

YOUTHCAN
communication | advocacy | networking

A Comprehensive Program Review of the Youth Communication Advocacy Network (YouthCAN)

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Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies
The voice of child welfare in Ontario

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Executive Summary

In 2016, the YouthCAN program celebrated its 10th anniversary. Through its first decade, YouthCAN became a unifying voice in Ontario for youth in the care of Children’s Aid Societies (CASs). Through active advocacy, leadership development, and communicating resources to CASs, YouthCAN has contributed to significant improvements in services and policies for youth in care and those transitioning out of care. The program aims to continuously improve the quality of care for youth so they feel empowered, secure, and able to realize their full potential.

The landscape of child welfare and the needs of youth in care have changed significantly since YouthCAN began in terms of policy, legislation, programs, and services. The purpose of the YouthCAN review was to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the program’s current strengths and weaknesses, to understand its unique role in the current context of youth-in-care advocacy, and to recommend a future path to better support youth in the care of Ontario’s child welfare system.

This report presents a review of the Youth Communication Advocacy Network (YouthCAN) Program, which has now entered its 11th year of operation. First, the report discusses the background, history, and key accomplishments of the program over the past decade. Next, it explains the process and method of how the program review was conducted. The report then outlines the findings emerging from a literature review of the field of child welfare and youth programming. Finally, the report puts forward recommendations aimed at senior leaders in the child welfare sector.

About YouthCAN

YouthCAN is a multi-component program for youth and by youth in the care of Children’s Aid Societies across Ontario. The program acts as a unifying voice for youth in care. Bolstered by the support of Children’s Aid staff, YouthCAN offers a unique model that harnesses the power of youth–adult partnerships to effect change. The functions of YouthCAN are facilitated by the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies. YouthCAN is dedicated to improving the quality of care for youth in Ontario’s child welfare system so youth feel empowered, secure, and able to realize their full potential.

The goals of YouthCAN are to:

- Advocate on behalf of youth in the care of Ontario Children’s Aid Societies;
- Communicate timely and relevant information to Children’s Aid Societies and youth in care;
- Increase youth input into policies, programs, activities; and
- Be a resource to Children’s Aid Societies, youth networks, and organizations with a youth-in-care mandate.

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YouthCAN Staff Champions

Background of YouthCAN

Since the early 1980s, the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS) has supported youth advocacy to better serve youth in the care of the Children’s Aid Societies of Ontario. Over the years, youth in care had attempted to create an independent youth network, but were regrettably unsuccessful in engaging the child welfare sector until a decade ago.

In 2005, a former Crown ward developed a proposal to create a network for youth in care. The program was officially approved in 2006. Later that year, OACAS hired former youth in care to design the new program, resulting in Ontario YouthCAN, a program endorsed by all OACAS member agencies. Consultations were performed around the province with youth in care, supported by various community stakeholders and youth advocacy groups. Based on the consultations, the program was developed into Youth “CAN,” which stands for Communication, Advocacy, and Networking. The program builds on the service model and infrastructure of OACAS, with communications, advocacy, and provincial networking representing the core elements of the program.

Program Elements

1. Communication

The communication component was first developed to increase sharing of resources and information. The earliest YouthCAN “conference” was held in 2006 in conjunction with the OACAS June Consultation attended by senior leaders from the child welfare sector. Youth were invited to the conference to speak on advocacy-related issues to agency leaders from across the province. The event format was later changed to that of a standalone youth-focused conference held at a college or university to promote post-secondary educational opportunities and the sharing of resources.

2. Networking

Secondly, the networking component was developed for YouthCAN through the zone-based networking activities. The YouthCAN networking groups consist of six zones, with each CAS nominating one staff member to act as a Youth Champion and another staff member to act as a Youth Leader. Funding was provided by YouthCAN to each zone to facilitate inter-zone networking activities.

The following rules were developed to guide YouthCAN:

1. Planning should involve youth;
2. Events should help youth build skills;

3. Youth representation should come from agencies across all zones;
4. Activities should have a “fun” element; and
5. Activities should not replicate what is already being done at an agency.

3. Advocacy

Advocacy was the final element of the YouthCAN program to be developed. Initially, OACAS youth staff attended OACAS board meetings, but this was later identified as ineffective as youth often struggled to attend meetings during the school year and expressed their concern that the board meetings were not focused on or reflective of their interests and needs. At the 2006 conference the youth who expressed interest in advocacy and change-making later formed an advocacy group. The Youth Policy Advisory and Advocacy Group (YPAAG) was formed as a group open to all youth in and from care, for youth, and led by youth. The model was created to allow for OACAS support without undue influence on advocacy priorities.

Key Statistics

YouthCAN

10 years in review

Communications



Advocacy



Networking



Improving the quality of care for the youth in Ontario's child welfare system so that they are empowered, secure and able to realize their full potential.



In 10 years YouthCAN has:

 **helped youth:**
 foster connections
 build relationships
 develop leadership skills

 **hosted:**
10 annual conferences
10 annual retreats
+200 regional events

 **distributed:**
40 newsletters

 **impacted:**
+10000 youth in care



A Summary of 10 Years of YouthCAN Advocacy

YouthCAN Advocacy is a collective effort that involves youth in and from care, the public, stakeholders, and government. Over the past decade, YouthCAN's Youth Policy Advocacy and Advisory Group (YPAAG) has led or been part of several key achievements. Below are some examples of YPAAG's work:

2008 — Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent (OCBe): YPAAG and YouthCAN advocated for a special fund to be established to support tutoring, skill building, recreational and cultural programs, as well as a savings program and financial literacy training for youth to attend before leaving care.

2008 — The Child Welfare League of Canada: awarded YouthCAN Coordinators the National Youth Leadership Award.

2008 — YPAAG's presentation "Who are YOU going to call?": The presentation focused on advocating for ongoing emotional support for youth and effectively highlighted the issue that "no other relationship ends with an expiry date."

2010 — YPAAG met with the Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services: Seven members of YPAAG met with the Honorable Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services. YPAAG provided a brief history of the group and talked about how they stayed focused on four main issue areas: a) emotional support; b) educational support; c) financial support; and d) ages of eligibility. The youth shared some of their personal experiences and asked the minister to continue to engage and work with them on some of the issues brought to the table.

2010 — Crown Ward Aftercare Benefits Initiative: YPAAG advocated for emotional support and services for youth over 21. Because of this advocacy, a 3-year pilot program was implemented to provide counseling services for youth aged 21–23 years old.

2010 — *Child and Family Services Act* Review Submission from YPAAG: YPAAG welcomed the mandated 2010 review of the *Child and Family Services Act* (the Act). This process allowed Ontario youth in care to contribute valuable input and provided the opportunity for positive changes to be made to the Act. The submission advocated for: a) raising the age of protection to 18; b) providing Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) support until the age of 25; c) allowing youth to remain in foster homes beyond 18; d) including youth who are on ECM in the Crown Ward Review process or another type of review; and e) raising the minimum ECM rate to a level that would ensure youth can live a healthy, dignified life while transitioning out of care.

2011 — YouthCAN/YPAAG presented to the Standing Committee on Social Policy regarding Bill 179: YouthCAN provided key recommendations that included allowing youth who leave care at age 16 or 17 to return at any time up to the age of 21; creating a smooth process for youth to return to care; the extension of mandated protection services up to the age of 18; and changing the age of eligibility for ECM from 21 to 25 years old.

2011 — Meeting with the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare: The commission met with the Grand River Zone YouthCAN Group and two additional zones as well as YPAAG. The commission wanted to hear from youth about “what makes growing up in care feel not ‘normal’.”

2011 — YouthCAN on Committee for ECM Guidelines: The Child Welfare Secretariat invited YouthCAN members to review the ECM guidelines. OACAS successfully advocated to have a youth voice at the table. The participation of youth was noted by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services as an important asset to this policy work.

2012 — Youth Leaving Care Hearings Project with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth: More than 10 members of YPAAG took on active roles with the Youth Leaving Care Hearings project. Four members were part of the team who listened to submissions and asked questions, while others helped with registration and event coordination. YPAAG also made a written submission to the Youth Leaving Care project.

2012 — Strengthening Family-Based Care: In response to the request from the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare for advice on strengthening family-based care, 15 members of YPAAG met in Toronto and developed responses to the questions asked by the commission and submitted a final report.

