

2022

SUMMARY REPORT
ADULT READINESS
AND AGING OUT
OF CHILD & FAMILY
SERVICES CARE IN
MANITOBA

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I. Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Manitoba has the highest rate of children in care in Canada, with 91 percent of those children being Indigenous (Brownell et al., 2010; Brownell et al., 2015; Doucet, 2021). The continued institutionalization of Indigenous children is unjust and not in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Calls for Action Report (Brownell et al., 2015; Doucet, 2021). Indigenous former foster youth such as Cheyenne Stonechild say that this cycle of taking children from their families and away from their communities reinforces assimilation and has historically reduced the capacity of these communities to thrive because of detrimental government-enforced systems such as residential schools and the Sixties Scoop (Bourassa, 2010; The Canadian Press, 2013). Research shows that there are three times as many children in state-care across Canada now than reported during the height of residential schools in 1953 (Global News, 2021).

The Government of Manitoba has not reported on the outcomes of the children emancipated from their guardianship in the last decade, despite mounting evidence that youth transitioning from government care into adulthood have significantly poorer outcomes in health and education, as well as socially, emotionally, and financially compared to those who without Child and Family Services (CFS) experience. (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2017). Since 2012, the Government of Manitoba has updated the community, experts, and stakeholders every five years to report on the well-being and development of children and youth across the province. The provincial government has been mandated to report on and provide updates to increase the well-being and development of young people, through The Provincial Healthy Child Manitoba Strategy. However, the government has not yet released details on how youth are being supported or lacking support when transitioning out of care. The last report was conducted in 2017, meaning the Government of Manitoba is due to report on children and youth in 2022 (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2017).

When one searches for reports from Child and Family Services (CFS) about strategies, youth engagement, outcomes for youth in their care transitioning into adulthood, and evaluation for self-sufficiency, there is a lack of relevant reports about how youth are transitioned and what their post-care outcomes are. Current evaluations, reports, and strategic plans for creating equitable standards for youth transitioning out of government care in Manitoba can be considered outdated, as not much research has been conducted within the last ten years.

WHO WE ARE & GOALS FOR THIS REPORT



Youth Employment Services Manitoba (YES Manitoba) offers free, inclusive employment services to youth across Manitoba. The organization focuses on helping youth find and maintain employment by utilizing a multilevel approach. In 2012, a collaborative partnership called Futures Forward was created between YES Manitoba, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Manitoba and Winnipeg, and Community Financial Counselling Services to support youth in care and former youth in care in Manitoba. Futures Forward offers accessible services and transitional support for current and former youth in care. In an effort to improve services and support, YES Manitoba noticed a gap in services and literature in support of youth transitioning out of government care in Manitoba. Understanding perspectives, experiences, challenges, and innovations across CFS systems is important for designing services and opportunities key for current and former youth's individual and overall success as adults.

Our research on youth transitioning out of government care in Manitoba focuses on exploring what “adult readiness” means on a provincial, national, and global scale. In our research, we do not attempt to offer a baseline of what adult readiness means for Canadians without consultation with differing communities or youth from differing identity groups. Rather, we combined the information regarding youth transitions, youth exiting foster care, adult readiness, and successful transitions, with information on the innovations or challenges as a means to help inform decisions when implementing additional assessments, research, or programming to support youth transitioning out of government care in Manitoba.

SETTING THE STAGE

This summary will begin with a brief statement on methodology and data collection. An overview of the Manitoba state of foster care will follow. This section provides statistical data to contextualize the statements made about exiting from foster care. Next, there is a profile of the demographic situation in Manitoba to offer insight into the current and future innovations and barriers experienced in the system of social welfare, the development of social policy, and overall levels of community wellness. The third section highlights the current life and wellness conditions of children, youth, and adolescents in Manitoba and Canada. This includes an overview of the economic, educational, health, and cultural developments and challenges. These three sections serve as brief foundational contexts for the main section of the summary.

The main section of the summary covers the public information available on youth exiting foster care through analyzing qualitative and quantitative sources published by parties such as government officials, non-profit organizations, CFS agencies, academics, Canadian news media sources, and child protection advocates. This section is divided into the following categories: A Note About Defining Terms; What is Age Based Exit; Factors that Influence Readiness; Diversity in Readiness; What is a Successful Transition; Barriers to Readiness and Success; and Hopeful Future Forward.

Section 1: A Note About Defining Terms

Section 2: What is Age Based Exit

Section 3: Factors that Influence Readiness

Section 4: Diversity in Readiness

Section 5: What is a Successful Transition

Section 6: Barriers to Readiness and Success

Section 7: Hopeful Future Forward

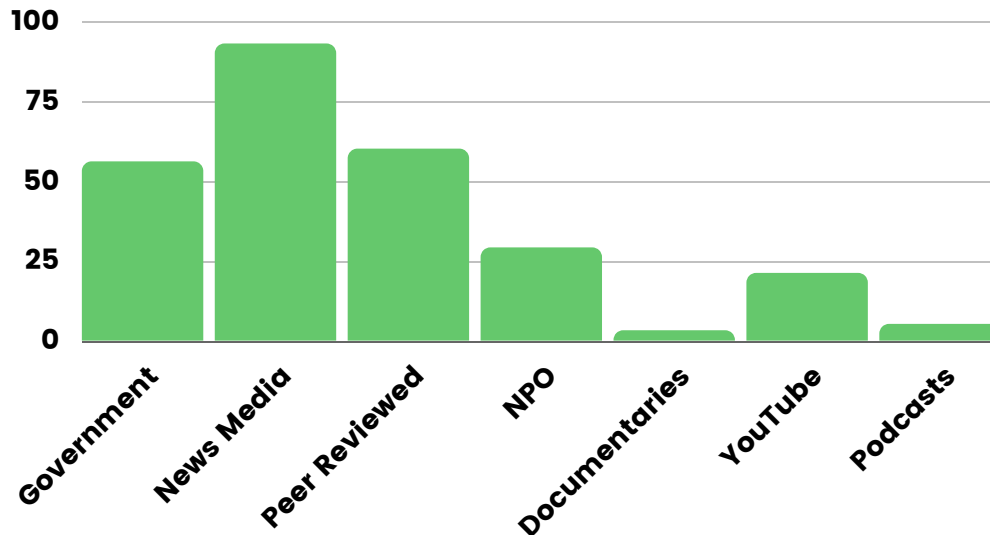
This report summarizes the provincial, national, and international research available regarding practices, policy, and legislation specific to youth exiting foster care. The research analyzes and interprets white, black, and gray literature from publicly available sources such as government policy or legislature proceeding transcriptions; Canadian national news media, including but not limited to: APTN, Global News, CBC News, CTV News, the Globe and Mail; non-profits; and open database academic articles. In addition, this research reviews visual media forms such as creative works and interviews available on YouTube, Vimeo, and social media platforms like Instagram. Including visual and oral forms is not only a critical component of Indigenous academic advocacy, but it also increases opportunities for people to access resources and platforms which are limited to people of specific privileges, like academics. The majority of the data and literature have been sourced using the six following resources: Google, YouTube, the Government of Manitoba, and Government of British Columbia websites, and two library databases: those of the University of Winnipeg and Carleton University.

This summary was conducted by Courtney Joshua, a graduate student at Carleton University in Ottawa, specializing in the field of Migration and Diaspora Studies. Previously, she graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a Bachelor of Arts in Human Rights. Courtney is a first-generation Canadian settler of colour who is passionate about areas related to research, advocacy, and justice, across eight weeks in 2022. In total, 267 electronic resources were reviewed, by searching for the relevant terms “adult readiness,” “aging out of care Canada/Manitoba,” “youth aging out of care Canada/Manitoba,” and “former youth in care, Canada/Manitoba”. Additional searches of these terms were conducted on local non-profits and research organization websites that were named in the first set of findings as being prominent actors in CFS systems in some way. Citations used in reports and research were also reviewed for promising content. The resources were only included if they reported qualitative and quantitative data about specific experiences related to adult readiness and aging out of care and were also published between 2010 and 2022. Our findings were limited to 209 findings as final sources. A breakdown of source types can be reviewed below in image 1, titled, “Data Graph.” The decision to limit the number of sources was made as a way to ensure a thorough, detailed analysis of information from across Manitoba and Canada was included while ensuring that the information was manageable to review considering the short time frame to conduct research.

METHODOLOGY

DATA REVIEW

A breakdown of all data reviewed. The total number is 267 sources.



