



**Department of Health and Social Services
PO Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6**

June 27, 2019

Annette King
Office of the Yukon Child & Youth Advocate
2070 – 2nd Ave. Unit 19,
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1B1

Dear Ms. Annette King,

Thank you for your office's analysis of the systemic issue for youth aging out of government care. The Department of Health and Social Services ("HSS") shares your concern regarding the issues faced by youth who age out of care and has been doing work to address the issues you have raised. Along with HSS developing and implementing new practices, the department is committed to training all staff in trauma informed, client-centred care. HSS has completed a literature review, jurisdictional scan of best practices in transitional supports for youth, and engagement with a goal of redesigning transitional services for Yukon; HSS is now in the process of writing a report with recommendations.

In May 2018, HSS established an external advisory six-member panel on the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA). This review is broad and has a full consultation strategy. It is anticipated that this review will provide significant and relevant recommendations to enhance legislation, policy and service delivery. It will focus on a collective, innovative and partnered approach. This will be an opportunity to apply a stronger connection to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child where appropriate.

Attached is a review of the work HSS is doing with respect to many of the issues your office has highlighted in your systemic analysis. For any questions or concerns, please contact Shehnaz Ali, Assistant Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services at Shehnaz.Ali@gov.yk.ca or 867-667-8343.

Sincerely,

Stephen Samis
Deputy Minister

The Department of Health and Social Services Response to the Child and Youth Advocate Systemic Advocacy – Aging Out of Care

Aging Out of Care: Response to the Needs and Rights of Youth

The Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) recognizes the need for supports for youth as they age out of care. HSS recognizes that services need to expand to other program areas outside of Family and Children's Services (FCS).-, Through linkages with other governmental and community-based programs and supports HSS can ensure a full continuum of supports for youth now and in their future years. Beginning in fall 2019, HSS will engage in consultation with other governments, First Nations, and Community partners to begin discussions on options for supportive housing for youth aged 19-24. This will be accessible to all youth including youth exiting care and will be focused on housing which has supports attached and available. This process will follow the implementation of the Transitional Support Services (TSS), Wann Road program.

In light of HSS's recent response to the recommendations found in the report, *Empty Spaces – Caring Connections: The Experiences of Child and Youth in Yukon Group Care*, similar themes will be noted. Updates will be provided biannually regarding both reports to streamline our communication. The response below is arranged around each of the specific 'issues faced by youth who age out of care' outlined in the Child and Youth Advocate Office (CYAO)'s analysis, *Systemic Advocacy on Aging Out of Care*.

“Severed ties from family, community and culture” and “Difficulty reintegrating in to the home community”

- **Honouring Connections: Continuing Custody Order Review** – Launched in January 2019, HSS, Yukon First Nations, and the Council of Yukon First Nations are working together on a process to reassess all 50 Yukon First Nations children and youth under continuing care orders and, where possible, reunify them with their families, extended families, communities and/or culture. In all cases, it is expected that enhanced cultural connection plans will be established for children and youth. Child and youth access with extended family members will be re-assessed to ensure their rights are being upheld. HSS will undertake the reassessment and reunification processes, where possible, for all non-Yukon First Nations children and youth as well. This process will highlight the voices and views of children, youth and their families.
- **Paralegal Position** – In December 2018, HSS introduced a pilot paralegal position to support social workers with legal processes and completion of affidavits. This increases the ability of

social workers to focus on prevention and enhancement support/work with children, youth, and families. It is important to note that there has been a significant reduction in the number of files before the court.

- **Extended Family Care Agreements (EFCA)** – As of November 2018, extended family caregivers are now provided with the same level of financial supports and services that are available to foster caregivers. FCS continues to see a significant increase in the number of EFCAs that allow children and youth to remain with their families and stay connected to communities and culture.
- **Memoranda of Agreement (MOA)** – In September 2018, HSS began the MOA process. The HSS-Kwanlin Dun First Nation MOA is undergoing a scheduled review. HSS is in the process of finalizing a MOA with Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, has started MOA negotiations with Carcross/Tagish First Nation, and is preparing for MOA negotiations with Ross River Dena Council. MOA outline cooperation between HSS and individual First Nations on the delivery of child welfare services to the First Nations' citizens. MOA ensure that Yukon First Nations youth who are involved with FCS have specific and supportive involvement from their First Nations. In addition to a youth's family, First Nations representatives/staff are often in the best position to help ensure that youth have natural support networks identified or in place prior to exiting care or when aging out of care.
- **First Nation Service Delivery Model** – In August 2018, a new replacement home for the Girls' Receiving home was put on hold. This step was taken to support HSS's commitment to partner with Yukon First Nations on conducting a facilitated review of group care which would include options for Yukon First Nations service delivery model and other models of care identified, developed and managed by First Nation partners. This process has not yet been initiated. This review will be determined in consultation with First Nations partners.
- **Signs of Safety Practice Framework** – In June 2018, workshop completed with First Nations partners on options for practice framework for child welfare with decision to go with Signs of Safety Practice Framework and creation of a Yukon specific screening tool. This will incorporate strong linkages to family and family history, genograms, etc.
- **Family Enhancement Teams** – In April 2018, child protection teams were realigned to form Family Enhancement Teams with a stronger focus on prevention and enhancement approaches in practice.

