

Improving the Post-Secondary Educational Outcomes of Former Youth in Care:
A Discussion with Former Youth in Care in British Columbia

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, University of the Fraser Valley, 2011

Thesis-Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the School of Public Administration

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Abstract

Post-secondary education is a key determinant of long term well-being, social inclusion and the foundation of self-sufficiency for former youth in care (FYIC). However, many children and youth who grow up in government care face a range of challenges that prevent them from accessing and successfully completing post-secondary education. Research indicates that while many FYIC aspire to attend post-secondary, only a small proportion do. Of those who do access it, very few complete their intended programs. The primary objective of this study is to examine what types of supports FYIC perceive as being necessary for successful post-secondary educational outcomes. Research indicates that when supported by strong practices and policies, the completion of post-secondary can support youth in overcoming immensely challenging experiences and moving forward towards stability and success.

SEARCH TERMS: former youth in care, educational outcomes, post-secondary, supports

Executive Summary

Post-secondary education is a key determinant of long term well-being, social inclusion and the foundation of self-sufficiency for former youth in care (FYIC). Research indicates that a lack of post-secondary education not only limits access to meaningful employment opportunities, but can also have broad societal implications. Both directly and indirectly, lack of post-secondary educational attainment impacts expenditures on health, social services, criminality, and economic productivity.

However, many children and youth who grow up in government care face a range of challenges that prevent them from accessing and successfully completing post-secondary education. Research indicates that while many FYIC aspire to attend post-secondary, only a small proportion do. Of those who do access it, very few complete their intended programs. Some of the barriers that prevent successful completion of post-secondary include:

- Limited financial resources;
- Mental health challenges;
- Poor academic readiness;
- Absence of steady family, social, and peer support; and
- Lack of preparation for adulthood upon transition out of government care.

While services and supports to help FYIC graduate from high school and access post-secondary are necessary, *continued* supports are essential for ensuring that the investment made in their post-secondary education yields fruitful results - namely, completion of their intended programs. In the last few years, the government of British Columbia (BC) has invested in a variety of young adult services that support youth to take on adult responsibilities, gain the skills necessary for independence and pursue post-secondary education. Many of these programs are designed for youth and young adults aged 16-24 and encourage them to find employment, attend support and rehabilitation programs, or pursue education.

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that increase post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC. This was accomplished through an extensive literature review that identified the personal characteristics of academically resilient FYIC as well as the external factors that promote access to and retention in post-secondary education. The second portion of this research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, FYIC were invited to participate in a comprehensive online survey. Upon the analysis of phase one results, the findings were further explored using open-ended key informant interviews. Cumulatively, the literature review and the survey/interviews addressed the following two questions:

1. How can the post-secondary completion rates for former youth in care be increased?
2. What types of supports do former youth in care in British Columbia view as being important for success in their post-secondary educational outcomes?

In total, 43 FYIC (BC) participated in the online survey and five participated in key informant interviews. Nearly three quarters of participants identified as female (71.4%), a quarter identified as male (23.8%), and two identified as transgendered (4.8%). Their ages ranged from 19-61, with an average age of 28 and a median age of 24. The three most common ethnicities were: Caucasian (n=23), Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit, Metis) (n=14) and East Asian (n=3). Most students were pursuing a degree in a post-secondary institution and the three most represented institutions were the University of Victoria, Langara College and Vancouver Island University.

For the online survey results, three types of statistical tests were used to assess relationships between different variables: *Chi-Square Test*, *Independent Sample T-test*, and *Bi-variate Correlation*. All results were interpreted using an alpha of 0.05. This means that for statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) there was only a 5% chance that the results occurred by random chance alone. Highlights from the online survey include:

- Roughly half of the students came into Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) care between the ages of eleven and fifteen, and the average years spent in care was a little over seven and a half years.
- While about half of participants had three or less placement changes while in care, about a quarter had seven or more. The fewer placement changes a student had while in high school, the more likely they were to view their transition out of care as positive.
- Out of a list of eight types of supports available, on average, students only accessed two. A very high proportion of students did not know supports from MCFD existed to attend post-secondary.
- Aboriginal students who had cultural support were significantly more likely to report feeling academically prepared to attend post-secondary.
- The most commonly accessed supports on campus were financial aid (i.e. scholarships, bursaries), housing support, and mental health support. Students who felt that they had support with finding housing before leaving care were significantly more likely to access supports on campus.
- Almost half (42.3%) of the students reported having a mental health condition (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety). Of these students, 60.7% did not attempt to get help within the last 12 months.
- Students who had social supports and felt connected to their campus were more likely to report a positive perception of their current mental health.
- Students with high stress scores, low resilience scores and a mental health diagnosis were more likely to temporarily withdraw at least once from post-secondary.
- Students who had sufficient support with financial management were more likely to report having had cultural support; a positive transition out of care; finding housing; no mental health condition; and lower stress scores.
- There was a strong correlation between the resilience and stress scores of students. Students with high resilience reported lower stress and a positive perception of current mental health.

Upon the analysis of the surveys, 60-90 minute key informant interviews were conducted with five participants. Participants were given the opportunity to explore what worked for them, what could have been better, and how they think post-secondary completion rates of FYIC can be improved in BC. Highlights from the interviews include:

- All participants displayed high levels of resilience. Students were confident, resourceful, problem-solvers and held beliefs that their success depended on them, suggesting an internal locus of control. Additionally, these students were motivated and driven by personal values, hard work and dedication.
- When asked “what worked” for them and promoted their ability to succeed in post-secondary, students reported the presence of social supports; interaction with engaged faculty and staff at post-secondary; and financial supports such as Agreements with Young Adults (AYA) and the Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAFF).
- On the other hand, the things that “could have been better” included receiving more support with financial, time, and stress management before leaving care and having access to trauma-informed mental health supports on campus.
- Finally, students were asked to identify what they think FYIC need to succeed in post-secondary education, and their answers suggested that more attention should be given to their success before they leave care.
- To succeed in post-secondary FYIC need quality foster placements while in care; better transition planning; engaged social workers; more information about the supports and resources available to them before they leave care; greater flexibility in the eligibility criteria for major financial supports like AYA and YEAFF; a sense of community on campus; opportunities for mentorship; and an awareness on campus about the unique challenges FYIC face.

In both the survey as well as in interviews, participants were directly and indirectly asked to make recommendations to MCFD and their post-secondary institutions about what would promote better post-secondary educational outcomes for future youth in care. Their recommendations were then articulated and grounded in what the literature identified as promoting positive post-secondary outcomes for FYIC. A total of 22 recommendations are made to MCFD and post-secondary institutions. The critical ones include:

- Placing priority on permanency and placement stability for children and youth in care.
- Connecting Aboriginal children and youth to their communities, cultures, and traditions.
- Strengthening policy/practice guidelines and training for social workers regarding transition planning.
- Connecting youth to supports and resources for post-secondary before they age out of care.
- Creating more flexibility in eligibility criteria for major supports like AYA and YEAFF.

- Expanding and promoting existing programs that bolster the social supports of FYIC with caring adults (i.e. Mentoring programs and Youth Transition Conferences).
- Creating specialized campus support programs that provide formal and informal support to FYIC and promote a sense of community.
- Providing more mental health supports on campus that are trauma informed.
- Providing staff at post-secondary institutions with professional development about the unique challenges faced by FYIC.
- Supporting the development of more academic research on improving the adult outcomes of FYIC in BC.

Given that youth transitions are a significant focus of MCFD's 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, it is strongly recommended that FYIC have a voice in informing the development of policies and services that directly affect them, or other youth like them. Post-secondary institutions can also increase retention in their programs by listening to the voices of students and partnering with them to co-create specialized campus support programs that fit the unique needs of FYIC at each respective institution.

Research indicates that when supported by strong practices and policies, the completion of post-secondary education can support youth in overcoming immensely challenging experiences and moving forward towards stability and success. Additionally, promoting their post-secondary educational attainment can also serve as a means of preventing their future conflict with other social systems and ensuring that they have every chance to experience better employment outcomes, professional success, personal fulfillment and engagement in civic life. Supporting FYIC to succeed in post-secondary education will ensure that as a society we do our part in the succession planning that will undoubtedly impact FYIC as individuals and also our collective humanity.

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Glossary

Aging Out – A term frequently used to describe a youth who is no longer in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) or Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) because he/she reached his/her 19th birthday. This is sometimes also referred to as “transitioning out of care.”

AgedOut.com – Introduced by MCFD in June 2015, AgedOut.com is an online one-site where former youth in care (FYIC) can find resources that meet their needs and connect with online and in-person supports. It provides up to date access of services available in BC. Beyond providing life-skills, it also gives FYIC a chance to earn real monetary rewards by completing quests in various domains including: education, health and wellness, housing, ID needs, money/income and personal life.

Agreement with Young Adults (AYA) – An MCFD program that supports young people aged 19-24 transitioning out of care and into adulthood. It provides financial assistance for living expenses while a FYIC participates in educational, vocational or rehabilitation programs. A youth may be eligible to enter into AYA at the age of 19 and to receive services and financial assistance if their legal status included a Continuing Custody Order or a Youth Agreement while in care. Typically, these agreements last 6 months; however, the total term of the agreements may not exceed 24 months, and the youth can only access them up until their 24th birthday (MCFD, 2015).

Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) – Legislation enacted in 1996 that governs child protection in BC.

Continuing Custody Order – While many children only come into care for a brief period of time, the Ministry’s relationship with children under a Continuing Custody Order is longer-term in nature, and the government is the legal guardian of the child.

Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) – Through delegation agreements, the Provincial Director of Child Protection (the Director) gives authority to Aboriginal agencies, and their employees, to undertake administration of all or parts of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA). The amount of responsibility undertaken by each agency is the result of negotiations between the ministry and the Aboriginal community served by the agency, and the level of delegation provided by the Director.

Former Youth in Care (FYIC) – An acronym used in this report for “former youth in care” or a young person who has spent time in the care of the government in BC.

Independent Living Program – initiatives designed to provide young people leaving care with skills (i.e. budgeting, cooking, life skills) that will limit their disadvantage and aid in their transition to adulthood.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) – A documented plan developed for a student with special needs that summarizes and records the individualization of a student’s education program.

Kinnections Mentoring Program – A program for youth aged 15-19 in care who are in a Continuing Custody Order or on a Youth Agreement as they transition into adulthood and beyond. The program is available in several communities across the Lower Mainland. Referrals can be made by anyone: a social worker, a foster parent, and most importantly, a youth.

Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) – is the mandated child welfare service provider in BC. There are currently approximately 8000 children in MCFD's care; approximately 700 transition out of care each year. The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCS Act) is the legislation that mandates child welfare services in BC.

Post-Secondary Education: usually any type of education beyond a high school diploma. Post-secondary education is offered by colleges, universities, vocational schools and any other educational facilities that provide an academic degree, diploma or certificate.

STRIVE – A new \$250,000, 18-month pilot program launched by MCFD and the YWCA Metro Vancouver to help youth who are transitioning out of government care to gain the life and work skills they need to become independent. Up to 10 youth per cycle receive hands-on guidance in life skills like financial literacy, time management, decision-making and problem solving that are key to living independently. Launched in February 2014, the STRIVE pilot operates six times, for 12-week periods.