225

of these were
from CANADA

51

of these were
from OUTSIDE
of CANADA

The research focuses on two main components: “aging out of care” and “adult readiness.” These components guided the data collection stage as the phrases were used to locate results in search engines such as Google and YouTube. The phrase, “adult readiness” was used less, as “readiness” is often used in context with education and psychology topics because both involve learning as a process to ensure one is ready for life events such as employment or post-secondary education. Some results concern people living with disabilities or mental health conditions. For these reasons, “adult readiness” was used to locate sources to support specific sections of the research, such as the definition section because it was not as useful compared to “aging out of care”.

Since the research focuses on government matters across the province, using the Government of Manitoba website search engine was valuable for sourcing data. Both phrases “aging out of care” and “youth aging out of care” were searched using this feature, populating 5,305 results in total. When inputting, “aging out of care” eight results ranging from 2014 to 2022 were located, whereas “youth aging out of care” populated 5,297 results, many of which were omitted because they were dated before 2010. Another reason there is a large number of results is that words like “care” “youth” and “aging” are often used with other topics such as seniors' wellbeing. This statement also applies to the searches done with academic databases, such as the University of Winnipeg Library. Therefore, the majority of results are not specific to CFS and were not included in the final data set count due to this reason. For both phrases, the majority of the results are legislature transcribed meeting notes which address the topic, however, they largely relate to child welfare and CFS more generally.

DATA COLLECTION

Generally, the data available when searching for “aging out of care” and “youth aging out of care” serves as informational resources for citizens living in Winnipeg. The conversations, although applicable to Manitoba, seem to center on specific regional matters. Some are the updates to budgets and provincial funded/led programs. Overall, when using the Government of Manitoba website’s search engine, phrases like “aging out of care” and “youth aging out of care” primarily focus on government aspects like finances, policy/laws, and updates on statistical data to note progress on important initiatives, and little information about the outcomes of youth exiting the child welfare system in Manitoba.

To ensure the data was not limited to Winnipeg or Manitoba, the main search engine utilized was Google. When conducting Google searches of “aging out of care” and “youth aging out of care” the results often populated the following items: government-related policies, reports, and memos; news interviews from organizations such as APTN, Global News, CBC News, CTV News, and Globe and Mail; published research article from journals; and annual summaries or research reports offered by non-profits such as Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC) and The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press; or reports from researchers working with non-profits such as Dr. Melanie Doucet. When reviewing published research articles and PDFs of summaries or research produced by non-profits, citation lists were used to locate additional sources.

The researcher also conducted YouTube and news media searches of the terms: “adult readiness,” “aging out of care Canada/Manitoba,” “youth aging out of care Canada/Manitoba,” and “former youth in care, Canada/Manitoba.” These results populated 94 articles and 27 videos to include as reviewable sources. Additional sources such as podcasts and social media websites such as blogs were gathered through word-of-mouth from researchers, social workers in Manitoba, and former youth in care. To narrow down all findings, the research only includes details of 208 pieces of data specific to Manitoba and Canadian published between 2010 and 2022. However, a few statistics are sourced from earlier timeframes (before 2010) due to a lack of new data and research.

THE STATE OF CHILD WELFARE IN MANITOBA

In Manitoba, there are 30+ Child and Family Services (CFS) agencies and Authorities working to transform the welfare of thousands of children, youth, and families residing in the province. CFS agencies are under the guidance of the Child and Family Services (CFS) Division of the Department of Family Services (Milne, Kozlowski & Sinha 2014). The Department of Families operates under several Acts and Recommendations. Some of the most relevant to "aging out of care" and "adult readiness" are provided in a chart labeled "Guiding Acts and Recommendations" provided below.

Guiding Acts and Recommendations (Department of Families, 2021).

Acts	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Child and Family Services Act (1985) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracia’s Trust (2002/2008)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Adoption Act (1999) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenix Sinclair (2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Child and Family Services Authorities Act (2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jordan’s Principle (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Poverty Reduction Strategy Act (2009) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (2013) 	

THE STATE OF CHILD WELFARE IN MANITOBA CONTINUED

All CFS agencies are audited by and report to the Agency Accountability and Support Unit to monitor the performance and transparency of the agencies operating under the Division of the Department of Family Services due to the variation of services and mandates applicable to each agency (Department of Manitoba Families, 2021). While CFS agencies can create and follow their mandates, provincial and federal-wide standards are enacted to ensure certain equitable measures are introduced for residents of Manitoba regardless of identity, ability, or community residence. Research shows a discrepancy in accessing equitable child and family-related services, particularly for Indigenous people, newcomers, racialized Canadians, and Canadians with lived experience of mental illness and/or physical, auditory, visual, or cognitive disabilities (Brownell et al., 2010; Stein & Dumaret, 2011; Sakai et al., 2014; Brownell et al., 2015; Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2021). A feature of CFS in Manitoba is families may choose the authority they wish to access services with to ensure their familial and cultural values or customs are respected (Brownell et al., 2015). However, many people from these identity groups are often reporting being exposed to significant rates of stigmatization, trauma, and discrimination while seeking services from child welfare agencies (Doucet, 2021). Some issues raised centered around social services providers lacking intersectional, cultural, or trauma-informed training (Bourassa, 2010; Brownell et al., 2015).

Child protective services are offered for a variety of reasons including but not limited to all forms of abuse, neglect, death, or conflict in the family such as domestic violence, or to support the child in their disability, health, or mental health needs (Brownell et al., 2010; Stein & Dumaret, 2011; Sakai et al., 2014; Brownell et al., 2015). These offers generally apply to all people aged zero to 17 years who require support. Some efforts have been made to support youth and young adults until 21 if under an extended agreement with the Government, or until 25 if enrolled in specific initiatives such as the pilot project for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) introduced in 2021 (Department of Manitoba Families, 2021). In Manitoba, a child in care is considered so under the following conditions: “when placed by a child and family services agency in substitute care; whose legal status is defined as a permanent ward, temporary ward, under a voluntary surrender of guardianship, under a voluntary placement agreement or apprehension; who is under the age of 18, and whose care needs are financially supported by government” (Department of Manitoba Families, 2021).

THE STATE OF CHILD WELFARE IN MANITOBA CONTINUED

The Canadian Department of Family Services' Annual Report of 2020-2021, notes approximately 9,850 children were in care in Manitoba, of which 72 percent are permanent wards, and 91 percent are Indigenous. Less than four percent of these children are placed in group-care facilities, meaning over 90 percent are placed in foster homes or with relatives (Department of Manitoba Families, 2021). All children within these statistics are under 17 years of age. For support provided to youth over 18 years and until 21, approximately 1,093 people accessed the Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) program between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021. However, from 2019 to 2020 only 811 people accessed these extensions, showing a considerable increase in the use of services upon services being extended until 21 years of age (Department of Manitoba Families, 2021).

A portion of the AYAs offered between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021, were because of the moratorium on aging out of care enacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports on these outcomes are not available yet, therefore the number of those who accessed the extensions is not yet known. In the Government of Manitoba's official announcement of the moratorium, it is suggested that at least 280 youth in care turning 18 could access the service and 70 young adults with agreements could receive extensions past 21 (Department of Manitoba Families, 2021). Additionally, since 2006, nearly thirteen times as many permanent youth wards of CFS have received support from age 18 to 21 indicating a growing need to ensure that funding, such as through AYAs or COVID moratoriums, are accessible to former youth in care (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2017).

DEMOGRAPHICS OF MANITOBA

Manitoba is the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. The province is home to approximately 1,342,153 people, of which approximately 18 percent are of Indigenous descent, and of which approximately 60 percent of this population live on reserves (Statistics Canada, 2022). From the 2016 census, it is estimated that five percent of the entire Canadian population is Indigenous, as approximately 1.67 million identify with at least one of the following groups: Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (Indigenous Services Canada, 2022). Several religious and ethnic minorities also call the province home, resulting from a rich history of immigration and efforts of groups in maintaining traditions and cultural norms (Urquia & Walld, 2020).