- **Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Prevention and Enhancement Supports** – In March 2018, HSS, in consultation with Yukon First Nations, agreed to changes in the allocation of funding which increases a direct flow of funding to Yukon First Nations communities. The changes to the funding are a direct result of continued collaboration, engagement and negotiation between the department, the Council of First Nations Health Social Development Commission and Federal Health representatives. This change to the funding allocation serves to further strengthen capacity in First Nation Communities to improve outcomes for First Nation children and youth. This approach recognizes that by working together we can improve outcomes for Indigenous children, youth and families.
- **Trilateral Table on Child Welfare** – In January 2018, senior officials came together and established the Trilateral table on Child Welfare to: determine how to facilitate information sharing, promote collaborative decision-making on priorities, coordinate program implementation, and discuss allocation of financial resources. Federal, Territorial, and First Nations government officials signed the terms of reference on February 18, 2019.

“Low graduation rates” and “Barriers to attending post-secondary”

- **Youth Achievement Centre (YAC)** – Over the past few years, due to a decrease in youth formally involved in the Youth Justice system, FCS has made changes in programming at YAC to allow for more at-risk youth to engage in recreational and other programming. This has increased opportunity and support for youth who may be disengaged from the traditional school structure. FCS will engage with Education partners and the new Assistant Deputy Minister of First Nations for Education to review opportunities for innovative supports to children and youth who are living with trauma and who are not benefiting from the traditional approach to education. This is pending for a potential 2019/20 start. YAC also provides job readiness and experiential programs to youth. They also provide opportunities for youth to complete any community service hours they may have as part of a court order.

“Unemployment” and “Poverty and homelessness”, “Dependence on financial assistance” and “Early pregnancy and parenthood”

- **Financial Lean Process** – In May 2019, FCS hired an external reviewer to conduct a review of the day-to-day financial processes for FCS and provide observations and recommendations to streamline the processes. This will assist in efficiency through reduction of steps to financial processes and consequently alleviate the wait times for payment to clients and vendors. Addressing this process will result in more expedient rental and tuition payments for young people accessing after care support.
- **Community Based Supports for Youth** – In February 2019, integrated supports for youth transitioned to Skookum Jim Friendship centre with no disruption to services and supports for youth. Youth are able to access daily supports, programming and connection to supports in community. A full review will be undertaken in 2019/20.
- **Transitional Support Worker** – In February 2019, FCS realigned caseloads and added a transitional support worker to support post-care services as well as youth agreements. A second transitional support worker position is being added in June 2019.
- **Cross Program Review of Case Plans** – Since January 2019, group home and FCS leadership meetings to review and confirm case plans for children in group homes are moving forward. There is continual focus on reunification opportunities for all youth and/or transition opportunities to extended family, foster care or supported independent living.

“Institutionalization – lack of skills and supports for independence”

- **Development of Supportive Housing** – In the fall of 2019, HSS will engage with other governments, First Nations, and Community partners to begin discussions regarding options for housing support for youth aged 19-24. This will be accessible to all youth including youth exiting care and will be focused on housing which has supports attached and accessible.
- **Enhanced Supports to Youth in Transition** – In April 2018, HSS purchased a property at 22 Wann Road in Whitehorse to replace two group home buildings. HSS has recently completed an engagement strategy to incorporate the voices of youth currently in care, youth who have aged out of care, First Nations partners, non-governmental organizations that work with Yukon youth, and other key partners. This project is offering the chance to expand the range of services for

youth exiting care and those aging out of care. Planned programming will include outreach services to youth in need of transition supports and a mentorship program by youth for youth. Youth residing in the program will be supported to increase their social and natural support networks and they will have access to a full range of practical life skill development opportunities.