2012 — Youth Leaving Care Working Group: In July 2012, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services¹ created the Youth Leaving Care Working Group, with input from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The group consisted of YouthCAN members, youth in and from care, and community partners. Its mandate was to act on the first recommendation of “*My REAL Life Book*”, completing an action plan for fundamental change of the child welfare system.

2012 — Continued Care and Supports for Youth (CCSY): YPAAG members were part of the committee to review the former Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) guidelines, leading to the development of the new Continued Care Supports for Youth (CCSY), which replaced ECM. Through CCSY, youth aged 18 -20 can receive financial and other supports from a Children’s Aid Society (CAS). This support is intended to help youth build on their strengths and meet their goals during their transition into adulthood.

2013 — Crown Ward “100% Tuition Aid”: The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities announced post-secondary tuition aid for former Crown Wards. YouthCAN Coordinators were in attendance during the official launch and announcement of these supports by Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Brad Duguid, at the University of Toronto.

¹ Blue Print for Fundamental Change to Ontario’s Child Welfare System: Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group (2013). Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Toronto, ON.

2014 — Aftercare Benefits Initiative (ABI): The ABI program was developed in response to recommendations made in the Youth Leaving Care Working Group report, *A Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System*. The ABI program, which was launched in 2013, provides health and dental coverage for former youth in care aged 21–24 years old. The implementation of the ABI program was administered by OACAS and YouthCAN.

2016 — The OACAS Residential Service Review Advisory Workgroup (RSRAW): The RSRAW consists of 14 members from across the child welfare sector, including CAS senior managers with specific expertise in residential service, executive directors, and youth representatives. It was established to support the development of child welfare sector submissions to the provincial Residential Services Panel, whose mandate is to build on the foundational work of previous reviews and report to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, advising on what is needed to improve the child and youth residential service system.

2017 — Legislative Review: A group of YPAAG members reviewed Bill 89, the proposed *Child Youth and Family Services Act* (CYFSA), to provide their input as part of a submission to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. One of the major proposed changes was raising the age of protection to 18, something YPAAG had advocated for since 2010. The group used a graphic facilitator to advocate and articulate their thoughts and recommendations as depicted below.



Purpose of the Review

In recognizing the changed landscape of child welfare and the needs of youth in care. The YouthCAN review aimed to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the program's current strengths and weaknesses, to understand its unique role in the current context of youth-in-care advocacy, and to recommend a future path to better support youth in the care of Ontario's child welfare system.

Review Methods

The YouthCAN review consisted of two simultaneous processes: a literature review and the gathering of qualitative information from youth participants, CAS staff, and community stakeholders.

The literature review consisted of compiling the existing scholarly research and grey literature reports related to youth in the child welfare system. The goal was to identify areas of concern for youth in care that YouthCAN could aim to address. The review analyzed several academic research and agency reports published in the past 20 years related to youth in care. A review of literature outside of Ontario was also taken into consideration to examine emerging trends in child welfare in other provinces and countries. These reports captured the voices of youth in care, child welfare professionals, and community organizations. Many of these reports revealed similar themes in highlighting issues and gaps in, as well as recommendations for the child welfare system.

The qualitative feedback was collected through in-person focus groups, one-on-one phone interviews, one-on-one in-person interviews, and written submissions. An advisory committee consisting of youth champions from across the province and youth in care alumni was established. The committee guided and directed the review, identified themes from the findings, and helped to develop the final recommendations.

A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) was performed to provide a thorough understanding of the YouthCAN program's strengths and weaknesses, while also examining opportunities for change and growth. Using some of the same tools that facilitated the transformation of the YWCA of Calgary², a needs-based segmentation and program realignment approach were taken into consideration as part of the YouthCAN program review. The needs-based segmentation breaks down how and which participants may benefit from the program. Using this approach, YouthCAN will be able to prioritize services and strengthen the areas of greatest need. Meanwhile, in the areas where YouthCAN is weaker,

² Finley, D. S., Rogers, G., Napier, M. & Wyatt, J. (2011). From needs-based segmentation to program realignment: Transformation of YWCA of Calgary. *Administration in Social Work*, 35, 299-323.

partnerships with community organizations will be explored to capitalize on their expertise in the delivery of services for youth.

For those familiar with the YouthCAN program, the SWOT analysis was specifically used to review the different parts of the program. For stakeholders who were not familiar with the YouthCAN program, the interview questions were framed in a general way such as, *“What do you think youth programming in child welfare should look like? What do you think is missing? What can be improved? What key issues or needs are youth in care experiencing?”* The interviews were recorded, and an analysis was conducted to identify key themes and patterns, which then formed the recommendations.

Benefits of Youth Programming

A review of the literature found that the following beneficial outcomes were associated with young people’s participation in youth development settings³:

- Increased self-esteem, increased popularity, increased sense of personal control, and enhanced identity development;
- Better development of such life skills as leadership and speaking in public, decision-making, and increased dependability and job responsibility⁴;
- Relationship building with peers and family, improved communication and conflict resolution;
- Fewer psychosocial problems, such as loneliness, shyness, and hopelessness;
- Decreased involvement in risky behaviors such as drug use, and decreased juvenile delinquency; and
- Increased academic achievement, enhanced professionalism, and career development⁵.

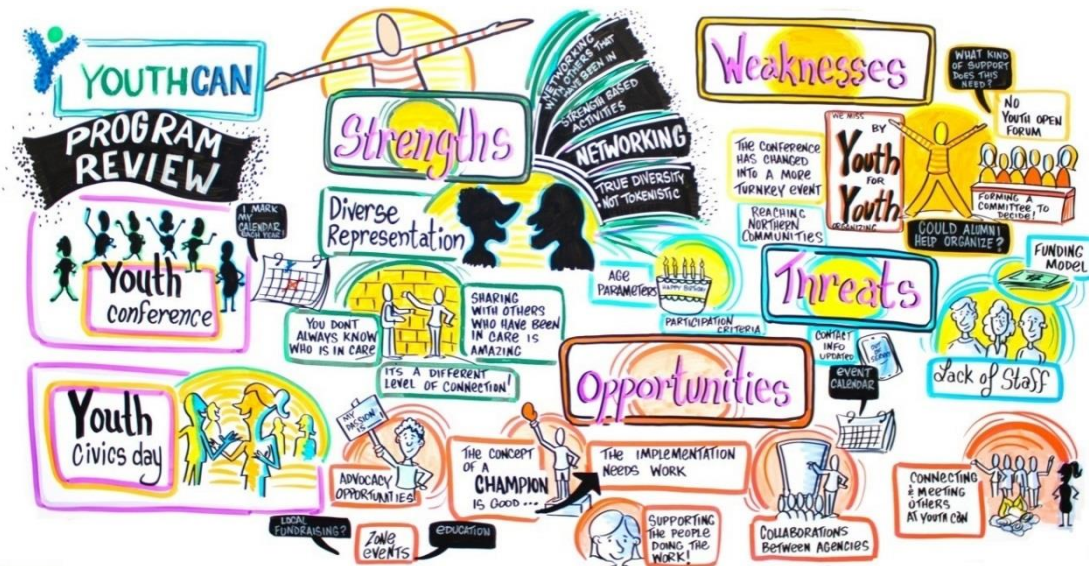
³ Edelman, A., Gill, P., Comerford, K., Larson, M., & Hare, R. (2004). Youth Development & Youth Leadership. A Background Paper. Institute for Educational Leadership.

⁴ Scales, P. & Leffert, N. (1999). Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

⁵ Shera, W., & Murray, J. M. (2016). CITY Leaders: Building Youth Leadership in Toronto. SAGE Open.

Key Findings of the Strength Weakness Opportunity Threats Analysis (SWOT)

a) Annual Youth Conference



What's working?

- It is the main identity of the YouthCAN program for youth;
- The event is highly anticipated by youth and staff annually;
- For some youth, this is the first time they are visiting a post-secondary institution, which reduces their anxiety about pursuing school;
- The conference is reported as being a life-changing experience for youth participants, as they can form lifelong connections, feel acceptance and a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals, and take away teamwork and leadership skills from the workshops;
- The YouthCAN talent show provides a safe space for youth to express themselves and showcase their talents in a judgement-free environment;
- Many youth want to come, more than the conference capacity;
- Youth over 21 often express interest in wanting to come back, volunteer, and stay connected; and
- The conference is a powerful and valuable event that youth and staff want to sustain and grow;

*"We need more camps and retreats!"
– Youth in care.*

What can be improved?