Tuition Waiver – In response to a challenge by BC's Representative for Children and Youth to provide FYIC with tuition waivers, 11 post-secondary institutions have accepted. Tuition waivers are programs that allow FYIC to attend publicly funded higher education by waiving tuition and fees. To access these funds, students must meet the institutions' eligibility criteria, which vary from school to school.

Youth Agreement – Youth aged 16 and 18 may be eligible for a Youth Agreement with MCFD if they experience a significant adverse condition such as homelessness, behavioural or mental disorders, severe substance abuse or sexual exploitation *and* they cannot live with their family *and* government care is not the best option. The purpose of the agreement is to help youth gain independence, return to school, or gain work experience and life skills.

Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEOF) – YEOF is a \$5,500 bursary to assist with the costs of attending post-secondary institutions, including tuition and books, and is administered in partnership between the Victoria Foundation, the Ministry of Advanced Education and MCFD. This bursary is available to former youth in permanent care (Continuing Custody Order) between 19 and 23 years of age who are attending university, college, a university-college, an institute, or a designated private school.

Youth Transition Conferencing (YTC) – MCFD's Youth Transition Conferences stem from the family group conferencing practices (FGC). It is a process designed to promote cooperative planning and decision-making. YTCs are a youth-driven process designed to assist youth in creating a transition plan while simultaneously bolstering their social supports. It is a voluntary process and is intended to give youth a voice, and to provide another set of tools to assist them in making their transition to adulthood.

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Dedication

Joel Czeck, you inspire me to fly. Thank-you for your love, encouragement and support throughout this season and for always reminding me that it's going to be worth it! You are my rock and the little voice that always whispers, "*You've got this.*"

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I also want to acknowledge and thank my dedicated supervisory committee – Jerry McHale, QC, Dr. Gord Miller and Michelle Wywrot, MA. Your deep knowledge of academia and government has been instrumental in helping me find the relevant applications of my research. I am confident that outcomes for youth in care in BC will improve because of champions like you!

This study would not have been possible without the subject matter expertise and valuable time of: April Feduniw, Chelsea Turpin, Diana Moffatt, Emma Mason, Erin Wilkinson, Evelyn Kalman, John Green, Kim Danderfer, Liz Snell, Lori Pruce, Melissa Penner, Michelle Peterson, Monica Andrei, Nozomi Franco Cea, Sobhana Daniel, Tabitha Foulkes, Vanessa Dueck, and Wendy Cohen.

Last, but not least, I want to thank each and every former youth in care who took the time to participate in this study. I have been so inspired speaking with you and learning about your journeys. I consider it such a privilege that you entrusted me with your stories.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Why Post-Secondary Education Matters

Education is a key determinant of long term well-being and social inclusion and the foundation of self-sufficiency (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Jackson & Cameron, 2012). An individual's educational attainment is one of the most important determinants of health, employment, income, and housing stability (Levin, Belfield, Meunnig, & Rouse, 2007; Jones, 2014; Winkleby, Jatulis, Frank & Fortmann, 1992). Both directly and indirectly, lack of educational attainment has enormous fiscal implications in terms of expenditures on health, social services and programs, employment, criminality, and economic productivity (Hankivsky, 2008).

By 2022, over one million new job openings will emerge in BC, and over three quarters (78%) of these jobs will require post-secondary education (BC Ministry of Advanced Education Annual Service Plan Report, 2014/15). To prepare FYIC and ensure their ability to reach personal fulfillment and contribute meaningfully to society, finding solutions that promote the attainment of post-secondary education must be on the agendas of policy makers, child welfare practitioners, other professionals and society at large.

Post-Secondary Educational Trends in the General Population

In the general population, of the 84% of students who graduated high school, about 77% attended post-secondary within ten years. Nearly half (47%) completed some post-secondary, and approximately a quarter (23%) completed a bachelor's degree within ten years of graduating from high school (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2015). However, a discussion of post-secondary educational outcomes is not complete without consideration of the Aboriginal perspective.

The Ministry of Advanced Education (2013) reports that about 41% of Aboriginal students complete high school and transition to post-secondary education within five years (versus 54% in the general population). In 2011/2012 a little over 20% of Aboriginal students were enrolled in a bachelor's program (versus 37% in the general population). Preston (2008) notes that by age 25-44, about 39% of Aboriginal individuals obtain a post-secondary credential, compared to 53% in the general population.

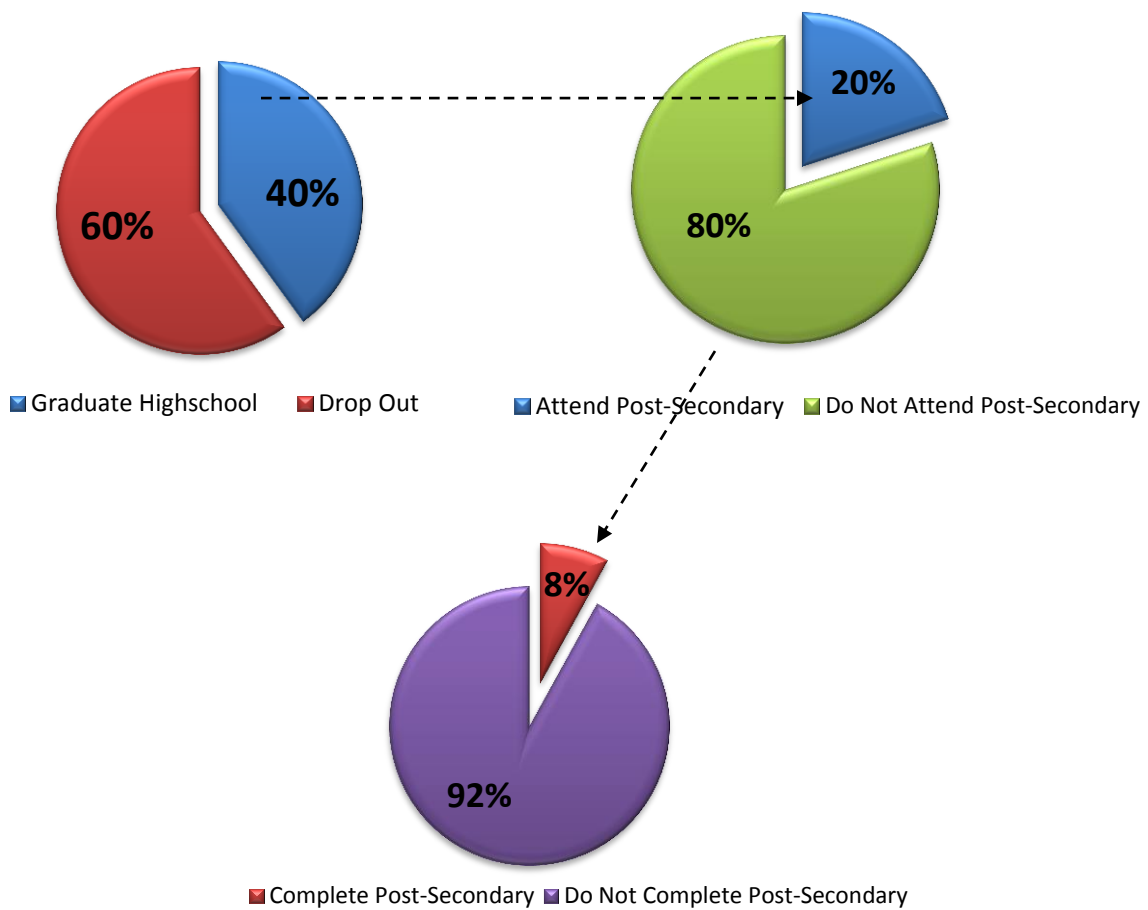
Post-Secondary Educational Trends for Former Youth in Care (FYIC)

In Canada each province administers its own child welfare system and there is no national database that systematically collects outcome data on FYIC. Similarly, BC has no publicly available post-secondary outcome data for FYIC. However, we do know that in BC, about 1,000¹ young adults transition out of government care each year (MCFD, 2014). In 2014, 47% FYIC graduated from high school before the age of 19, in contrast to 84% in the general population (MCFD 2015/16-2017/18 Service Plan, 2015; BC Ministry of Education (EDUC), 2014).

¹ 700 youth are on a Continuing Custody Agreement and 300 are on a Youth Agreement when they leave care.

While it is difficult to determine how many FYIC who attend post-secondary complete their studies, it is possible to draw conclusions using data from other comparable jurisdictions. As seen in Figure 1, in the USA, researchers cite that generally about 25-50% of FYIC graduate from high school, compared to 70% of the general population. Of the 25-50% who graduate, 20% apply and are accepted to a post-secondary institutions, and of that 20%, only 1-8% graduate (Casey Family Programs, 2014; Courtney, Dworsky, Lee & Raap, 2010; Harris, Jackson, O'Brien & Pecora, 2009, 2012; Jones, 2013; Salazar, 2012, 2013).

Figure 1: Educational Attainment of FYIC (USA Data)



Barriers Preventing Successful Completion of Post-Secondary

Some of the barriers that prevent FYIC from succeeding in higher education include:

- Limited financial resources;
- Mental health challenges;
- Poor academic readiness;
- Absence of steady family/social/peer support; and
- Lack of preparation for adulthood upon transition out of care.

The lack of preparation for independence, coupled with their low educational attainment, often translates to a variety of social problems such as homelessness, unemployment, over-reliance on the welfare system, mental health issues, substance abuse, early parenthood, and lack of healthcare (Jones, 2011; Tweedle, 2005; Vancouver Foundation, 2013). Furthermore, a high proportion of FYIC are of Aboriginal heritage, which has associated challenges. For Aboriginal FYIC, post-secondary enrolment and completion barriers are not isolated problems, but a pattern of inter-related conditions. Preston (2008) states that aside from the mistrust bred by a history of colonialism, additional barriers for Aboriginal students include:

- Geographical isolation;
- Learning styles;
- Teaching styles at post-secondary institutions;
- Language and communication modes;
- Cultural patterns; and
- Intergenerational residential school trauma.

These factors vary greatly from the traditional pedagogy of Aboriginal peoples. When considering that more than 50% of the foster care population identify as Aboriginal, increasing their post-secondary educational outcomes becomes an even more pressing issue that requires the commitment of all levels of government (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2013; MCFD, 2015; Preston, 2008). In BC, the oversight body for child welfare, the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) has also studied the issue of youth transitions, which have enhanced the ability of FYIC to access post-secondary.

While many FYIC aspire to attend post-secondary, very few who do attend complete their intended programs. While services and supports to help FYIC graduate from high school and access post-secondary are necessary, *continued* supports are essential for ensuring that the investment made in their post-secondary education yields fruitful results - namely, completion of their intended programs. Given that significant amounts of resources are allocated to increase the educational outcomes of FYIC, a study which explores the receptivity, utilization and perceived effectiveness of supports from the youth's perspective is beneficial for the formulation of policies, services, and supports that will further advance this issue in an inclusive and evidence-based way.

