



RISKS FACING YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE DURING COVID-19

The Bottom Line

Many youth in care have experienced immense trauma in their lives. This can lead to consequential risks once youth have aged out of care and are no longer receiving consistent support. Youth report that changes need to be made while they are in care and after they have aged out of care to increase protective factors.

Risks for Youth Aging out of Care

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada COVID-19 Youth Support Fund was temporarily placed on hold in June 2020 after overwhelming demand for funds. Nearly all (93%) funding requests from youth were for basic necessities like housing and food and 40% were for counselling and mental health services.

Youth who have aged out of care are more at risk for homelessness, mental health issues, lack of education, under/unemployment and general unpreparedness for the world.

In a Manitoba study, youth in care were 5 times more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system than their peers who were not in care. By the age of 21, youth in care were more likely to have been involved with the criminal justice system than to have graduated high school. Additionally, 70% of youth who were involved with both the child welfare system and the criminal justice system had mental health challenges.

In a British Columbia study, youth aging out of care were 5 times more likely to die by suicide than their peers who were not in care. The rate of PTSD in youth transitioning out of care is twice that of war veterans.

COVID-19 hasn't changed the issues for young people in and transitioning out of care, it has amplified them.

Possible Responses Outlined by Youth who Have Aged out of Care

- Support online forms of connection and community. Internet access should be a right and not a privilege for youth in and transitioning out of care. For many, it is a vital resource for mental health and well-being.
- Invest in interests, talents and strengths of youth. Create opportunities to practice them to increase confidence in and out of care.
- Reduce restrictions for animal companions. For many, pets can offer a type of unconditional love that may be foreign to youth in care. Barriers to obtain a therapy animal certification as well as to find housing that allows the youth aging out of care to have pets should be removed.
- Ease access to land, culture and spirituality. There is a need for culturally appropriate workers, placements, and programs before youth age out of care, as well as opportunities like cultural programs and retreats to reconnect during the experience of transitioning and after they transition out of care.
- Expand the definition of family. Include people who are not blood related so youth may have visitor access to a long-term support system. Decreasing the clinicality of separation: If siblings must be separated, ensure there is a natural rather than clinical environment to spend time together to diminish feelings of resentment from the separation and to ensure they keep the long-term connection of kinship.
- Use trauma-informed practices. Reduce crisis-focused mentality and expand on genuine restorative interest of the youth's dreams, goals, and mental health status.
- Support youth-centered decision-making, where their needs are heard, believed, and advocated for. Often, decisions about youth are made without their voices.
- Foster long-term unconditional support and nurturing. There is a need for long-term mentoring programs that start in care and last after the youth has aged out of care to be able to maintain a sense of permanency in relationships. Doucet (2019) requests the age of transition be moved to 25, as youth require more time to become adults just like their peers who on average live with family up until age 29.
- Support for youth should be provided unconditionally. This would benefit many youth from care who fall through the cracks when unable to meet an extended array of criteria to be eligible for support.

For original sources and documents, please visit: www.childtraumaresearch.ca