Winnipeg is the largest city and the capital of the province with approximately 833,000 citizens (Statistics Canada, 2022). Winnipeg is in the southern half of the province, which has benefited the urbanized development of the city and region overall. Winnipeg has been a major region for collaboration long since before European settlement, because of its proximity to the Red and Assiniboine Rivers which was valued and still is by many Indigenous nations. The total median income for the region of Winnipeg in 2020 was \$40,000, which rose from the year prior as the total median income in 2019 was \$38,000 (Statistics Canada, 2022). In northern Manitoba, the total median income in 2020 was \$31,000. In 2019, the total median income of northern Manitoba was \$27,600. The majority of residents in Manitoba receive a total income of \$20,000 to \$29,999 per year and hold some type of employment. However, these totals do include anyone over 15 years of age which influences the applicability of these numbers (Statistics Canada, 2022). People under 18 may work for many different reasons than people over 18 because they have different spending or saving habits and often are unable to work the same hours as people over 18, and often have lower-paying jobs (Morissette, 2021). However, more than a quarter (1,400 - 27%) of Winnipeg homeless people in 2017 were youths ages 16 to 29 (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2017). Overall, Manitoba has varying levels of community wellness resulting from the fluctuations which occur from economic, social, cultural, and health interests and challenges.

CHILD & YOUTH WELFARE OF MANITOBA

Canada has a high rate of children in care compared to several other westernized countries, such as the United States and Germany, which fall second and third respectively in having the highest number of children in care. In Canada, Manitoba has the highest rate of children in care among all Canadian provinces and territories (Bourassa, 2010; Brownell et al., 2015). Reports show that Indigenous children are exposed to higher rates of poverty than non-Indigenous children (Dow, 2021). Additionally, Indigenous children are exposed to higher rates of exposure to CFS as 91 percent of children in care are Indigenous in Manitoba (Brownell et al., 2015). However, only six percent of all Canadian children are Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2022). Since 2011, the Government of Manitoba has committed to more transparent and sustainable innovations to ensure poverty is reduced across the region, which includes legislation to ensure the Government of Manitoba creates strategies to meet the needs of Manitobans who are experiencing poverty and provide reports on the outcomes of the strategic initiatives to reduce poverty. One target area has been addressing the rate of child poverty. Between 2011 and 2015 a 62 percent reduction was achieved (Barkman & McCracken, 2019).

Poverty in Manitoba has been a historical issue since at least the 1950s. This is when the province started to develop some of its first community programs, which were also emerging across Canada during the 1950s to 1960s as a means to help confront problems related to poverty. However, much of the aims in Manitoba at the time were focused on the eradication of the “long-standing ‘Indian and Métis problem’” rather than being economically or socially based (Bourassa, 2010; Langford, 2016). It is important to note that before and during this time, child welfare also functioned to eradicate Indigenous communities as “child protection” between 1879 and 1946 by forcing Indigenous children aged seven to 15 years to attend residential schools (Bourassa, 2010; Brownell et al. 2015). During this time, many Indigenous peoples also created their own organizations and associations to support advocacy work related to recognizing them as rights-bearing people, and to stop ongoing human rights violations such as Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop (Bourassa, 2010; OHRC, 2018). Despite significant efforts made through time by Indigenous advocacy, a combination of detrimental outcomes has risen from challenges related to poverty and discrimination against Indigenous communities. Some outcomes have influenced the quality and access to education and healthcare in Manitoba, leading to further issues in areas like CFS, as children are unable to get the assistance they need in several areas of life (Eni et al., 2021).

II. Main Report

SECTION 1:

A NOTE ABOUT DEFINING AND APPROACHING TERMS

Exiting foster care or services: This term is used interchangeably with others such as leaving care, emancipation from care or CFS, transition to adulthood, and aging/aged out of care. Additionally, a person who exits care may refer to oneself as alumni or care leaver, depending on the country or region they are from.

Extension of care: We borrow the definition provided by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY). In certain circumstances, a child's care with a child and family services agency can be extended beyond the age of majority (18) to the age of 21 years. This applies to permanent wards only (MACY, 2020). Separate from the definition provided by MACY, we would like to note that once 18, continued support is offered under a contract or legal agreement between the adult, their social worker, or CFS generally.

Permanent ward: We borrow the definition provided by MACY. In our summary this term "refers to a child who is under the permanent guardianship of a child and family services agency. The guardianship rights of the child's parents or guardians have been terminated" (MACY, 2020).

Racialized people: Within this summary, "racialized people" is a term encompassing folks who are non-Indigenous or white. The term was chosen as a way to indicate how society has codified meanings and understandings of race through social contexts, leading to inequalities and inequities (Doucet, 2021).

Indigenous peoples: We use the term Indigenous peoples to collectively reference First Nations, Métis, or Inuk (Inuit). In using this term, we understand that there are consequences and disagreements in using this distinction. We attempt to use this term as a means to respect the unique rights, entitlements, historic and current lived experiences, and knowledge of Indigenous peoples and nations (Doucet, 2021).

Youth or adult: There is a lack of consensus across academia, non-profits, and government spaces regarding how to define terms such as "child," "youth," "adult," or "adult readiness." Definitions for the terms often conflict depending on the situation they are used with. For example, Safe Work Manitoba considers youth as those between 15 and 24 years of age (2022). This is similar to the YES Manitoba definition, which includes ages 15 to 29. The Government of Manitoba in policy and law defines children as people under 18 years of age (Child and Family Services Manitoba, 1988). The government often interchangeably uses youth and children; however, youth often are over 15 years of age. Additionally, the Government of Manitoba defines "Supported Children" as one of the following criteria (Child and Family Services Manitoba, 2005):

SECTION 1 CONTINUED

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the care of a Child and Family Services (CFS) agency • Receiving or whose family is receiving services from a CFS agency • Receiving or are entitled to receive mental health services or addiction services provided by or on behalf of a public body as defined in The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) or a healthcare facility as defined in The Personal Health Information Act (PHIA). • Receiving or are entitled to receive disability services provided by or on behalf of government • In custody or under supervision with the youth criminal justice system • Have or are eligible to have an <u>individual education plan</u> (IEP) • Receiving or whose family is receiving family conciliation services provided by or on behalf of government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving or whose family is receiving victim support services; this includes services provided for children or their families by or on behalf of government for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Victims of crime ◦ Witnesses involved in criminal prosecutions ◦ Individuals and families who are affected by domestic violence, as that term is used in The Domestic Violence and Stalking Act ◦ Children who are sexually exploited or at risk of sexual exploitation.
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Due to this discrepancy in defining the term youth, the notion of the term adult becomes impacted as well. Additionally, The Age of Majority Act highlights this ongoing discrepancy in defining terms accurately, leading to the absence of a definition for terms like "adult," "full age," "infant," "infancy," and "minority," Therefore, the Act utilizes terminology like "the age of majority and ceasing to be a minor" instead of the previous terms offered (C.C.S.M. c. A7, 1988). The Age of Majority Act is a provincially designated law, which led to different services and outcomes for youth exiting foster care across Canada. In provinces such as British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, and Yukon, the age of majority is 19. This means that youths exiting care receive one more year of support compared to provinces with the age of majority set at 18. Provinces that have the age of majority set at 18 are Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan (Department of Justice, 2017).

SECTION 1 CONTINUED

According to The Age of Majority Act, anyone over 18 is considered an adult in Manitoba (C.C.S.M. c. A7, 1988). Yet, The Age of Majority Act conflicts with the regulations set forth for Liquor, Lotteries, and Cannabis. Although cannabis and liquor have differing influences on one's capacity, both can intoxicate a person to the point of creating a safety or health concern for themselves or other Manitobans. Therefore, in Manitoba people at the age of 18 can buy liquor and must wait until the age of 19 to buy cannabis because each requires different protections based on the dangers they may bring to one's development (C.C.S.M. c. L153., 2022). Similarly, variations in defining terms exist across different professional situations often because each area has specific policies or mandates to protect the wellbeing of those they work with. Yet, we do not see those same flexible mandates to protect the well-being of youth aging out of care who might not be ready to navigate life's challenges because of age-based barriers.

Adult Readiness

As noted above, there is no clear or widely used definition to account for the terms "adult" or "youths" within child welfare systems or scholarships in Canada or Manitoba. This influences the definitions for the term "adult readiness." According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary definition, readiness as a noun means "the quality or state of being ready which includes: Being in a state of preparation; having a prompt of willingness; or doing something with ease or facility" (Merriam Webster, N.D). The adjective, "ready" as defined by Merriam-Webster, is to be "prepared mentally or physically for some experience or action" (Merriam-Webster, N.D).