Background

In BC the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has responsibility for child welfare and youth legally become adults, or *age out* of care, when they turn 19. Services are provided through regional ministry offices in 13 service delivery areas, or through one of 23 Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAA) who have signed agreements with MCFD (MCFD, 2014). However, for many young people leaving government care, the exciting experience of turning 19 can be overshadowed by anxiety as the comforts, supports, and securities of adolescence sometimes disappear. Though the experience of being in care is not always positive for children and youth, it does usually provide for their basic needs.

Unlike many young adults in the general population who sometimes experiment with living independently, FYIC cannot always rely on returning to the proverbial ‘nest’ if the challenges of adulthood became overwhelming (Jones 2014; Rogers, 2011). Fortunately, many governments are acknowledging that withdrawing support from young adults who may not be ready for this transition can have devastating effects (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta, 2013, p. 7; Jones, 2014). In fact, MCFD has committed to improve the outcomes of youth aging out of care. One of the central goals of the MCFD 2015-2018 Service Plan is to ensure that youth and young adults are prepared for adulthood. The Ministry will do this by:

1. Enhancing planning and preparation for youth transitions;
2. Establishing a Provincial Director’s Youth Advisory Council;
3. Exploring the option of extending availability of post-majority services and supports by two years; and
4. Mapping and coordinating services for youth to understand the current state and identify gaps in services (MCFD, 2014).

In the last few years, the BC government has also invested in young adult services that support youth to take on adult responsibilities, gain the skills necessary for independence and pursue post-secondary education. These programs include, but are not limited to:

- AgedOut.Com;
- Agreements with Young Adults (AYA);
- Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAF);
- Youth Transition Conferences (YTC); and
- Independent Living Programs (ILP).

Many of these programs are designed for youth and young adults aged 16-24 and encourage them to find employment, attend rehabilitation programs, or pursue education. A full description of these programs is available in the glossary section of this report. In the last three years post-secondary institutions and private sector organizations have also introduced financial resources to support the post-secondary educational attainment of FYIC. In response to a challenge by the RCY to provide FYIC with tuition waivers, 11 post-secondary institutions have accepted. Tuition waivers are programs that allow FYIC to attend publicly funded higher education by waiving tuition and fees. To access these funds, students must meet the institutions’ eligibility criteria,

which vary from school to school (Sherlock & Culbert, 2014). Coast Capital Credit Union has also established a \$200,000 trust fund to help FYIC pay for costs associated with attending university or college (RCY, 2014, p.5).

MCFD strongly supports and believes that research plays an important role in understanding the past, and identifying areas for improvement and informing future direction. In early 2014, the Deputy Minister requested that the current modes of support, financial and non-financial, available for FYIC at post-secondary institutions be examined. In collaboration with Ministry experts, this research study was undertaken (Czeck, 2014). A literature review identified five salient themes that promote successful completion of post-secondary education for FYIC. These themes were:

- Academic supports;
- Campus connectedness;
- Mental health supports;
- Social supports; and
- Independent living skills.

These themes were explored through key informant interviews with five post-secondary institutions: Vancouver Island University, University of Victoria, University of Winnipeg, Ottawa University, and Washington State University (Czeck, 2014). The results revealed that post-secondary institutions have implemented support programs to promote the educational attainment of FYIC. Supports included tuition waiver programs, scholarships and bursaries, tailored academic services, mentoring and campus drop-in centres, mental health services, and referrals to off-campus services. One of the four recommendations made to MCFD was to engage with FYIC to assess how these supports are perceived from the youths' perspectives (Czeck, 2014). This recommendation serves as the impetus for this study.

Purpose of Current Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine what types of supports FYIC perceive as being necessary for successful post-secondary educational outcomes. For the purposes of this study, successful post-secondary educational outcomes are operationalized as enrolment in and successful completion of post-secondary education. The research questions that guide this study are:

- 1. How can the post-secondary completion rates for former youth in care be increased?**
- 2. What types of supports do former youth in care in BC view as being important for success in their post-secondary educational outcomes?**

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

While there are many areas that could be explored, for the purposes of this study, and within the context of supporting the post-secondary educational attainment of FYIC, this literature review is divided into four sections (see blue box below). The search strategy used to generate this literature is included in Appendix A.

1. **The Transition to Adulthood:** First, there is growing recognition that without a positive transition out of care FYIC are less likely to access and succeed in post-secondary education (Hass, Allen & Amoah, 2014; Rutman et al., 2007; Jones, 2014; Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011; Lee & Berrick, 2014). Thus a brief overview of youth transitions to adulthood is provided to situate the larger issue of promoting positive post-secondary educational outcomes for FYIC.
2. **Internal Factors:** Secondly, research has shown that the *internal factors* or personal characteristics of a youth in care can either support or hinder their ability to succeed in post-secondary education (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; En-Ling & Chin-Chun, 2011; Masten, 2014). Using resiliency as a theoretical backdrop, key studies that explore the role of resilience in promoting successful post-secondary educational outcomes for FYIC will be highlighted.
3. **External Factors:** Thirdly, *external factors*, such as academic readiness, campus connectedness, mental health and social supports, and independent living factors are also important elements that promote successful post-secondary educational attainment (Salazar, 2013; Czeck, 2014). It is important to note that many of the environmental factors work together with the internal factors to produce successful post-secondary outcomes, and at times it may appear that they overlap.
4. **Youth Voices:** Finally, this paper will examine a few articles that capture the voices of FYIC, specifically pertaining to the types of supports they consider most important for post-secondary educational achievement. This research is important to highlight because giving young people a voice across a variety of policy arenas will not only support civic engagement, but also promote positive youth development (Day, 2011; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky & Fogarty, 2012).

Research examining resilience of FYIC in post-secondary education within a Canadian context is sparse. This study will examine both the internal and external factors of FYIC attending post-secondary institutions in BC and will be the first of its kind. It will also serve as the foundation for discussing what supports are missing, and what services or policies may be worth exploring as MCFD continues to advance its youth transitions agenda.

1. The Transition to Adulthood

In many developed countries, independence and the emergence of young adulthood occur in the late teens or early twenties. In Canada, some provinces consider 18 to be the age of majority, although in BC it is 19. While these ages may have been an appropriate benchmark of adulthood in previous decades, there is a general consensus among academics that today's transition from adolescence has been delayed by nearly a decade (Jones, 2012). Typical markers of independence include completing education, working, living independently, marrying or having meaningful community and relational connections, and having children (Danzinger & Rouse 2009; Jones, 2012; Xie, Sen & Foster, 2014; Yates & Grey, 2012).

In previous decades, young adults completed their transition into independence by the time they reached their twenties. However, the transition into adulthood over the last 60 years has become longer and more complex, and very few young adults in the general population actually achieve independence by their early twenties (Batsche, Hart, Ort, Armstrong, Stozier & Hummer, 2014; Furstenberg, 2010; Jones, 2012; Rogers, 2011). In fact, the gap between adolescence and adulthood has become so significant that some psychologists have proposed that an additional developmental stage be considered (Arnett, 2000).

The 2011 Canadian Census statistics revealed that almost half of the young adults between the ages of 20 and 29 either returned to live with their parents, or never left home (Statistics Canada, 2012). In BC, a study of 1,820 participants found that 36% of 18-28 year olds lived at home with their parent(s) or an extended relative (Vancouver Foundation, 2013). Caregivers undoubtedly play a central role in supporting their children to achieve independence.

As evidenced by the trends in the general population, a youth's transition into adulthood is difficult without support (Xie, et al., 2014). While the challenges during this developmental transition may be similar for *all* young adults, the unique challenges faced by youth who were in government care make them more vulnerable to negative outcomes such as homelessness, criminality, early pregnancy, unemployment, mental health challenges, substance abuse, poverty, and reliance on social assistance (Hass, Allen, & Amoah, 2014; Hiles et al., 2013; Jones, 2014; RCY, 2014; Rutman, Hubberstey & Feduniw, 2007; Xie et al., 2014).

-Info Box 1- Parental Support

According to a BC study, parents provide support to their children in six areas:

- Shopping and groceries (69%);
- Free rent (69%);
- Post-secondary education funding (60%);
- Living supplies (56%);
- Transportation (55%); and
- Job advice (53%).

Excluding the costs of post-secondary education, parents in the USA provide an average of \$38,000 per child between the ages of 18 and 34 to help them transition into adulthood. This translates to roughly about \$2,200 a year (Jones, 2012, 2014; Vancouver Foundation, 2013; Schoeni, 2005).

Some factors that enhance their vulnerability include:

- Long term traumatic effects of maltreatment and neglect (Johansson & Hojer, 2012);
- Multiple transitions in different homes and schools (Merdinger, Hines, Lemon & Wyatt, 2005; Mitic & Rimer, 2002); and
- Overall impacts of being in foster care, including factors such as stigma, poverty, and lack of contact with biological parents (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005).

Research demonstrates that creating youth-centered systems, with appropriate services that strive to build strong support networks and teach life skills, are essential to achieving positive long term outcomes for vulnerable and at-risk youth, including attainment of post-secondary education (Krinsky & Liebmann, 2011). Without a gradual and extended transition to adulthood, the likelihood of attending post-secondary is significantly decreased (Hass, Allen & Amoah, 2014; Rutman et al., 2007; Jones, 2014). In today's knowledge economy, post-secondary education is essential for better employment outcomes, professional success, personal fulfillment and engagement in civic life (Hankivsky, 2008; Salazar, 2013).

The extension of services beyond the age of 19 by the BC government is an encouraging trend given that a growing body of evidence demonstrates that extending services relates to better outcomes, including higher educational rates, delayed parenthood and increased skills that promote self-sufficiency (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Lee & Berrick, 2014). Understanding the internal characteristics that promote positive adult outcomes is also important because it will allow policy makers and service providers to ensure that programs and policies are created in such a way that they enhance and build upon the existing strengths of the youth.

2. Internal Factors

Research indicates that the presence of internal factors, or personal characteristics, work together with environmental factors to produce post-secondary academic success for FYIC. As seen in the literature, children and youth at risk of continuing in a life of dysfunction can, and often do, overcome incredible odds (Bernard, 2014; Daining & DePanfilis 2007; Hines et al., 2005; Ungar, 2013). While there are many theories that explain why some individuals are more apt to overcome adversity, for this research, resilience theory was used to pinpoint the specific characteristics that allow FYIC to thrive in the post-secondary context.

2.1 Resilience Theory

There are many definitions of resiliency in the literature (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Put simply, resiliency is the ability to bounce back successfully from negative circumstances, despite exposure to severe risks. The International Resilience Project surveyed close to 600 children across 30 countries and describes resilience as “a universal capacity that allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimise or overcome the damaging effects of adversity” (Grothberg, 1997, p. 7). In the child welfare context, a few notable adversities and risks include neglect, abuse, and trauma (Bernard, 2014).

Neuroscience research also emphasizes the plasticity of the human brain, especially for children and youth (Sanders & Munford, 2014). With consistent intervention and learning, the brain has the capacity to change structurally and functionally, holding enormous promise for the promotion of resilience for young people in foster care (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2014). As resiliency is a universal and ordinary phenomenon of human development, rather than the “luck” of a few special children, it can be nurtured to support positive post-secondary adult outcomes for children in care, including post-secondary educational achievement (Hass & Graydon, 2008; Masten, 2014).

