

Creating Pathways for Youth: Digital for Youth in Transition

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada

BARNES MANAGEMENT GROUP
JULY 2019

JODENE – Former youth in care



Introduction

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada is our country's leading charity dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth involved in the child welfare system. We raise and grant funds, and deliver a wide range of high-impact programs and services in partnership with 74 child- and youth-serving agencies across the country that support more than 22,200 vulnerable young people and 3,500 families annually. We know that by helping these young people, they gain the strength and resilience to create a lifetime of their own unstoppable successes.

One population the Foundation serves is youth who are in transition from permanent care. The Foundation is interested in exploring the idea of a digital resource like a website or an application to help reach this population of youth and connect them to available information, resources and support.

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada is proud to present this feasibility study report, made possible by a grant from Citi Foundation. It was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the needs of young people and service providers that could be met through a digital resource, and to show the way forward.

Executive summary

A primary goal of Children's Aid Foundation of Canada is to assist former youth in care to secure employment, and/or to pursue educational goals, while also identifying the barriers that prevent or hinder these goals from being achieved. In the spring of 2019, the Foundation sought to explore if a digital resource, like a website or an application, for youth in transition could help to reach this population of youth and connect them to available information, resources, and support. Before investing in building a web-based resource, **the Foundation wanted to gain a better understanding of the needs of young people and service providers, and what would draw young people to a web-based resource and continue to use it.**

Barnes Management Group (BMG) was engaged to lead consultations with youth and service providers to assess the needs of youth in transition, and how these groups perceive the use of digital as a helpful resource. Additionally, BMG included a technology consultation to research existing tools and platforms, and review and interpret the results to provide initial understanding of the technical specifications of a web-based resource.

Throughout this project, conversations were held in over 15 communities across Ontario, with over 100 youth and leaders from 25 service organizations. These voices shared what today's priority needs for youth are, how they seek information and support to meet these needs, where a digital and web-based activity could support these needs, and what the key success factors to creating long-term engagement with tools that work are.

Additionally, an initial national scan of nine active web-based resources were reviewed. Discussions with the 'owners' of these resources assessed what works and what is a challenge when leveraging web and digital tools to support youth in transition in accessing the services that help them move forward in education and employment outcomes.

This report summarizes the recommendations and learnings of the consultations, the environmental scan of existing tools, and the technical review, which together fully support the use of digital as a secondary means of connecting with youth on the topic of employment and education (in addition to other priority topic areas such as mental health and housing). The primary means of support voiced throughout this project continues to be the need for human relationships. This was repeated in all consultation activity. Digital opportunities must serve as a tool to connect youth with others, creating an on-line community, while offering relevant, timely, and 'live' content on the priority areas of their development: education, employment, health, housing, and supportive relationships.

It was evident very early into this project that digital is a critical element when connecting youth-in-transition with the necessary education and employment information in today's 'wired' society. A second phase was developed during this project for a deeper exploration into the technical requirements of a digital tool. The second phase has been

launched to carry forward the findings in this initial report, which are that digital is a critical means of connection and communication for youth in today's digital world.

Context

Each year in Canada, approximately 2,300 young people age out of the child welfare system. At the age of 18 they are considered to be adults and therefore are no longer eligible for the type of support they had been receiving while living in foster care or group homes. The odds are stacked against them. Young people aging out of the system face challenges most of their peers do not: all of them have experienced childhood traumas, like neglect or abuse, more than 80% have been diagnosed with special needs, and close to half of them require medication for health conditions, not to mention the instability and loneliness that typically accompany their time in care.

These youth, however, often find themselves entering the system as smart and curious children, wanting to succeed like every other person their age. Youth who have been supported by care from the system yearn for the skills to match their desires, and long for learning opportunities to reach their potential similar to those of any 8, 13, or 15 year old. Unfortunately, youth who have transitioned out of care often describe that it is life's obstacles when in care, and sometimes even the systemic attitude toward youth in care (lower expectations), that prevent them from succeeding to their full potential just as much as it is their traumas and history.