- Increase capacity (currently 10 youth are permitted per agency) at the conference or increase number of conferences per year to allow more youth to attend;
- Change eligibility to support returning youth participants;
- Fund and support youth over 18 to attend YouthCAN events;
- Provide youth participants with more of a voice in selecting YouthCAN workshops;
- Establish a formal youth planning committee and facilitator team to ensure that conference is focused on being for youth, by youth;
- Design a program that allows alumni youth to be formally part of the conference planning and facilitating team;
- Give staff champions open forum time for zone event planning, discussions about youth topics, and sharing of resources and ideas; and
- Create youth open forums for better networking and sharing.

*“The conference is always a success!” –
Youth in care.*

b) Quarterly Youth Newsletter

What’s working?

- Discontinued since 2015 due to lack of resources; and
- Formerly called the *NOTICE* (Needs of Teens in Care Everywhere), a newsletter written by youth, for youth. The newsletter provided transitional tips for youth, updates on resources, summaries of zone events across the province, and collected submissions from youth to express their artistic talents.

What can be improved?

- YouthCAN to review whether the *NOTICE* newsletter is necessary, as some youth and members have expressed interest in the newsletter continuing;
- If production resumes, provide a print version, as some youth do not have access to computers or the Internet

c) Public Website

What’s working?

- A public website that includes relevant resources and news for youth preparing for transitioning out of care; and

- A Ministry-funded website called Resources Supporting Youth in Transition (RSYT) that has a variety of helpful links and resources to prepare youth for independence in a self-guided manner.

What can be improved?

- Refresh the website so that resources are up-to-date and relevant for today's youth;
- Form a youth committee to inform and keep the website refreshed;
- Appoint a dedicated youth staff to manage, update, and maintain the website content and links. This youth staff can be outsourced on a project-by-project basis to youth who are pursuing careers in graphic design or web-marketing related fields;
- Improve accessibility, as the website resources and content are limited to audiences who can read and navigate the material. Focus on delivering the information to audiences who are visual and auditory learners by using videos, storyboards, and audio.

d) Advocacy

What's working?

- Existence of a youth advocacy group is important to youth, member CASs, and community stakeholders;
- Increase youth voice and input in decision-making processes;
- OACAS is a registered lobbyist, which allows opportunities for formal advocacy and engagement with members of provincial parliament (MPPs);
- Ask youth who have lived experience of being in care to provide input on policies and legislation that affects them;
- YPAAG has played a critical role in changes in policies and supports in child welfare; and
- YouthCAN hosts an Annual Youth Civics Day to promote learning about the parliamentary system.

What can be improved?

- Develop tailored leadership and advocacy training;
- Examine how to set realistic expectations for YPAAG members and prepare them to transition out of the group;
- Revise the application process for YPAAG members and revise the terms of references, roles, and expectations;
- Consider whether it is possible for YPAAG to have an independent voice in advocacy if the group is directly tied to OACAS;

"We have been fighting, struggling, and yelling to be heard for a long time. A few years ago, we were heard and now have this day to commemorate the efforts of youth in care and youth advocates who have been fighting to improve the futures of youth in care" – Former youth in care comments on the official Child and Youth in Care Day.

- Address stakeholder question of whether OACAS influences YPAAG’s interest and priorities related to advocacy;
- Explore how to better take care of YouthCAN youth members who participate in advocacy or YouthCAN events;
- Create a plan for consistent, structured meetings throughout the year;
- Schedule meetings throughout the year so that YPAAG can consult with multiple community stakeholders on multiple issues;
- Actively engage external advocacy groups and youth networks to work together on advocacy issues;

e) Networking

What’s working?

- Each CAS zone hosts between two and four events per year to promote networking and leadership;
- Providing opportunities for youth to network and connect with other peers;
- Youth report having feelings of belonging and identify staff and youth as part of their “family” at these events;
- Youth members take part in planning and facilitating the events;
- Staff champions use this time to connect, share resources, and plan for future events; and
- YouthCAN staff coordinators share important resources and information at these events / act as a resource reference for staff champions and youth.

What can be improved?

- Provide more structure to the networking events, and create a purpose and learning component that is consistent across the province;
- Distribute additional marketing and promotional material to CASs so that youth are aware and learn about the YouthCAN program;
- Develop partnerships and relationships with community organizations serving youth to take advantage of opportunities for cross-promotion, collaborations, and resource sharing to benefit youth;
- Open eligibility for a cross-section of youth to the YouthCAN program, e.g., adopted youth, youth receiving services in CAS but not in care, youth in residential homes, youth living in foster homes;

“It is really important for me to have a connection with other youth which YouthCAN provides. YouthCAN provides me with a sense of permanency and family” – Former youth in care.

- Develop a better strategy to support and engage the Northern remote agencies and zones.
 - Remote agencies need additional resources, funding, and promotion of their events due to the layout of the CASs;
- Invite community stakeholders to attend zone events;
- Advocate for additional funding and resources to the YouthCAN networking program, e.g., increase number of events, increase number of participants, expand the eligibility criteria; and
- Explore developing an external membership-based program that allows external organizations to participate in YouthCAN events and resources.

f) YouthCAN Staff Champions

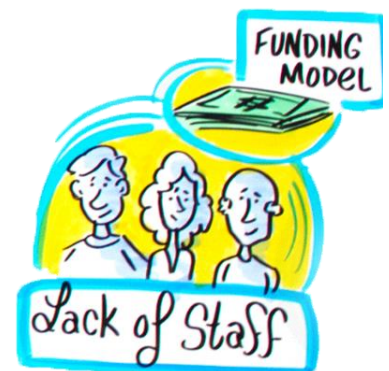
What's working?

- Good representation of CAS staff, as most agencies have at least one designated youth champion per agency;
- Collaboration with other staff champions within and across zones to plan events for youth;
- Opportunity for relationship building, as staff serve as a resource for youth between YouthCAN and local CASs;
- Co-facilitate two to four zone events annually with youth and YouthCAN; and
- Promotes youth–adult partnerships.

“We need to share our successes around the province so others can learn.” – YouthCAN Staff Champion.

What can be improved?

- Not all CASs have a dedicated Youth Champion;
- Staff champions typically take on this role in addition to their core child protection duties;
- CAS staff champions expressed the need for all CAS agencies to be involved in zone networking events and meetings if the program is to function efficiently;
- Staff champions need support from their agency’s senior management team, so that they have time to plan and host the zone events, e.g., protected time for planning, support in attending the events, funding for youth, travel, and accommodations costs;



- Provide additional funding so that staff champions can include youth alumni who are over age 21 in events; and
- Develop contingency orientation training for temporary or new staff champions.

Other OACAS Youth-Related Programs and Activities

OACAS is also responsible for delivering other programs and services that impact youth in care in Ontario. Over the years, some of these programs and services have had both direct and indirect interactions with the YouthCAN program. The YouthCAN team has taken leadership in administering the following events and programs listed below for CAS member agencies.

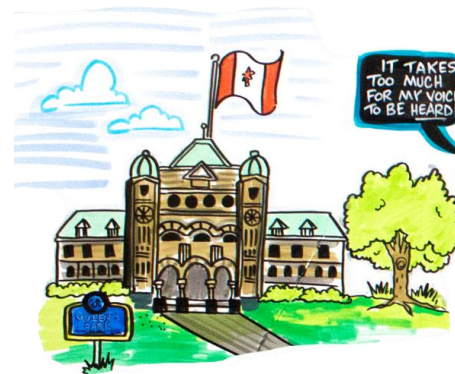
g) Youth Civics Day

What's working?

- An annual event at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (Queen's Park) to promote learning about the parliamentary system and activities for youth in care;
- An opportunity for youth in care to visit the historic Legislative building for the first time, and observe the MPP debate; and
- Opportunity for youth in care to meet MPPs in person and to learn about parliamentary procedure and law-making.

What can be improved?

- Promote Youth Civics Day as an opportunity to showcase advocacy initiatives related to child welfare;
- Provide opportunities for follow-up on how to get involved with YPAAG, such as attending a customized advocacy and government relations training



h) OACAS Scholarship Awards Program

What's working?