While traditional discourses have focused on identifying the risk factors that lead to adverse outcomes, the last decade of work has begun to reframe research questions to ask more solution-oriented questions such as:

- What personal characteristics allow individuals to become capable of surviving and thriving despite difficult life experiences?
- How can programs, communities, and child-welfare agencies foster environments that support and enhance positive outcomes?
- How can programs build on existing strengths of youth?
- Who else needs to be involved in ensuring that children/youth have a community of supports that foster belonging?

These types of questions lie at the heart of resilience theory (Guild & Espiner, 2014; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Kwok, Hughes, Luo, 2007; Leve, Harold, Chamberlain, Landsverk, Fisher & Vostanis, 2012; Masten, 2014).

As seen in Figure 2, Bernard (2014) proposed that resiliency arises from an interaction between two categories: *personal strengths* and *environmental protective factors*. A protective factor is generally understood as “a moderator of a risk or situation that enables an individual to adapt more successfully than would be the case if the protective factor were not present” (Mallon, 2007, p. 107). However, children and youth can be resilient in one domain of life but not in others, and resilience can be present in some years and absent in later ones (Yates & Grey, 2012).

Figure 2: Bernard's Model of Resilience



In Bernard's theoretical model, *personal strengths* contain four domains:

1. **Social competence:** includes relational skills, flexibility, cross-cultural competence, empathy and caring for others, communication skills, and sense of humour.
2. **Problem solving:** includes the ability to plan, insightfulness, critical thinking skills, and resourcefulness.
3. **Autonomy:** refers to a sense of identity, an internal locus of control and positive self-esteem, self-awareness, and resistance skills.
4. **A sense of purpose:** reflects goal-setting abilities and one's motivation.

Bernard's second category, *environmental protective factors*, works together with one's personal strengths to develop resilience (Bernard, 2014). This is done through:

1. **High expectations from supportive relationships with caring adults:** high expectations encompass a belief in the youth's ability to achieve, demonstration of respect, and recognizing and building on the youth's strengths.
2. **Opportunities to participate:** can include meaningful involvement and responsibility, the power to make decisions, and opportunities for reflection and inclusive dialogue.

The theory of resilience is recognized as an ecological approach. That is, a dynamic process between individual factors and environmental influences that interact in a reciprocal and transactional relationship to produce resilience (Bernard, 2014; Ungar, 2013). Bernard's (2014) protective factors, while not necessarily labelled the same, have been proposed in many other resiliency models in existing literature (Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lepine, Begin, & Bernard, 2007; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Flynn, Ghazal, Legault, Vandermeulen & Petrick, 2004; Flynn, Miller, Vincent, 2012; Guild & Espiner, 2014; Hass et al., 2014; Hines et al., 2005; Jones, 2012; Leary & DeRosier, 2012; Mallon, 2007; Skinner, Pritzer & Steele, 2013; Xie et al., 2014).

-Info Box 2- Theories of Human Development

Resilience theory is supported by prior theoretical models of human development, including those of Erik Erikson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, Rudolf Steiner, Abraham Maslow, and Joseph Chilton Pierce. While focused on different components of human development, at the core of all these approaches is the assumption that growth and development unfolds naturally in the presence of certain environmental factors (Bernard, 2014).

2.2 General Factors that Promote Academic Resilience

Due to the many transitional factors faced by young adults when entering post-secondary institutions, including leaving home, financial pressures, adapting to new social circles, and challenging academic requirements, it is not uncommon for students to experience stress, anxiety and psychological distress (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). Studies have demonstrated that the extent to which students are able to cope with stress during their first year of post-secondary education is directly related to their academic performance (Howard, Dryden & Johnson, 1999; Flynn et al., 2012; Mak, Ng, & Wong, 2011).

Positive responses can be elicited in the face of stress through social supports, physical, mental and spiritual self-care, optimism, and positive self-talk (Leary & DeRosier, 2012; Sawatsky, Ratner, Richardson, Washburn, Sudmant, & Mirwaldt, 2012). These protective factors have a cumulative effect, and the more factors possessed by an individual, the more likely they are to adapt positively to stress and display academic resilience (Howard, Dryden & Johnson, 1999;

Flynn et al., 2012; Jones, 2012). Academic resilience, in this case, is defined as the “ability to effectively deal with setback, stress or pressure in the academic setting” (Martin & Marsh, 2006, p. 267).

In a recent study of 120 undergraduate students at four post-secondary institutions in the USA, Leary & DeRosier (2012) identified four domains of post-secondary academic resiliency, and tested whether possessing resources in any one particular domain was more strongly associated with positive stress-related outcomes than the others. The four domains included:

- **Social supports:** positive connections with others;
- **Self-care behaviours:** a healthy diet, sufficient sleep, exercise, humour;
- **Cognitive styles:** how students explain their personal successes and failures, confidence in their abilities, the nature of their outlook on the future; and
- **Life skills:** self-regulation and coping skills.

The results indicated that *social connectedness* and *cognitive styles* were the most important predictors of stress management (Leary & Derosier, 2012, p. 1215). While the study’s sample was not exclusively FYIC, these results support Daining & DePanfilis’ (2007) findings that FYIC with lower perceived stress and strong social connections display higher levels of resilience. Thus it is imperative that programs explicitly encourage social connections and foster optimistic and constructive cognitive styles (Parkin & Baldwin, 2012, p.11; Samuels & Pryce, 2012).

The Role of Cognitive Styles in Stress Management and Academic Achievement

Many research studies confirm that *cognitive styles* have direct implications for a student’s well-being. Individuals who have a positive view of the future report having greater psychological well-being and overall health, feel in greater control of their environment, and have more confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles (Beck, 1987; Coksun, Garipagaoglu & Tosun, 2014; McGregor, Gee, & Posey, 2008; Jones, 2012). In a study of 1,419 college students, researchers found that positive cognitions about the self, the world, and the future were significantly associated with academic resilience. In turn, resilience was directly related to higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depression (Mak et al., 2011).

Additionally, students with high levels of hope are less influenced by the negative impact of stress, are more likely to accept challenges as opportunities, and adopt more effective coping strategies to combat challenging academic demands (Horton & Wallander, 2001; Thoits, 1995; Scheff, 1990; Snyder, 1994; Valle, Huebner & Suldo, 2006; Zaleski et al., 1998). This may be because appraising a threatening situation in a positive way promotes resourcefulness and problem solving, both foundational skills for academic achievement (Coksun et al., 2014). Other adaptive responses to college and university challenges include: strategizing, help seeking, self-encouragement and commitment.

In contrast, negative forms of coping include confusion, escape, concealment, self-pity, rumination, and projection (Skinner et al., 2013). Regardless of which coping strategy a student employs, it all begins in the mind. For this reason, Mak et al. (2011) proposes that workshops, seminars and orientation sessions at post-secondary institutions engage students and teach cognitive techniques for overcoming negative beliefs about the future, de-catastrophizing exercises, and foster the development of resistance skills.

The Role of Social Supports in Stress Management and Academic Achievement

There is evidence that a lack of supportive relationships predicts academic underachievement, greater stress, and poor physical and mental health (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2009; Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christianson & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Samuels & Pryce). Conversely, the positive role of social support is uncontested, and it is important that it is present in childhood (Barrera & Prelow, 2000; En-Ling, Chin-Chun, 2009). For example, high parental expectations and encouragement are strongly associated with academic achievement. High expectations not only promote a child's motivation, but also enhance their ability to overcome adversity. This holds true for foster children as well.

Cheung et al. (2012) found that children in care had better academic outcomes when caregivers had high expectations and provided them with literacy-focused environments (Cheung et al., 2012; Driscoll, 2011, 2013; Guild & Espiner, 2014). There is also evidence that having well-educated foster parents makes a substantial contribution to the long term outcomes of children in care (Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Jones, 2014). Therefore, targeted recruitment of educated caregivers and providing training for foster parents on how to support the educational outcomes for children in their care may serve as one promising practice for improving the educational achievements of youth in care.

Sufficient modes of social support can also act as buffers against life stresses, especially in post-secondary environments (Jones, 2014). For example, the social stress buffer hypothesis states that individuals with social supports are better able to cope for two reasons: first, their social networks may be able to provide feedback in a way that helps the individual re-appraise and perceive the situation as less stressful; and second, the mere presence of a social support may act as a shield that decreases the impact of the stress (Cohen & Willis, 1985). In addition to some of the general factors that promote positive outcomes for the general student population, there are also specific factors that promote academic resilience for FYIC.

2.3 Specific Factors that Promote Academic Resilience for FYIC

Academic resilience for FYIC has been defined as graduation from high school and enrolment in institutions of higher education (Rios, 2009; Jones, 2012). Understanding the different factors that promote educational success for this particular population is important, because studies have shown that low educational attainment and poverty are the two most salient factors that hinder positive adult outcomes for FYIC (Bezin, 2008; Jones, 2012). Factors at the individual, family/community, systemic, and cultural level operate in a dynamic manner to contribute to resiliency, and subsequently, successful transitions to post-secondary for FYIC (Batsche et al.,

2014; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Hines et al., 2005; Hass et al., 2014; Driscoll, 2013; Rios, 2009; Thorton & Sanchez, 2010). It is important to acknowledge that these levels are interconnected and often overlap, reflecting the ecological nature of resilience.

Individual Level Factors

There are many individual factors that promote resilience among youth transitioning out of care, including: self-confidence, self-efficacy, autonomy, problem solving, resourcefulness, sense of purpose, faith and spirituality, social competence, and civic engagement (Flynn, 2014; Hass et al., 2014; Hines et al., 2005; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Jones, 2014; Mallon, 2007; Parker, 2015; Williams, Lindsey, Kurtz & Javis, 2001).

Furthermore, resourcefulness and motivation are often present in academically resilient FYIC, with many noting that seeking advice about schoolwork, obtaining tutors, buying extra study resources and becoming friends with high-performing youth were among some of their most successful strategies (Rios, 2009).

Academically resilient FYIC also have an internal locus of control (Bernard, 2014; Hines et al., 2005). These individuals believe that when they are faced with challenges, they have control over what happens, in contrast with those with external loci of control who, when faced with challenges, believe that external factors are to blame and they have no control over what happens (Gomez et al., 2015). An external locus of control is similar to learned helplessness, which occurs when an organism is repeatedly subjected to aversive stimuli that it cannot escape. Then, even when presented with an opportunity to escape, learned helplessness will prevent any action.

A recent study of 132 FYIC who experienced homelessness revealed that events such as abuse, placement and school disruption, and poor parental relationships contributed to the perception of learned helplessness (Gomez et al., 2015; Jackson & Cameron, 2012). These experiences in turn prevented the development of self-efficacy, motivation, and the belief that they can affect future events—all of which are critical elements required for developing academic resilience (Coksun et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2015; Leary & DeRosier, 2014; Mak et al., 2011). These findings highlight the critical importance of building self-reliance and confidence in FYIC (Xie et al., 2014).

