

LITERATURE REVIEW

Best Practices in Transitioning Youth Out of Care

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Successful Transitions, Success as Adults



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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Presenting Issue ~ Youth In-Care Transition to Adulthood

The “quarter-life” crisis is known to be a challenging time for youth navigating the bridge from adolescence into young adulthood. Developmental tasks for this period include youth taking definitive steps towards achieving measures of independence in areas of finance, emotional maturity, employment, housing and education. Embodied in this transition period is the view that it is a period of growth, but one that can be a difficult crossroad for many.

Social history research has found key elements, such as the timing of marriage, economic opportunities, and affordable, post-secondary education, can individually or in combination impact this transition period. In short, social, cultural and economic factors influence when youth leave the care of their family (Gutman, Pullum-Pinon & Pullum, 2002). What is also known is that youth are staying in the family home longer. A 2009 analysis by Eurostat of 14 European countries found the average age that youth left home had risen since the 1960s and now ranged from age 22 (Finland) to age 32 (Slovakia) with males staying in the family home longer than females; for nine of the 14 countries, the age of exit from the family home was between ages 25 to 32 (Eurostat, 2009).

For youth transitioning from the care of a child welfare agency the navigation from care into independence can be particularly difficult. While it is a tricky period for any youth, for those who carry short and long-term effects of child maltreatment, mental health issues and an in-care experience, the research has been robust in finding the preponderance of youth in care face multi-faceted barriers and challenges in the transition period (Burt & Paysnick, 2012; Courtney, Dworsky & Pollack, 2007; Goodkind, Schelbe & Shook, 2011). Examples of such challenges include but are not limited to: dropping out of school, failing to find employment, becoming parents too soon, experiencing conflict with the law and/or homelessness and having minimal familial support (Centre for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, 2009; Havlicek, Garcia & Smith, 2013; Samuels, 2012). These adverse experiences not only make the transition to adulthood much more difficult and delay it but have deleterious long-term effects by impacting the youth’s ability to provide for themselves in early adulthood and their ability to provide for their family and children in later adulthood (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children & Youth, 2013).

In sum, understanding what practices and services realize positive outcomes for this cohort of at-risk youth who are transitioning from care to adulthood is essential to helping them successfully manage this transition and achieve the best possible outcomes.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the practice literature and correlate the findings of what are the best practices for youth transitioning out of care that realize successful outcomes for them as adults. Within this framework, this literature and practice knowledge review has two components.

1. Identification of areas that are barriers to youth achieving positive outcomes in their transition from care;
2. Identification of existing evidence-informed/based approaches and successful programs that assisted youth to successfully transition.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review Methodology

Within the Scholars Portal and Google search strategies it is apparent that this area of evidence based practice for successful transition has seen limited knowledge development to date. This literature review focused on related topics, such as the barriers youth face when transitioning out of care.

Key words used included:

- ✚ [Out of Home Care] AND [Leavers of Care] AND [Transitioning Youth] AND [Out of Care Home] AND [Adults Transitioning out of Child Welfare] AND [Emerging Adulthood] AND [Child Welfare] AND [Resilience] AND [Care Leavers] AND [Transitional Age Youth] AND [Better Outcomes] AND [Youth Transitioning From Foster Care] AND [Young Adults From Foster Care] AND [Aging Out] AND [Young Adult Outcomes] AND [Foster Care Youth] AND [Independent Living Services] AND [Independence] AND [Evidence-Based Practice for Youth] were utilized to complete a wide-ranging review of published literature.

Employing the above key words, the search strategy used for the following databases:

- EMBASE
- Social Service Abstracts
- PsycINFO
- Social Work Abstracts

In addition to the above databases listed, internet-based databases, websites and other literature sources, such as conferences and working groups specific to the topic were searched and reviewed.

The literature review was geared primarily to the last decade (2005 to 2014). The international literature was included throughout this project due to the limited amount of information on the topic, Canadian or otherwise.

A meta-review of the overall literature gathered suggests this is an epistemology that is still in the early stages of development. There is a paucity of knowledge on best practices for youth transitioning out of care that strongly correlate with their successful navigation of this transition period from youth to adult. Much of the literature that has been developed, academic or otherwise, tends to be descriptive and process-based, not outcome and longitudinally focused.

3.0 FINDINGS FROM REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

3.1 *Barriers to Youth in Care Successfully Transitioning from Care*

Research finds a range of transitions can occur from well-planned to a sudden departure request by the youth to leave care to the youth going AWOL. For some youth the actual transition out of care can be quite sudden or unexpected, where the decision to exit is made without financial or emotional support in place, resulting in poor outcomes (Smith, 2011). The literature identifies four contributing barriers to successful transitioning youth out of care.

1. Lack of supportive relationships
2. Educational challenges
3. Housing instability
4. Economic challenges (unemployment)

3.1.1 Lack of Supportive Relationships

A review of the extant literature highlights a key area of importance for youth that either contributes to a poor outcome or is a protective factor in realizing a successful transition from care. The factor is: **youth are at risk if they don't develop and maintain long-term supportive relationships with adults** (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Goodkind, Schelbe & Shook, 2011; Havlicek, Garcia & Smith, 2013; Jones & Gragg, 2012; Kirk & Day, 2011; Rosenwald, McGhee & Noftall, 2013; Singer, Berzin & Hokanson, 2013; Smith, 2011; Storer, Barkan, Sherman, Haggerty & Mattos, 2012).

