VOICES FROM FORMER YOUTH IN CARE

YOUTH IN CARE CHRONICLES

Presented by Cody Murrell, BSW, RSW
on behalf of the YCC Editorial Team:
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Theresa Tucker-Wright, and Erin Leveque
I would like to respectfully acknowledge that I am located on Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territories; the traditional gathering places for diverse Indigenous peoples where the footsteps of the Blackfoot Confederacy - Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika - the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuu T’ina Nation, and the Métis People of Alberta have remained imbedded in these lands for generations. This includes the Métis Settlements and the Six Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands and continue to influence our vibrant community.
DISCLAIMER AND PROCEEDS

The ideas, views, and opinions in this book and presentation are those of the contributors and do not represent the views of the Government of Alberta or Alberta’s Children’s Services. Neither the Government of Alberta nor Alberta’s Children’s Services provided any information in relation to the contents of this book.

All proceeds from the sales of the Youth in Care Chronicles will be invested in future projects to benefit youth in care.
OVERVIEW

WHAT WE’LL DISCUSS

- An overview and history of the Youth in Care Chronicles book
- The experiences of youth in care and the unique challenges they face
- An overview of the themes identified from the former youth in care’s stories that impact professional social work practice through the book’s learning guide
- Lessons learned along the way about community organizing and grassroots publishing
- Discussion and questions
YOUTH IN CARE CHRONICLES

REFLECTIONS ON GROWING UP IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

What is it?
The Youth in Care Chronicles shares the voices of former youth in care, connects lived experience to practice, and raises awareness of the real experiences of growing up in care.

Why is this important?
Youth in care face many social issues throughout their lives that intersect with all areas of social work. Understanding their experiences will help to support positive outcomes for this population.
YOUTH IN CARE CHRONICLES HISTORY
FROM BIG DREAMS TO BIG IMPACT

Youth Self-Advocacy Panels
Panel fatigue, sharing emotional stories repeatedly, and frequent asks to share at conferences demonstrated that this work, though important and meaningful, would be unsustainable.

Service to Humanity, Social Justice, and Self-Determination
Acting within our CASW social work values and wanting to respond to the ask from the former youth in care to share their stories in a sustainable way that still supported their well-being, we began to seek a way to permanently share these important stories.

Youth in Care Chronicles and Beyond
Now with a book, the former youth in care can share their stories on a broader scale, further empowering this group of young adults and many others who share the same experiences as a current or former youth in care.
CHILD WELFARE IN CANADA

- What is child welfare in Canada and how does it vary by province/territory?
- What do child welfare authorities do?
- When do children and youth come into care?
IN PERSPECTIVE...

52% children and youth in care in Canada are Indigenous, despite representing 7% of the population.

1 in 6 endangered runaways are likely trafficked for sex.

57% of youth overall and 73% of youth who became homeless before the age of 16 reported being involved in child welfare services.

Youth in care are three to four times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population.

16,210 Albertan children and youth received child intervention services in 2019.

Youth in care with intellectual disabilities were 46% less likely to exit foster care than their peers without disabilities.

Youth in care are five times more likely to experience anxiety.

Youth in care are 7 times more likely to experience depression.

47% of youth in care completed high school compared to 84% of their peers in the general population between 2012-2013 in B.C.

54% of the children and youth who had died by suicide received welfare services in the year prior.
CODY MURRELL
BSW, RSW, FORMER YOUTH IN CARE

• Being a contributor and part of the editorial team

• Cody’s personal journey as a youth in care
YCC LEARNING GUIDE
CONNECTING THE VOICES FROM FORMER YOUTH IN CARE TO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

PURPOSE
This learning guide was set out to be a roadmap for new workers in the field, upcoming students, or seasoned professionals seeking a fresh look on child welfare. Five themes from the stories were discussed between the editorial team to share and reflect on the ways we can better our practice as social workers.

THEMES
The five themes that were determined from the Youth in Care Chronicles include: relationships, advocacy, connections, transitions, and compassion. To inform best practice for work with youth in care, both the perspective of professionals and the voices of the former youth in care themselves are represented in these themes.

REFLECTIONS
Social work education and professional growth often involves deeply reflective discussion to investigate the influences acting upon the populations we work with. This learning guide is simply a guide, but the real work is done through your own professional, ethical, and critical reflection on your social work practice.
WHAT DO THE PROFESSIONALS SAY?
Strengths-based, trauma-informed, and harm reduction practice approaches are key to working with youth in care. It is important to understand the youth's histories to understand their responses to stressors, and to further strengthen a positive relationship with them.

WHAT DO THE YOUTH SAY?
Youth want child welfare workers to know that they are still human beings with hopes, dreams, fears, and needs even after the worker's shift has ended. They want to be treated as people and not as a problem.