- Program provides important financial support for youth pursuing post-secondary opportunities;

- Allows youth over 21 to apply independently, giving them the opportunity to access the funding;
- Important avenue for youth engagement for OACAS;
- YouthCAN and OACAS administers a scholarship award program to youth in and from care in Ontario;
- Over 45 youth are awarded scholarships supporting their post-secondary career paths;
- Youth under 21 are nominated by their CAS for the awards;
- Youth over 21 apply independently; and
- Review committee that chooses the award winners consists of board members from CASs across the province.

What can be improved?

- 4-year bursary is not always being maximized as not all youth are entering 4-year programs (or are in their first year of study);
- The award eligibility criteria do not support youth who may want pursue other educational opportunities (e.g. trades, certifications, licensing programs);
- Onerous application process for youth and workers;
- Tuition assistance is not necessarily where the need is, given OSAP and related government policy changes;
- Application process allows for favouring of certain youth over others; and
- No coordination between OACAS and other CAS agency awards, meaning many of the same youth may be winning multiple awards, while others receive none.

i) Aftercare Benefits Initiative

What's working?

- Program provides comprehensive coverage to youth who otherwise would not have health, dental and counselling benefits;
- ABI, a comprehensive health and dental benefits program for former youth in care aged 21–24 years old, provides a broad range of benefit coverage, including prescription drug, dental, vision, extended health benefits, counselling, and life skills support services;
- Launched on July 31, 2014, ABI is administered by YouthCAN and OACAS and is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services;
- Over 1,600 former youth in care have been enrolled into the program, as well as more than 300 dependent children;
- An additional 140+ youth on social assistance have access to the counselling and life skills support services; and

- Eligibility criteria was expanded in 2016 to include adopted youth (none currently enrolled).

What can be improved?

- Streamlined application process (e.g. matching of worker and youth portions of the application);
- Better training for agencies/workers so they are clear about their role in the application process;
- Increased outreach to youth in transition workers so they are aware of the program and can help more youth access the benefits;
- Increased promotion of the EFAP portion of the plan;
- Make coverage available to more youth (e.g. older youth, youth on social assistance where coverage is not as robust);
- Clearer process for submitting claim reimbursement exceptions; and
- Include Spousal coverage.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Both the literature review and overall findings overwhelmingly support the ongoing need for the YouthCAN program. This review further points to the importance of situating YouthCAN within a provincial framework for youth programming. To meet the high demand for its services, the YouthCAN program must continue growing and expanding the range of services it offers so that more youth can benefit, particularly marginalized youth and those from Northern agencies.

The youth-in-care community views the YouthCAN conference as essential to their well-being—meaningful relationships are developed over time through participation in the program and are considered by youth, and their staff champions, to be life-changing. As YouthCAN enters its second decade, the time is ripe to find opportunities for partnerships with community stakeholders (e.g., summer camps and leadership training) and to capitalize on the programming expertise of staff at other community agencies. To ensure that CAS staff champions have adequate support in their roles and feel valued for the contributions they make, training resources and a guide on roles and responsibilities should be developed.

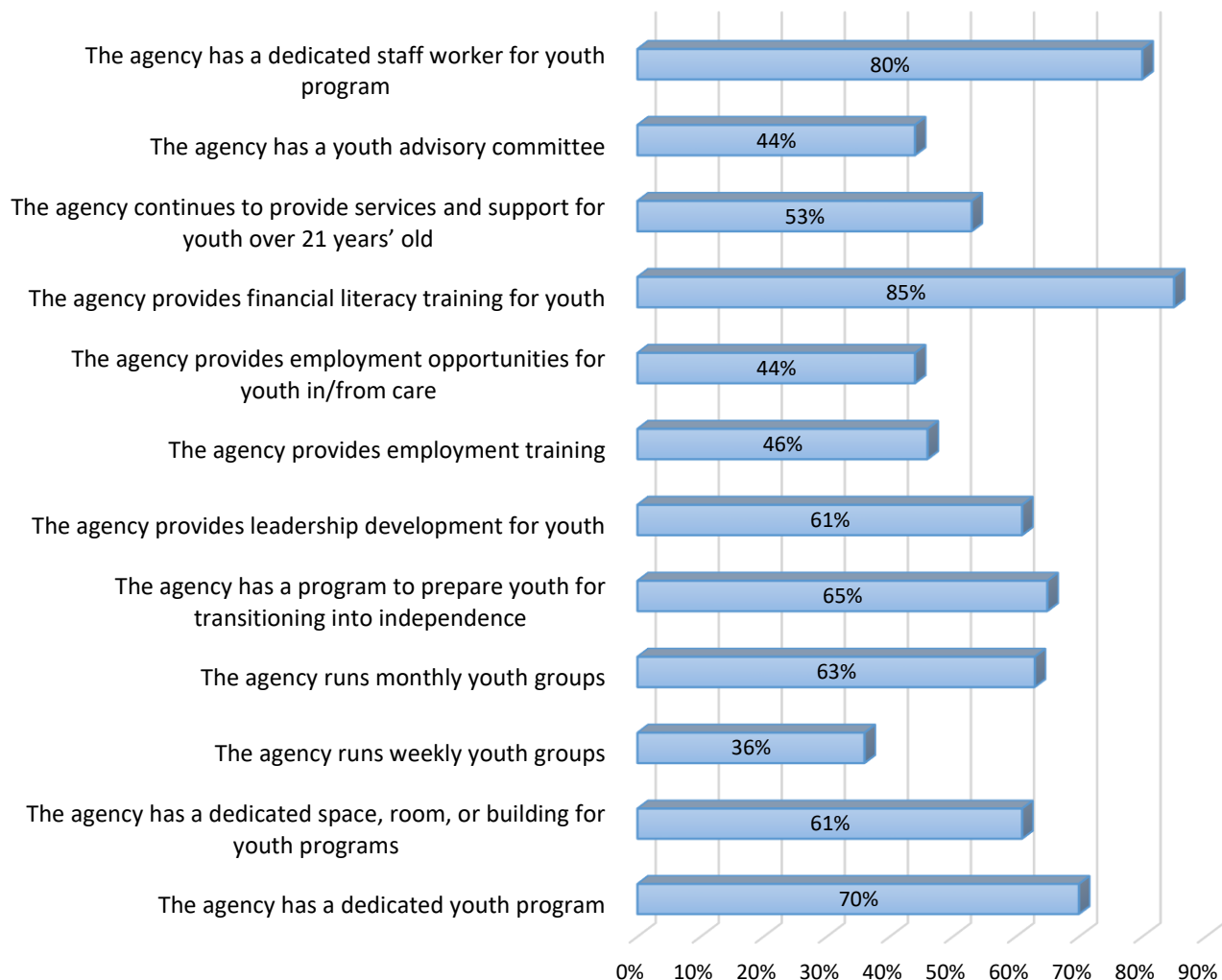
Finally, senior leaders in child welfare are encouraged to better support the participation of their staff in the YouthCAN program to ensure the program continues to thrive at local, zone and provincial levels.

Survey Results: CAS Youth Programs and Services

In March 2017, the YouthCAN program circulated a survey as a result of discussions from the YouthCAN review working group to learn more about youth programs and services offered by CASs across the Province. The results from this survey show discrepancies in programs and services, this reinforces the need for consistent quality of care and services offered across Ontario in child welfare. Full details of the survey responses can be found in Appendix B.

The following results were based on 41 out of a possible 48 CAS agency responses:

Overview of CAS Youth Programs and Services



Recommendations to Improve YouthCAN

These recommendations arise directly from the YouthCAN review based on the qualitative feedback received through interviews, written submissions, and focus groups. The findings were grouped into key themes with the support of the youth review committee and staff champions. The recommendations in this report are based on anecdotal statements as well as a review of the academic literature and child welfare grey literature. These recommendations are *not* presented in the order of importance, but rather in the order they should be implemented to reach the stated goals. For further details and supporting research on each recommendation, see the Appendix section.