More specifically, the work of Barth, Greeson, Zlotnik and Chintapalli (2011) suggest it is not the quantity of adults but the quality of the relationship and support that is key. They found that **a permanent connection with at least one committed adult** who provides a safe, stable and secure relationship, unconditional commitment and lifelong support would foster improved success for youth transitioning from care. Practice knowledge and research evidence has been slow to emerge in this area. For example, the Centre for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (2009) found support from family is recognized as an important contributor in a successful transition to adulthood. What is also recommended is that youth in care need their birth family involved as they prepare to launch into adulthood. Illustrations of support could mean offering a safe place to live,

providing food, health care, emotional support and guidance in making fundamental decisions as well as recognizing and celebrating the youth's milestones and achievements.

Despite this growing consensus, few projects have been implemented or programs evaluated on this factor regarding best practices in this area. *Should it be a community-based volunteer? Or someone attached to the Society that could monitor the quality? How to ensure sustainability? Would a peer-mentor model work? How best to involve the youth's kin?*

3.1.2 Educational /Training Challenges

Lack of educational achievement and training opportunities will likely hinder the transition process (e.g., poor educational outcomes). As highlighted by the analysis conducted by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) (2008) on youth in care in Ontario children's aid societies (CAS), high school graduation will not guarantee a successful future for youth in care. However, obtaining Grade 12 (Gr12) is important as a requirement for post-secondary learning and in securing work internships. In short, having Gr12 is a key element in a successful transition into adulthood. According to OACAS (2008) there are no current research studies that are collecting information on the educational success of youth that graduate high school and attend post-secondary educations while transitioning into adulthood.

Jones and Gragg (2012) found that transitioning youth face many challenges such as difficulty learning and are given inadequate educational opportunities. Transitioning youth also face considerable educational and training disparities and inequalities of access (Kirk & Day, 2011). These factors inform the current reality that the preponderance of eligible youth in care do not leave care with a high-school diploma. According to the findings in the 'Gateway to Success' Report (2008), only 42% of 19 and 20 year-olds in care of a CAS appear to be successfully completing high school; this is significantly different from the provincial graduation rate of 81% (OACAS, 2011). Further evidence that education counts in the transition process is found in the statistic that only one-in-five (21%) of the 18-20 year-old youth in CAS care had participated in post-secondary education, and those who did enrol in post-secondary school, eight-in-ten (84%) lean towards apprenticeship or community college versus 16% who enrolled in university; this is a reverse trend for non-CAS, community youth, where 33% attend a college and 41.7% are enrolled in a university (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Again, it appears that both knowledge and study in this area are limited. *What type and level of educational supports for youth in care are needed to realize a Grade 12 diploma? Are educational supports for males different from female youth? Does a poor transition from grade school to high school influence high-school completion? Does the number of school moves impact graduation rates? Does culture affect high-school graduation rates?*

3.1.3 Housing Challenges ~ Instability

Housing instability is another significant factor that can adversely impact the successful transition for youth leaving care. According to Kirk and Day (2011) a lack of resources (e.g. employment, limited education, no support from family and housing) make youth in care particularly vulnerable to negative social outcomes such as incarceration, homelessness and unemployment. Added risk factors include the current economic climate which poses additional challenges for youth in general: increasing rental costs, decreasing vacancy rates, under-developed life skills, and access only to unstable and/or unsafe living conditions.

Recent literature has examined the link between the youth's placement stability and a successful transition to adulthood (Havlicek, 2011; Kirk & Day, 2011; Stott, 2013). According to Stott (2013) more research needs to be done to better understand how the youth's need for stability and normalcy in their living environments as a child/youth may impact their success in being prepared to transition into adulthood.

There are a considerable number of queries in this area. *Does placement instability in the teen years in care predict housing instability for these youth as they transition to adulthood? Does supportive housing for 21-25 year old former youth in care delay or deny later risks of housing instability? Does extended foster care (to age 21-25) mitigate housing risks for youth in care? Given males tend to stay in the family home longer – are different transitions needed by gender? For youth with heightened risks (e.g., LGBTQ, comorbid mental health issues, developmental challenges) should the housing supports and transition period be extended beyond age 25?*

3.1.4 Economic Challenges ~ Under/ Unemployment

Recent studies have documented the struggles and adverse outcomes for youth in care regarding employment challenges and the likelihood of under/unemployment. Cunningham and Diversi (2012) interviewed youth transitioning out of care and found that securing employment was a pivotal factor between securing housing or experiencing homelessness. Additional support for this view is found in the study by Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook (2011) who also found that youth in care had difficulties in transitioning out of care; the study authors assessed it to be due to a lack of material resources, such as, employment. Moreover, Barth, Greeson, Zlotnik and Chintapalli (2011) suggest youth within two to four years after they leave care at age 18, will face unemployment, suffer spells of homelessness and rely on public assistance.