The use of the term "adult readiness" is rarely utilized in government literature, as the Government of Manitoba often refrains from using the term "readiness." Instead, it is common to see phrasing such as "preparing youth for leaving care," "exiting foster care," "transiting from foster care," and/or "transitioning to adulthood" (Manitoba Government, 2022). Research suggests that when governments are flexible in their use of terminology, aspects like power, networking, exchanging resources, and negotiations, are more successful (Dostal, 2002).

When conducting Google searches only for the phrase "readiness" not "adult readiness" a wide range of topics are offered, many of which seem to be related to the fields of education and psychology. The concept of "readiness" is rooted in knowledge acquisition and learning as a process to ensure one can obtain the skills or information required. In a general sense, to be ready means having the skills or knowledge to be able to complete, handle or process a situation--whether one must navigate life's challenges or our personal goals and desires, we all wish to be ready to have a successful transition (CHC, 2016; Dunsmore, 2019; Silver, 2022).

SECTION 1 CONTINUED

The concept of “adult readiness” is frequently used in education and psychology lending to the idea that there are significant variations and factors in how one accesses, processes, and continues to use skills related to knowledge acquisition and learning as a process. Additionally, healthcare professionals take a similar stance in recognizing that individual and specialty plans for transition are important for the well-being and success of the child. Healthcare tends to use “adult readiness” when speaking of children transitioning to adult care services. The difference between healthcare approaches to readiness and educational and psychological approaches can be found when reviewing the specific definitions chosen to account for terms like “youth” and “readiness”.

Children’s Healthcare Canada (CHC) defines youth as: “A person between 12 to 25 years of age” (CHC, 2016: 5). The latter concept is defined as: “a rating of the level of capacity that a youth (or with the help of others) has to engage in behaviors and/or activities required by the adult health care system” (CHC, 2016: 5). Neither the Government of Manitoba nor MACY have agreed upon definitions to account for terms like “adult readiness” or “youth” despite the use of these definitions being pertinent to youth transitions from government care. Therefore, defining youth and adulthood readiness still needs to be agreed upon by stakeholders to provide consistency to youth receiving services from their organizations and departments. However, the differing definitions across education, psychology, and healthcare can support the research on CFS agencies and aging out of care, as all highlight the need for individualized, youth-focused transition plans, in addition to standardizations across regions, like Manitoba or Canada, to create equitable standards and ensure coordinated services can grow (CHC, 2016: 5).

SECTION 2: WHAT IS AGE BASED EXIT FROM CARE?

Generally, across the data and literature, the term “age-based exit” is nationally presented as a process that begins at 15 years of age, but is dependent on the age when a person enters care and provincial standards. This process finishes once a person turns the age of majority in their province. All permanent youth in care in Manitoba get the option to enter into a contract with the government allowing them to receive funding until their 21st birthday if they choose to--this is known as an Agreement with Young Adults (AYA); however, not all agencies offer the same support leading to variations in funding (Doucet, 2021). This leads countless youth, who have reached the age of majority (18 or 19 depending on province or territory of residence), while receiving child protection system (CFS) services, unable to access these supports because of age-based legislative policies (Doucet et al., 2020; Doucet, 2021; Doucet et al., 2022).

While legislative standards vary across Canada and within provinces due to the oversight that CFS agencies have within the provincial (off-reserve) or federal (on-reserve) spaces where child protection occurs, children who have reached the age of majority receive different types of support or services because of their location or agency (Milne, Kozlowski, & Sinha 2014; Dunsmore, 2019; Doucet, 2021). There is little consistency across the quality and standard of services, leading to vast inequitable services and standards for Canadian, Indigenous, and newcomer youths receiving CFS support and services who require specific supports related to their identity groups (Doucet, 2021). The Government of Manitoba approaches adult readiness by using a definition that emphasizes age rather than skills, knowledge, or ability. Therefore, in an “age-based exit from care,” no matter one’s level of readiness, no extensions are offered to youth past the age of 21. Nor is this service available to voluntary care agreements or temporary wards (Milne, Kozlowski, & Sinha 2014; Brownell et al., 2015; Dunsmore, 2019; Doucet, 2021).

In reviewing the CFS manual, terms such as “Age of Majority / Transitional Planning” are primarily used, alongside the term “employment or education readiness” (Child and Family Services Standards Manual, 1988). In section 1.1.3 of the Child and Family Services Standards Manual, the process of “transitional planning” is described as involving an assessment and development of skills needed for adult living (2005). The CFS manual offers a general list of skills and services that should be offered during this planning process which can be reviewed in image 2, titled “Age of Majority.” However, the manual does outline that “preparations for becoming an adult include but are not limited to ensuring the youth can access” the areas offered in image 2. One may conclude from this statement that CFS policy and mandates are flexible enough to account for diversity, yet that there is no standard for ensuring that children and youth’s rights and opportunities are safeguarded (Bourassa, 2010; Doucet, 2021).

When there is no standard to protect rights or equitable services, numerous detrimental social, economic, and health outcomes can occur, potentially leading to further social concerns. The growth of social concerns stemming from the lack of equitable services is a known conflict in both Canada and the United States for youth aging out of care and former adults who have aged out (Brownell et al., 2010; Brownell et al., 2015; Barker et al., 2020; Doucet, 2021). Much of what is reported in the literature shows a focus on educational and employment transitions. Few programs directly address barriers that prevent or impede the youth from obtaining and maintaining employment, such as safe and affordable housing (Dunsmore, 2019). While Manitoba has an extension of care/Agreements with the Agreement with Young Adults program (AYAs) that includes financial support, youth express that it is not enough money to ensure their basic needs are met (Dunsmore, 2019; Doucet, 2021). Additionally, once a person in care reaches the age of majority, services and supports are discontinued effective their birthday unless they enter into the agreement until the age of 21. If a person refuses or discontinues their agreement at any time, they cannot opt back into the program (Dunsmore, 2019).

Studies have been conducted in the United States of America (USA) regarding the differences between providing free healthcare and other social services to youth who have aged out of foster care, at ages 18, 19, and 26. Across these USA studies, it is concluded that youth should be supported until at least 26 years of age, as they lead to greater success in adulthood are common (Chen, 2017). Although Canada does have universal healthcare, there are many limitations to what is publicly covered, such as mental health. Wait times for some health services in Manitoba are high in many publicly funded spaces resulting from staffing shortages (Manitoba Health Coalition, 2022). Additionally, social services work best when coordinated and comprehensive (Dunsmore, 2019). Therefore, youth aging out of care should not be limited to receiving one service or type of funding, such as for health, education, housing, or employment.

Research suggests that neurobiological developmental changes are occurring in young adulthood because the human brain is not fully developed until approximately age 26 (Chen, 2017; Barker et al., 2020). Therefore, the transition from youth to adulthood can be disrupted by trauma and/or substance abuse, which can be further exacerbated by events such as the following: undiagnosed or untreated mental health concerns, housing, food insecurity, lack of positive mentors or familial relations who can help navigate these disruptions, and more (Barker et al., 2020). Human rights, such as the right to housing, are intersectional, interdependent, and interrelated, meaning that if one does not have safe and affordable housing, in a community that has access to high-quality and low-cost foods, adequate social services, and sufficient public transportation, they will face persistent barriers in other areas such as employment or education (OHRC, 2018; Barker et al., 2020).

SECTION 2 CONTINUED

Image 2: Aging Out (CFS, 2015)

Age of Majority / Transitional Planning – The case manager is responsible for ensuring that all youth in care, regardless of legal status, at the age of 15, have a detailed transition plan with a view to them leaving care. The plan must involve the assessment and development of skills needed for adult living.

If the youth is 15 years or older and is expected to return to their family prior to their 18th birthday the transition plan will also reflect the family's involvement, where appropriate, in the following process.

Preparations for becoming an adult include but are not limited to ensuring the youth can access the following if appropriate:

- referrals to appropriate adult services
- continued medical, dental and prescription coverage
- development of an Agreement with Young Adults to be offered for supported services which reflects the cultural background identified by the youth.
- ability to identify the process to secure safe and appropriate housing with additional support
- explore and identify future learning opportunities including post secondary education, trades and other training that would enable the youth to enter or continue in the workforce
- assistance and referral to available funding sources for continued lifelong learning

Preparation for becoming an adult includes but is not limited to ensuring the youth has the following skills:

- ability to perform basic life skills such as laundry, shopping and maintain personal hygiene
- understand basic concepts of money management including banking, paying rent, budgeting and credit cards prior to and after transition planning is completed
- plan for employment readiness
- development of a stable social support network prior to and after reaching adulthood

All transition plans must include evidence of consultation with the youth and where appropriate, alternative care providers, legal guardians, educators, family of origin and/or any other applicable parties identified in the care plan by the youth.