While their peers continue through their twenties to benefit from their parents financially, emotionally, and often physically – by continuing to live at home – young people from care too often transition into poverty, under-employment, poor health, and homelessness while faced with healing from childhood traumas. This is why Youth in Transition is one of the key population groups served by Children's Aid Foundation of Canada. With the right supports at the right time, young people from care can achieve outcomes on par with their peers not from care.

While numerous supports for youth from care exist, and some young people are getting help through their transition by accessing programs and services offered by the Foundation and numerous other youth-serving organizations across Canada, it is difficult to reach their full population after they have left care, particularly those who face multiple barriers. This is often because youth don't know about the programs that are available to them.

As a result, the Foundation initiated the "Creating Pathways for Youth: Web Resource for Youth in Transition" project to converse with youth and service providers on employment and education needs, as well as perceived value for digital opportunities.

Project approach

Scope:

The overarching question the project sought to answer was:

Is it recommended that a technology platform (web-based/digital resource) be developed to assist youth transitioning out of care to connect to information, resources, and supports in the areas of employment and education?

More specifically, the project explored:

- What existing and prospective web-based resources exist, and what are the associated pros, cons, and risks?
- What are the key information and support needs of this population of young people who age out of care?
- What are the interests and key information needs of service providers supporting young people in transition?
- What are the key success factors for engaging youth via web-based tools in ways that create sustainable digital interaction between youth, providers, and Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, and provide the greatest knowledge exchange?

Activities:

To address the project's research questions, the following activities were undertaken with bi-weekly calls held between the project team.

- Scan existing technology / digital-based resources (jurisdictional scan) and explore current pros, cons, and risks.
- Conduct youth consultations in five to six communities.
- Conduct service provider consultations in five to six communities.
- Engage two youth to support the BMG analysis activity as it relates to the project.
- Present findings to the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada team for discussion late June 2019.
- Submit final report to the Foundation in July 2019.

Project team:

The project team included:

- Rebecca Green, Director of Grants & Programs, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
- David Barnes, Project Director, BMG
- Sheldon Caruana, Youth Engagement Specialist, BMG

- Maria Crawford, Senior Project Advisor, Service Providers Consultation Lead, BMG
- Carlos McDonald, Youth Engagement Specialist, BMG
- James McGuirk, Senior Project Advisor, Youth Consultation Lead, BMG
- Sherman Quan, Technical Advisor, BMG
- Michelle Schurter, Project Lead, BMG

A unique feature within this project was the outreach to include two former youth in care as part of the BMG Data Analytics team. Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada posted an opportunity for two individuals to submit interest and experience to support the project by analyzing qualitative data collected during the Service Provider and Youth Consultations. Ruina Zhang and Yessinia Vasquez, were selected and provided excellent services to the BMG team to prepare some of the summarized findings in this report.

Several Children’s Aid Society (CAS) regional groups, as well as other team members at the Foundation and organizations that support Children’s Aid activity, were instrumental in organizing and supporting consultation sessions.

Youth consultation

Communities visited:

The following is a list of the Ontario communities visited, where youth engagement sessions were held by the BMG Youth Consultation team.

- Windsor (April 15) Children’s Aid Society, 27 youth
- Kingston (May 14) Eastern Zone YouthCAN (representatives from Ottawa, Cornwall, Frontenac/Lennox/Addington, Kawartha /Haliburton/Highland Shores), 36 youth
- London (May 15) Children’s Aid Society, 12 youth
- Sudbury (May 30) Children’s Aid Society/Group Homes, 16 youth
- Thunder Bay (June 8) Regional Multicultural Youth Centre, 16 youth
- Toronto (June 26) Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada, 7 youth

Summary of youth consultation:

In addition to the information provided being helpful in thinking about developing a digital tool to support youth-in-transition, the following themes emerged throughout the conversations with youth.