1. Develop a Strategic Vision that is Youth-Centered

Develop a new strategic vision that sets the YouthCAN program priorities, mission, vision, and strategic plan for the next 3 years in conjunction with the YouthCAN review process. This strategic plan would include:

- 1.1. A youth committee to inform and develop the program's strategic vision;
- 1.2. Programs and decisions that are youth centered, consistent with the new proposed *Child, Youth and Family Service Act, 2017*⁶;
- 1.3. Support of independently led youth-in-care networks in Ontario that are separate from adult/professional influences⁷. YouthCAN will explore and facilitate the establishment of a board of governance made up of youth in and from care to make decisions;
- 1.4. A provincial youth engagement framework that increases youth participation at events held by CASs or YouthCAN; and
- 1.5. The youth voice at all decision-making levels. As advocated by youth and many stakeholders, it is important that the voices of children and youth in and from care are heard and included when developing policies that impact them⁸.



⁶ Bill 89: An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act. 1st Reading Dec. 8, 2016, 41st Legislature, 1st Session. Retrieved from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario website: http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=4479.

⁷ Mickleborough, L. (2016) The Bus Ride Home Project. Children's Aid Foundation & Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Toronto, ON.

⁸ BluePrint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System (2013). Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group. Toronto, ON.

2. Develop a Youth Engagement Strategy

Develop a youth engagement strategy that specifically addresses the need to engage marginalized youth, including youth involved in the justice system; youth experiencing mental health issues; youth living in shelter systems; youth with developmental exceptionalities; and youth living in Northern and remote areas; African Canadian youth; and Indigenous youth. The youth engagement strategy needs to:

- 2.1. Provide direct support to Northern CASs by promoting YouthCAN events and advocating for additional funding to meet the complex needs of this region;
- 2.2. Develop a strategy to engage community organizations and develop partnerships⁹ with organizations that work with youth experiencing homelessness;
- 2.3. Encourage younger children to participate in extracurricular activities¹⁰ including YouthCAN activities
- 2.4. Host full-day mini conferences across the province;
- 2.5. Develop an engagement strategy to offer more diversity in its programming to reach different youth, e.g. arts, trades, sports, and
- 2.6. Provide online training webinars that youth can access from home and teleconference options so that youth can maintain connections with other youth across the province.

3. Develop a Zone Collaboration Framework

Develop a framework that ties all the YouthCAN program recommendations and program components together and focuses on implementing the recommendations from this review, to help CASs and YouthCAN link the program outcomes with the deliverables. Note: the development of a zone collaboration framework should be concurrent with other recommendations, but may require implementation of some to be fully operational.

- 3.1 Draw on existing YouthCAN networks and the CAS staff champions to develop the proposed framework. A working group consisting of YouthCAN participants, alumni, and CAS staff champions will strengthen the youth–adult partnership model.
- 3.2 Develop a framework consisting of the following elements:



⁹ Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., Feduniw, A. & Brown, E. (2007). When Youth Age Out of Care: Where to From There? Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.

¹⁰ Mickleborough, L. (2016) The Bus Ride Home Project. Children's Aid Foundation & Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Toronto, ON.

- a) An approach to better support youth participants as they navigate through the program;
- b) A community partnership strategy;
- c) A youth engagement strategy;
- d) Revised roles and responsibilities of YouthCAN staff champions;
- e) Cross-zone collaborations and interagency resource; and
- f) Sharing of best practices.

4. Expand the Program Eligibility Criteria & Increase Accessibility

Access to most YouthCAN services is only available to youth who are connected to their workers through a children's aid society —limiting the number of youth who can benefit and participate in YouthCAN zone events, leadership retreats, advocacy work, and conferences. Given that YouthCAN is typically funded fully only for youth in care under 21 years of age due to CAS funding restrictions, expand YouthCAN's eligibility criteria and increase accessibility to service by:

- 4.1.** As per the recent *The Bus Ride Home* report, providing opportunities for older youth to return and engage in “alumni roles” to support youth in care programming and lead change¹⁰;
- 4.2.** Providing additional support to youth over 21 who have recently left care, allowing them to stay connected to their agency and supports;
- 4.3.** Providing services beyond Crown wards to children and youth in care or receiving services from CAS; and
- 4.4.** Giving children and youth the freedom, support, and resources to participate in different activities that interest them¹¹.

5. Provide More Training in Life Skills & Preparation for Independence

Provide youth who are ready to transition out of care with more life skills training and preparation for independence as young adults by

- 5.1.** Integrating life skills and training on transitioning to independence into the YouthCAN program;
- 5.2.** Adding educational and experiential life skills training to the YouthCAN program's zone networking events and annual conference;

¹¹ Youth Leaving Care Working Group (2013). *Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System* (2013). Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group.

- 5.3. Developing a customized program guide for life skills and independence training, created with input from youth in care and designed for youth in care, integrating the program into the YouthCAN program, and sharing widely with CASs across Ontario; and
- 5.4. Providing youth with opportunities for practice and rehearsal for life after care. Social experimentation is encouraged to put the knowledge learned in training into real-life practice. For example, discussing, planning, and role-playing various life scenarios¹².

6. Develop Leaders and Advocates

Develop a formal leadership program with specific outcomes (i.e., employment skills, academic achievement, communication skills, and relationships) to help youth navigate through their preparation for adulthood.

- 6.1. Develop a customized training for youth in and from care, such as the Creative Institute for Toronto's Young (CITY) Leaders program, a leadership development institute for diverse young people working and volunteering in the social service sector¹³. Youth can receive a certificate for completion of the leadership training program.
- 6.2. Focus on improving training and support around how to be an advocate. Training can truly inform and prepare young people on the risks and implications of engaging in advocacy, media appearances, and public interviews.
- 6.3. As recommended in *The Bus Ride Home* report¹⁰, host retreats and gatherings for youth in and from care to help youth build leadership skills, life skills, and enable youth to form lifelong relationships and mentorships. Furthermore, ensure these retreats are led by youth, for youth, to strengthen the youth-in-care advocacy movement.
- 6.4. Refresh the mandate of the YPAAG to be the primary source of the youth in care voice, input and expertise in to decision-making and initiatives of the child welfare sector;
- 6.5. Explore the creation of a partnerships with other organizations to streamline the provision of youth in care voice, input and expertise in response to requests by government and other stakeholders (external to the child welfare sector), with YouthCAN supporting the development of youth in care advocates;
- 6.6. Explore the creation of a partnerships with other organizations to streamline the provision of youth in care voice, input and expertise in response to requests by government and other stakeholders (external to the child welfare sector), with YouthCAN supporting the development of youth in care advocates;

¹² Brady, E. (2017). Supporting Youth Leaving Care: The organizational Role. Toronto, ON: Practice and Research Together.

¹³ Shera, W., & Murray, J. M. (2016). CITY Leaders: Building Youth Leadership in Toronto. SAGE Open.

- 6.7. Develop a mentorship program (or partner with existing mentorship programs) as part of training. Mentorship program staff identified that when young people age out of their program, many offers to come back and mentor the new program members¹⁴.

7. Reduce Barriers to Post-Secondary Options (Education and Employment)

Reduce educational and employment barriers for youth:

- 7.1. Build on the success of the YouthCAN conference by expanding its capacity or by delivering additional events to reach more youth who could benefit from this experience so that more youth can get a “feel” for campus life, which will help reduce barriers to education.
- 7.2. Start engaging and planning with young people about their educational and career paths at an earlier age. This allows time for goal setting, career exploration, course selections, and financial planning¹⁵.
- 7.3. Focus mentorship programs led by alumni youth in care on post-secondary and career planning to guide younger mentees.
- 7.4. Develop a strategy to reach and engage diverse youth such as:
- younger youth who are not able to successfully graduate from secondary school and
 - youth who are not interested in pursuing post-secondary education paths, e.g., trades, apprenticeships;
- 7.5. Engage in partnerships to reduce barriers to education and employment. YouthCAN can focus on facilitating collaborative relationships between the various systems¹⁶ and professionals. Rather than 're-inventing the wheel', there are benefits to developing partnerships with community organizations that have expertise in employment skills development and mentorship programs.
- 7.6. Provide and advocate for employment opportunities and skill development. Although there are currently employment skill-building organizations and programs that help youth with résumé building, interviewing, and job hunting, there needs to be more



¹⁴ Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta (2013). Youth Aging Out of Care Special Report. Government of Alberta.

¹⁵ Measured Outcome (2014). Beating the Odds: Scholarships for Youth Transitioning from Care. Toronto, ON.