Working part-time during the high-school years is a common way most youth gain work experience prior to their transition to adulthood. Yet, for youth in care working while attending school is not a common activity. Many factors may contribute to that fact such as frequent placement and school moves, a youth's educational challenges, and quite possibly having a 'youth in care status' may hinder being hired. Research does suggest if "working while going to school" is kept to less than 20 hours a week, then there is an

important positive correlation: youth are less likely to drop out of high school compared to youth without a part-time job or those who work more than 20 hours a week (Usalcas & Bowlby, 2006). Furthermore, an analysis of OECD countries found a factor that influences youth's successful transition to emerging adulthood is the availability of public funds that are NOT affected by work participation (Aron, Loprest, & Steuerle 1996 cited in Wittenburg & Loprest, 2003). In short, the message is to not apply disincentives to youth who work. Helping youth in care acquire work experience and partnering with the job sector to offer such work and placement opportunities is an area for great potential to improve youth outcomes in the area of acquiring employment in the post transition period that meets a "living wage" level.

Within the population of youth leaving care there is a cohort that will not be attending a university or college or training program, have obtained their Grade 12 but most likely have no prior work experience. What are their prospects? A recent analysis by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) found that youth, aged 15-24 (nearly one-in-ten young Canadians) are at risk of chronic unemployment as they have no work experience despite graduating well-educated. In real numbers that is around 420,000 youth who are 15-24 year-olds, who are neither in school nor employed, with one-in-five never having held a job (Tal, 2013). The issue of rising high youth unemployment rates and the difficulties young people have in finding jobs extends beyond Canada to other countries, such as Europe.

While it is essential to acknowledge the present economic challenges associated with youth in general in their transition to adulthood, it is also key to recognize that certain cohorts of youth are in particular peril. According to the International Labour Organization (2005) there are two subcategories of youth that require special attention. The first group are *youth who are unable to effectively join the labour market in a meaningful way*; the second group is *youth who are not in employment, education or training*. Youth in care fit both categories.

Going forward there is much that needs to be known regarding how best to build employment opportunities for youth into their service care plan. What is known is doing so advances both short-term (adolescence to adulthood transition) and long-term (young-adulthood to older adulthood transition) economic, social and health outcomes for youth in care.

Many questions need to be answered regarding the intersection between youth in care and employment. *What programs are effective that help youth in care minimize educational gaps and gain work experience during the high school years? How can the profit, not-for-profit, and education sectors do a better job in helping youth in care gain employment exposure, internship and/or placement experience? For youth in care not likely or not wanting post-secondary schooling/training what is best practice in preparing them for employment post care? What types of employment supports are most effective for youth in care: short-term vs. long-term mentoring, CV services, career planning? What model of service delivery is preferred: CAS, 3rd party?*

3.2 Promising Practices to Youth Transitioning Out of Care and Success as Adults

A review of the extant and published program literature find several programs and services are flagged as helping youth effectively transition to independent, self-sufficient adults. That said, the delivery and financial elements of these programs and services varies greatly. Although many programs can benefit youth in transition, some of the more common and well documented services that are being utilized effectively to improve outcomes for youth ‘aging out’ are the vocational and education training supports, housing aid, and employment services.

Findings from the Centre for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (2009) indicate there are specific elements that are not only recommended but essential to achieving positive outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood. These include:

- ✚ Youth have strong relationships with families who are committed to them;
- ✚ Provide ongoing educational supports that include employment readiness and career planning;
- ✚ Ensure youth have access to quality housing with financial assistance;
- ✚ Incorporate effective ‘readiness planning for adulthood’, including job skills, life skills and financial management training.

3.1.1 Best Practices ~ Supportive Relationships

✚ Youth have strong relationships with families who are committed to them

While the four criteria above all make intuitive sense, the reality of operationalizing each across all CASs for each youth in care remains a challenge. For example, in examining the goal of ensuring strong family relationships for each youth in care it becomes apparent that it is not a simple task but a sustained, persistent process of engagement of the family and the youth in care, over time. For some youth and their families, much of that time the CAS and the youth’s family may have been locked in a litigious, highly contentious process. In short, neither the youth in care nor their family exist within a vacuum and they do function within a community context, where some communities have more supports and services than other communities. It is not a level field regarding the amount, the type, and the quality of services and resources available to each CAS and the communities in which they work.

For example, in a study by Carter (2001) for the Youth Development Institute, the report noted that youth development organizations can strengthen families by promoting emotional connectedness, sharing and promoting high expectations for youth, assisting in mediating conflicts in families, providing adult role models outside of the family, bridging worlds, and promoting parental efficacy. While that type of service may be available in some communities – in some it is under-developed or not existent.