There is also some evidence that there is a relationship between gender and resilience, with females typically displaying higher levels of resilience. Courtney & Dworsky (2005) proposed that the relationship between resilience and gender might be because females are more likely to

-Info Box 3- Academically Resilient FYIC

Academically resilient FYIC tend to display the following characteristics:

- Assertiveness;
- Determination to be different from abusive adults;
- Ability to seek out and accept help;
- Flexibility and openness to new ideas;
- Adaptable and positive self-image;
- Ability to make changes after making mistakes; and
- Resourcefulness (Hines et al., 2005; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Unrau, Font & Rawls, 2012).

leverage social relationships and seek out support from independent living services (Lemon, Hines & Merdinger, 2005). For example, Daining & DePanfilis (2007) assessed whether gender, the level of perceived stress, and social support were associated with resilience and found that FYIC with highest levels of resilience were females with significant social networks, lower perceived stress, and who were older at the time of discharge from care. The relationship between being older at discharge and resilience was also found in Batsche et al., (2014) study.

Family and Community Level Factors

At the family and community level, resilient FYIC report having strong relationships with significant others, foster parents, mentors, teachers, or extended family members. In fact, maintaining contact with former foster parents is positively associated with resilience for FYIC (Batsche et al., 2014). This was also found in Pecora's (2012) large-scale analysis of over 1,600 case files and 1,087 interviews with youth in care. This study found that FYIC who had a positive relationship with their longest foster family were two times more likely to complete high school. Thus, Geenen & Powers (2007) emphasize the need for caring relationships, especially with foster parents, to be maintained throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

However, maintaining connection with biological parents can sometimes be negatively associated with resilience. For example, Hines (2005) discovered that resilient FYIC attending post-secondary reported that they did not maintain a strong connection with their family of origin. Jones (2012) also found that FYIC who lived with their biological families after leaving foster care were significantly less resilient. This may be because some parents continue to struggle with poverty, mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence or other issues that led to their child (ren)'s removal in the first place.

Further to this, Samuels & Pryce (2008) found that when FYIC maintained connections with their biological families, often they were the providers rather than receivers of support, which explains why in Driscoll's study (2013), FYIC reported that their families of origin were a significant source of stress. Inversely, Daining & DePanfilis (2007) indicated that close familial bonds served to sustain youth through their transition to adulthood, and were especially important for African-American youth.

-Info Box 4- The Development of Academic Achievement through Sibling Co-Placements

At the family level, research shows that sibling relationships are an important factor in the development of resilience for foster care children/youth. Rios (2009) noted that siblings served as motivation for FYIC attending post-secondary schools, and provided a source of emotional, financial and academic support.

Richardson & Yates (2014) examined the benefits of 170 sibling co-placements while in foster care, and the resulting long term effects on later life outcomes—such as educational achievement, occupational competence, housing situations, relationships, and civic engagement—and found that it was uniquely related to educational achievement, especially for males.

This is an important finding, given that males typically display less resilience and academic achievement when transitioning out of care (Thorton & Sanchez, 2010; Kirk, Lewis, Brown, Nielsen & Colvin, 2012).

Systemic Level Factors

The child welfare system has a large role to play in supporting caregivers to provide children and youth with family and community environments that promote the development of resilience. When children and youth are provided with stability and caring and continuous relationships, they thrive. For this reason many child welfare systems are focusing on achieving permanency, or “forever homes” for children and youth in care (RCY, 2014).

While there are multiple dimensions of permanency, typically, it refers to long term and meaningful connections, or attachments, between a child and an adult. This can be achieved through reunification with a family, transfer of custody, or adoption. Permanency offers children and youth a family, lifelong support, and a sense of belonging (Cowan, 2004; Lloyd & Barth, 2011; Triseliotis, 2002; Zill & Bramlett, 2014). There is strong evidence that children who experience permanency have improved outcomes compared to children that remain in long term foster care. Examples of improved outcomes cited in the research include:

- Greater educational attainment;
- Increased emotional development;
- Increased ability to form relationships and carry out parenting roles;
- Increased employment;
- Decreased reliance on social security benefits; and
- Decreased homeless.

An evaluation examining the benefits and drawbacks of different forms of care was done in Sweden in 2011. The researchers compared the youth and young adulthood outcomes of two groups: long term foster care and adopted children who came into the child welfare system at a young age. While outcomes for both groups were weaker than their peers in the general population, the foster children fell short of adoptees on all outcomes, including educational outcomes (Vinnerljung & Hjerm, 2011).

However, permanency is not always an option for every child or youth. If it is not possible, research strongly urges that placement stability be prioritized. Merdinger et al., (2005) proposes that academically resilient FYIC are successful because they are able to form strong relationships with adults (teachers, school administrators, counsellors) due to their placement stability in high school (Jones, 2014; Strolin-Goltzman, 2014). Particularly, academically successful FYIC usually have fewer than two foster care placement changes during high school (Merdinger et al., 2005; Hines et al., 2005; Johansson & Hojer, 2012).

The education system is also an important systemic level factor that can promote the resilience of youth in care, especially in providing support, escape, and refuge from troubled family life (Hines et al., 2005; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). Research shows that strong relationships with teachers and other school staff in high school are a predictor of post-secondary attainment for FYIC, with successful students reporting that they had empathetic teachers, administrators, and caregivers who advocated for resources and information on their behalf (Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Rios, 2009; Weinberg, Oshiro & Shea, 2014; Xie et al., 2014). In fact, school personnel

are cited as *the* source of financial information, career advice and college access by many FYIC attending post-secondary institutions (Batsche et al., 2014; Hass et al., 2014; Merdinger et al., 2005).

In contrast, frequent changes in care placements and a general lack of interest, advice, and information from social workers about educational opportunities, are consistently cited as barriers to post-secondary educational achievement for FYIC. While youth in care often seem indifferent to social support, they, like many adolescents in the general population, only recognize its value in retrospect during adulthood. Key informant interviews with 18 FYIC revealed that those who did *not* attend post-secondary institutions reported no continuity of relationships after leaving care, and a general feeling that caregivers and social workers showed no personal investment or interest in their education. Unsurprisingly, this rendered them vulnerable to academic underachievement (Mallon, 2007).

Other variables like independent living competencies including factors such as money management, work, parenting skills, transportation, and cooking, a high school degree, good mental health, utilizing services after discharge, and stable living arrangements or housing, predict resilient outcomes in adulthood (Barnow et al., 2013; Courtney et al., 2011; Jones, 2012; Pecora, 2012; Xie et al., 2014). While these studies each highlight different factors that promote resilience, all emphasize the significant role of social supports. This serves to point out that even independent living programs geared at teaching “hard skills” are not only about attending a class, but also about having a person to guide a youth through all of life’s important moments (Pecora, 2012).

Cultural Factors

Another factor that plays a critical role in the development of resilience is that of culture, religion, and spirituality (Malindi & Theron, 2010). Aboriginal traditions for instance recognize that resilience originates outside of the individual (in family, community, society, nature), therefore it is important that efforts to improve educational outcomes take on a holistic approach that combine spirituality, family strength, Elders, ceremonial ritual, oral traditions, identity and support (Burrack, Blinder, Glores & Fitch, 2007; The Conference Board of Canada, 2014). Resilience-based programs targeted at improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth highlight the critical importance of community, culture and identity (Lafferty, 2012).

Developing a strong sense of culture and identity involves recognizing cultural attributes, such as beliefs, values, practices, norms, traditions, and heritage, as well as understanding how these attributes are reflected as part of an existing identity. When Aboriginal youth are able to develop a clear understanding of their cultural past, present, and future, it is easier for them to sustain a

-Info Box 5- The Importance of Receiving Information about Postsecondary Education

A study of 216 FYIC attending post-secondary schools highlighted that having information about financial aid, seeing advertisements about the types of universities available for them, and participating in university preparation classes were the most important activities that helped them make the decision to attend post-secondary (Merdinger et al., 2005).

sense of connectedness and commitment to their future (Conference Board of Canada, 2014; Thorton & Sanchez, 2010; Kirmayer, Dandenau, Marshall, Phillips & Williamson, 2011).

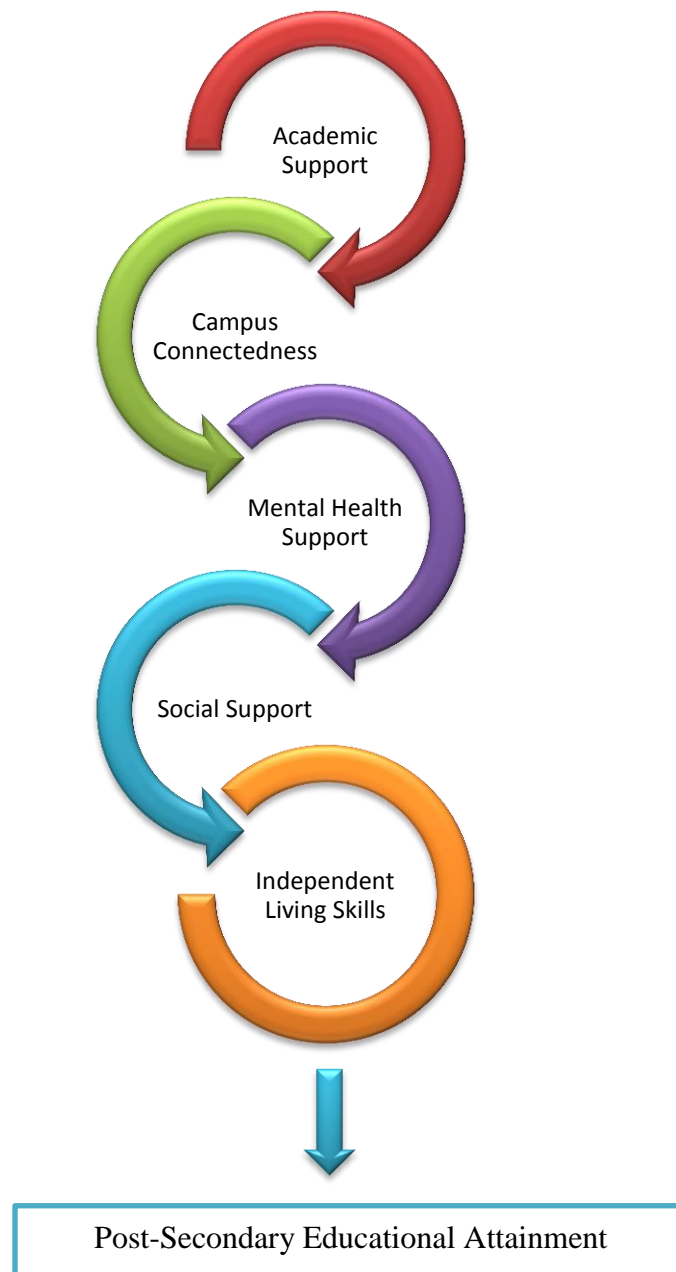
Summary

- The transition to adulthood has been delayed by nearly a decade and within the general population, parents are providing significant financial and non-financial support to their children on their journey towards independence.
- Research shows that FYIC who are older when discharged from care tend to have better adult outcomes and are more likely to attend post-secondary institutions. The extension of services beyond the age of 19 is also a promising practice that is generating positive adult outcomes for FYIC.
- Resilience theory is a theory of human development that provides a lens to improve the post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC using strengths-based approaches. Simply, resilience is the ability to bounce back despite exposure to adversity.
- The extent to which students are able to cope with stress during their first year of post-secondary education is directly related to their academic performance/success.
- In the general population, positive cognitive styles and social supports, among other things, promote positive stress management and academic achievement.
- For FYIC, factors at the individual, family, community/systemic and cultural level promote the development of resilience, and consequently post-secondary academic achievement.
- At the individual level, some of the salient characteristics that distinguish academically successful FYIC are: an internal locus of control, motivation, assertiveness, ability to seek/accept help, positive cognitive styles, flexibility, learning from mistakes, and resourcefulness.
- At the family/community level academically successful youth have strong connections with positive adults (including teachers, mentors, foster parents and sometimes biological/extended families) who hold high expectations and support education. Children who are placed in care with their siblings also have better adult and educational outcomes, especially males.
- At the community/systemic level FYIC need the following things in order to be prepared to access and succeed in post-secondary education: permanency, placement stability, positive school environments, access to information and resources, and independent living skills.
- Cultural connection has been shown to be important in promoting positive outcomes for Aboriginal students. Spirituality and religion have also been highlighted in the literature as being important in helping students foster a sense of purpose.

