

# Youth Leaving Care Update

Policy Development and Program Design

October 1, 2013

## MCYS Supports for Youth In and Leaving Care

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) supports youth to prepare for independence by developing and implementing programs and resources that help youth stay in school, pursue post-secondary education and training, develop and maintain strong relationships, and have more stability in their lives.

In January 2013, the ministry launched the Strategy to Further Transform Ontario's Child Welfare System. This strategy intends to build a responsible and fiscally sustainable system that achieves better outcomes for children and youth in and leaving care. The strategy is based on three areas of focus: prevention, permanency and preparation for life, with a number of key elements in each area.

In July 2012, MCYS created the Youth Leaving Care Working Group, with input from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (OPACY), made up of youth with experience living in care along with community partners. Its mandate was to act on the first recommendation of My REAL Life Book — completing an action plan for fundamental change of the child welfare system.

The Working Group reviewed all of the goals and recommendations identified in My REAL Life Book, the report from the youth leaving care hearings, to determine how it could further strengthen the child welfare system.

On January 22, 2013, the Working Group submitted its Final Report, *Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System* (Blueprint), to former Minister Laurel Broten.

On January 24, 2013, Minister Broten announced a number of new resources and supports for children and youth in and leaving care, which are described below:

- The *Continued Care and Support for Youth* (CCSY) policy came into effect in May, 2013 and replaces the former Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) policy, for youth 18-20

(inclusive). Under CCSY, eligible youth may receive financial support of \$850/month, as well as non-financial supports, to help them meet their goals during their transition into adulthood.

- *The Living and Learning Grant (LLG)*, provides \$500 a month during the school year to youth between the ages of 21 to 24 (inclusive) who received, or were eligible to receive CCSY, and who are enrolled in an OSAP-eligible post-secondary education or training program. The program is a partnership with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, which administers the program.
- MCYS is working with the Ministry of Education (EDU) on the development of student achievement protocols. The protocols will be established between CASs and school boards to address barriers to student achievement. Both ministries worked with sector representatives to create a provincial Student Achievement Protocol Template that will be used by school boards and CASs across the province.
- MCYS is currently implementing the *Youth-in-Transition Worker (YITW)* program, which will provide funds for community agencies to hire up to 50 workers to support young people as they transition out of care. The YITW program will be in place in the Fall of 2013.

In addition to the new supports resulting from recommendations made in the *Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System*, MCYS and its partner ministries offer the following programs to children and youth receiving services from Ontario's children's aid societies (CASs) in order to support their successful transition to adulthood:

- The *Renewed Youth Supports (RYS)* Program allows youth whose court-ordered society care or formal customary care was terminated at age 16 or 17 to voluntarily enter into an agreement with a CAS to receive supports up to age 18. Through the RYS program, youth also become eligible for further supports once they turn 18, including *Continued Care and Support for Youth*.
- The Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent (OCBE) provides increased access to educational, social, cultural and recreational opportunities for all youth up to and inclusive of age 17. In addition, youth ages 15, 16 and 17 who have been in the care of a CAS or a formal customary care agreement for 12 consecutive months or more are eligible to participate in a savings program. The OCBE program currently contributes \$100.83 a month to each savings account.
- Tuition grants, reimbursements for application fees, *Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)* exemptions for CCSY and for OCBE savings are available to encourage more youth in and leaving care to pursue and complete post-secondary studies or vocational training.
- The *Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP)* Program supports increased educational attainment for youth who have been in the care of CASs. Through the program, CASs are required to establish RESPs for eligible children in care. When a youth in or leaving care

enrolls in an eligible post-secondary education or vocational training program, he or she can access the RESP funds to support education-related expenses.