According to Smith (2011) the transition to adulthood involves coming to term with relationships of the past and establishing new ones. As youth leave foster care, they may feel some uncertainty about which connections will last, especially if there has been little or no contact with their birth family, or if their experiences with them have been disappointing or harmful. A study by Goodkind, Schelbe and Shook (2011) examined this issue and found that the most difficult challenge identified by youth in making a successful transition out of care into adulthood was securing the supportive, personal relationship with family. Of equal importance from this study is the finding that services cannot take the place of meaningful relationships. In other words, having the CAS provide the post-care service will not be as effective or as meaningful as the personal, individual one. A key question for CAS's is: How best to help the youth develop and hone and manage their family and community relationships while in care and with the lens of post-CAS care?

Other best practices emerged from the 2013 jointly sponsored work of the Ontario Ministry for Children and Youth and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth that created the Youth Leaving Care Working Group. The Working Group members were given the responsibility of building a plan for fundamental change to the child welfare system on behalf of children and youth across Ontario. In addition to what has been noted above, their review of *what works* identified two additional important findings regarding what elements foster a successful transition for youth. First, is that positive, supportive relationships occur for youth through peer-mentoring; and second, that youth are able to maintain those relationships once they are transitioned out of care (Blue Print for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System, 2013).

3.1.2 Best Practices ~ Educational Supports

Provide educational supports that include employment readiness & career planning

Education is a leading predictor of adult success. Education supports for at-risk students (e.g., those with academic, social, behavioural, contextual, physical and/or mental health challenges) are essential to facilitating graduation rates. According to Snow (2012), postsecondary education, as a poverty prevention strategy, is a well-established axiom. The Council of Ontario Universities (2014) recent report called *University Works ~ 2014 Employment Report* underscores that fact. Analysis found that,

- 1) "...Ontario university graduates have the best labour market outcomes" (pg. 1);
- 2) "University graduates have low unemployment rates and the highest life-time earnings in Ontario" (pg. 2);
- 3) "University grads have the highest share of employment" (pg. 10).

Research finds there is a clear link between those who advance their education and an ability to secure employment and higher earnings compared to those who did not pursue education. The ramifications for adulthood are significant in that education not only increases job security and earning potential, education also reduces the likelihood of housing instability and homelessness (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2005). Employment also reduces reliance on social assistance and realizes other benefits, such as improved health status.

So what more can government ministries, CAS's, donors, and the public do to advance educational opportunities for youth in care? The 2009 study by the Society for Research in Child Development found youth for whom foster care is extended do better educationally and earn more than youth where it was not extended. Rosenwald, Mcghee and Noftall (2013) also suggest that practices such as assistance with school registration and financial aid assistance increase school success for youth in care, creating a 'win-win' situation. That said, assistance with school registration and guidance is complex and can be difficult to navigate if the CAS is not familiar with the world of academia and counselling for future direction. This suggests that partnering with colleges, universities and other post-secondary learning as well as education and employment counselling is important in order to leverage "wins" for youth in care.

A robust finding in the literature on youth moving on to post-secondary education is that educational mentoring programs can be an important piece to a successful transition. This type of partnership requires the best efforts and sustained commitment of CASs, communities, academic and training institutions, as well as government collaborating together to improve the quality of life for youth in care who are transitioning into adulthood. This kind of intervention requires visionary leadership and broad sector, multi-level planning. An example of this type of initiative is the work of the Toronto Crown Ward Champion Team (TCWCT) which was formed as part of the *Access to Opportunities-First Generation Strategy*, a tri-ministry program with the Ministries' of Training, Colleges and Universities, Education, and Children and Youth Services. The Toronto Team was formed in the pilot phase in 2007 along with teams in Thunder Bay, London and Ottawa. An element of the TCWCT was the Toronto Crown Ward Education Champion Team (TCWECT) which focuses on identifying structural obstacles that face Crown Wards during their educational journey (Goodman, Zoppi, Marshall & Chan, 2012). Recent advancements in tangible supports to Crown Wards have been made at the college and university level in Toronto through on-site, Crown Ward academic advocates.

For those in-care youth who transition into post-secondary education, having a college/university mentor work with the youth on a one-on-one basis and assist the youth in defining their ongoing educational goals appears to be an asset and a protective factor. The aim of the mentor is to help the youth identify and fine-tune their unique educational plans. Having clarity with their direction then optimizes the likelihood the youth will develop the required skills, navigate the application processes, visit colleges and universities campuses or schools of their choice and learn about applying for financial aid. Underpinning this approach is that strong and positive encouragement for all youth to attend post-secondary education or training is required. According to OACAS's *Gateway to Success* (2008) report this initiative was implemented as a pilot project. While small gains have been made much remains to be learned about how to effectively sustain educational outcomes for youth in care.

The literature flags an outstanding knowledge gap regarding advancing educational opportunities for youth in care: how to measure success? In a study by Kirk and Day (2011) a positive and promising intervention involves linking transitioning youth in care with alumni (already transitioned youth) as role models. As noted earlier, a growing

body of research is finding that youth who are linked with mentors do better during the transition process. More specifically, youth mentors can provide a positive model for similar programs and services in all types of higher educational institutions (Blue Print for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System, 2013; Snow, 2012).