SECTION 3: INFLUENCES ON READINESS

Academic research experts suggest a person's level of "readiness" is influenced by their mental, physical, and emotional abilities and barriers. These abilities and barriers grow as a result of birth/genetics or the physical environment in utero and throughout infancy, childhood, youthhood, and into adulthood (Gough & Fuchs, 2010; Santos et al., 2012). Some research suggests ages zero to five years are most critical for development. Dynamics such as birth year, gender, how long one stays in a hospital after birth, how long one is breastfed, family income, age of the birth parent at the time of birth, and needs of a family with accessing supports such as Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) are all key developmental factors. The status of parents' marriage and rates of maternal depression, combined with the number of kids in a home, is also shown to influence children's overall health and well-being, and readiness in adulthood (Santos et al., 2012). Additionally, a person's abilities and barriers are also shaped by social dynamics such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, culture, politics, religion, family/friends (networks), national identity, associations with community, and education (Gough & Fuchs, 2010; Brown et al., 2011; Santos et al., 2012).

Not all youth have the same abilities or capacities as their peers, requiring differing or more personalized support (Gough & Fuchs, 2010; Santos et al., 2012; Silver, 2022). However, consistently children and youth with complex, multi-system needs and/or mental health and addictions are left to explore opportunities and support without assistance, leading to a lack of personalized support (Stein & Dumaret, 2011; Sakai et al., 2014). Without support from family or community resources, many youth transitioning out of care experience greater difficulty in managing their mental, physical, and emotional abilities and barriers (Stein & Dumaret, 2011; Sakai et al., 2014; Patterson, Moniruzzaman, & Somers, 2015; Rutman, & Hubberstey, 2016; Harrison, 2019)

CFS Relations

The research reveals the greatest and most consistent factor that influences readiness is the approach taken by CFS in offering age-based support, rather than one that is flexible to meet the basic needs and goals of the individual. Equitable standards/service, as defined by the Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC) means prohibiting "one-size-fits-all approaches (i.e., treating everyone 'equally') [because it is] not appropriate for youth in care" (Doucet, 2021, p.5). Although youth in care may share commonalities, each has a particular history that leads to their unique lived experiences, youth in care cannot be considered "the same," leading to diversity in one's needs, strengths, and life goals" (Doucet, 2021, p.5). In Manitoba, social and income inequalities across CFS services stem from multiple social, cultural, and human rights challenges ongoing across the province.

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

These challenges include factors such as poverty, unstable housing, and living in a neighborhood with a low average level of education--all of which can create poorer health and increased teen pregnancy rates (Bourassa, 2010; Brownell et al., 2010; Silver, 2016; Dunsmore, 2019; Brownell et al., 2015; Silver 2022).

In 2018, the Government of Manitoba published a final report which reviewed the CFS services in the province. In the report, the government recognized the need to expand age-based supports from 18 to 25 years of age to provide more time to reduce the impact of trauma, support family reunification, and connection to culture. In this report, the government also outlined the need for youth to have a feature that allows them to opt-in and out of the program at any time until 25 years of age (the Government of Manitoba, 2018). As of 2022, commitments that were made in 2018 to achieve these expansions in Manitoba have not been met, unlike the British Columbia Government, which implemented their commitments in 2022 to support youth who have aged out of care until 27 years of age (Children and Family Development, 2022). Both the Government of Manitoba and the British Columbia Government recognize youth in care and former youth in care can experience trauma as a result of their relationship with child welfare services. Yet, as of July 2022, the Government of Manitoba has not publicly released any plans to reduce the influence of trauma or exposure to violence and neglect, challenges with permanency, and connection to or knowledge of other important identity markers like family or culture through program expansion (the Government of Manitoba, 2022), despite the trauma and relational factors which influence the levels of readiness and success of former youth in care (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Doucet, 2020; Doucet, 2021).

Social and Economic Inequalities

Social and income challenges not only contribute to the variations in the quality of CFS services, but increase the amount of youth in care or families requiring services (Brownell, Roos, MacWilliam, Leclair, Ekuma, & Fransoo, 2010). Statements from former youth in care suggest that aspects like the social work agency where one is receiving services from, location of the youth in the city or across the province, biological, adoptive, or foster family, the individual circumstances of the family, and the child's/children's best interests are all influential on the ability to obtain equitable services (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Doucet, 2020; Doucet, 2021). Therefore, while CFS policy and mandates do include statements that reflect aspects and values such as being family-centered or utilizing case-by-case approaches which are culturally, religiously, or spiritually relevant, this does not always occur. An example of such policy is expressed in the following statement: "if the youth is 15 years or older and is expected to return to their family before their 18th birthday the transition plan will also reflect the family's involvement, where appropriate" (CFS, 2015).

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

However, research shows that many youths who age out of foster care or are permanent wards experience barriers in accessing re-unification due to a lack of family connections, lack of attempts by CFS agencies, or stigmatization heavily from their community due to identity markers such as being disabled or identifying as 2SLGBTQ+ (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Doucet, 2020).

Relationships with kinship or people with shared communities are known to protect cultural identity and heritage, as the ability to share traditions and practices occurs more frequently and naturally. When one can access cultural knowledge, one can build a greater sense of self and security, which is known to improve mental well-being and opportunities for success in adulthood (Brown et al., 2011). Yet frequently, youth in care do not know what cultural knowledge is best to assist their needs or how to access these forms of traditions or practices, if even offered by community organizations (Doucet, 2020; Doucet, 2021).

Statements by former foster youth often echo messages about the erasure of identity, feelings of rootlessness and displacement, sense of loss of belonging, and lack of control of circumstances or power which is commonplace when placed in foster care and/or from having multiple, temporary caregivers (Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Doucet, 2020; Doucet, 2021). Additionally, many former Indigenous youths who were placed in non-Indigenous foster or adoption homes have expressed feelings of loss and isolation related to being disconnected from their cultural knowledge and teachings. Furthermore, many report experiences of racism and violence from their non-Indigenous family or caregiver upon expressing the desire to connect to their identity or culture (ANFC, 2021).

Many of these hardships arise for youth transitioning out of care when they have not been adequately supported by foster families, group homes, and/or CFS workers throughout their infancy, childhood, youthhood, and/or adulthood. Research shows that foster families experience challenges as a result of inadequate resources, obscure messaging, and mismatched child/family placements (Ahmann, 2017; Dunsmore, 2019; Best & Blakeslee, 2020; Doucet, 2020; Doucet, 2021). Some families are in better positions to support their children and offer stable living conditions. This not only reduces the family's overall chances of interacting with CFS systems but can offer greater opportunities in both adoption and fostering. Physical and relational stability is key for the overall success of youth and into adulthood (Seita, 2001). Stability becomes a greater risk of concern for youth in care due to issues such as instability with housing, and lack of social connections resulting from high overturn in social services (Seita, 2001).

The benefits that arise when families are better able to support their biological or foster children is also referred to as a "family privilege" which John Seita (2001) used to describe invisible benefits arising from being a member of a stable family. Some of these invisible benefits include being more successful and readier for adulthood (Seita, 2001). Another benefit that comes from family privilege is "generational wealth," which describes the channels of wealth passed across generations (Pfeffer & Killewald, 2018).

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

When families are more emotionally and financially stable, they have greater social mobility and power, which means they are better able to access resources or devote finances to support differing areas (Seita, 2001; Pfeffer & Killewald, 2018). Barriers experienced by youth are not new to advocates and former youth in care, who call for increased support and urgent transformations regarding youth in foster care.

A country-wide expert on children's rights and wellbeing, the Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC), argues youth should be assessed on an individual basis, yet should still follow some type of federal-wide system to ensure minimum standards are met (Doucet, 2021). The standards proposed by CWLC "represent the minimum key elements that need to be in place before a young person exits the child protection system and transitions to adulthood, regardless of age, place of residence, and legal and/or placement status; this also pertains to all types of placements within the child protection system (e.g., residential/group home units, foster homes, kinship placements, etc.)" (Doucet, 2021: 4). CWLC offers eight foundational pillars to guide youth in care with their transition to adulthood which can be viewed in image 3 titled "CWLC Pillars." However, CWLC recognizes that "a multitude of supports and programs in place across government, community, and private sectors" are required to ensure equitable standards (Doucet, 2021: 5).

