



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW



BREANNA - funding recipient

AUTHORS

Deborah Goodman, Anna-Marie Vena, Alin Waldmann, Lisa Marajh,
Roobika Karunanathan & Fataneh Naghavi, CHILD WELFARE INSTITUTE,
CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF TORONTO and Rebecca Green, Denyse
Gregory & Wendy Chan, CHILDREN'S AID FOUNDATION OF CANADA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE IMPETUS FOR THIS STUDY came from a question posed by Children's Aid Foundation of Canada in the fall of 2016: *"What impact does our post-secondary funding have on the youth we serve?"* From that question, this evaluation emerged. The Child Welfare Institute is pleased and honoured to partner with the Foundation in examining this important query.

Many thanks go to the Foundation and its support in funding the study and report. Grateful thanks to Foundation staff Rebecca Green, Wendy Chan, and Denyse Gregory who provided many hours in reviewing and editing the survey tool and the final document. This is also an opportunity to thank all the donors who, through the years, have generously and continually given towards supporting our child welfare youth through post-secondary education supports.

Special thanks go to the Advocacy and Research Team (ART) for reviewing and testing the survey tool and adding their wise comments and good suggestions to improving it. ART is composed of human service professionals who bring research and evaluation expertise along with the lived experience of being in care. Their input and critical lens made this a better study.

Appreciative thanks to the other stakeholder groups who contributed their data to the study: foster parents, child welfare supervisors, as well as Foundation staff and volunteers. Your critique of what worked and what did not was invaluable.

Finally, to all the youth who so generously gave their time, their data, and their insight to this study - a thousand thanks. Each and every youth is remarkable in their grit, determination, and fortitude. The potential of these youth is limitless. While youth are a percentage of our population today, they are 100 per cent of our future. The report findings underscore that our role is to provide them with any and all the opportunities and supports that will aid them in reaching their goals.

Our task at the Child Welfare Institute was to analyze the data in order to understand what difference, if any, post-secondary funding makes to youth in permanent care. As the findings show, post-secondary supports make significant and important differences to the lives of these youth, to their future opportunities, as well as to improving their children's prospects.

Please note, all errors and omissions related to this report are mine alone.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah Goodman, PhD.,
Director, Child Welfare Institute
Children's Aid Society of Toronto

A MESSAGE FROM CHILDREN'S AID FOUNDATION OF CANADA

CHILDREN'S AID FOUNDATION OF CANADA is pleased to release this report examining our Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Program. The PSE Program is an integral part of our overall Education Strategy and our mission to improve the lives of children and youth in the child welfare system by removing barriers and providing access to opportunities. The program has been supporting young people in their academic pursuits in Toronto since 1995 and at a national level since 2008. Since 1995, the Foundation has awarded **\$12.3 million** to students through **4,304** donor-funded scholarships, bursaries and other awards from the Foundation.

At Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, we are committed to using evidence to inform high quality program development and execution. This evaluation of our Post-Secondary Education Program has been able to advance our understanding of the impact of post-secondary education funds for students and where program improvements could be made. The data and insights arising from this report will inform our fundraising, grants and programs for years to come.

The PSE Program would not be possible without the heartfelt and longstanding commitment of our donors who are empowering students to realize their dreams. The Foundation is committed to stewarding donor funds and ensuring that they are being invested in the best ways to help children and youth.

We hope that others within the field of child welfare will also be able to learn from the study and the data and that the report stimulates discussion on the importance of PSE supports for all youth in care.

Finally, we would like to thank the students who have shared their experiences with us through this study. The time and insights you have shared will help us to improve our programs to help you achieve your post-secondary education goals. You should be tremendously proud of your resilience and your accomplishments.

A copy of the full report can be found on our website cafdn.org/about-us/publications-and-financials or the Child Welfare Institute's website childwelfareinstitute.torontocas.ca

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW

WHAT WE DID

In 2017, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada (Foundation) partnered with the Child Welfare Institute to study the effects of Foundation support on young people who were in permanent care and who received donor funding to pursue a post-secondary education.

Since 1995, the Foundation has awarded **\$12.3 million** to students through **4,304** donor-funded scholarships, bursaries and other awards from the Foundation. The \$6.3 million in grants awarded to 903 students between 2005-2006 and 2014-2015 represent:

- 1,231 scholarships
- 638 bursaries
- 189 graduation awards
- 69 HSBC Youth Opportunity Fund grants
- 150 grants to students for textbooks, equipment or laptops

It is a well-known fact that education can elevate young people above the circumstances they were born into. Research also shows that an education is much more than better jobs and financial stability. Education is a protective factor and it can help young people overcome the devastating effects of childhood maltreatment on other markers of well-being, like their physical and mental health. For child welfare-involved youth who received post-secondary supports, the overarching study question was: **“What impact does our post-secondary funding have on the youth served by the Foundation?”**

To answer that question, the 903 youth who received Foundation support between 2005-2006 and 2014-2015 were surveyed and asked how funding helped them and how they're doing today. The study was limited to this time period due to the declining quality of contact information for students. Responses were received from a statistically valid sample of 182 youth. Also interviewed were foster parents, child welfare staff, Foundation staff and volunteers. The study found that donor support does make a difference academically and it makes a difference in other key ways. For example, the simple action of awarding support is significant in that the action sends an important message to the youth that somebody believes in them, someone sees their potential even when they may not see it in themselves. Social Determinants of Health factors were used to explore common indicators of health and well-being. The report has been written as a research summary of the evaluation and is organized by the five research questions that guided the study:

1. What are the characteristics of the population of youth receiving PSE support?
2. Where are the youth who received funding, today?
3. What is the impact on youth who receive PSE support?
4. How can the Foundation improve the PSE Program going forward?
5. Are there common indicators the Foundation can employ that aid in impact measurement of the PSE program going forward?