In the United States, 'The Midwest Study' by Courtney, Dworsky, and Pollack (2007) followed the progress of 700 youth in care from three states (Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin) between 2002 and 2011 and described the experiences of the youth in their transition to adulthood. A summary of key findings includes:

- 1) Higher education was a key component to a successful transition;
- 2) Youth in care were more than twice as likely not to have a high school diploma or GED compared to their community peers;
- 3) Each additional year that a youth remained in care was associated with an increase in additional annual earnings.

Later research by Mendes (2011) both supported and added to the learning from the Midwest Study findings. Mendes (2011) found a social inclusion model would benefit youth transitioning out of care. This model supports the youth who are leaving care by having them participate in mainstream activities and by linking them with a range of professional and community supports which can address key developmental needs, like education, in a more sustained fashion. This type of mentoring program aims to '*foster the young person's sense of self*' through supporting them as they seek education and training opportunities while countering the isolation and alienation issues. The mentor is to navigate the process from start to finish. Further support for this type of mentoring approach is iterated in *The Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System* (2013) which underscores the importance of an easy and accessible Ontario Student Assistance program application process for both the youth who are currently in care and for those who have exited care.

3.1.3 Best Practices ~ Housing Supports

Ensure youth have access to quality housing with financial assistance;

Housing can be a significant barrier or an important asset to youth in care who are in transition to adulthood and independence. *The Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System* (2013) strongly recommends that transition support be available to youth leaving the child welfare system. Transition support is really a basket of services to youth in care that can include but is not limited to the following: identifying housing options, developing a plan for stable housing before they depart care, connecting the youth with supportive or transitional housing, and/or facilitating access to a fund for housing start up costs and emergencies.

The literature also outlines the necessity for stable, consistent housing for youth once they have left care. Illustrations of such a service include a transitional housing approach that offers a supportive service model (e.g., rental assistance). This tactic provides youth with an opportunity to live in a housing unit but still receive support – financial as well as other types. This program design provides supportive services,

housing assistance and stability while allowing the youth time to obtain employment or continue their education; it also allows the youth to establish a successful rental history while they work towards self-sufficiency.

Independent Living Services (ISL) is an approach taken by a number of American states. For example, in Michigan, starting at age 14, youth in foster must begin preparation for independent living. ILS references a model of service delivery that promotes independence and stability by providing a range of concrete services such as: financial assistance to attend a post-secondary education, rent, living expenses and case management along with support groups. The ILS programs and services assist with a certain competency in navigating systems. According to Barth, Greeson, Zlotnik and Chintapalli (2011), ILS programs have a growing research base that demonstrates a ‘moving forward’ approach to a program for assisting youth in transition. For example, Scott (2013) highlights that eligible young adults may be referred to an ILS program that provides them an apartment in a transitional living complex and access to supports, services and case management. An ongoing challenge identified in the ILS literature is the struggle with being able to secure an apartment within the housing crisis and to locate transitional housing opportunities. Housing most certainly is a key factor in realizing a successful transition from care. It is difficult to go to school or a maintain a part-time job after school or prepare for an agency interview if one’s accommodation is unstable and/or unsafe and/or non-existent.

In sum, a review of the literature finds ILS models show great promise for their ability to foster improved outcomes for youth transitioning from care, as these programs combine subsidized housing with case management and life skills training. While there seems to be substantial progress in developing more innovative options for youth transitioning out of care, challenges remain that need to be better understood regarding continued adverse outcomes for youth despite the added supports. Examples include continued risk of housing instability, and at worst, homelessness, ongoing food insecurity, and for many, a growing debt load.

3.1.4 Best Practices ~ Employment

- ✚ **Incorporate effective ‘readiness planning for adulthood’, including job skills, life skills and financial management training.**

Providing youth in care with supported employment opportunities means offering well-defined approaches to helping them participate in the competitive labor market, helping them find meaningful jobs, and providing ongoing support from a team of professionals. According to the literature, employment services to youth in care vary. It has not been an area that has been well developed nor is consistently provided by all CASs from a service delivery perspective. A review of programs find a range of services that can include: resume building, interviewing skills, job readiness, job training and job search assistance. Most lack the last step – job shadowing, internships or actual obtainment of employment. While some CASs have aligned with a third-party service that offers a “one-stop” self-sufficiency centre, for many the service offered is an employment counsellor. In other words, support is offered but not the supply of an employment

opportunity. Moreover, when an employment opportunity does arise it is typically not at the level of a living wage. This was evident in the recent Florida report on 1,821 youth, ages 18-22 who had recently left care, of the 322 who indicated they had a full-time or part-time job, 48% said they did not make above minimum wage (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2012)

Clearly employment preparation and securing a job are key elements to a successful transition from care and beyond. This was recognized in a recommendation from the report *Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare* (2013) "...children's aid societies partner with businesses, trade associations, and youth-serving community agencies to provide meaningful work experience/internship opportunities for youth in and from care" (page 11).

The reality is that youth typically hold more than one competitive job before finding one that is optimal for them. Research suggests that when youth have jobs that match their preferences and capabilities, they are able, with ongoing assistance from the supported employment counsellor, case managers, family members, and others, to keep these jobs over a period of time.