- *Crown Ward Education Championship Teams* provide direct supports to current or former Crown wards to support their pursuit of post-secondary education and training. There are 21 teams in Ontario, comprised of representatives from CASs, school boards, Employment Ontario service providers and post-secondary institutions, that have implemented a variety of innovative initiatives, including:
  - the development of a peer mentoring model for Crown wards to help them succeed in high school and move on to post-secondary studies;
  - the provision of experiential learning opportunities for Crown wards with employment, education and training organizations that allow youth to explore career pathways and provide future references and contacts;
  - the engagement of Crown wards in “on-campus” activities and presentations; and
  - the development of a resource guide for Crown wards transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education.
- *The Ontario Access Grant (OAG) for Crown Wards* covers 50 per cent of tuition (up to \$3,000 per year) for current and former Crown wards and youth who are or were eligible for CCSY, in programs of two or more years in length for up to four years. For current and former Crown wards in one year programs, the OAG for Crown wards covers 100 per cent of tuition to a maximum of \$3,000. The grant can be used by students to study full-time in their first post-secondary program.
- The *100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care* program is administered by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). This program is available to current and former Crown wards and/or students who are receiving or were previously receiving CCSY. The program covers 100% of a student’s tuition fees to a maximum of \$6,000 (i.e. 50% of tuition fees are covered through the Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards and/or the 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant and the remaining cost is funded by participating institutions). The 100% Tuition Aid program is a joint initiative between MTCU and participating publicly-assisted colleges and universities in Ontario and is available for up to four years of post-secondary study. For the 2013-14 academic year, twenty-one universities and eight colleges are participating in the program.

In addition to targeted initiatives for youth leaving care, MCYS has also introduced a new child welfare funding model and a new approach to accountability, so that each CAS remains focused on its number one priority – the protection of children and youth in their community.

The new child welfare funding model allocates funds based on relative need for child welfare services, as measured by community socio-economic and volume of activity factors, to better align funding to the needs of kids, families and communities.

The new accountability framework will broaden the focus from compliance and financial management to include measuring and publicly reporting on outcomes for children and youth. This will be facilitated through the introduction of several mechanisms, which are described below:

- Collection of performance indicators (PIs) in all CASs - In 2013-14, the ministry is supporting the Ontario's Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) in leading the sector's data collection and management of 24 PIs in all CASs. This work and further consultation with the sector will lay the groundwork for PI reporting to the ministry and public reporting of PIs.
- Public reporting of up to 5 PIs - Public reporting of PIs is intended to increase transparency, accountability and awareness, while supporting a commitment to continuous improvement in outcomes for children and youth served by CASs across a range of important areas, including safety, permanency and well-being. The ministry has begun consultations with the sector on the development of a detailed plan for public reporting of performance indicators, including the purpose of public reporting and the proposed criteria for selecting publicly-reported indicators.
- Cyclical Reviews to facilitate an assessment of a CAS's performance and capacity - Cyclical reviews are periodic reviews of all CASs intended to support the improvement of services for children, youth and their families, enhance accountability, and support a culture of learning and continuous organizational improvement by: 1) determining where performance meets expectations; 2) identifying strengths and/or challenges that require attention; and 3) sharing promising practices and documenting systemic issues. Areas of assessment for the reviews could include: client outcomes and experience; governance and leadership; management and financial controllership; service delivery; and performance management. The review process will be designed to value the contribution of Boards, staff and stakeholders; recognize the diversity of CASs and their communities; and ensure transparency through the sharing of clear expectations for performance. The implementation of cyclical reviews is targeted to begin in early 2014.
- A performance management strategy to recognize CAS performance that exceeds expectations and identify opportunities for improvement where challenges are identified. The strategy, which is currently under development, will recognize CAS performance that exceeds expectations and address areas requiring improvement through a continuum of rewards, incentives, supportive interventions and/or corrective actions. The ministry is targeting the introduction of the Performance Management Strategy in 2014-15.
- Accountability Agreements - the ministry has implemented accountability agreements for CASs in 2013-14. Accountability agreements set out expectations for CAS performance and continuous improvement along with clear roles and responsibilities for the CAS and the ministry.

For more information on any of the initiatives noted above please contact Jill Dubrick, Manager, Prevention and Protection Services, Child Welfare Secretariat at [jill.dubrick@ontario.ca](mailto:jill.dubrick@ontario.ca).