- Ongoing need for adult support

Without mentorship and guidance from social workers, group home staff, foster parents, educators, and/or alumni youth, **they are unable to confidently utilize digital to reach 'transition' goals**, for example enrolling in post secondary education, applying for employment, or becoming successfully independent via the internet/digital tools alone.

Youth in and from care **feel pressured to succeed** and, although they have intentions on pursuing independence and post-secondary, they also **don't often know where to begin**. Simultaneously, youth in care report that they feel workers/society have lower expectations of them. Youth reported experiencing lower expectations by feeling staff are less likely to help them reach their full potential and that staff buy into the idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy that youth in care can't be as successful as their cohorts not in care.

Youth who age out of care at 17 or 18 are **not equipped to manage decisions** like OSAP, post secondary, employment, and mental health services. Web-based information or digital applications don't necessarily support the decision-making process that requires adult support.

- Digital as a tool to build relationships over time

Youth naturally grow and develop with tools that become part of their learning and growing process over time. As such, youth recommended that **any digital tools be offered before youth are transitioning out of care**, starting as an earlier resource platform to help them navigate a variety of supports. By using the tool with workers to gain access to learning modules at a younger age, the resource will become a well-known platform for when they are seeking supports for education and employment as they transition out of care.

- Teaching independence and decision-making is a process

For youth who have been institutionalized in group home care environments, **decisions are always made on their behalf** therefore, they **should not be expected at 17/18 to know what are the best decisions for their future**.

Youth need to feel supported and **require tangible mentorship as they make decisions** (eg. a youth who's medication has been administered by group home staff didn't know how to self administer on their own at by 18, so therefore stopped taking their medication all together.)

- Technology and education...a privilege or right?

Screen time and safeguarding children and youth from inappropriate/unsafe material is the dilemma of all guardians in today's digital world. Additionally, access to technology for the purpose of social media, gaming, entertainment, etc. is commonly considered a 'reward' for positive behaviour between children and caregivers. As a result, youth in care reported that access to technology is often included as part of the reward system in their 'care' environment.

However, when access to technology and internet use is implemented as a reward for 'good behaviour' or a lost privilege for 'negative behaviour' this **interrupts necessary academic and educational activities, and bears a significant restraint** on a primary success factor for youth as tomorrow's future workforce. By way of 'correcting' behaviour, the behavioural program inadvertently creates another roadblock to success for the youth who desperately need education success to create a positive path forward. Youth request that the conversation of screens as a privilege ensures that technology for education purposes, falls outside the reward system, with academics and digital proficiency remaining a priority at all times.

- Youth in transition and peers who have not been in care have different needs

Youth in and from care recognize that their peers of the same age are **not subjected to the same pressures**. Most of their peers live at home, they are also guided by their parents and financially supported (housing and basic needs). But youth aging out of care are not only without permanency; they are then **expected to know what to do and to make the initiatives without any guidance or support**.

Any resources built to support youth in transition must reflect that they have more complex and demanding pressures than peers who have more extensive social, financial, and tangible support systems.

Service provider consultation

Communities visited:

The following is a list of the communities visited (or contacted), where conversations were held with service providers.

- London (May 7) Youth Opportunities Unlimited, CAS London and Middlesex, NokeeKwe - 3 Director / Manager participants
- Sudbury (May 10) Youth Job Connect, YMCA, CAS, SACY - 4 Youth Workers / Leader participants
- Windsor (May 27) Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc., Children's Aid Society, Windsor Essex CAS, Youth Opportunities Strategy - 4 Director / Manager / Supervisor participants
- Thunder Bay (May 30, 31) YES Employment Services, Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario, Kairos Community Resource Centre - 3 Executive Director / leader participants
- Ottawa (June 5, 14) Youth Services Bureau, Children's Aid Foundation of Ottawa, Child Welfare League - 3 Executive Director / leader participants
- Toronto (June 10, 11) Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (also representing CAS Toronto), Catholic CAS - 2 Manager / Supervisor participants

Summary of service provider consultation:

- There is a need for **human contact**

The development of long-term relationships that would be a part of a youth's life and "inner circle" is important. They need to have someone in their life to care and support them; someone who is not being paid to do so, or whose "job" it is to do so.