¹⁶ Ferguson, H. & Wolkow, K. (2012). Educating children and youth in care: A review of barriers to school progress and strategies for change. Children and Youth Services Review, 34, 1143- 1149.

experiential learning. This can be achieved by offering job-shadowing opportunities, internships, and paid job experiences¹⁷.

8. Continue Building the Youth-in-Care Network (Community and Relationship Building)

Continue building the youth-in-care network, one of the main strengths of YouthCAN, by providing opportunities to facilitate networking and encouraging friendships among peers, adults, and professionals¹⁸:

- 8.1.** Make YouthCAN events and programs more accessible to a diverse range of youth (see recommendations from “Youth Engagement Strategy”) to give every youth the opportunity to engage in recreational activities and build relationships with peers and adults;
- 8.2.** Implement a mentorship program within YouthCAN networking events. Develop a mentor and mentee program that matches new participants with alumni or veteran YouthCAN members;
- 8.3.** Continue to seek and develop formal partnerships with community organizations; and
- 8.4.** Encourage local CASs to develop and grow their youth networks. The Alberta Youth Aging Out of Care Report found that agency youth networks give youth the opportunities to learn life skills, connect with a worker who helps them build relationships, feel connected, and reduce anxiety about transitioning into independence¹⁹.

9. Incorporate Program Evaluation into YouthCAN

A formal evaluation component should be incorporated into all YouthCAN programming going forward to document the program’s impact over time from a stakeholder perspective. This evaluation could explore the following themes:

- a) Benefits to members, such as positive personal/professional impacts;
- b) Benefits to the child welfare sector; and
- c) Program components that need to be improved moving forward.

- 9.1.** Publish this research and evaluation and make it publicly available;

¹⁷ Dewar, L. & Goodman, D. (2014). Literature Review: Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care – Successful Transitions, Success as Adults. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Institute, Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

¹⁸ Brady, E. (2017). Supporting Youth Leaving Care. Toronto, ON: Practice and Research Together.

¹⁹ Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta (2013). Youth Aging Out of Care Special Report. Government of Alberta.

- 9.2. Gather more information by tracking and monitoring the outcomes of youth leaving care to develop best practices for future youth²⁰;
- 9.3. Ensure the program evaluation and mentorship programs track and follow-up with older alumni youth; and
- 9.4. Gather up-to-date data from the literature to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs²¹.

10. Ensure YouthCAN Program Sustainability

To implement recommendations from this review, and to meet the needs and expectations of the program’s participants and developing youth leaders, the following operational recommendations are directed to Children's Aid Societies and to the OACAS:

- 10.1 Increase the annual agency contribution from \$1500 to a base of \$5000, aligning the contribution with broader membership fee policies on inflationary or other adjustments. Sustainable funding is critical to the ongoing operational success of YouthCAN, sufficient staffing and coordination, and appropriate engagement of youth participants;
- 10.2 Ensure every agency designates a YouthCAN Champion, with dedicated time to fully participate in and facilitate program activities;
- 10.3 Develop a YouthCAN guide for agency participation to support consistent and equitable programming, eligibility, access and resources for all youth and staff across the province;
- 10.4 Perform a provincial review of programs and resources in place to help children and youth in care with education and social, emotional development, including but not limited to, OCBe, life skills and financial literacy training, supports from agency-level foundations/fundraising, and Clark awards;
- 10.5 Promote and support youth–adult partnerships wherever possible in agency and Association operations; and
- 10.6 Ensure YouthCAN has standing within the sector's new decision-making, engagement and governance framework.

²⁰ Dewar, L. & Goodman, D. (2014). Literature Review: Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care – Successful Transitions, Success as Adults. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Institute, Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

²¹ Measured Outcome (2014). Beating the Odds: Scholarships for Youth Transitioning from Care. Toronto, ON.

Conclusion

As the YouthCAN program celebrates its 10-year anniversary, the program review was helpful to highlight the success and importance of the program. Meanwhile, open dialogue on the areas of weaknesses and concerns that the program must work to address in the future. It was striking to note that so many of the program's original objectives remain the aspirations of young people in and from care a decade later. YouthCAN's original premise was simple, yet powerful: create a community of, for, and led by youth in care, where their voices can inform decisions and policies, where they can work in partnership with caring adults, and ultimately, where they can support each other to succeed.

The review findings remind us that this premise needs revitalizing. YouthCAN has accomplished many great things in its first decade, but it requires constant vigilance and nurturing to be sustained. A new generation of youth-in-care leaders is demanding it. Long-time agency staff have pledged their commitment to renewing it. The review recommendations reinforced the need to remain youth-centered and challenges the child welfare sector leaders to ensure its viability.

The review has demonstrated that YouthCAN is more than a program; it is a unique community within the child welfare sector, distinct from other spaces where youth in and from care work together. This is the moment to step up and provide the collective leadership YouthCAN needs to thrive.

Appendix A

Background Research

The following is a detailed list of evidence and research to support the recommendations made in this report.

Recommendation 1

- The YouthCAN program has not revised its goals since the program was started in 2006. The program currently does not have formal vision, mission, or strategic direction.

Recommendation 2

- Although the YouthCAN program is beneficial to those who participate, many expressed that there are several groups of youth who are not attending the programs. The YouthCAN program needs to do a better job of engaging and targeting diverse groups of youth in programming and events.
- Numerous reports going back to the mid-1980s recognize that youth leaving care are over-represented in the youth justice, mental health, and shelter systems²².
- CASs in the Northern zones indicate that it is more difficult and expensive for them to provide services and host events than it is for CASs in central southern regions. The cost of travel is significantly higher for Northern agencies that are hundreds of kilometres apart from each other in the region. It takes many hours to travel, and puts a strain on staff time and availability²³.
- The Alberta Youth Aging Out of Care report found that some youth are not eligible for certain programs due to factors such as addictions, behavioral challenges, or mental illness and therefore have fewer program options²⁴.
- According to Youth Homelessness in Canada, 43% of homeless youth have previous child welfare involvement; 68% have come from foster homes, group homes, and (or) a youth centre²⁵.

Recommendation 3

- Currently, YouthCAN is a membership-based program for CASs that pay membership dues to OACAS.
- In 2013–2014, there were approximately 23,341 children in care; approximately 44% were permanent wards of the province (Crown wards)²⁶.

²² Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2009) Annual Report. Toronto, ON.

²³ Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2015) Pre-Budget Consultation. Toronto, ON.

²⁴ Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta (2013). Youth Aging Out of Care Special Report. Government of Alberta.

²⁵ Raising the Roof (2009). Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.

Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., Feduniw, A. & Brown, E. (2007). When Youth Age Out of Care: Where to From There? Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.

²⁶ Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2015) Pre-Budget Consultation. Toronto, ON.

Recommendation 4

- Youth in care are expected to transition into adulthood and leave the care of their CAS by age 21. This expectation and process can be extremely tough and one that mainstream youth do not have to experience. A Eurostat study of 14 European countries found the average age at which youth leave home has risen since the 1960s; the age of exit from their family home is now between ages 25 and 32²⁷.
- Several reports and statements from youth in and from care have identified that life skills training and support to transition out of care is an area of weakness in child welfare. The Youth Leaving Care Report recommendations included the need to “provide workshops or classes regarding finances, help us better prepare for leaving, job training, financial assistance, life skills education, support for medications, dental care, mental health”²⁸
- Longitudinal studies on leaving care from British Columbia showed that youth from care fared poorly compared to mainstream population in areas of life such as high school completion, health and mental health, income, crime involvement, experience with abuse, and lack of safe and secure housing and (or) experience of homelessness.²⁹
- Youth expressed that they need better preparation for post-secondary education and entry into the job market³⁰.
- Youth reported that life skills training programs can help them transition into independence more effectively³¹.
- An Alberta Youth Aging Out of Care report states that it can be beneficial to engage existing community-based programs and partners that already have capabilities and structure to host weekly youth groups that offer a variety of skill development opportunities⁸.

Recommendation 5

- The YouthCAN network brings together youth who share common interests and backgrounds to foster connections and relationships. Throughout the review, there was a consistent theme for integrating a leadership and advocacy curriculum into the events. The training can provide youth with skills that carry over into their personal lives.
- Mentorship programs can be beneficial for a peer-to-peer learning style; alumni youth can offer tips and guidance to younger youth on how to successfully navigate being in care and transitioning into independence⁹. Some activities of the mentorship program

²⁷ Dewar, L. & Goodman, D. (2014). Literature Review: Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care – Successful Transitions, Success as Adults. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Institute, Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

²⁸ Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2012). Youth Leaving Care Report. Toronto, ON.