4.0 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This literature review examined the barriers and best practices related to effectively working with transitioning youth as they exit care and reviewing what interventions are linked to best outcomes as adults. The review was restricted to the extant literature most recently produced over the last decade (2002-2013). In reviewing the available literature on this topic, it is evident that there is a growing focus on the transitioning youth, however much more research is needed. The good news is that more research is being focused on examining this key period in the life of a youth in care; it is equally evident that there is little research to date that specifically and longitudinally examines correlations between best practices related to working with transitioning youth out of care and success as adults. Knowledge creation and transfer remains at the beginning stage.

Burt and Paysnick (2012) underscore that knowledge of what works best in transitioning out of care is still in the early stages and best practices are not yet clearly solidified. Like Flynn and Vincent (2008), they too recommend longitudinal, multiple-informant studies of youth transitioning out of care; they identify the need to include more comparisons groups, and they flag the need to conduct studies that capture best practices of successful transitions. In summary, there remains a large gap in the collective child welfare literature on preferred, evidence-informed approaches to advancing educational, employment, housing and supportive relationships outcomes for youth transitioning out of care. Havlicek (2011) aptly notes that minimal attention has been given in research, policy and in practice to understanding the transitioning experience and related outcomes within a longer developmental time frame.

Towards the aim of consolidating the *'best knowledge to date'* regarding effective best practices, we reviewed both literature and content from several intersecting areas. We identified barriers and areas of future focus and they are one in the same:

- ✚ Enduring relationships ~ Family Links;
- ✚ Educational Supports (in/after care);
- ✚ Housing Supports (in/after care);
- ✚ Employment Supports (in/after care).

The review also identified promising practices in the literature and connected them together with practices of successful transitions to independence. Promising, evidence-informed practices identified in this literature review include the following:

- Strengths-Based Approach;
- Relationship-Based Approach;
- Client-Centred Planning and Care;
- Independent Living Services (ILS)
- Network Bridging
- Parenting Programs

The literature review has identified some innovative, promising program models (e.g., ILS). However, the research conducted on such interventions has not been longitudinal nor have they reported findings of success. Without question, youth in care who are transitioning into adulthood face many challenges and require a range of supports that will optimize their successful transition to adulthood. The first step is in recognizing much more needs to be accomplished for that goal to be reached.

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Authors consider the evidence-based approach for a multitude of services to adolescents in out-of-home care. They evaluate the existing research base for each of the services. The outcome of the findings is to provide a framework for consideration highlighting policy, programs, and evaluation recommendations.

Burt, K., & Paysnick, A. (2012). Resilience in the transition to adulthood. *Development and Psychopathology*, (24), 493-505. doi: 10.1017/S0954579412000119

Authors review research on positive outcomes in the transition to adulthood following a history of experienced adversity. Investigations focused on resilience in diverse specific populations.

Carter. (January, 2001). Promoting positive youth development in New York State: Moving from dialogue to action. New York: Adolescent Project Team of Partners for Children.

The focus is on youth, families and communities in New York State's Youth Development program. This 'Blueprint', which takes a strength-based approach, was the result of the impact and involvement of all levels of professionals, communities, and persons of all ages young and old). Blueprints looked at community youth development researched-based frameworks.

Centre for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. (2009). Cw360: A comprehensive look at a prevalent child welfare issue. *Permanency or Aging Out: Adolescents in the Child Welfare System*, (2), 1-44. Retrieved from <http://cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw>

This report addresses permanency or aging out in the child welfare system in the United States and conducts an overview of the current child welfare system. In addition, it highlights current perspectives and collaborations addressing housing, education, familiar supports, and supports for persons with mental health challenges and/or disabilities.

Courtney, M., & Endowed, B. (2009) Youth in foster care: Easing the transition to adulthood. *Society for Research in Child Development*, 23(1). SRCO Office for Policy and Communications.

This social policy report brief highlights why for youth in foster care there is a need to ease the transition to adulthood. It addresses the policy implications, what the current research states and it emphasises the statistical information as well as addressing the lack of empirical evidence of what works in terms of independent living and transition services.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., & Pollack, H. (2007). When should the state cease parenting? Evidence from the Midwest study. *Issue Brief, Chaplin Hall Centre for Children, (115), 1-10.*

This brief discusses the findings from the Midwest Study and the implications for child welfare policy. It explains the challenges in estimating the effects of extending care for foster youth in transition, higher education, pregnancy, earnings, and independent living services.

Cunningham, M., & Diversi, M. (2012). Aging out: Youths' perspectives on foster care and the transition to independence. *Qualitative Social Work 12(5), 587-602. doi:10.1177/1473325012445833*

The authors of this American article examine qualitative data and use ethnography to engage youth in sharing their perspectives on the process of 'aging out' of foster care. The youths' narratives during the early stages of transition from foster care provide insights for professionals, policy makers, and future research.