There is a need for continuity, genuine empathy, understanding, and support; the need to be able to come home for support, care packages, loans, advice, comfort, encouragement, guidance, etc. Human support was unanimously seen as the one key critical element that was at the top of the priority list in terms of the needs of youth transitioning out of care.

The idea of a mentorship program, which uses the digital tool as a communication and knowledge exchange tool, was mentioned often.

- On **the technology** itself...

An app should not replace the human element. Instead, it should embrace and include a human contact element.

A website is a non-starter, but an app is the recommended approach. Developing any technology is one thing, upkeep is another. A fear was noted that this would be a “project”, and as such have a lifespan - usually that of a particular donor’s interest, and therefore could be another resource that begins as a helpful resource and then fades out or is terminated. It was felt that there had to be a long-term commitment, and one that would live past the cycle of any one particular donor.

The marketing (look and feel) will need to be developed in a way that draws youth to it, and have them interact with it regularly as a go-to resource.

- **Youth involvement**

Youth should be involved in the creation of the app as they would know best what would appeal to other youth, and how to best package the information contained therein. It was also noted that involvement in the development of the app, and in the ongoing maintenance of it, would provide **valuable experience to the youth** involved in many areas (eg. skill-building, resume building, network development, etc.). Once the information is amalgamated and synthesized into a final product for app developers to then use, that a group of youth should be struck who will be attached to this work, and who can guide its development.

Information must be relevant, current, and geographically specific, particularly for youth in rural, remote, and indigenous communities. By involving youth, the value of information will be constantly checked in a “live” process.

- Need for **“immediacy” / “immediate” response**

Features such as a chat or access to a live contact / crisis component, particularly during times when service providers are closed and the needs are high (midnight to 7am, or on weekends), is critical for the needs of youth in transition. Without immediacy interest wanes; they won’t come back to it, or go through a multi-step process to complete interaction.

- Need for **“incentives”**

Incentives that promote motivation and affirmation will increase engagement with a digital tool. Several examples were noted (see individual service provider responses in Appendix B); including some type of reward for completing a task, or

learning module (Tim Horton's gift cards, gift certificates, coupons for discounts at local stores/establishments that youth frequent, etc).

- **“Click thru capacity / learning modules”**

A popular use of digital and information sharing is to incorporate learning via modules or “gamification”. Suggestions were made to include modules similar to taking an on-line course/learning module, getting transcripts, making appointments, linking Ontario Works verification of school attendance, etc. Also providing access to other types of certification will add relevance to the tool, such as First Aid, CPR, Smart Serve, Safe boating certificate, financial literacy knowledge building, Driver's License/test preparation, etc.

For Indigenous youth, a click through capacity to learn their **native languages** (Cree, Ojibway, Oji-Cree, etc.) was strongly recommended.

Additional input:

- Indigenous youth priorities

During the consultation in Thunder Bay, material was shared that highlights the following issues, which were identified and ranked as priorities by Aboriginal youth working at the Multicultural Youth Centre during the summer of 2018. Surveys were conducted in city neighbourhoods and schools. Peer focus groups and social media were also used to gather data.

- Education: staying in school and graduating, job-readiness, careers, professions, trades and work-skills development.
- Addictions: dependency on alcohol, drugs, prescription pills and coping with related mental illness.
- Racism / Discrimination / Homophobia
- Teen pregnancy
- Save spaces to hang-out: free of the temptations of alcohol and drugs, violence and criminal street gang influence
- Peer Leadership Training and Role Model Development
- Bullying: cyber-bullying, mental stress, trauma
- Gangs: crime and violence
- A residence / Living Centre to house boarding students
- Safer schools and safer neighbourhoods
- Homelessness / Addictions / Prostitution / Panhandling
- Cultural (Seven Grandfather) Teachings

Technology scan

Resources (sites) visited/reviewed:

The following is a list of the resources visited (and contacted), where conversations were held with the owners for each tool.

