

Section 3.8: Preparing Youth for Independence

3.0 LONG TERM CARE

3.8 Preparing Youth for Independence

Policy

Within the context of the youth's case plan, the youth must receive assistance in preparation for independence by being provided the necessary training, guidance and support to take responsibility for most aspects of his or her life, according to his or her capabilities, upon reaching the age of majority.

Practice Guidelines

- Guardianship includes the responsibility to assist the child or youth in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Children and youth growing up in their own families learn to be independent, responsible adults by gradually being given more responsibility as they mature. Children and youth in care need additional training and support because they are more likely to leave the home of caregivers at an earlier age and may be without the benefit of a network of family support.
- Unless the child's level of development is severely impaired or delayed, the child's caseworker and the child's caregiver should provide the child with opportunities to gradually acquire self-care skills as soon as the child is old enough to learn. When the child reaches 15 years of age, active preparation for more autonomy must begin.

Preparing the child or youth for independence includes:

- assessing the child's or youth's level of functioning in relation to his or her age and developmental capabilities;
- seeking the child's or youth's views about his or her goals for the future, and the level of support and services that would assist the child or youth in achieving their goals for the future;
- ensuring that the child or youth's case plan identifies the services that will be provided to enhance his or her self-care skills and knowledge;
- ensuring that the child's or youth's case plan identifies the actions that will be taken to support the child's or youth's efforts to achieve their goals for the future, consistent with the child's or youth's capabilities and best interests;
- ensuring that the child or youth has appropriate identification and required documentation such as a social insurance number, health card, birth certificate etc.;
- ensuring that children who have treaty status are registered and informed of their entitlements;
- ensuring the child is aware of any benefits held in trust by the Public Trustee;

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- for youth 16 years of age and over who wish to discontinue foster care, the appropriateness of independent living within the context of the youth's case plan must be determined;
- ensuring that the youth is aware of the support and services available under Section 56 of *The Child and Family Services Act*. (see Chapter 3.9)

Planning for Independence:

From the time that preparing a child or youth for independence begins, each Child Assessment and Developmental Plan should include additional information and assessment of the child's or youth's:

HEALTH:

- awareness of factors related to a healthy lifestyle
- access to information about sexuality and related issues
- the services available to assist the child or youth to take responsibility for his or her own health care, and
- the child/youth's views about all of the above.

EDUCATION:

- the child/youth's educational and vocational goals
- the services that can be provided for the child or youth to assist with his or her education or vocational development, and
- the child/youth's views about all of the above.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:

- the family, social and community support the child/youth is likely to have after becoming independent
- for an aboriginal child/youth, involvement of the child/youth's aboriginal community once he or she becomes independent
- the means by which support may be enhanced prior to independence
- the child/youth's recreational, cultural and spiritual connections and activities
- the services that can be provided for the child/youth to assist them in maintaining these activities
- the child/youth's views of the above.

EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL DEVELOPMENT:

- emotional or psychological issues requiring professional counselling or care, particularly if the child/youth has suffered abuse and/or trauma
- behavioural responses to situations, such as anger management, assertiveness and conflict resolution skills

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- services that can be provided to meet the child/youth's emotional needs and to enhance the child/youth's level of development, and
- the child/youth's views about all of the above.

SELF CARE SKILLS:

- household management skills, including cleaning, shopping, and meal planning and preparation
- money management skills, including budgeting and banking
- appropriate to age and development, support to learn to operate a motor vehicle and obtain a license to drive
- social skills required for independent functioning
- knowledge of how to apply for entitlements, services, employment or how to seek advice and assistance in relation to these aspects of independent functioning
- parenting skills, if applicable
- the services that can be provided to assist the child/youth to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to make a successful transition to independent functioning, and
- the child/youth's views about all of the above.

Youth Who Wish to Discontinue Foster Care:

- Some youth who have been in long term care may not form a significant relationship with a caregiver and may wish to discontinue foster care. Their reasons for wishing to discontinue care need to be taken seriously and explored with them. The youth may wish to return to their family, extended family, or for First Nation's children, their Band.
- The caseworker needs to determine, in consultation with the youth, if their wish to discontinue care would be in the youth's best interest.
- The caseworker must explore options for family reunification, extended family placement or placement with a person who has a significant adult relationship with the youth to determine if a possible placement resource can be located.
- Where the youth's family, extended family or a person with a significant relationship is able and willing to care for the youth, explore with them the possibility for assuming custody of the youth. In assessing the appropriateness of the placement, the caseworker should ensure the placement would not place the youth in need of protection and there is reasonable potential for continuity of the placement. Where the youth wishes to return to their family of origin child protection issues need to be evaluated from the perspective of the youth's current age and development.

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- Where the youth's family, extended family or a person with a significant relationship wishes to assume custody, an application to vary the order should be undertaken to facilitate their assumption of custody.