Finnie, R., Childs, S., & Wismer, A., (2011). Access to Post-secondary Education among Under-represented and Minority Groups: Measuring the Gaps, Assessing the Causes. *Education Policy Research Initiative. Working Paper No. 2011-01.*

The dataset, *Youth in Transition Survey, Cohort A*, is used to examine youth post-secondary education status in 2006 (Cycle 4) of youth who were 15 years old in 2000, and surveyed again in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010 (cycles 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6). In 2006 the youth were then age 21 and were examined for postsecondary education (PSE) status. Analysis found that in addition to commonly known characteristics that influence university attendance (e.g., parental income, parents' education, rural vs. urban, family type [single vs. 2-parent], Canadian-born vs. 1st Generation) that other factors were influential on PSE participation (i.e., the effort to obtain marks counts, cultural affiliation/background).

Florida Department of Children and Families (2012). Florida National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Survey: What Young Adults Who Have Aged Out of Foster Care Can Tell Us. Author.

In spring 2012, 1,821 Florida youth, aged 18-22, were surveyed after they left the foster care system. While there were many positive outcomes (e.g., 85% were enrolled in high-school, GED classes or post-secondary training/college), many challenges for these youth remained (e.g., 28% had experienced homelessness, 40% had couch surfed, only 70% had an open bank account, and 47% relied on a food assistance program).

Flynn, R., & Vincent, D. (2008). Canada. In M. Stein & E. Munro (Eds.), *Young people's transitions from care to adulthood* (pp. 36-48). London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This chapter highlights the financial, educational, and social supports for Canadian youth in transition and the age limits on eligibility. It details the lack of research conducted to date and recommends emphasis on large and representative samples, and high quality evaluations of the effects of specific evidence-based transition interventions.

Goldstein, A., Faulkner, B., & Wekerle, C. (2012). The relationship between internal resilience, smoking, alcohol use, and depression symptoms in emerging adults transitioning out of child welfare. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.08.007>

This study examined the relationship between an internal resilience measure and several external measures of resilience and behavioural outcomes. The findings support internal resilience as both a compensatory and protective factor for depression systems in the context of sexual abuse among emerging adults transitioning out of child welfare.

Goodkind, S., Schelbe, L. A., & Shook, J. J. (2011). *Why youth leave care: Understandings of adulthood and transition successes and challenges among youth aging out of child welfare* Elsevier. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.01.010

Authors' reviewed recent evidence suggesting that remaining in care may be beneficial and posited that there is a need to understand why youth leave. Using data gathered from in-depth interviews with young people aging out of care, this paper explored the study question, relating it to youths' understandings of adulthood and the successes and challenges they face during their transitions.

Goodman, D., Zoppi, L., Marshall, A., & Chan, C. (2012). *Child Welfare Youths' Views on Barriers to Post-Secondary Education, Training and Employment. Report for Toronto Crown Ward Education Champion Team.*

Study analyzed worker data from 391 youth in care attached to one of the four Toronto children's aid societies on key variables such as age, gender, current placement type, complexity of youth, and likelihood of post-secondary education/training. From the 391, a random sample of 38 youth consented to an in-depth phone interview on assets and roadblocks to post-secondary school/training. In order of importance, they identified four: financial challenges, academic challenges, personal challenges, and challenges with support.

Gutman, M., Pullum-Pinon, S., & Pullum, T. (2002). Three Eras of Young Adult Home Leaving in 20th Century America, *Journal of Social History*, 35: 532-576.

Article divides the history of coming of age in 20th century USA into three time periods: 1st) 1880 -1945, 2nd) 1945- 1969, 3rd)1970 -1990 by age left home using census data and found transition had major changes and variance. They posited three factors influence departure: 1) Timing of marriage, 2) Economic opportunities, and 3) Post-secondary availability and affordability.

Havlicek, J., Garcia, A., & Smith, D. (2013). Mental health and substance use disorders among foster youth transitioning to adulthood: Past research and future directions. *Children and Youth Services review*, (35), 194-203.

The authors' conducted a meta review of 16 peer-reviewed articles and/or research reports to identify lifetime and past year rates of mental health disorders and service utilization. The findings of this review suggest the need to focus future efforts in research, routine screening and supported treatments and integration and planning between child and adult mental health service systems.

Havlicek, J. (2011). Lives in motion: A review of former foster youth in the context of their experiences in the child welfare system. *Children and Youth Services review*, (33), 1090-1100. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.02.007

The author highlights a review of child welfare research which finds that many former foster youth go through a number of placements challenges. The author brings forth the need of future research, taking into consideration a substitute care design and carrying out studies examining the outcomes of aging out foster care populations.

Jones, J., & Gragg, J. (2012). Transitional foster youth's perceptions of preparation to act as self-advocates: A phenomenological study. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and families*, 20(4), 411-418. doi: 10.1177/1066480712451423

This in-depth phenomenological study explored the perceptions of three youth who were judged to be more effective self-advocates than their peers, concerning how they felt to act as self-advocates. The research highlighted the fact that many youth transitioning out of care are rarely taught self-advocacy. It was also suggested in this study that acting as a self-advocate may enhance the educational choices and familial relationship of transitional foster youth.

Kirk, R., & Day, A. (2011). Increasing college access for youth aging out of foster care: evaluation of summer camp program for foster youth transitioning from high school to college. *Children & Youth Service review*,(33),1173-1180.