- The Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute Inc. (SFNFCI) – It's My Life App
- Partners for Youth in New Brunswick – Website
- YouthRap in Toronto – Website
- Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network – Website
- Begin: Family and Children's Services of Frontenac, Lennox, and Addington - Website
- YouthCan - Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies – Website

Findings and recommendations

Based on the conversations with the resource owners, assessments of the websites, and data from the youth and provider consultations, there were key findings that emerged as it relates to the use of technology to support youth in transition.

Many youth find transitioning out of care difficult because they have not been adequately prepared to manage life outside of care. They are not well informed about the resources available to support them and how to access these resources. Support workers are their primary link to these resources but they are extremely busy because of their case load and often don't know all the resources available. Youth therefore do their best to search online for what's available and rely on word of mouth from their peers. But there are a lot of resources out there and the information is often not relevant or out of date. Youth believe that technology can play a major role in helping to connect them to the resources they need to support their transition out of care. They would want either a website or application that can act as a "one stop shop" where they have access to all resources relevant to them.

While technology was identified as a key enabler, there are several barriers and considerations that must be factored into a technology resource for it to be valuable. Many youth, especially those in rural/remote areas, don't have easy access to a smartphone, computer, or the Internet. Those who have a phone often don't have data plans. The technology would need to be designed to be very intuitive and easy to use. More importantly, the technology must not remove but rather facilitate more interaction with their support worker. The human element is very important and the technology can't promote social isolation. Connecting youth to peers and creating a sense of community is

valuable, but the system also has to protect youth from predators who would try to exploit vulnerable youth. Ensuring information is locally relevant and kept up to date is critical, and there needs to be some type of incentive for using the technology.

Technical requirements

Following the completion of the feasibility study above, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada continued to work with BMG to understand the requirements of building a digital resource and the details required. A series of phone consultations were completed with another five young people and a representative from one youth-serving organization.

BMG has recommended a technology solution with two components, a web application (through a website) and a smartphone application. A list of requirements has been developed that will inform the budget and program plan moving forward. Initial requirements include: incentives and rewards to engage young people, geolocation to offer specific supports based on user location, offline mode, tasks and notifications, user rating and feedback among other ideas. The requirements will be further adjusted or added to as the project progresses, as funds are secured and as youth are further engaged.

Acknowledgements and next steps

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada would like to thank Barnes Management Group for their leadership of this initiative.

The Foundation would also like to sincerely thank the youth-serving organizations and all of the young people who took the time to share their thoughts with us. Youth input has helped to inform this study and will continue to be very helpful as we work on the next stages of the project.

The Foundation is committed to build a digital resource that has been identified through this study to be helpful to youth in transition from care. An important next step in this project is securing the funds that will be required to start building the digital resource. In addition to fundraising, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada will be busy developing partnerships with organizations in the sector who could play essential roles in the project going forward, such as hosting the resource and contributing to content.

Throughout the next phases of the project, as we work to build the resource, we will continue to engage youth with lived experience to ensure the resource is responsive to the needs of youth in transition from care.

Appendix A

Youth feedback:

A series of questions were explored during each consultation session, which highlight specific needs for youth in transition, common sources of support, preferred digital platforms, and indications of what will maintain the success of any digital resource. These questions and the youth's responses were as follows.

1. What are your education goals?
 - Finish high school
 - Return to high school
 - Attend college or university
 - Receive good grades
 - Receive higher grades