The discrepancy in support for cultural access is important to note, as findings show members of both Indigenous and racialized families, such as Black children, are overrepresented across the Canadian child welfare system, and grossly under-supported in several basic human rights such as education, healthcare, and poverty reduction, creating a growing crisis for many communities (OHRC, 2018; Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2021). However, this discrepancy suggests there is little support for folks who are not Indigenous nor who have mixed identities, such as being both Black and Indigenous. The lack of data brings two main questions: do youth get the choice in what types of services they gain when they have different identities than their biological family or extended family members? If one gets the choice, is there pressure to decide between one culture or identity over another?

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

Stigmatization

Current and former youth in care report high occurrences of stigmatization from their foster families, community members, and social service providers (Gaetz, 2014; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2021). Many foster youth have multiple intersectional identities which place them at greater risk of exposure to discrimination and violence, regardless of if they are in care or aging out. Identity markers such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and religion are important to understand in greater connection to the systemic and structural factors, such as discrimination and violence, obstacles to accessing public systems or social services, and gaps across government or publicly funded supports and resources, all causing greater inequities for those who already are experiencing significant and historic disadvantages and growing death rates of former youth in care (Gaetz, 2014; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Dunsmore, 2019). Additionally, many Canadians report experiencing high rates of stigma from the government, families, community members, and social service providers when receiving any financial benefits such as disability, employment, and income assistance, if in foster care, or if on an AYA (Gaetz, 2014; Bounajm, Beckman & Thériault, 2014).

Advocating for a community that values interdependence, regardless of circumstances, is a key component of creating better, more equitable, and just communities. Many experts agree that no youth or person, no community or nation, can be entirely independent of another (Propp, Ortega, & Newheart, 2003; Ahmann, 2017; Best & Blakeslee, 2020; Doucet, 2020; Doucet, 2021). The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in the USA agrees that young people in care succeed when experiencing interdependent support by advocating for “interdependent living to gain the knowledge, practical skills, and social capital that will support them into adulthood” (Doucet, 2021: 34) Since the early 2000s, Propp, Ortega and Newheart (2003) have explored the benefits of former foster youth in moving towards interdependence, which incorporates values of “connection, collaboration and empowerment, rather than complete independence and self-sufficiency” and “aims to normalize stigmas of reliance” which former youth in care and youth aging out of care experience at higher rates (Doucet, 2021: 34).

Image 3: CWLC PILLARS (Doucet, 2021)



SECTION 3 CONTINUED

Although advocates have expressed the importance of secure, close, and long-term relationships for youth in care to support them when in care and upon aging out for over 20 years, many CFS agencies in Manitoba are currently unable to offer this opportunity for youth. Often youth, elders, community service supports, and volunteers in the child welfare community cite issues with funding and lack of oversight from the government over differing agency mandates or policy reach (ANFC, 2021). Yet, it can be argued that Indigenous and other racialized youth in care are paying the highest price, not stakeholders. However, relationships cannot only be limited to a specific type of support or conditional relationships such as financial incentives for paid employees (Ahmann, 2017). Best and Blakeslee (2020) found that former youth in care participating in their study defined close relationships differently than most, and multidimensional support, defined as emotional, informational, and concrete, is only one component (Best & Blakeslee, 2020). Former foster youth identified several key components in defining what a close relationship meant to them. The youth stated, “stability, multidimensional support, advocacy, honesty and genuineness, commonalities, trust, and small interconnected core networks” (Best & Blakeslee, 2020).

SECTION 4:

DIVERSITY IN READINESS

Our research suggests “adult readiness” comes in several forms such as vocational and employment readiness; learning and skill readiness; and cognitive, social, and emotional readiness. These forms of readiness are impacted by the nature in which a person is physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally able to become ready. In this sense, readiness is not always based on outward support and services. One has to be motivated and willing to participate and communicate when involved in an activity. Motivation influences willingness and the nature of participation or communication, in addition to factors such as perceptions of success, ability to persevere, or levels of engagement and achievement. Motivation can be undermined if people lack feelings of security, belonging, experience with success, connections to those they work with such as peers, and the belief that someone is truly and holistically interested in their best interests (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2009: p.29). Concerns about motivations, often seem to arise for folks who are part of communities that experience some level of trauma or discrimination, both of which apply to many current youth in care and former youth in care (Thompson, Greeson, Brunsink, 2016).

Motivation is only one of several factors that influence an individual’s readiness. The research reveals that there are six core areas highlighted as being the important pathways for ensuring readiness in Manitoba: reducing poverty (Brownell et al., 2010); education or training (Brownell et al., 2015); culture, spirituality or religion to foster a connection to identity and heritage through belonging which often regards Indigenous, or newcomer communities (Brown et al., 2011); mental health and health access, which includes disability rights and increasing accessibility by reducing stigma for folks with disabilities, experiencing addictions or living with mental health (Stein & Dumaret, 2011; Sakai et al., 2014); Supporting 2SLGBTQ+ rights and efforts (Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). This aspect of the research does indicate a high level of complexity in navigating the social services in Manitoba due to the quality, funding, and oversight from provincial or federal politics. CFS agencies must be supported in connection with other areas like education and healthcare, disability, and Indigenous rights. Here we can also see how human rights, community wellbeing, and individual prosperity intersect, as well as the indivisible; interdependent, and interrelated nature of these areas (OHRC, 2018).

SECTION 5: WHAT IS A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION?

Many variations and factors lead individuals and/or families to differently define what a “successful transition” from care means. Largely it depends on the individual identity and experiences of the person, combined with societal, cultural, and familial influences on who is doing the defining and for what purpose. Therefore, there are no firm definitions available to support what this means.

The Employment and Social Development Canada has designed a program called “Skills for Success” which is a three-part initiative to support Canadians not only during job searching, but the program also ensures that individuals gain skills to succeed in learning and “become an active member of [their] community” by offering skill assessments and skill training programs online and in person. However, not all assessments or programs are available at free, low cost, or to individuals. Some programs are only offered to groups or professionals. This creates limitations for youth who are aging out of care, as they often do not have access to these aspects to participate in assessments or programs. In the “Skills for Success” initiative, the government focuses on building nine different areas of skill development. Details regarding the skill types/names, definitions, and reasons supporting why the skill is important, are provided in image 4 titled “Skills for Success”. Employment and Social Development Canada argues that these specific skills are “needed to participate and thrive in learning, work, and life” (ESDC, 2021). Therefore, based on the “Skills for Success” initiative one could interpret that success is influenced by societal expectations and our duties as citizens in supporting different areas of governance and development to ensure communities thrive.

Our findings support that there are outward pressures stemming from our duties as citizens, as patterns reveal there are societal expectations of adults to obtain full-time work and/or complete education until grade 12 at least, offering a potential baseline to reference for what it means to be successful as a Canadian (ESDC, 2021; Bounajm, Beckman, & Thériault, 2014). However, it is important to recognize that not all people need support in these areas or agree with this definition of success. The literature indicates that at minimum, adults are expected to obtain a diversity of skills such as basic skills, digital literacy skills, and professional or soft skills as a means to navigate education or employment challenges (Dunsmore, 2019; ESDC, 2021; Silver, 2022). Rarely does the research focus on different types of skills or success such as emotional skills which can aid in challenges related to parenting or navigating additional concerns such as food or housing security.

SECTION 5 CONTINUED

Research heavily supports that not all youth in care successfully transition to adulthood extending from systemic and systematic historical barriers to which specific communities are often targeted, such as Indigenous communities (Bourassa, 2010; Dunsmore, 2019). Systemic and systematic historical barriers can also be found across child welfare systems in Manitoba and Canada leading to increased bouts of trauma for those accessing the system. Barriers to accessing basic needs of human rights, extend across several areas such as financial, social, and legal concerns, and are further able to influence a person's physical and social readiness, as well as their cognitive and emotional levels which are substantial for human development (Bourassa, 2010; Dunsmore, 2019). Regardless of the nature one is exposed to CFS (fostering, adopted, neither), cognitive and emotional levels are foundational to learning and readiness, however, are known to be exacerbated by experiences such as trauma (Gough & Fuchs, 2010; Santos et al. 2012).