²⁹ Rutman, D., Hubberstey, C., Feduniw, A. & Brown, E. (2007). *When Youth Age Out of Care: Where to From There?* Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.

³⁰ Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (2016) OACAS Residential Services Review Panel Submission. Toronto, ON

³¹ Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta (2013). Youth Aging Out of Care Special Report. Government of Alberta.

include matching mentors and mentees, developing positive relationships, and linking to community resources³².

- The CITY Leaders program demonstrated positive short to medium outcomes over a 4-year period. Program participants reported that retreats are powerful and provide focused investments in team building and self-knowledge.
- Life skills are difficult to teach within a time-limited workshop. They must be practiced and developed into habits over the course of a lifetime³³.
- Youth living in residential homes frequently mentioned programming, counseling, culture, and recreation as aspects of a good residential program³⁴.
- Mentors benefit from gaining leadership and employment skills; meanwhile, they also help mentees to reduce barriers to education, increase academic achievement, and prepare for independence³⁵.
- Camps and retreats are powerful for social connections and skill building. They are essential for a young person's development.

Recommendation 6

- Children and youth in care may have experienced difficult upbringings, trauma, and abuse, all of which can lead to a variety of developmental challenges. It is well-known that children and youth in care tend to reach developmental milestones at a slower rate than the general population³⁶.
- Youth in care struggle with academic achievement and advancing their educational and career paths. An Ontario child welfare survey found that just 44% of youth in care graduate from high school, compared to an 81% graduation rate for the general population³⁷. US research indicates that 50% of youth in care drop out and do not graduate from high school³⁸.
- In the past decade, there have been several advances in policies and supports to help youth pursue post-secondary education, such as government tuition aids, application fee waivers, scholarships, and grants. But throughout our review, youth and stakeholders made it clear that child welfare should do more to improve the outcomes for children and youth who wish to pursue higher education and start careers.
- The YouthCAN Annual Conference continues to be a popular and oversubscribed event each year. The purpose of the conference is to promote post-secondary and career

³² Mickleborough, L. (2016) The Bus Ride Home Project. Children's Aid Foundation & Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Toronto, ON.

³³ Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2016) OACAS Residential Services Review Panel Submission. Toronto, ON.

³⁴ Snow, K. & Finlay, J. (1998) Voices from Within. Youth Speaks Out. Office of the Child and Family Service Advocacy

³⁵ Dewar, L. & Goodman, D. (2014). Literature Review: Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care – Successful Transitions, Success as Adults. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Institute, Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

³⁶ Brady, E. (2017). Supporting Youth Leaving Care. Toronto, ON: Practice and Research Together.

³⁷ Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (2015) Pre-Budget Consultation. Toronto, ON.

³⁸ Cox, T. (2013). Improving Educational Outcomes for Children and Youths in Foster Care. *Children & Schools*, 35, 59-62.

options. It is held on a college or university campus to give youth a “feel” for post-secondary education.

- One-on-one mentorship programs appear to be a positive asset and protective factor for youth pursuing post-secondary education³⁹.

Recommendation 8

- Due to past trauma, youth in care often struggle with developing friendships and relationships. They need positive and supporting relationships.
- The YouthCAN program brings together youth in care from across Ontario with similar experiences and backgrounds to foster connections and a sense of belonging. During the networking events, youth often build lifelong connections with their peers, learn new skills, and become connected with adult professionals and the community.
- Youth in care have said that⁴⁰
 - “Group homes and staff should actively engage the community for various recreational programs, opportunities for collaboration, and set up consistent networks and events.”
 - “The development of positive peer relationships must be supported and encouraged among young people in residential care settings⁴¹”
 - “Residential home workers and CAS teams need to work harder to establish connections between youth and the community⁴². Community and local programs and opportunities for youth engagement is critical to developing good self-esteem, positive connections to prosocial behaviors.”

Recommendation 9

- Currently, YouthCAN does not have a formal evaluation component as part of the program. One of the common questions that came up during the review was, “What is YouthCAN trying to achieve? And how do we know you are achieving this?”
- Youth and staff stakeholders reported that participating in YouthCAN and YPAAG offers an opportunity to grow both personally and professionally in several ways. With this in mind, the suggested evaluation approach will be based on Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Training Evaluation model, which focuses on reaction, learning, behaviour, and impact (see Diagram 1). This model will be adapted to focus on how stakeholders have experienced YouthCAN/YPAAG, how participation in YouthCAN/YPAAG has helped them learn new knowledge, skills, and (or) attitudes, how participation in YouthCAN/YPAAG may have changed behaviours, and how participation in YouthCAN/YPAAG has impacted their lives.

³⁹ Dewar, L. & Goodman, D. (2014). Literature Review: Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care – Successful Transitions, Success as Adults. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Institute, Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

⁴⁰ Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (2016) OACAS Residential Services Review Panel Submission. Toronto, ON.

⁴¹ Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2016). Searching for Home, Reimagining Residential Care. Toronto, ON.

⁴² Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (2016) OACAS Residential Services Review Panel Submission. Toronto, ON.

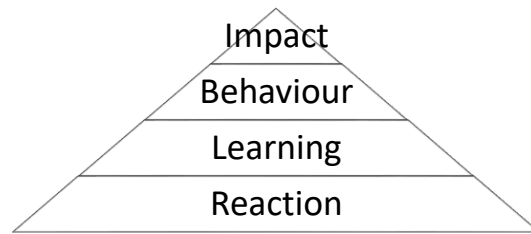


Diagram 1. Kirkpatrick's Four-level Training Evaluation model⁴³.

- According to the Youth Leaving Care Report recommendations⁴⁴, it is important to collect research-based information on how children and youth in care are doing.
- Transitioning out of care can be difficult for youth; consequently, longitudinal research studies can help agencies to better understand the needs of youth and to develop effective policies and programs.

Recommendation 10

- The program contribution from member CASs has not increased since the inception of YouthCAN.

⁴³ Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1998). The four levels of evaluation. In S.M. Brown & C.J. Seidner (Eds.). *Evaluating corporate training: Models and issues*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

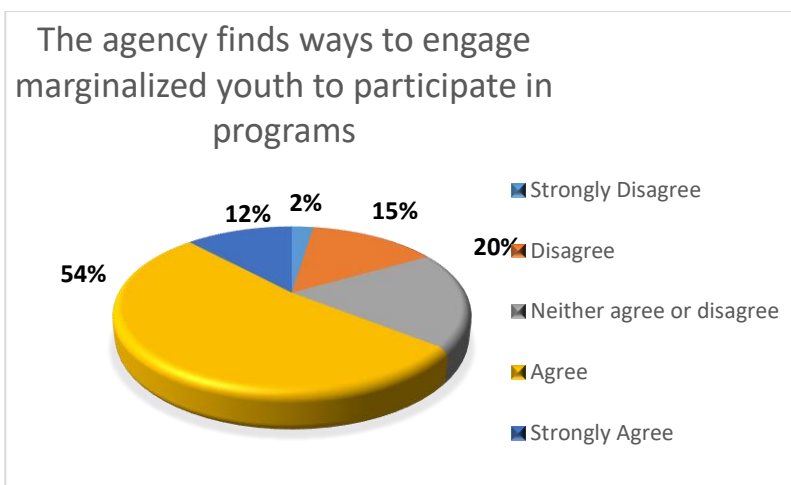
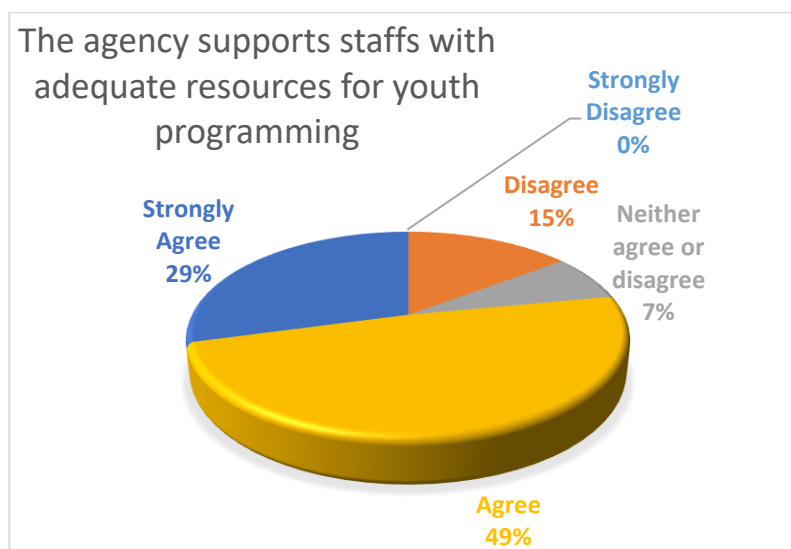
⁴⁴ Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2012). *Youth Leaving Care Report*. Toronto, ON.