2. What are the barriers to education?
 - Workers sometimes refer you to take applied courses if you are struggling in academic instead of getting you the support you need (eg. tutors that can change your path from University to college to no post-secondary). Then you have to retake courses.
 - If you have to help at home with looking after siblings or providing money, this can be an added stressor on your school life
 - Multiple moves = inconsistent stability = no stability in school
 - In high school, you can be in survival mode as a youth in care therefore education takes a back seat
 - Compounding pressures compete with school as a priority i.e. making money to survive
 - To survive you sometimes suppress things and they emerge later in life as mental health concerns
 - Struggle to balance life and mental health, which create emotional barriers
 - "It's like being in a bouncy castle, hard to make peace and find balance"
 - Drug use is a barrier to everything, especially if caregiver is unaware
 - If education is instilled in you as important, it is easier to focus on doing well. If not, then it is easier to ignore.
 - There is not enough support on the value of education
 - Some agencies know everything about resources available, some know nothing (One youth from Hamilton was in second year at University before she learned about scholarships through the Foundation)
 - Not enough known about supports in post-secondary and transitional programs
 - Not every teacher knows how to deal with an IEP....think they are too long to read
 - Workers sometimes take a band aid approach to helping youth

- Behavioural issues could be from trauma....trauma could be from school/education... not enough emphasis on trauma informed practice in education
- “We are not dumb, we just need help healing.”

3. What are your employment goals?

- Nurse
- Doctor
- Actor
- Musician
- Youth justice worker
- Social worker
- Police officer
- Video game designer

4. What are the barriers to employment?

- Having a job in school could be too much pressure added
- Lack of resources to help find jobs
- Lack of experience
- Already behind in school and need to catch up; difficulty to progress if you don't have security and stability
- Lack of knowledge about soft skills i.e. what to wear to interview/job, basic skills about a job.... arriving on time, calling in sick...how do you learn about this stuff if you do not have someone to talk to about it?
- Lack of security of having someone to help take care of you
- Personal development skills
- HUGE issues with losing ID, not having it, not having access to it, not having a SIN
- Some workers/caretakers do not look at a job as a priority
- Understanding that it is ok to not be ok; learning to handle failures; how to talk to someone about that
- Struggles if you are a refugee; hard to become a part of society anyway
- If you don't know how to do it? How do you learn? You don't know what you don't know.
- Negative self-talk...what if I'm not good enough
- Need a high school diploma for a job
- CAS \$ may be spent on addictions; fall into survival mode
- When you leave care, you are sometimes faced with another system i.e. welfare
- Not having resources to buy what you need for a job i.e. uniforms etc.
- Afraid people will judge you
- Day to day life gets hard
- Challenges hit you at different ages and stages

5. What is the best way for you to get information about these goals?

- Google
- Talking to people
- Teachers
- Connection through family and friends
- Experienced individuals
- Career cruising
- My blueprint (school database)
- Read about it / books
- Mentorship
- Social media / online community
- Grade level assemblies
- Asking Guidance Counsellors, but “Guidance does not understand CAS”
- Word of mouth “as agency did not know about a lot of resources”

6. What are the top 3 ways to access resources to education and employment?

- People / experts
- Google
- Support from a mentor provided by CAS
- Job search site
- Adult education centre
- Internal resources on campus

7. What are the barriers to accessing these resources?

- Stereotypes
- Financial security; paying for education
- Bullied for being in care
- Limited access; internet, staff support, community time
- 21-25 year old youth are faced with other challenges; family problems, mental health, financial security, homelessness
- Lack of knowledge; we don't know what we are accessing or how to successfully complete applications to scholarships, OSAP, post secondary education, housing, etc.

8. Can technology improve access to these resources?

YES

9. What would that look like? Design a digital resource!

- Siri...but better
- Virtual mentor / Access to a live representative or mentor
- Video tutorials
- No ads
- Booklet

- Include a search bar; financial services, housing, schooling, jobs, mental health supports, food bank, community dinners, affordable activities, health services
- Services to be relevant to youth in care
- Info on how to apply for OW, ODSP, OSAP
- Not too much overwhelming information
- Questionnaires/filters
- Not intrusive
- Something quick re: short attention spans
- Login style
- Badges/points to move forward
- Incentives
- Chat box
- Texting app to get support
- A mentor who is not just “doing a job”
- Wi-fi capable
- Eye opening...something that makes you want to come back to it
- Rewards/checklist
- Sense of accomplishment
- Builds experiences for resumes i.e. you completed this section on money management
- Community + technology
- Centralized person at an agency
- Virtual self-care platform
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Graphics and videos
- Apps to help celebrate milestones
- Community events
- Virtual holiday service
- “My Blueprint”...you can plan things and see a path...start putting puzzle pieces together
- Playlist of how to videos
- Updates when you log in
- Events tab for community
- Emojis/avatars to help with mental health/self-reflection
- Where to go to get letters of support, help with Learning Disabilities (LDs), Individual Education Plans (IEPs) etc.
- Push notifications
- Reminders of deadlines
- A place to house all your academic/employment stuff
- Searchable by profession
- List of contacts