PRACTICE REFLECTIONS
What have been the most meaningful relationships in my life? What made them meaningful and how can I model that for the youth I am working with?
ADVOCACY

WHAT DO THE PROFESSIONALS SAY?
Workers should advocate for the youth’s goals and help to empower youth to advocate for themselves. Embrace opportunities to support and help youth develop effective advocacy skills as they will need them to be successful.

WHAT DO THE YOUTH SAY?
Many workers remained passive during emotional and traumatic apprehensions, and the youth shared that they need worker's to be on their side, to be active, and to speak up for the youth’s autonomy to make decisions for themselves.

PRACTICE REFLECTIONS
Why is advocacy important and how can I help youth in care build this skill?
WHAT DO THE PROFESSIONALS SAY?
As a worker, we are situated to help facilitate connections for youth to their culture, family, resources, and in supporting the youth to build safe networks. This means that we need to be aware of intergenerational trauma, colonization, local resources, and know of who we can reach out to as workers when we don’t have the answers.

WHAT DO THE YOUTH SAY?
Many of the youth talked about the need to have long term connections with workers, family members, agency supports, etc. So much in their young lives are already temporary, and the need for permanency is imperative.

PRACTICE REFLECTIONS
How do I learn more about what connections (resources or relationships) that the youth wants or needs in their life?
WHAT DO THE PROFESSIONALS SAY?
Transitions are stressful at every age, and youth need both the space to make their own decisions, and the continued support before, during, and after to experience successful transitions. Transitions may include changing homes, workers, starting work or school, etc.

WHAT DO THE YOUTH SAY?
Many of the youth described needing workers to be more involved during and after apprehensions to work through the change and emotions. Youth need more of a worker’s time during transitions, not less.

PRACTICE REFLECTIONS
Thinking back to a time when you experienced a big change or transition in your life, what helped you to be brave and successfully make it through this? What from your own experience could be applied to your work with a youth experiencing a big change or transition?
WHAT DO THE PROFESSIONALS SAY?
Overall, an important aspect of compassion is to be intentional and honest with the youth. If you don't know what to do next or you have made a mistake, it is important to acknowledge, apologize, and talk about it.

WHAT DO THE YOUTH SAY?
Youth want professionals to know that they are more than just labels, they have interests and dreams that need to be nurtured. Small acts of kindness like going out for food after a hard day can have a profound impact.

PRACTICE REFLECTIONS
What would the youth you are support say about how you interact with them? Would they say you care about them and if not, what could you do to help them feel that you care about them?
LESSONS LEARNED

Community organizing, advocacy, and grassroots publishing has come with many challenges, triumphs, and knowledge for how to work through this process with more insight for upcoming projects.
Working with Contributors

INTERVIEWS

CHECK-INS

DRAFTS
PUBLISHING: What is the Best Option?

- What is the best option for publishing?

- What are the factors to consider in making the decision about how and where to publish?

- What did we learn about self-publishing?
Our team was very diverse in experiences, networks, perceptions and strengths, which made this project well rounded and possible. Despite our differences, our common goal was the glue that kept everyone focused and passionate.

Some of the team members were current employees of programs supporting youth in care and navigating the conflict of interest and impacts of this dual role was important to work through intentionally.

As a mostly unfunded project, there were expenses to keep in mind. This including the cost of the contributor copies, which as a team we decided to pay for and provide to all the contributors as a way to thank and honor them.

We worked on this project outside of work hours, held weekly meetings, and had often very tight turnarounds. It was important to check-in, support, and communicate with one another.

The skills and experience varied across the team including publishing history, technical backgrounds, and research backgrounds. Knowing each person’s strength and networks contributed to the overall project greatly.
ADAPTING AND BEING FLEXIBLE

This project speaks to the importance of shifting, learning, and evolving when there is something worth doing. We adapted from unsustainable panels to a permanent piece of literature that can be used for years to come.

IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO NOT GIVE UP.
THE BOOK NOW: IMPACT AND FEEDBACK

- There has been over 300 books sold
- We have helped spread the word organically through posting on social media, reaching out to our networks and word of mouth
- We have been lucky enough to receive some media interest and have completed interviews, (with CBC, UToday, 770 CHQR Radio, etc.) as well as the opportunity to participate in this webinar
- There has been some implementation of the book in university-level social work courses
- There has been lots feedback and impacts after the book was published, which is perhaps an additional lesson learned and something to consider
QUESTIONS OR FEEDBACK?
DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

What is your greatest takeaway or learning from this presentation and what will you incorporate into your own practice?
DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

How might sharing lived experiences impact professional social work practice?
DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

What key messages do you hear from youth in care in your own practice?
CONTACT US
FOR QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND MORE INFO

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If you know someone who may be interested in participating in future related projects, we would love to hear from them! Please contact Penny.

To purchase: https://www.amazon.ca/YOUTH-CARE-CHRONICLES-Reflections-Growing-ebook/dp/B08NHJG82W
References