Exit Process:

- Caseworkers for long term wards or permanent wards should provide a process to facilitate closure for their time in care and plans for their future, with the youth, prior to the youth's 18th birthday to:
 - review and assist them in understanding their experience during their time in care;
 - review the youth's plans for the future and assist in anticipating and resolving possible problems;
 - provide the youth with any information they may require;
 - provide the youth with information about extended services that are available to them under Section 56 of *The Child and Family Services Act*. (see Chapter 3.9)
 - assure youth is aware of their constitutional status and any legal status that may provide benefit to the youth, i.e. inheritance or survivor benefits;
 - be sure the youth knows how to contact the Ministry for assistance in the future;
 - bid the youth farewell and follow up with a letter.
- This process would typically begin 3 - 6 months prior to the youth's birthday and would require 2 - 3 interviews.
- Caseworkers should summarize this process and the information provided in a letter so that the youth has a written record of the information.
- Where a youth will require services from other Ministry programs, comprehensive planning must commence at least 12 months prior to the transfer to adult services. (See Protocol - Adult Transition Planning of Individuals in Care of the Minister - Ch. 11.15)

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Section 3.9: Extension of Support for Former Wards

3.0 LONG TERM CARE

3.9 Extension of Support for Former Wards

Policy

The Ministry may, with the approval of the Director, Service Delivery or designate, enter into an agreement to extend child in care services to a permanent or long term care ward who:

- Is between the age of 18 and 21 years of age;
- Is continuing their education;
- Require assistance or training to enable them to continue their education or obtain employment; or
- Because of a mental or physical disability or impairment, require care or participation in a program to assist them in their mental or physical development or in the acquisition of life skills; **and**
- Is willing to comply with the terms and conditions of the agreement.

The services that may be provided are those services available to a child in care.

Services terminate when:

- the objectives of the agreement are completed;
- the former ward reaches the age of 21 years.

Procedures

1. An agreement to provide assistance is available to persons who were permanent/long term care wards, upon discharge from care on their 18th birthday or any time before their 21st birthday.
2. An extended care agreement must be signed by the former ward and the children's services worker, and approved by the Director, Service Delivery or designate. Where a person lacks capacity to enter into an agreement, the director may provide services to the person without entering into a written agreement.
3. Support may be provided to achieve goals which include:
 - completion of high school;
 - university education;
 - trades, business, vocational or technical course;
 - services for youth who are intellectually challenged and require constant care or day programming;

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- interim support to prepare for further education;
 - supports that will provide for skills and capacity to prepare for further education or to enter the work force;
 - supports to find and sustain employment.
4. Support may include all benefits available to a child in the care of the Minister. Where available, services, supports, education or training should be provided through publicly funded agencies in the youth's home community. Out of province education or training should only be considered where comparable programs are not available in Saskatchewan.
 5. To the extent they are able, former wards are expected to contribute financially toward their program and to support themselves from their earnings during extended holiday periods. The amount of continued support during these periods is at the discretion of the Director, Service Delivery.
 6. The Ministry does not require permanent or long term wards to apply for student loans.
 7. If a plan is interrupted (e.g. due to illness, employment for a semester, abandoning the plan), the agreement may be renewed after discussion and consideration of the youth's new plan. A new agreement outlining the conditions must be signed by the youth, caseworker and approved by the Director, Service Delivery or designate. It should be recognized that as part of the developmental process, plans may be interrupted one or more times. The worker should actively continue to engage the youth in developing or returning to their plan.
 8. When the permanent committal of a Saskatchewan ward residing outside the province expires, the Director, Service Delivery or designate may enter into an extended care agreement when recommended by the authorities in the province in which the former ward resides. Saskatchewan Social Services is responsible for all maintenance, education and other related costs for wards and former wards living in other provinces. Where the Ministry is providing courtesy support to a ward from another jurisdiction at the request of that jurisdiction, services may be extended based on legal authority in the other jurisdiction. Financial support is the responsibility of the other jurisdiction. (See Chapter 11.13 Interprovincial Protocol)
 9. All wards that approach their 18th birthday should be informed, in writing, of the extended care provisions.

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Practice Guidelines

- Children who are permanent or long term wards do not have the family supports that most children have.
- In today's society most families continue to provide some additional support for their children after they reach the age of maturity to help them with the move to independence. For children placed in the permanent or long term care of the Minister, the Minister has primary parenting responsibility and therefore needs to provide similar supports.
- Due to the difficulties they have experienced in their childhood, children and youth in care often have special needs that may require supports in addition to what other youth may require to help overcome these difficulties.
- Extension of support must be conducted as part of the policy on Preparing Youth for Independence, Chapter 3.8.
- Extension of support allows for continuity of care and planning by individuals who have an in-depth knowledge of the youth and their needs and are better able to help them achieve successful independence.
- The worker must take a proactive role in engaging the youth in entering into an agreement.
- If the former ward becomes married or is residing in a common law relationship, the circumstances should be reviewed as to what supports are still required.
- It must be recognized that as part of the developmental process youth may have difficulty meeting the terms of the agreement and may occasionally abandon their plans. The worker must make all reasonable efforts to help the youth achieve their goals. The worker must be open to entering into a new agreement at any time where a youth may have abandoned his/her plans but wishes to re-establish planning.