10. What are you using now?

- Google
- Laptop
- Cellphone
- Social media
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat

11. What are the issues with technology that prevent you from using it?

- Internet access
- Internet is a privilege
- Limited community time
- Distracting ads
- Confidence
- No technology (laptop, cellphones, computer)

12. Do you have easy access to internet / data?

- Access in rural areas are limited
- Youth have access to internet when they are permitted by guardians

13. What are your recommendations for building a technology resource?

- Develop an app
 - Website
 - Booklet
 - Video tutorials
 - Create a live person component to the website or app
 - Youth mentors to support youth navigating resources
 - No Ads (causes too many distractions)
 - Easy to understand and navigate for those who have barriers
 - Create a video game that will help those who need visual accommodation
- A resource that can be accessible to all youth with different barriers (e.g., learning disabilities, mental health issues, limited to internet / or no access to internet)

Appendix B

Service provider feedback:

A series of questions were explored during each consultation session, which highlight specific needs for youth in transition, through the lens of service providers as well as common sources of support, preferred digital platforms, and indications of what will maintain the success of any digital resource.

1. Please describe an overview of services that your organization provides to former youth in care in the areas of:

EMPLOYMENT

- Pre-employment supports (resume writing, interview skills, job search, job placements, clothing bank)
- Skills assessment and career exploration
- No specific in-house employment services with the exception of participation in the Canada Jobs Program for administrative roles at Catholic CAS
- In all other cases, youth are referred to community services
- Summer internship program
- Youth Works program designed to provide youth with pre-employment supports
- RBC Career Launch
- Community partnerships (i.e. WoodGreen, HireUp)

EDUCATION

- Scholarships and Bursaries
- Academic upgrading (OSSD or GED completion)
- Access to mentoring, tutoring, and financial assistance with food and housing
- Job shadowing and mentorship programs
- CAS Toronto, CYS has education committee focused on improving educational outcomes (Dare to Dream Event, Freshmen care packages)
- Ambassador program: an alternative program for youth who have not been successful in traditional school environments
- JVS provides psycho-educational and psych-vocational assessments
- Assistance with college/university applications
- Strive for Success program: provides support to youth in navigating their first transitional year from high school to post-secondary. Includes workshops focusing on financial literacy and self-care.
- Partnerships with Bolt, Hammerheads, and Empower
- Stay Home for School Initiative: Ministry of Education funded initiative aimed at helping youth stay in their foster/group home to improve high school graduation rates

- Educational Liaison funded by the Ministry – targeting youth under 18 for better educational outcomes prior to post-secondary. Liaisons coordinate with their counterparts at other CAS's. Trying to do a combination of supporting young people directly with their education outcomes and training staff with their capacity in case the program does not continue. Focuses on ensuring children and youth in care have the ability to continue in the same school if they have to move homes; that they are registered in an appropriate school for their needs if they do have to change schools; that youth have the supports they need in school such as an IEP/IPRC, following up on recommendations from psycho-educational assessment; and consulting for children and youth who may have FASD. Liaisons also participate in Crown Ward Education Championship Teams who are working collectively to help improve educational outcomes e.g. campus tours, STEM camps. Information sessions are offered for young people under 18 who are aspiring to attend Post Secondary Education, bringing in colleges and universities, offering session on completing OSAP applications with youth.
- CCAS also have scholarships for youth going on to Post Secondary Education. CCAS provides a graduation grant to youth who graduate.