- **Youth Agreement Practice Update** – Although these agreements have been in place since the Child and Family Services Act was implemented in 2010, emphasis has been placed on educating staff in the utilization of these types of youth agreements. FCS has seen a significant increase in their use and this practice is in line with empowering youth in their own case planning. Youth agreements are a viable alternative to group care and can often better facilitate transitional planning for youth. Youth are more engaged and invested in the success of self-developed case plans.
- **Placement Review Committee (PRC) Review** – In August 2018, FCS undertook a review of the long standing PRC committee process. This review was undertaken with First Nations partners. Revisions to the PRC process have been completed and a policy is now completed. Placement decisions involving group home placement will now be conducted as part of the main case planning and decision making processes. The PRC will focus only on out-of-territory treatment options if required. First Nations partners, family and youth will participate in this new PRC process and decision making. Release of the revised PRC process and associated communication and training will be completed by June, 2019.
- **Child Protection Training for Yukon** – In August 2018, a CORE training design team, made up of Yukon First Nations representatives, the Council of Yukon Nations and HSS staff began work to help finalize the content and design of child protection training for Yukon. This work is ongoing and course content specific to the issues of aging out of care and exiting care are under development.
- **Transitional Support Services (TSS) Staffing** – From 2018 until present, TSS has implemented a pool of on-call staff to provide additional support and supervision to group homes. Two evening and weekend supervisors have been added to better support frontline staff and youth. There is now a personnel assistant to perform scheduling functions which removes a time consuming function from supervisors. TSS has also co-located a human resources representative to improve services and supports to clients and staff. Staff are not scheduled to work alone, and every effort

is made to fill last-minute vacancies. HSS also established a position dedicated to leading the formal development of transitional support services programming for youth (Wann Road).

- TSS Post Care Youth Support Services – TSS has an existing policy to allow for up to six months of support services by group home staff for all youth who exit services. In many situations, youth continue to return to their former group homes years after leaving. FCS intends to increase monitoring during the 2019/20 fiscal year so a clearer picture of TSS post care service utilization can be made available. Additional aftercare and outreach support programming options will be explored with the youth and our partners over the next year.

“Poor health and mental wellness (emotional, mental, physical, social and spiritual)”

- Supervisor Training – In October 2019, there will be an implementation of supervisor training that will offer components on strengths-based supervision in child welfare, First Nations components, critical thinking, cognitive biases, and the Challenge of Choice. There will be a specific emphasis on transitions out of care and aging out covered during supervisory training as well as emphasis on a Natural Supports framework approach to planning. Some of these modules are for all supervisors. Others are limited to child welfare supervisors.
- Risking Connections Train-the-Trainer – In June 2019, TSS and Mental Wellness and Substance Use partnered in a train-the-trainer program for Risking Connections and Trauma Informed Practice which includes an historical trauma component. A faculty trainer from Connecticut attended to provide trainer programming. Continuing to ensure we have a roster of trainers means that all positions that support youth in care including those aging out of care will have access to crucial trauma informed training.
- Risking Connections and Trauma Informed Practice – In April 2019, TSS and MWSU partnered to deliver a joint Basic Training on Risking Connections and Trauma Informed Practice to all TSS and MWSU staff.
- CORE training - In fall 2017, CORE training was piloted for all child protection staff. The Child and Youth Advocate and her staff presented to both groups of trainees on the topics of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, YCAO Annual Report (2017), the Child and Youth Advocate Act as well as the protocol between YCAO and Health and Social Services (2016). This

training was mandatory for all front-line staff and supervisors and included some management. Over 90% of all front-line staff and supervisors were trained, some were missed due to operational requirements. CORE training was offered again in the fall 2018 by the Deputy Child Advocate and other staff from the YCAO. The content included the TRC Calls to Action, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the UNCRC. Issues specific to aging out of care or exiting care are also covered during this training.

“Involvement in justice system, both as victims and/or offenders”

- **Vision 20/20 Youth Justice Forum** – In the spring of 2020, FCS will undertake a Youth Justice Forum with a focus on best practice, avenues to modernize services, and to enhance the focus on restorative and preventative approaches. This is being led by the Youth Justice team and will involve First Nations and Justice partners.