When considering Indigenous histories, current conflicts, and transformations, the term “successful transitions” differs for Indigenous communities. This can also be applied to other communities such as folks with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+, Black and racialized communities, and immigrants or newcomers (Brown et al., 2011; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2021). In advocating for culturally and trauma-informed services and approaches, awareness of the concerns of concepts such as “aging out of care”, “readiness”, or “successful transitions” as being foreign westernized colonial ideologies has grown across Indigenous advocacy groups and academics. For Indigenous communities, skills related to cultural or traditional knowledge are of utmost importance and often include fostering land-based skills which can occur in a range of settings, not all of which are located indoors or in city limitations (Doucet, 2020). Many of these skills are important for self-realization and identity for Indigenous youth and can aid their successful transitions into adulthood (Brown et al., 2011; Doucet, 2020).

SECTION 5 CONTINUED

As colonial concepts, terms like “aging out of care,” “readiness,” or “successful transitions” disregard the sovereignty of “First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations and peoples, their inherent jurisdiction over child and family services, and their approach to raising and caring for children in the community” (Doucet, 2021, p4). Similarly shared across many immigrant diasporas, is it customary for young adults to live in a community manner such as living with parents until marriage or even afterward as a way to support generational living, pass on family or cultural values, and provide respectful support for all aging families (Brown et al., 2011). However, if CFS is limited in its ability to offer reunifications or similar cultural supports to youth who are permanent wards, successful transitions can become hindered (Ahmann, 2017; Best & Blakeslee, 2020). It is important to recognize that colonization has not only created differences in approaches towards defining terms but also access to resources (Bourassa, 2010).

Research obtained from several news media sources shows the ability in supporting diverse approaches in “aging out of care,” “readiness,” or “successful transitions” are hindered by some of the following aspects, although not limited to: inequities with funding of CFS services (Broham, 2019); underrepresentation of social workers with lived experiences (King, 2021); lack of trauma and culturally informed approaches and experts (Treleaven, 2019); privacy limitations in obtaining information with accessing knowledge on family history (Smart, 2021); band councils' conflicts with families or youth leading to unacceptance (Proctor, 2020); stigmatization of foster youth and families (King, 2021); and other structural, systemic, and historical influences challenges experienced both on reserve and off reserve, or for status and non-status, with basic human rights, poverty reduction options, and overall access to services (Treleaven, 2019).

**IMAGE 4: “Skills For Success”
(Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), 2021).**

Adaptability	Your ability to achieve or adjust goals and behaviours when expected or unexpected change occurs, by planning, staying focused, persisting, and overcoming setbacks. For example, we use this skill to change work plans to meet new deadlines, learn how to work with new tools and improve our skills through feedback.	Major changes in society are affecting how you work, live, and learn and require you to constantly adapt to change. Strong adaptability skills will help you deal effectively with change and to learn new skills and behaviours when needed, stay focused on your responsibilities and goals, and not give up when situations are difficult. They will help you stay positive and manage the stress that can come from change in the workplace, community, and your life at home.
Collaboration	Your ability to contribute and support others to achieve a common goal. For example, at work we use this skill to provide meaningful support to team members while completing a project.	Modern workplaces are more diverse, and many jobs require you to work with others from different backgrounds and cultures to complete tasks and solve problems. It is important to be able to work respectfully with people who have different professions, experiences, cultures, and backgrounds. Collaboration skills help you perform better in a team by understanding how to support and value others, manage difficult interactions and contribute to the team’s work. Strong collaboration skills help you build and maintain positive relationships with others at work, in school, and in other parts of your life.
Communication	Your ability to receive, understand, consider, and share information and ideas through speaking, listening, and interacting with others. For example, we use this skill to listen to instructions, serve customers and discuss ideas.	Strong communication skills help you share information in a way that others can clearly understand. You also need strong communication skills to listen to, pay attention to, and understand others. In all jobs, communication skills are important for developing good working relationships with co-workers and clients, including those from different backgrounds and cultures. You also need these skills to work effectively in a team, understand a variety of viewpoints, and to gather and share information while problem solving – whether at work or in your daily life.
Creativity & innovation	Your ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel, unexpected, or challenge existing methods and norms. For example, we use this skill to discover better ways of doing things, develop new products, and deliver services in a new way.	Creativity and innovation skills help you come up with new, unique, or “outside the box” ideas or to approach something differently than in the past, both at work and outside work. A curious mindset that finds inspiration from a broad range of experiences and perspectives helps develop creativity and innovation skills. With strong creativity and innovation skills, you can also support and inspire others to develop their own creativity and innovation.
Digital	Your ability to use digital technology and tools to find, manage, apply, create and share information and content. For example, we use this skill to create spreadsheets, safely use social media, and securely make online purchases.	Digital technology has changed the way you find and share information, solve problems, and communicate with others. Most jobs now use digital skills, and you need them when you apply other skills such as reading, writing and numeracy. Digital skills help you keep up with changing demands in the modern workplace and in your daily life.
Numeracy	Your ability to find, understand, use, and report mathematical information presented through words, numbers, symbols, and graphics. For example, we use this skill to perform calculations, manage budgets, analyze and model data and make estimations.	The modern economy requires numeracy skills that go beyond basic arithmetic. Understanding numbers remains critical to functioning in today’s society. Many jobs require the ability to work with numbers and math. Numeracy skills are also needed in a wide variety of daily contexts, including managing your finances and making sense of statistics in the news.
Problem Solving	Your ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions. Problem solving helps you to address issues, monitor success, and learn from the experience. For example, we use this skill to make hiring decisions, select courses of action and troubleshoot technical failures.	Every day you use information to make decisions, solve problems, and take actions. This can include thinking about different ways to complete a task and choosing the best solution, or deciding what to do first when several activities are competing for your attention. The ability to think, make decisions, and solve problems effectively improves the way you carry out activities, and meet goals and deadlines at work or in other daily life situations. Strong problem-solving skills will help you gather the right information, identify and solve problems, and make better decisions.
Reading	Your ability to find, understand, and use information presented through words, symbols, and images. For example, we use this skill to locate information on forms and drawings, and to read items such as emails, reports, news articles, blog posts and instructions.	Reading helps you to understand and interpret the meaning within the text. Strong reading skills allow you to do your job and to work safely, and efficiently. You use reading skills to learn other skills, for example, by reading online learning resources. Reading is important in day-to-day activities, such as understanding changes in travel advisories and interpreting the important messages in articles.
Writing	Your ability to share information using written words, symbols, and images. For example, we use this skill to fill out forms and applications, and write emails, reports and social media posts.	In today’s world, we require writing skills that are suitable for different situations including digital platforms. Knowing what to write, how much to write, and in which style to write is important. Writing skills ensure your writing is suitable for your purpose, the intended reader, and the context.

SECTION 6: BARRIERS TO READINESS & SUCCESS

Barriers to readiness and success are difficult to summarize, as they depend on aspects like history, resource allocation, funding of programs, services, and the amount or nature of published research. Additionally, no barriers described below are stringently correlated to either readiness or success, as they are not mutually exclusive. Barriers to readiness and success are contextually specific to the individual, family, community, and/or country in question. Some research suggests that even with the range of factors, there are some universal foundational skills related to education and literacy more specifically, both of which are proven to help navigate readiness, leading to greater successes. Literacy is defined as “the skill base that enables people to participate and adapt to change in the workplace, the home, and community life. It provides a foundation for further learning as it is also a driver for sustainable development since it enables greater participation in the labor market; improved child and family health and nutrition; reduces poverty and expands life opportunities” (UNESCO, n.d). Education is defined more specifically as “activities aimed at achieving sufficient levels of literacy, numeracy, and other essential skills” required to qualify for differing types of higher employment, training or education (Silver, 2022: 4).

In interviewing adult learners, Silver (2022) found that in Manitoba not all folks are offered access to these essential skills because the programs are inadequate in meeting the needs of adult students who did not receive “sufficient levels of literacy, numeracy and other essential skills” during grade school. Adult learning centers (ALCs) were organized across Manitoba in the 1990s to meet community needs, as school divisions noticed there was increased interest to expand schooling options past 18 years of age. ALCs often use adult literacy programs to support their students; however, these differ depending on which organization is responding to the needs of their community. Silver (2022) notes that ALCs lack policy and mandates to meet community needs, leading to fragmented and disjointed services which have exacerbated inequities in learning and accessing education.