3. External Factors

In addition to the internal factors that promote resilience, there are also five salient external factors that promote successful completion of post-secondary for FYIC: academic supports, campus connectedness, mental health services, social support and independent living factors (Figure 3). These themes are interconnected and often overlap, but they are distinct from the internal factors because they speak to the elements that need to be in place to ensure retention once a youth accesses post-secondary education (Salazar, 2012).

Figure 3: External Factors that Promote Post-Secondary Retention



3.1 Academic Supports

Academic preparedness for post-secondary schooling begins *before* a FYIC enters post-secondary education (Mitic & Rimer, 2002). However, children who experience maltreatment often have negative academic outcomes (Jones, 2013). One quarter of students who withdrew from post-secondary education cite academic difficulty as a primary reason (Coohey, Renner, Hua, Zhang, Whitney, 2011; Salazar, 2013; Unrau et al., 2012). In BC, a survey of 1,600 FYIC students revealed that 41% repeated a grade (versus 9% in the general population) and 43% received special education (versus 7%) (Mitic & Reimer, 2002; Morton, 2015). Grade repetition often contributes to the over-representation of foster children in alternative schools. FYIC are not only involved in special education and alternative schools at higher rates, but they are also more likely to be suspended or expelled, which delays their learning and often interferes with their ability to finish high school (Harris et al., 2009; Pecora, 2012).

Placement Stability

Supporting and encouraging FYIC to attend post-secondary institutions begins with making high school count. However, as previously mentioned, lack of placement stability impacts learning levels and resilience (Batsche et al., 2014; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Mallon, 2007; Strolin-Goltzman, 2014; Topitzes et al., 2013). The average number of placement changes for youth in care varies, but four to seven are not uncommon numbers (Salazar, 2013; Pecora, 2012). This instability often leads to anxiety, withdrawal, depression, an inability to concentrate, and a lack of social skills, all of which affect school performance (Mitic & Reimer, 2002; Mallon, 2007; Snow, 2009).

A new home typically means a new school, and changing schools usually results in a student losing up to 4-6 months of learning progress (Mitic & Reimer, 2002). Additionally, the likelihood of a youth in care completing high school is two times greater if he or she has less than one placement per school year (Pecora, 2012). This is why Tweedle (2005) stresses the importance of permanency planning, reducing the number of moves, and focusing more attention on education for children while they are in care as ways to achieve better outcomes for children when they transition out of care.

Educational Liaisons in Schools

Policy changes can also contribute to better academic outcomes. In England, for example, multi-professional “*leaving care teams*,” often led by a qualified teacher, achieved a 20-fold increase over five years of the number of FYIC attending post-secondary education. While other countries continue to have a division between social services and education, in England the education and child welfare systems are brought together at the central government and local levels (Driscoll, 2011). Each school appoints a senior teacher to provide strategic direction and oversee the education of children in care; these teachers bring a trauma-informed lens to their work and are empathetic to the unique challenges faced by youth in care (Jackson & Cameron, 2012).

This practice is similar to the “educational liaisons” emerging in the United States (Jones, 2013). Put simply, their role is to build relationships with youth and their foster families, provide support, and troubleshoot educational barriers. As in England, educational liaisons have been used by some jurisdictions to serve as a bridge between the child welfare and educational systems. While their strategies for promoting educational achievement vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, their cross-agency policies are producing positive outcomes.

In a longitudinal study of 32 youth, the qualitative results indicated that the presence of educational liaisons increased school attendance, promoted traditional educational trajectories (versus alternative schools), and reduced school moves (Weinberg, Oshiro, Shea, 2014). At least 75% of the students had zero school moves in the three-year period of this study. One youth noted that a constant message she received was, “you can do it, you are bright, you have a good future ahead of you... it was consistency more than anything that made the difference for [her]” (Weinberg et al., 2014, p. 48). Placement stability and educational liaisons are two promising practices that make a difference in supporting FYIC to become academically prepared for the rigours of post-secondary education.

3.2 Campus Connectedness

Once in post-secondary education, the extent to which the student “fits” within the university, college or trades program they attend promotes their academic achievement. Personal satisfaction, campus involvement, and institutional commitment are predictors of retention (Parkin & Baldwin, 2012; Salazar, 2012). This commitment is contingent on the level of integration and compatibility a student feels with their campus. When a student does not feel a sense of community they are more likely to drop out (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Dworsky & Perez (2010) cite a lack of support from the post-secondary institution as a significant reason FYIC drop out of post-secondary education.

Campus Support Programs

In the last five years, many post-secondary institutions have adopted specialized campus support programs for FYIC to help improve their post-secondary success (Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013). Typically, programs operate as independent entities and the services offered vary (Dworsky & Perez, 2010, p. 258; Watt et al., 2013). Services range from semi-formal to informal and include campus orientations, mentorship programs, and opportunities for leadership development (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Some programs require students to live together in residential communities or attend mandatory summer university preparation camps, while others adopt a more laissez-faire approach and serve FYIC under a student services umbrella (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Kirk & Day, 2011; Klefeker, 2009).

Regardless of the variation, campus support programs generally offer the following:

- Financial aid;
- Housing support;
- Academic support;
- Emotional support services; and
- Independent living skills (especially financial literacy, employment readiness support, stress management.)

Maintaining strong links with other campus and community resources, engaging in extensive personal contact with students to build trust and generating a “family on campus” environment are also activities considered to be essential elements of a successful and comprehensive campus support program (California Pathways, 2012; Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Naccarato, 2011; Pontecorvo, El-Askari & Putnman, 2006; Rassen et al., 2010).

Campus Liaisons Dedicated to FYIC

Another promising practice to increase the post-secondary education retention of FYIC is the use of campus liaisons who serve as a link between FYIC and other relevant resources. For example, in the state of California alone, there are 112 foster youth liaisons in financial aid offices that provide support and guidance (California Pathways, 2012). These individuals are usually also responsible for making referrals to relevant supports, and may or may not work as part of the larger campus support program (Dworsky & Perez, 2010).

Having someone available who FYIC can check in with provides them with social support, and greatly contributes to their campus connectedness. A study indicated that 90% of students who accessed campus liaisons found it beneficial (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). Moreover, designated liaisons serve to “fill service gaps and overcome obstacles that may keep these students from fully utilizing available, campus based support services” (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 10). Through building relationships with the student(s), the liaison is able to empower the student to seek further services if they are struggling—be it mental health, housing, or whatever specific need the student has.

-Info Box 6- FYIC vs. First Generation Students: The Case for Specialized Supports for FYIC

Literature suggests that FYIC are a special population and require more support than students who experienced similar disadvantages growing up (Parrent, 2008).

A recent study examined the retention differences between FYIC (n=444) and low income or first generation students (n=378) to determine if there was a difference in retention between the two generally similar populations.

Results indicated that FYIC were significantly more likely to drop out before the end of their first year (21% versus 13%) and prior to degree completion (34% versus 18%) than their non-foster care peers.

While it is difficult to attribute the lack of retention solely to campus connectedness, this data illustrates that even when compared to a population with similar characteristics, FYIC *still* have unique challenges that require specialized attention (Day et al., 2011).

While campus support programs hold promise for increasing post-secondary retention for FYIC, several challenges are noted in the literature, including:

- Identifying and recruiting FYIC;
- The ability of students to handle college level work;
- The large service and support needs of FYIC (including mental health); and
- The issue of long term program sustainability (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Cooper, Mary & Rassen, 2008).

Nonetheless, Czeck (2014) found that the sustainability of campus support programs hinge on the “buy in” from all relevant stakeholders, including representatives from financial aid, housing services, counseling services, community partners and non-profit organizations, the child welfare agency, experts in the field (both academic and practical), and legislative advocates. It is by engaging players at all levels of “the system” that meaningful changes can occur.

3.3 Mental Health Supports

Another significant barrier to FYIC’s successful completion of post-secondary education is mental health challenges (Duncan, 2000). Roughly one third of FYIC have a mental diagnosis in contrast to 19-23% of the general population (Jones, 2012). Another study of 373 foster care students indicated that 37% met a DSM-IV psychiatric diagnosis in the past year, and 61% met a lifetime disorder such as a conduct disorder, major depression, or attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADHD) (Pecora, 2012).

Similarly, an examination of 188 foster children showed that 35% reported symptoms indicative of mental health disorders in the past year and 7% had three mental health problems. The most common conditions in this study were major depressive disorder, major depressive episode, intermittent explosive disorder, conduct disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Also, the rates of PTSD among FYIC aged 19-30 were twice as high as US War Veterans (Pecora, Kessler, O’Brien, Downs, & English, 2012).

Post-secondary adjustment is often accompanied by stress, which, for some FYIC, may trigger pre-existing childhood traumas and mental health problems such as PTSD, anxiety and depression. While most campuses offer mental health supports for students, many are not tailored to address the traumas and other unique challenges faced by FYIC (Harris et al., 2009; Pecora, 2012). MCFD Trauma Informed Policy

- Info Box 7- The Link Between Mental Health and Homelessness for Youth in BC

In BC, the McCreary Centre Society flagged mental health as an area for concern in their study of over 600 homeless youth (50% of whom had lived in care). In fact, 68% of the youth (62% males, 72% females) reported having at least one mental health issue and almost half (42%) considered suicide within the last 12 months (McCreary Centre Society, 2012).

More alarming, however, is that over a third (38%) did not access mental health services. While these youth were not participating in post-secondary education, these same mental conditions undoubtedly play a role in the interference of learning since more than 50% of students with mental health challenges drop out of school (Keller, Salazar, & Courtney, 2010; Xie et al., 2014).

B-18 (2014) defines trauma as “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (p. 4).

In addition, FYIC who suffer from mental illness are not likely to seek out help. Depression and anxiety often cause people to isolate themselves from the outside world, or cause them to lack the motivation or energy to actively seek help. Furthermore, it is often common for youth in care to abuse drugs and alcohol as a form of coping, typically 3-4 times more than their peers (Jones, 2014). For this reason, trauma-informed and outreach-based mental health services must be implemented to promote the educational attainment of FYIC (Porter, 2011).