Appendix B

CAS Survey Results on Youth Programs and Services

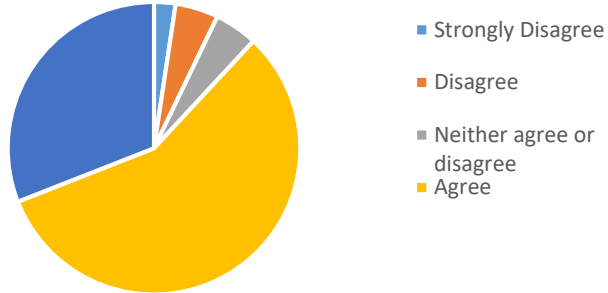
In March 2017, the YouthCAN program circulated a survey as a result of discussions from the YouthCAN review working group to learn more about youth programs and services offered by CASs across the Province. The results from this survey show discrepancies in programs and services, this reinforces the need for consistent quality of care and services offered across Ontario in child welfare. Full details of the survey responses can be found in Appendix B.

The following results were based on a 93% response rate from 41 out of a possible 44 member⁴⁵ CAS agency responses:

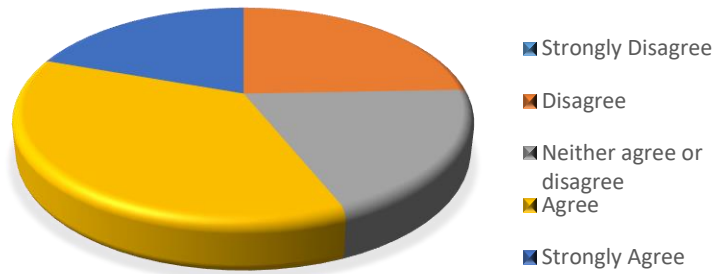


⁴⁵ Member of Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

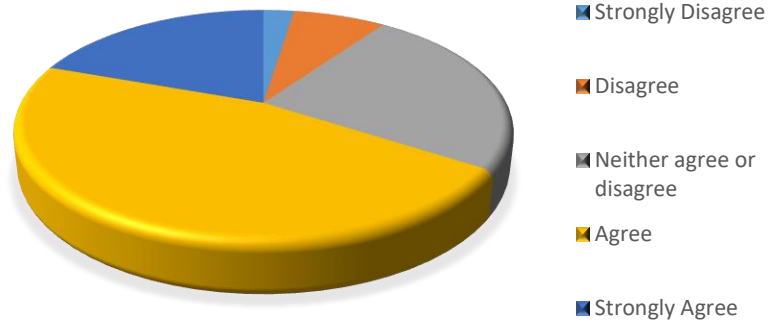
The agency works with other community organizations service youth



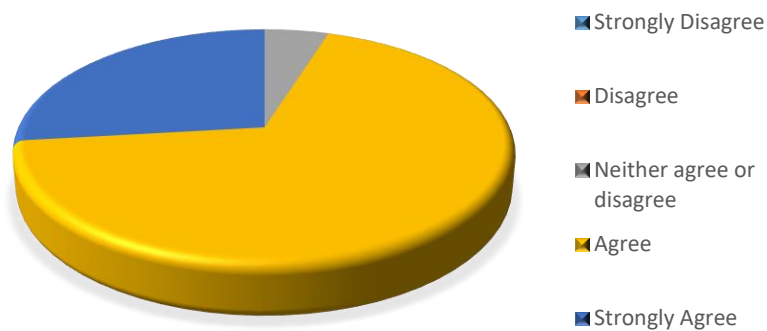
The agency has voices of youth in/out of care in the decision-making process



The agency communicates relevant information and resources to youth



The agency works with residential and foster homes



Appendix C

Draft Scope Document: 10-Year Review of OACAS YouthCAN Program

Purpose

- To mark the program's 10th anniversary, celebrate its accomplishments, and recommend a path for its future
- To hear from youth in/from care, agency champions and other YouthCAN stakeholders, to learn what they want from a provincial program like YouthCAN
- To conduct a first-ever assessment of the program structure against its original objects
- To consider the program within the current landscape of youth-in-care advocacy and policy, and of sector structural change
- To ensure YouthCAN is representative of the broad diversity of youth in/from care and focused on the issues that matter to them

What questions will the YouthCAN review answer?

- What is unique about YouthCAN in the current context of youth-in-care advocacy, policy, and programming?
- Where has YouthCAN made the most impact?
- What aspects of the program work well or need to change?
- Who does YouthCAN serve well? Who does YouthCAN serve poorly/not at all?
- How effective is the current program structure and how might it be improved?
- Is the funding model sustainable?
- Is the child welfare sector leadership committed to YouthCAN?

Deliverables

- Audio-visual presentations (interim and final) of findings and recommendations:
 - to youth in / from care
 - to sector leadership
 - to broader YouthCAN stakeholders

Activities

- Key informant interviews — e.g. YouthCAN/YPAAG members, former YouthCAN staff, YouthCAN agency champions, key external stakeholders (e.g. Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth)
- Survey to YouthCAN networks — youth, staff, former YouthCAN participants
- Document review (policy submissions, advocacy efforts)
- Funding analysis
- Website development/administration (YouthCAN website as home base for review activities)

Timeline

- September 2016 – March 2017

Resources needed

- Staff at 2 days/week
- Hospitality costs (meetings), honoraria (for youth participants)
- Printing and/or design costs
- Translation costs

Draft Timeline

- September 2016 —Announcement of review and calling for members
- October 2016 — Committee is formed and plans review strategy
- November 2016 — Gathering input, data
- December 2016 — Finalizing data and forming themes
- January 2017 — Draft report completed
- February 2017 — Review report is completed
- March 2017 — Next steps in response to report findings and recommendations

Appendix D

Quotes and Testimonials

The following are samples of the qualitative feedback received during one-on-one and group interviews:

“This is wonderful a bunch of strangers with similar struggles coming together as a family. You guys are all amazing and stronger then you give yourselves credit for. Keep going the grass really is greener on the other side.” – Former youth in care.

“We need more programs and activities like YouthCAN.” – Former youth in care.

“We need to share our successes around the province so others can learn.” – YouthCAN Staff Champion.

“Camps are great for social and emotional development.” – Community youth organization.

“The conference is always a success!” – Youth in care.

“It is really important for me to have a connection with other youth which YouthCAN provides. YouthCAN provides me with a sense of permanency and family” – Former youth in care.

“There needs to be more YPAAG meetings so we can discuss important advocacy issues.” – Youth in care.

“Most have no stable family, and many celebrate birthdays, Christmas, weddings, baby showers, and other events with each other. They seek out support when they are depressed and always get positive input from their friends. Most are NOT living in the same towns and aren't from the same CAS. They met through YouthCAN and have remained ‘family’ ever since.” – Former youth in care.

“My youth in care family is my FOREVER family. I love you all and I am happy I was able to celebrate Youth in Care Day with you! Was celebrating in spirit with those who weren't here. We have come so far and we're not stopping here. We are changing the future for so many youth and this is our legacy!” – Former youth in care.

“We have been fighting, struggling, and yelling to be heard for a long time. A few years ago we were heard and now have this day to commemorate the efforts of youth in care and youth advocates who have been fighting to improve the futures of youth in care” – Former youth in care.

“The point being hundreds of former YouthCAN-teers are lifelong friends. They consider each other family. Hundreds based on what I can see on Facebook, and likely this is a fraction. That's what makes me happy. Not claiming any credit. Just really happy about this.” – Former youth in care.

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