The authors examine the challenges that youth transitioning out of care experience including the lack of support and other educational barriers. This research highlights the perceived increases in college related knowledge and information as well as enhanced perceptions of life skills, self-concept, empowerment and sense of purpose. It demonstrates strengthened resilience and helped build steps from care to higher education. Peer support, role modeling, mentoring and active learning sessions were important to the success of the program. Outcomes were influenced by leadership and delivery by foster care alumni.

Mendes, P. (2011). Towards a community development support model for young people transitioning from state-out-of-care: A case study of St. Luke's

**Anglicare in Victoria, Australia. *Practice Social Work in Action*, 23(2), 69-81.
doi: 10.1080/09503153.2011.557148**

This article argues that a community development support model based on a partnership between professional social welfare workers and local community networks is most likely to enhance opportunities for the social inclusion of care leavers. Some of the conclusions highlighted are based on the experiences of service users about 'what works' in leaving care programs.

Ministry of Children & Youth Service and Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2013) *Blueprint for fundamental change to Ontario's Child Welfare System: Final report of the youth leaving care working group.*

This report highlights the role of the working group which included nine youth in and from care and seven community representatives from across the province. The working group members were given the responsibility of building a plan for fundamental change to the child welfare system on behalf of children and youth across Ontario. This report places emphasis on the short term and long term recommendations that will improve outcomes for youth transitioning out of care. Best practices were not examined at this phase of the report.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. (2008). *Gateway to success* OACAS Survey of the Educational Status of Crown Wards and Former Crown Wards, Age 16 to 21.

This document highlights educational outcomes for children and youth in the Ontario child welfare system. This survey was intended for child welfare professionals with pre-existing knowledge of this population and their multi-faceted needs. The document highlights what the pre-existing knowledge was and what initiatives were being conducted. This document placed emphasis of future directions due to the findings of the survey addressing further attention given to youth transitioning out of care.

Rosenwald, M., McGhee, T., & Noftall, R. (2013). *Perspectives on independent living services among resilient youth. Journal of family Social Work*, (16), 148-163. doi: 10.1080/10522158.2013.765816

The authors examine the results of a qualitative study of youth aging out of foster care and utilizing Independent Living Services (ILS). A discussion of identified themes and recommendations for child welfare agencies that work with this population highlighting the importance of providing more support to youth transitioning to adulthood. Another element of the recommendations is the opportunity to have access to educational mentoring and increasing services such as daycare supports for young adults with their own children. This study suggests by addressing the needs within an ILS interventions requires service provision and delivery that is thorough, responsive, and efficient.

Samuels, G. M. (2012). *Youth leaving foster care: A developmental, relationship-based approach to practice. Social Service Review*, 86(2), 359-361.

The author explores the transition into adult roles for foster youth. The analysis reports on educational and career outcomes, and suggested factors that may help to improve outcomes. Also examined are youths' relationships with significant others such as birth families, caregivers, peer, mentors, and romantic partners. It concludes with a discussion on key practice principles relating to education, employment and relationships.

Singer, E., Berzin, S., & Hokanson, K. (2013). Voices of former foster youth: Supportive relationships in the transition. *Children and Youth Services Review*, (35), 2110-2117.

This study builds on literature on social support among transitioning foster care youth. The study collects data from 20 qualitative interviews with foster youth ages 18-21. They identified that youth had a network of both formal and informal relationships that provided a variety of support. They recommend future research would benefit from longitudinal studies that examine how youths' conceptualization and utilization of relational networks affect outcomes in young adulthood.

Snow, K. (2012). Vulnerable children and youth studies: An international interdisciplinary journal for research, policy and care. "I am a voyager": From aspirations to belonging, 1-11, doi: 10.1080/17450128.2012.722703

This article discusses a project that is identified as a social innovation strategy that unfolded over a five- year period in an Ontario children's aid society. The aim was to redress educational disruption and disadvantages faced by children in the permanent care of a CAS. Author recommends that investment is required in supporting youth in care having in increased opportunities to 'network bridging' as a promising approach to improve outcomes.

Storer, H., Barkan, S., Sherman, E., Haggerty, K., & Mattos, L. (2012). Promoting relationship building and connection: Adapting an evidence-based parenting program for families involved in the child welfare system. *Children and Youth Services Review*, (34), 1853-1861. doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2012.05.017

These authors provide an in-depth discussion on the proposed adaptations to making an evidence-based parent program 'Staying Connected' more relevant for foster families, including the additional skills training to help overcome barriers. This program cultivates promise of more supportive home environments that have the capacity to nurture youths' healthy development.

Stott, T. (2013). *Transitioning youth: Policies and outcomes* Elsevier. doi:10.1016/j.chilyouth.2012.10.019

This author examines the primary policies and outcome studies regarding youth transitioning from foster care and young adults who have aged out of foster care. In terms of educational achievement, employment and well-being many youth continue to fare poorly. The article also addresses the needs of youth transitioning from foster care, child welfare policies and practices to focus more attention on the relational and social development of youth.

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