

Theme 5: Supports for youth transitioning out of care as they reach adulthood

Youth who are in care are supported by the CFS system until they are 18 years old. Those who are permanent wards are able to apply for extended supports until the age of 21. The Manitoba government provides support for some youth who are aging out of foster care.

This support is to assist youth with the transition to independence and may include financial

assistance for a young adult to remain living with their foster family while attending skills training or post-secondary education. As of March 30, 2017, 917 young adults aged 18-21 continued to receive assistance. CFS-related supports terminate when a young person reaches the age of 21.

Questions

1. Should conditions of eligibility for extended supports be prescribed in legislation? Examples include: a new age limit, a minimum number of years a youth would need to have been in care to qualify for supports, and expectations associated with the receipt of supports.
2. If present resources were made available, should extended supports for youth who are transitioning from the CFS system be developed and delivered by community partners and organizations who are aligned with the unique needs of young adults?

Theme 6: Youth rights

Currently, the CFS Act allows for the views of children age 12 and older to be considered in decision-making processes. Many child welfare workers work hard to ensure that teenagers are given the ability to voice their opinion about care decisions. Despite these efforts, young people may feel like they have little ability to influence the adults around them who have the power to make decisions about where they live and who they spend their time with.

Just like parents, CFS agencies need to be able to make decisions about children in care, even if those children are teenagers. But it is also very important for teenagers in care to feel heard and empowered at every opportunity. Once a youth in care reaches 18, he or she can make their own decisions. Until then, the CFS agency that has guardianship over them, can make decisions for that youth.

Questions

1. Should the CFS Act be amended to allow youth to have more say in decisions that affect them?
2. Should the CFS Act be amended to allow youth (age 16-18) to have the final say in planning for their transition to adulthood?

Theme 7: Accountability

Accountability enables Manitobans to ensure that government, CFS authorities and agencies, as well as other stakeholders, fulfill their responsibilities. In the CFS system, where decisions about the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families are being made every day, accountability is important.

Examples of accountability measures include:

- independent reviews of the CFS system
- special investigation reports written by the children’s advocate
- enhanced collection and sharing of data and performance measures
- clear contracts with funded entities
- relevant legislation, standards and policies

Accountability extends beyond data or evaluation to also recognize the value of communicating with and asking for feedback from stakeholders about service delivery or program activities, expectations and outcomes. Meaningful and effective accountability not only protects Manitobans who receive essential services, but also helps the system to identify better ways to function, inspire staff, and inform decision makers and funders.

As discussed in the introduction of this document, the four CFS authorities (three of them Indigenous and one non-Indigenous) are responsible for ensuring that their mandated CFS agencies are accountable for providing services in accordance with legislative, policy and funding requirements. The three Indigenous CFS authorities also have an important leadership role in supporting their mandated agencies to design and deliver services that meet the needs of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and families who receive their services.

Despite efforts to develop services that are culturally informed, while meeting the accountability expectations of Manitobans, some people believe that the current system is not meeting the needs of children and families. They may also be of the opinion that child welfare is not sufficiently responsive to the concerns of communities, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities in Manitoba.

Questions

1. Do you think that the structure of Manitoba’s CFS system is best designed to meet the needs of children and families who require child and family services?
2. Should the law be amended (changed) to achieve more accountability, consistency, community influence and better outcomes for children and families?
3. Should the legislation be changed to allow for enhanced Indigenous community control over the design and delivery of child and family services?

Theme 8: Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality is important. Children and families involved with the CFS system have the right to have their privacy respected. But sometimes, there is a need to share personal information to protect or support children and youth. Information about children and their parents also needs to be shared when planning or providing services for the child.

A good balance between the need to share personal information about service recipients and the need to respect their privacy is required. Child welfare workers need to make decisions every day about what information to share and with whom. Information sharing should be informed by what is in the best interests of the child.

Under the current CFS act, personal CFS-related information cannot be shared with the public. This is to protect the privacy rights of children and their families.

Some people believe that there is too much emphasis on confidentiality and that a more open approach to sharing CFS information would lead to better public accountability. For others, protecting the privacy rights of children is more important than allowing for public disclosure of identifying information under the CFS act.

Questions

1. Should the law be amended to allow for more information sharing under certain circumstances?
2. Should the law be amended to allow for the public disclosure of identifying information of children and families involved with child welfare?
3. Can family consent, even if a child is in permanent care, be the basis for disclosure in certain circumstances?

Glossary

Abuse: an act or omission by any person where the act or omission results in:

- physical injury to the child
- emotional disability of a permanent nature in the child or is likely to result in such a disability
- sexual exploitation of the child with or without the child's consent

Child: a person under the age of 18 years and includes a youth unless specifically stated otherwise

Foster parent(s): adult(s) who provide a temporary home and everyday nurturing and support for children who have been removed from their homes. The individual(s) may be relatives or nonrelatives and are required to be licensed to provide care for foster children.

Legislative: related to laws or making them

Permanency planning: an effort to provide long-term continuity in a child's care, as an alternative to temporary foster care or facility placements

Review of Child Welfare Legislation
Manitoba Families
205-114 Garry Street
Winnipeg, MB R3C 4V4

cfslegislativereview@gov.mb.ca

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