Trauma informed practice includes an awareness and understanding of trauma in all aspects of service delivery, with appropriate developmental considerations and collaboration with young adults, and includes the following:

- Awareness of how trauma, during any stage of development can impact a youth’s social, emotional and physical development;
- Emphasis on safety and trustworthiness;
- Opportunity for choice, collaboration and connection; and
- Strengths based and skill-building interventions focused on enhancing social and emotional development (MCFD Trauma Informed Policy 18-B, 2014).

Ensuring that post-secondary institutions are equipped to address mental health challenges faced by students is paramount for post-secondary success and retention. A recent study examined the current modes of supports at five post-secondary institutions and found that while all five institutions had mental health services available, they were not always specific to FYIC, despite evidence that suggests they are a distinct population in need of specialized support (Czeck, 2014; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2011; Rassen et al., 2010). The most discussed services were counseling and coaching to help students manage depression and anxiety (Czeck, 2014). A greater emphasis must be placed on building capacity for mental health professionals at universities to work with the complex and traumatic pasts of FYIC.

Examinations of campus support programs for FYIC reveal that access to mental health services remains a challenge. For example, given the severity of the trauma experienced by FYIC, the annual caps on the number of visits may not be adequate to provide meaningful treatment. Most university campuses are limited by time and space and provide solution-based counseling, rather than trauma informed practice (Czeck, 2014). As trauma informed services are not typically available on campus, the student must be referred to a community agency. This can cause students to not follow through, due to their distrust of mental health professionals and unwillingness to open up to yet another professional (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). Another important consideration is the idea that western clinical ways of dealing with mental health, including trauma informed practices, may not be appropriate for Aboriginal students. For meaningful healing, Aboriginal students must engage their own cultures through ceremonies and traditions (Czeck, 2014).

3.4 Social Supports

Jones (2014) defines social support as “the emotional, psychological, physical, informational, instrumental and material assistance provided by others to either maintain well-being or promote adaptation to difficult life events” (p. 85). Successful transition into adulthood and post-secondary education hinges on a youth’s social capital, with social capital being understood as the presence of social supports, connections, and networks (McCreary, 2015). In fact, a lack of continuity in relationships after transitioning out of care is a significant risk factor for poor outcomes (Mallon, 2007; Xie et al., 2014; Jones, 2014). For this reason, academics are urging the child welfare system to help youth make lasting connections, be it with stable family members, relatives, mentors, peers, or foster families (Collins, 2004; Geenen et al., 2007; Massinga & Pecora, 2004; Perry, 2006).

Mentoring has emerged as a popular way to cultivate caring relationships between youth and adults and more recently has been recognized as a promising approach for foster youth (Ungar, 2013). However, using mentors to provide relational continuity as youth are exiting care is not a new concept. In a Canadian study of 19 resilient FYIC, their transitions out of care were successful because they had mentors who helped them reach their goals and develop a positive self-image; they were also provided with opportunities to participate in group activities such as sports and clubs, and were engaged in positive thinking strategies (Silva-Wayne, 1995).

Another study found that FYIC who had a mentor for at least two years before turning 18 not only had higher levels of education, but also reported better mental and physical health (Ahrens, Dubois, Richardson, Fan & Lorenzo, 2008). A meta-analysis of 55 mentoring evaluations revealed that while the magnitude of the effects of mentoring programs were small and medium for the general population, the programs designed for the most “at risk populations” yielded the largest effects (DuBois et al., 2002). Other benefits of mentoring include:

- Increased self-esteem;
- Development of coping skills; and
- Positive outlook on the future—all of which are elements required for academic resilience (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Leary & DeRosier, 2012).

Jones (2014), however, warns against using mentoring programs as a cure-all for the relational deficits FYIC have, as there is a large variation in the quality of mentoring programs, and some can do more harm than good. This is particularly the case in programs that rely on the use of volunteers who only spend brief periods of time with youth. For a youth that has experienced extreme relational disruptions, this can have devastating effects. However, the increasingly positive characteristics of effective mentoring are: matches that are longer than a year, consistent contacts, emotional connections, and programs that provide support and resources for activities (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002; Osterling & Hones, 2006).

Willingness to Receive Social Support and Help

Due to their abuse histories, many youth are unwilling to invest in new relationships out of fear of hurt or further betrayal. However, relationships with caring adults are important because they are a significant conduit through which youth can build competencies, receive social support, and develop resilience (McCreary, 2015; Rogers, 2011). Receiving support, much less asking for it, is difficult for youth in care (Xie et al., 2014). As noted in the resilience literature, self-reliance can be a source of resilience when aging out of foster care. However, Samuels & Pryce (2008) caution that it can also serve as a potential risk factor, and perhaps lead to difficulties in facilitating connections to supportive relationships.

Many FYIC deny needing help, rooted in a belief that “accepting or expecting a relational connection might place them on an irreversible path toward a lifetime of dependence on others” or that it makes them appear weak (Jones, 2014; Samuels & Pryce, 2008, p. 1209). However, accepting help from others is an important element in the emergence of resilience, and research has shown that FYIC who attend post-secondary schools are not only willing to receive help, but actively seek it out (Rios, 2009; Rassen, Cooper & Mery, 2010; Williams et al., 2001).

-Info Box 8-

Factors that Enhance Willingness to Receive Social Support and Help

1. Readiness for help:

Interviews with 30 FYIC in the UK revealed that youth appreciated “the difficult balance, or contradiction” between wanting social workers to help facilitate their independence while also providing them with highly personalized and emotional support” (Rogers, 2011, p. 421). FYIC also wanted to feel that they could refuse help, without fearing that the “offer for help” would be permanently revoked (Rogers, 2011). For this reason, adults in the lives of FYIC should periodically check in with them to ensure that they understand that the offer for support is not contractual, but based on a trusting relationship (Rogers, 2011).

2. Quality of help:

The quality of the relationship also matters; for example, in a study of 497 Canadian youth in care who accessed more than one service in the last six months, Ungar (2014) reported that the quality of care provided by one single service provider held more promise in producing positive outcomes, especially school engagement, than the quantity of services accessed.

3. Sense of trust in the relationship:

Although developing sincere connections with youth in care takes persistence and time, when professionals empower youth to be actively involved, it facilitates the space for quality relationships to emerge (Singer, Berzin & Hokanson, 2013). Youth are more willing and able to accept support from authority figures that have not only demonstrated respect for their views, family, and culture, but have also proven themselves as trustworthy advocates (Driscoll, 2013; Sanders & Munford, 2014).

The Balance between Independence and Interdependence

While much of the child welfare system is concerned with promoting independence for youth in care, many academics argue that the act of seeking help is an empowering and necessary element that enhances growth and well-being (Curry & Abrams, 2015; Propp et al., 2003; Rogers, 2011; Quick, Joplin, Nelson, Quick, 1992). Both independence and interdependence are conceptualized as “normative aspects of development emerging from, and depending upon, previous experiences of attaining emotional security and relational connection” (Samuels & Pryce, 2008, p. 1209).

In other words, independence cannot emerge without earlier states of dependence. This has powerful implications for the child welfare system, which typically emphasizes the economic and more practical aspects of adult independence (Curry & Abrams, 2015). While these independent living skills are critical and more easily taught than relational skills, many youth age out of care with few relational skills and supportive networks. They then lack the emotional investments that are foundational to adult independence and well-being (Propp, Ortega & NewHeart, 2003; Quick, Joplin, Nelson, Quick, 1992; Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

One major challenge to forming strong social supports for FYIC is attributed to their complex trauma histories. For example, frequent placement changes, and turnover in social workers and other adults in their lives, makes them more likely to avoid close relationships (Vranceanu, Hobfoll, & Johnson, 2007). Additional factors that make it difficult to connect with FYIC are:

- Caregivers’ stigmatized views of youth in their care;
- Challenges in working with youth in “survival mode”;
- Cultural disconnection or differences; and
- Difficult behaviour on the part of the youth (Storer et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, efforts should still be made to encourage the development of social supports within the lives of FYIC. Merdinger, Hines, Lemon, & Wyatt (2005) reported that FYIC who were successful in the completion of their post-secondary education attributed a large part of their success to the social support they received during their college or university career. In a sample of 252 FYIC, 87% noted that they had a family member or friend to talk to when the stress of university became difficult to manage. Furthermore, over half of respondents also maintained relationships with former child welfare workers, foster parents, and other FYIC peers. These findings echo the 2001 findings of Courtney, Pilivin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith who also found similar patterns. Therefore, the role of social supports, and interdependent relationships, cannot be understated.

3.5 Independent Living Skills

While the average age that an individual becomes self-sufficient generally varies between 26-30 years of age, there is an assumption that youth in foster care are capable of this self-sufficiency by the age of 19. To prepare youth for self-sufficiency, child welfare systems have invested heavily in independent living programs (McCoy, McMillen, Spintznagel, 2008; Tweedle, 2005). Montgomery, Donkoh & Underhill (2006) describe independent living programs (ILP) as “initiatives designed to provide young people leaving care with skills that will limit their disadvantage and aid in their progress to adulthood” (p. 1436). The two streams of focus in ILPs are personal development and independent living factors.

-Info Box 9- Types of Independent Living Skills

1. Personal development skills focus on helping the young person develop competencies such as communication and decision-making.

2. Independent living factors focus more on building skills such as budgeting, household tasks, vocational training, educational attainment (often graduating high school), parenting skills, utilizing community resources, and obtaining housing (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Lemon et al., 2005; Montgomery et al., 2006).

Negative Determinants of Poor Independent Living Skills

Lack of independent living skills translates into negative determinants. For example, after aging out of care, approximately 17% of youth are completely self-supporting. In Unrau et al.’s (2012) study only one third of youth transitioning out of care had basic resources at their disposal such as a driver’s license, money, or basic necessities. Most did not have anyone to co-sign a loan or lease, which in turn made it difficult to secure safe housing. Also, upon aging out, 65% of youth do not have a place to live, and 51% are unemployed (Cooper, Mary & Rassen, 2010; Rassen, Cooper & Mery, 2010).

American studies cite that between 12%-22% of FYIC experience homelessness (Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora, 2003). A Canadian study examined the relationship between foster care, substance abuse, and mental illness and found that among 497 homeless adults, 30% reported being in foster care as children (Patterson, Moniruzzaman, Somers, 2015). In BC, a large-scale study examining the health of homeless and street-involved youth found that over half of the 689 homeless sample (in 13 communities) had lived in government care at one point (McCreary, 2015).

Independent Living Factors That Promote Post-Secondary Completion

Research shows that possessing independent living skills contributes to post-secondary success. Pecora (2012) conducted an extensive analysis of 1,609 case files and conducted 1,987 in-person

interviews with FYIC, and produced a model of fourteen variables that predict high school completion. Among other factors, the study found that youth with employment experience were four times more likely to graduate high school.

Another study found that job preparation skills and having income support services that cover basic needs while attending ILPs was related to positive post-secondary educational and employment outcomes (Barnow et al. 2013). Within two years, in a sample of 1,058, 35% of youth gained employment, 23% obtained a GED, and 17% enrolled in post-secondary schooling (Barnow et al. 2013).

