincial Employment and Income Assistance program, life skills training and recreational support.

According to data obtained from the ANCR Annual Report for 2009-2010, a total of 124 youth received services through this program between April 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010. A total of 61 independent living files were open; 11 were transferred to other agencies and 18 were closed throughout the year. The rest remain open. In addition, a total of 39 youth were referred to the IYS Life Skills Group where 28 youth completed the life skills training program and 53 youth were referred to the provincial Employment and Income Assistance Program.

43. That the Department of Family Services and Labour provide funding to increase the number of transitional and emergency bed spaces in the province for youth under the age of majority.

**Action: Completed**

**Response:** Through the Changes for Children Hotel Reduction Strategy each Authority was given funding for foster home recruitment positions. Priority was given to creating new bed spaces for high needs children, sibling groups, and hard to place youth. As of December 2009, 2,676 new bed spaces have been created for Manitoba youth in care. Group homes were developed in Winnipeg, Thompson, Dauphin, and Swan River that can be used as emergency bed spaces. In addition, Ji-zhaabwiing is an emergency and short term assessment facility in Winnipeg developed to meet the transition care needs of youth. According to CPB reports, as of March 2011, there are 11,938 bed spaces available for children in care.

44. That the Department of Family Services and Labour establish a fund for aftercare services to former youth in care. This funding should be available to community

organizations to develop programs offering services to meet the varying needs of former youth in care.

**Action:** Other: Alternative solution with funding to Authorities rather than community organizations.

**Response:** Mentorship Funding was made available to the Authorities, based on submitted plans for age of majority initiatives in three areas - mentoring, development, and engagement. Results from youth engagement activities favour the development of post care services for youth who have transitioned out of care. Annual funding of \$120,000.00 is being provided for this initiative. It is anticipated that over time, the Mentorship Program will grow as youth in care are assisted in their transition and in turn will assist other youth as they prepare for independence and after they age out of care.

VOICES is a network for youth in care and former youth in care that provides resources and support. VOICES holds monthly drop-in nights for teens and young adults, connects its members with scholarship opportunities and teaches them about their rights. VOICES also raises awareness about issues facing youth in care by speaking to social work classes and hosting SYSTEM KIDS, a weekly radio show on CFUW that airs Thursdays at 5pm. In 2010, VOICES held a five day workshop called MASSIVE (Multimedia Advocacy, Sacred Stories, Innovative Voices Experience). The goal of MASSIVE is to provide a forum for youth to express themselves and develop a sense of community.

In addition, MYTEAM will offer a range of supports to youth including post care services.

45. That the Department of Family Services and Labour increase funding to VOICES, the Manitoba Youth in Care Network, to develop a peer support program matching former youth in care with those who are preparing to leave care for support, mentoring and role modeling.

**Action:** Completed

**Response:** According to information provided by the DFSCA, VOICES was provided additional funding in 2007/2008 (\$20k) which has since been incorporated within their annual grant. VOICES holds monthly drop-in nights for teens and young adults, connects its members with scholarship opportunities, and

**teaches them about their rights. VOICES also raises awareness about issues facing youth in care by speaking to social work classes and hosting System Kidz, a weekly radio show on CKUW.**