WHAT WE KNOW

A vast amount of literature exists on the very poor outcomes young people who grew up in care typically experience in comparison to their community peers.

YOUTH FROM CARE	OUTCOMES	COMMUNITY YOUTH
46% < 3%	Education Graduate from Secondary School ^o Earn a Post-Secondary Degree by age 25 *	83% 28%
46% 70%	Employment Employed at age 26 * At age 26 earned employment income in previous year *	80% 94%
45%	Income Experience at least 1 economic hardship *	18%
9%	Housing Have their own residence by age 26 *	30%

^o OACAS Gateway to Success Cycle Three (2014)

* US data (Frayser, Jordan & DeVooght, 2017)

WHAT WE FOUND

The study results found donor support is transforming young people's lives. Areas explored were the journey students took through primary and secondary school, when and why they made the decision to attend post-secondary, their path transitioning out of care, and their experiences during post-secondary school.

• **Positive Impacts:** Overall, this research finds the Foundation programs yielded positive impacts in the lives of these youth. For example,

- **92%** of students graduated or are on track to graduate from post -secondary studies;
- **Foundation support had a transformative effect on young people's health and well-being;**
- **91%** describe themselves as thriving.

"Without the financial help I wouldn't have been able to pursue my Master's degree. [It was not] only the financial aspect [that helped] but also the feeling that someone is investing in me and cares and wants me to do well - [this] was a huge motivation to do well in school." Y184

• **Higher Academic Performance:** Students overwhelmingly reported that Foundation support made important and significant difference in their ability to succeed at school:

- **98%** reported support helped them academically
- **85%** reported support was critical to their ability to attend school
- **1.45** degrees/programs completed per youth (average)
- **18%** have completed a graduate program
- **92%** reported gains (e.g., improved school attendance & attitude to studies, fewer work hours)

• **Improved Quality of Life and Well-Being.** The support the youth received had a multiplying effect into other areas of their health and well-being today:

- **80%** reported better social connections
- **76%** of youth are either employed or in school
- For youth who are employed and not in school, **79%** describe their employment as stable
- **92%** describe their housing as stable
- **90%** have close friends they can count on
- **90%** describe their physical and mental health as good
- **81%** reported improved emotional well-being as a result of Foundation support
- **33%** said they would not have been able to attend school without Foundation support

"I would have been so stressed without Foundation support. It saved me financially. It helped me pay for school, transportation, food, housing and sustain a living since I was a sole support parent." Y137

In summary, this evaluation has provided the Foundation, its community partners, such as others in the child welfare sector, governments, philanthropists, policy makers, academics, the non-profit community, its donors and most importantly, the child welfare involved youth with research evidence on the key short-term and long-term benefits of post-secondary supports.

WHAT WE WILL DO

Informed by the findings, the Foundation crafted recommendations to better support youth from care to achieve their post-secondary education (PSE) goals and to help more youth reach this milestone.

R1 Increase secondary school graduation rates

Many more youth from care could benefit from PSE but currently only 46% in Ontario graduate from secondary school (national statistics for youth from care are unavailable). Results of the PSE Review highlight a number of factors that led students to graduate that could be expanded or built-upon for youth in care. It is recommended that the Foundation, its partners and supporters work to increase secondary school graduation rates.

R2 Provide flexible support to ensure post-secondary success

Youth from care face many barriers in their lives. We recommend that flexibility within PSE funding be applied to help address singular and intersecting barriers. Factors such as race and gender are important areas of consideration. Flexibility can be applied the following ways: how PSE dollars can be used by students, number of programs and schools that students can attend given that youth may have false starts or may attend both college and university, and the age of support given that youth may delay their PSE or return to school at a later age.

R3 Support progression from post-secondary into fulfilling careers

The report highlights that youth graduate with high debt and struggle to find work in their areas of study. The Foundation recommends maintaining Graduation Awards as a way of helping students manage debt. It is also recommended that the Foundation support employment programs to assist youth with the progression from post-secondary school into fulfilling careers.

R4 Support youth transitioning out of care

Leaving care is a difficult transition period for all youth. Transitioning from secondary school to PSE is a difficult period for all youth, and this is even more difficult for youth simultaneously transitioning from care. Those instrumental shifts are often made by the youth with little support. To ensure the success of more students at PSE and to help more students go on to PSE, we recommend that the Foundation continue to highlight transition funding (eg. housing, health, and life skills supports) as a priority, and to try to increase access to these supports outside of Toronto and across the country.

R5 Partner with child welfare and community agencies

Youth from care can only benefit from the Foundation's PSE support if they know that supports are available. We recommend that the Foundation work in partnership with child welfare and community agencies to ensure that students begin post-secondary with knowledge about the supports available.

R6 Explore research opportunities

We recognize that this comprehensive data set has the potential to illuminate many other issues and possibilities. We recommend that the Foundation set up a process to make the study data available to researchers interested in learning about this population and uncovering new insights.