Similar to CFS with regards to the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth, adult education is overrepresented by Indigenous students. Approximately 45 percent of students who attended ALCs from 2019 to 2020 were Indigenous, and 38 percent of all programs in Manitoba are geared towards Indigenous students. This data is supported by other research. Mendelson (2016) found that “71 percent of Indigenous people aged 20–24 and living on reserve in Manitoba did not have a high school diploma” (Silver, 2022: 12). Here we see the detrimental consequences of historic and ongoing forms of colonization, poverty, and discrimination that have impacted the lives of Indigenous people, outside of CFS (Bourassa, 2010).

SECTION 6 CONTINUED

Silver (2022) notes Indigenous students struggle with learning because of concerns with retention directly extending from intergenerational trauma; therefore, many Indigenous ALCs in Manitoba also include counseling programs to ensure that students are emotionally ready to learn. However, funding for this component is sparse, particularly for northern Manitoba, leading to failures in succeeding while attending programming (Silver, 2022). In an older study from 2006 used by Silver, Indigenous learners were found to be more successful when accessing “holistic and learner-centered approaches which focus on strong social, emotional and practical skill development in a warm, highly personalized and non-hierarchical learning environment.” (Silver, 2022: 14).

Another population that utilizes ALCs is newcomers. However, both Indigenous and newcomer students report feeling unsupported when attending school by the government when on social assistance, as employment can overlap with education. However, many students can work and attend school without consequences. Without the opportunity to attend school, many are unable to access all areas of the labor market, leading to low-ranking and paying positions (Silver, 2022). Many of these findings are key areas to consider in CFS or specifically when a youth ages out of the system. Studies show that when parents are in school or have higher education and employment, children also do better in school because children learn from their parents or mentors. However, when they do not have regular access to these relationships due to displacement, youth are unable to learn important skills or broaden their understanding of society as quickly as those who do have these relationships (Silver, 2022).

Overall, Silver (2022) offers us a foundation for understanding how CFS systems need to work alongside these other social services and systems, like ALCs, to ensure that children and youth’s well-being and welfare are at the front of the opportunities. Silver (2022) also brings attention to the overlap between identity, poverty, opportunity (education and employment), and success. Children and youth who are not successful during kindergarten through grade 12 years are more likely to experience poverty in adulthood because of limitations in opportunities that can last for generations. The relationship between education and CFS is supported by a wealth of data, revealing that a large portion of foster children experience one of the following: special education, high rate of absenteeism, expulsion, and suspension, low learning attainment, less likely to graduate, and/or more likely to repeat a grade (Brownell et al. 2010: 807). Additional research shows that family wealth and privileged contribute significantly to the reduction of exposure to these areas, revealing a complexity with how CFS systems operate for youth aging out of the system or permanent wards generally, as they are unable to access family wealth and privileges (Brownell et al., 2015).

SECTION 7: A HOPEFUL FUTURE FORWARD

Significant changes to public systems are planned or are currently underway across Manitoba due to tireless advocacy efforts. Several recommendations, along with government and community agreements to support innovations, have grown out of these calls for action to review and transform the child welfare state and services in Manitoba. Some hopeful and profound changes have resulted in Manitoba extending from the following efforts/events detailed below. This next section serves as a foundation for ways to move forward as a community to better support youth aging out of care. The information below offers avenues for youth and their loved ones to voice their concerns and make much-needed changes to government-funded and mandated services.

Tracia's Trust: Tracia Owen passed away in 2005 at 14 years of age due to suicide, after being exposed to trauma resulting from failures to access safe and adequate resources while under CFS care (the Government of Manitoba, 2019). Owen, was sexually exploited, lived with trauma, and multiple addictions as a result of being removed from her parent's care, and had lived in over 60 group homes. Various programs, reports, recommendations, and strategies have been produced in memory of Owen, as they address a series of conflicts such as "online exploitation and trafficking, additional supports for adults who aged out of the child welfare system and are at risk of exploitation, a substance abuse treatment model with emphasis on methamphetamine, a reform of specialized placements and resources to better support exploited youth by addressing factors such as addictions and mental health and ongoing collaboration with urban and rural stakeholders" (Billeck, 2019; the Government of Manitoba, 2019).

Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry: Phoenix Sinclair was removed from her parents' care for abuse and neglect, however, was returned to her parents at the age of 5 years which resulted in her death in 2005 (the Government of Manitoba, 2015). Her parents, both aged out of the child welfare system without support while in care or upon aging out which led to outcomes that influenced their parenting (The Canadian Press, 2013). In the Sinclair inquiry, significant social conflicts were highlighted as being common for youth in care and former youth in care, such as inadequate access to resources and services such as education, addiction services, mental health providers, secure housing, and stable employment. Additionally, exposure to sexual exploitation and criminal justice systems was highlighted as well. In 2011, an investigation was conducted on CFS service and support leading to a report and recommendations to better protect Manitoba children (The Canadian Press, 2013; the Government of Manitoba, 2015).

Jordan's Principle: Jordan River Anderson was born in 1999 with multiple disabilities leading to his long-term care with the government. As a result of provincial and federal payment disputes, colonialism, and historical land and social conflicts, Indigenous children have not always had the same access to services as other non-Indigenous children (Indigenous Services Canada, 2019). In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) determined inadequate resources and service based on government disputes, is discriminatory towards Indigenous communities, which further established an External Appeals Committee to review issues related to health, social, and education access and need. Jordan's Principle now helps to ensure all Indigenous children living in Canada can access the supports, services, and tools required to succeed as non-Indigenous children/communities do (Government of Canada, 2022).

Bill C-92: In 2020, the Federal Government passed an Act regarding ensuring there is culturally based equity for children and families, known as Bill C-92 (ISC, 2019). This act ensures that Indigenous peoples across Canada gain legal rights and public recognition of their jurisdiction over child and family services. In 2022, the the Government of Manitoba proposed changes to the CFS Act to help with the transition towards Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGB) as established under Bill-C-92 (The the Government of Manitoba, 2022). Extending from Bill C-92 and Jordan's Principle, efforts have been made to ensure that funding allocations for IGBs are adequate and equitable for all who utilize the services offered. In Manitoba, CFS agencies started a provincial-wide lawsuit against the provincial government to investigate the misuse, retraction, and withholding of over \$334 million in funds for Indigenous families (Petz, 2022). Children's Special Allowance was created by the Federal Government to ensure Indigenous children in care received the same funding that other children did receive through the Canada Child Benefit and Child Disability Benefit. However, as a result of Provincial oversight conflicts arose with the funding leading to increased vulnerabilities and human rights conflicts extending from the loss of funds. The Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench found that the government actions "disproportionately impacted Indigenous children in care living off reserve" and detrimentally impacted the funding opportunities to support youth aging out of care, further contributing to the risk of exposure to homelessness and the criminal justice system (Petz, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This review includes various types of literature, sources, and data both from academic and non-academic sources; however, is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the topics of aging out of care or adult readiness due to the lack of data currently available on Manitoba. Instead, it serves as general guidance for establishing further research, as it reveals key patterns raised by a range of experts who are knowledgeable on issues affecting Canadian youth when aging out of or exiting from the child welfare system, including but not limited to academics, advocates, and youth with lived experience.

Overall, the findings suggest there is a growing consensus from parties such as government officials, child welfare advocates, former foster youth and families, Indigenous leaders, and academics that there is a need to address the detrimental, and somewhat hidden reality, in which youth are unable to be fully protected under laws, policy, or mandates and when receiving CFS services. Along with this consensus, experts conclude there needs to be improved transparency of the system's benefits and failures, and transparency in regards to the outcomes of services to ensure human rights are protected and child welfare is at the forefront even long after the youth has ended their services with CFS (either by choice or force). Calls for action include, but are not limited to, increases and improvements to the following areas: data collection, research, policy analysis, funding, and training.

iii.

TOOLKITS

TOOLKITS

Across Canada, there have been previous models for research around transitions and outcomes. The few Canadian-wide or provincially specific research projects which have been conducted by folks with lived care experience are offered below. The results of this research have produced several important frameworks which one can review to directly support youth aging out of care, and indirectly youth using CFS services by overall improving the system. Some examples are:

- No. 01 – Fostering Change Report: Opportunities in Transition**
- No. 02 – A Long Road Paved with Solutions: ‘Aging out of care reports in Canada**
- No. 03 – Child Welfare League’s Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood**
- No. 04 – U.S. Department of Education, Foster Youth Transition Toolkit**
- No. 05 – Canadian Observatory on Homelessness: Youth Employment Toolkit**

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