2. Do you have challenges letting youth know about programs after they have left care?

- Continuation of relationship between youth transitioning out of care and the C.A.S varies depending on consistency of outreach and the personal motivations of youth to stay connected.
- Lack of up to date contact information (for example, creating a list of email addresses from CPIN, but still some emails bounce back).
- Some success with social media platforms such as SnapChat.
- A suggestion that providers could look through Share Point or post discharge notes to see how youth find out about things via web and digital.
- Currently no data on which mediums youth tend to use to access resources

3. What other services/supports are these youth accessing?

- Mental Health
- Housing supports/shelters
- Food Banks
- OW and ODSP
- Child and Family Center
- John Howard Society
- Addictions services
- Financial literacy
- Indigenous Friendship Center
- WoodGreen

- Youth in Transition Workers (Comments made that youth are largely referred to YIT Workers who then connect youth to services. Some organizations mentioned that they refer out to housing more so than any employment or education resources, as there is limited supportive housing available)
4. What do you see as the greatest barriers youth have in accessing resources to support their education and employment efforts – (ie any barrier, technology and other)?
 - Lack of family / personal / social supports; leads to reliance on institutional supports
 - Housing Instability
 - Poverty / access to funding
 - Transportation
 - Mental Health: History of trauma and abuse
 - Residential school survivors – mistrust of government interventions
 - Child care
 - Addictions / Mental Health
 - Human Trafficking
 - Lack of life skills/preparation for independence
 5. Do you feel a technology solution could improve youth in transitions' knowledge of and access to resources to support their education and employment efforts?
 - YES!
 - Limited concerns noted, however they did include:
 - Fear that youth would post something when they are in crisis (could involve bullying)
 - Hard to manage
 - Worry about high prevalence of human trafficking
 6. What type of technology solution do you think they would use and what would keep them using it?
 - Any technology resource must be accessible on a mobile device
 - Email is outdated, and youth aren't using websites
 - Must be instantaneous, 'live', and low data pressure: texting, SnapChat, Instagram
 - It is essential that youth transitioning out of care have input in development
 - Must be up to date and relevant to the demographic, links to housing & employment
 - Access to local resources
 - Tool must create opportunities to interact with, and learn about resources and supports from other youth like themselves

- Let's youth know of other users of the app in their own community
- Must include resources that can be accessed immediately
- Culturally appropriate
- Offer a variety of resources
- Simple headlines that clarify what information and tools are available
- A space for youth to be private
- Suicide prevention link/Crisis Link
- Access to online learning modules – Smart Serve, Health and Safety Training, etc.
- For resources specific to Indigenous youth – input from Band Councils recommended
- Learning modules/access to resources on Indigenous culture and language
- Emphasis on Accessibility/User Experience – specifically for youth with disabilities
- Issues of relevance to Indigenous youth
- 'click on' options that 'spider out' into other resources (e.g., mental health, food banks, shelters, housing, grocery stores, pharmacy, etc.)
- Motivational videos
- Positive feedback was heard from youth about agedout.com

7. If technology would not improve access, why not?

- Many rural and remote areas do not have internet access – some reserves have a community broadband
- Access to smartphones and data plans
- Lack of cultural sensitivity and relevance; language can offend; ensure it is an inclusive space
- Tools that “eat up too much data”
- Technology can seem cold and impersonal
- Lack of incentives
- If it is not AODA compliant

8. Do youth in transition generally have a smartphone with data or easy access to a computer with internet access? Can they afford a smartphone or internet access at home?

- Overall, there is large disparity in smartphone ownership and access to data among youth
- Lack of consistent access to internet in foster / group homes; stories of internet access used as a reward / incentive
- Lack of access for youth under 18-16, and 17 year olds can't sign a contract – means they have to go with the most expensive option (pay as you go)

- Smartphone ownership is cost prohibitive for most youth
- Those who do own smartphones are unable to afford data plans Telus program is helpful but capped at age 26