The results also showed that outcomes were more visible when these ILP supports were provided over an extended period of time, further supporting the argument that extending services beyond the age of 18 is a promising practice in promoting the educational attainment of FYIC. Batsche et al. (2012) found that areas important to FYIC as they transitioned into post-secondary schooling were:

- Money management;
- Time management;
- Parenting skills;
- Transportation support; and
- Housing support.

Many spoke of the need for creative strategies to manage these pressures. Given that FYIC are a highly mobile population, some innovative and flexible ways to promote independent living skills that address these barriers include: resource/drop-in centres, internet resources and access, telephone assistance and information hotlines, and independent living refresher workshops (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Lemon et al., 2005; Montgomery et al., 2006). As independent living skills are learned and mastered in stages it is important that programs begin in early adolescence and continue through to early adulthood.

Summary

- Once FYIC reach post-secondary education, continued supports are required to ensure that they complete their intended studies.
- Academic preparedness for post-secondary schooling begins *before* a FYIC enters university. Factors such as effects of maltreatment and trauma and placement instability often contribute to grade repetition, higher attendance in special education, and problematic behaviours at school that result in suspension and expulsion. This inevitably affects learning and the ability to later access higher education.
- Child welfare and education systems are beginning to work together to ensure FYIC complete secondary education and are prepared for higher education. This is done through “care leaving teams” or educational liaisons responsible for the academic portfolios of FYIC in elementary and secondary schools.
- Campus connectedness promotes retention in post-secondary. Many campuses now offer specialized campus support programs specific to FYIC. Typically, programs offer financial aid, housing, academic support, emotional support services, and continued independent living skills.
- Mental health supports on campus must be delivered using trauma informed approaches. However, many campuses may not have the capacity to effectively support FYIC in addressing complex traumas.
- Social support is as important, if not more important, to FYIC when transitioning out of care, and into post-secondary. Help seeking is one of the hallmarks of academically resilient youth.
- The factors that promote help seeking include: readiness of help, quality of help, and the level of trust in relationships. More attention should be paid to striking the balance between independence and interdependence when helping youth transition out of care.
- Independent living skills translate to self-sufficiency in adulthood. Areas where FYIC require additional support to succeed in post-secondary studies are: money management, time management, parenting skills, and living supports (housing and transportation).

4. Youth Voices: What FYIC Say They Need to Succeed

There are a myriad of internal and external factors that promote post-secondary educational attainment for FYIC. While these factors are important, it is equally important to actively inquire about what FYIC say they need to succeed. This practice is sometimes referred to as youth engagement, or the youth participation movement. The youth participation movement begins with the basic premise that “without listening to the voices of those affected by the policies and programs that are created, efforts to improve the systems designed to help them are at risk of failure” (Hass et al., 2014, p. 388). Additionally, giving young people a voice across a variety of policy arenas will not only support civic engagement, but also promote positive youth development (Day, 2011; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky & Fogarty, 2012).

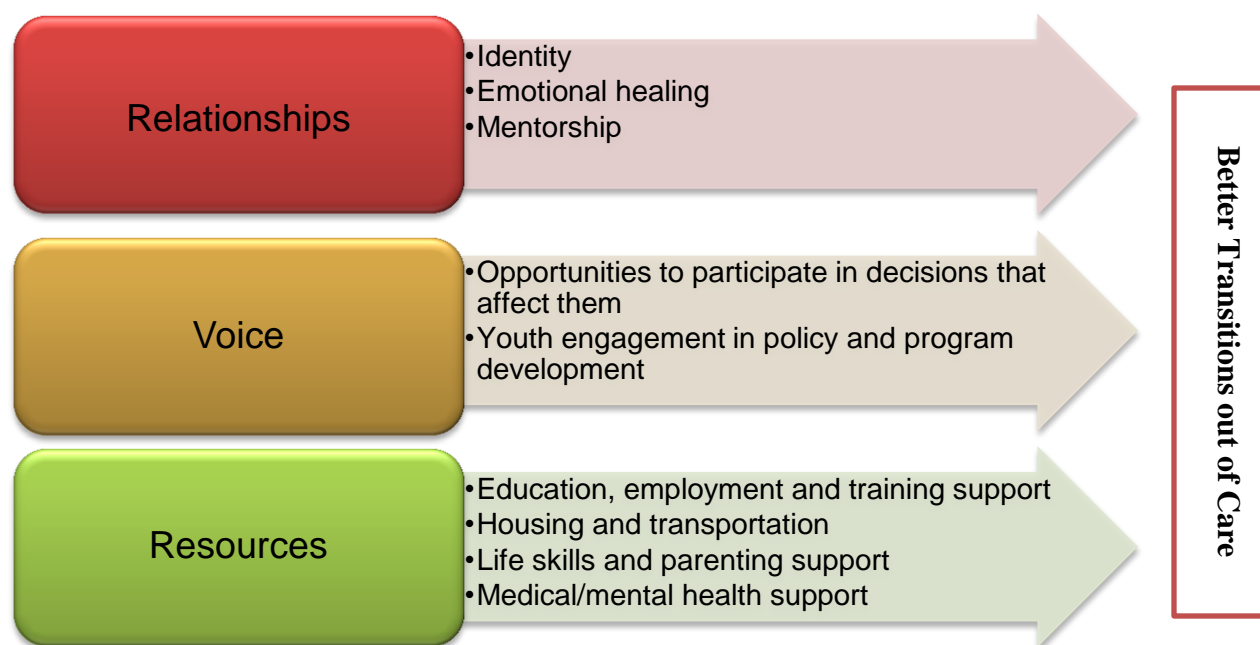
Several US studies have interviewed FYIC to determine what supports they deem necessary when leaving care, with the most notable being: increased financial support, ongoing supportive relationships, mentoring/peer support, assistance in gaining access to education, employment or training programs, parenting support, access to mental health and health services (including medical benefits and coverage), independent living skills, and opportunities to develop decision-making and problem-solving skills (Casey Family Programs, 2008; Rutman et al., 2007; Tweedle, 2005).

In BC, the RCY has also determined that in order to have successful transitions out of care, youth need supports under seven main pillars: relationships, education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement and emotional healing. The underpinning foundation that sustains these pillars is financial assistance (RCY, 2014). Similarly, MCFD has engaged with youth on *Youth Agreements* to inquire about what they deem important for ensuring better transitions to adulthood, and like in previous studies, the most notable requests are:

- Need for ongoing supportive relationships;
- Peer support, independent living training;
- Increased access to financial support; and
- Support in gaining access to education, employment and training programs.

While each of these factors can be separately dissected and analyzed in their own right, for the purposes of brevity, they can be considered as sub-themes under three general categories: relationships, voice and resources (Lavin, 2013; Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2012). Figure 4 conceptualizes the general categories with respective sub-themes based on what youth have said they need to succeed in previous research studies.

Figure 4: Factors that Improve Youth Transitions out of Care



4.1 Relationships

Overwhelming empirical evidence indicates that relationships are the cornerstone of human development, and that youth not only need connections with caring adults and positive peers, but they need to *matter* to someone (Greeson, Usher, & Grinstein-Weiss, 2010; RCY, 2014). In fact, in order to develop intellectually, emotionally, physically and morally, every child needs at least one adult who is “irrationally crazy about him or her” (p. 565). This type of support is important for *all* youth when they are transitioning to adulthood. Yet, research shows that this is not often the case for youth in care. Hiles et al., (2013) conducted a systematic literature review of 47 academic research studies examining young people’s experience with social supports during the process of leaving care, and identified several themes:

- Youth who have stable placements during their time in care were better able to form relationships.
- When positive and supportive, relationships with extended family and friends offered *all* forms of social support (tangible and intangible).
- Some youth who return to their birth families after leaving care experience higher levels of resilience and support, while others experienced the opposite.
- Having relationships with engaged professionals often translates to access to more resources from the child welfare system.
- When professionals offer practical support it creates opportunities to provide emotional support for youth in the future. Money management skills are the primary challenge FYIC report when leaving care.

- Many FYIC experience a lack of voice while in care and want the opportunities to have a voice in decisions that affect them. In addition to a more gradual transition out of care, FYIC also want more control during transition planning.

Within the context of education, youth emphasize the need for better placement stability, as changing schools often interferes with their ability to form bonds with peers, adults, or their community (Lee & Berrick, 2014; McCreary, 2015). Having environmental and relational stability as youth leave care can reduce anxiety about future sources of support, freeing them up to develop skills necessary for adulthood (Day et al., 2012; Hiles et al., 2013; Lavin, 2013).

Youth also want educational advocacy and teachers who are aware of their personal challenges and flexible with their teaching styles, while “adopt[ing] multi-sensory classrooms [and] techniques [that] provide more opportunity for hands on learning” (Day et al., 2012, p. 1011). Being offered opportunities for leadership and extracurricular activities is also important to youth that have left care (Riebschleger et al., 2015). Relationships with engaged and caring adults allow youth to have a voice in decisions that affect them.

4.2 Voice

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children* (Article 12, Section 22(12)) requires children to be consulted about any decisions that concern them, including placements, education, friendships, and the care they are receiving. Young people want to be given a voice and can effectively participate in decision making, including policy making, if given the opportunity; yet their voices are noticeably absent from the literature (Day et al., 2012; Nybell, 2013; Nestmith & Chrisophersen, 2014; Riebschleger et al., 2015; Singer et al., 2013). Providing FYIC with a voice is the main rationale for the youth engagement that was undertaken to answer the research questions for this study.

There are implications for withholding a youth’s right to participate in decisions that affect them (Liebmann & Madden, 2010; Lee & Barrick, 2014). Many FYIC recall frustrations about “being given little to no opportunity to exercise agency while in foster care, yet being expected to be in control and direct [our own] lives upon exiting the system” (Lee & Berrick, 2014, p. 81). Additional harms of excluding youth from decision-making include:

- Emotional damage;
- Inability to make decisions in the future;
- Anxiety;
- Learned helplessness;
- Lack of confidence;
- Frustration with the system; and
- Attachment issues.

On the other hand, sharing power with youth and giving them an opportunity to exercise agency contributes to the development of resilience, health, and well-being (Leeson, 2007). Some challenges that prevent meaningful participation become present when professionals lack the

communication skills required to talk with youth, and when they hold erroneous assumptions that youth are either too emotionally damaged to take part, or too immature to understand the ramifications of their decisions (Leeson, 2007). The time a child is in care should be a place for them to experiment with identity formation, and make mistakes in the presence of caring adults who can help them make sense of how to learn from them, and move forward in a positive way (Lee & Berrick, 2014). The more opportunities a youth has to make decisions, the more confident and proficient they become—a core ingredient for resilience in adulthood (Barnard, 2014).

While not all youth in care have opportunities for meaningful engagement, MCFD is nonetheless taking steps to address this. To encourage youth engagement in the development of policies, programs and services, between 2009-2012 MCFD commissioned the development of a Youth Engagement Toolkit (co-created by youth, MCFD staff, and the University of Victoria). This toolkit was developed to encourage Ministry staff at all levels to assess their current youth engagement practices and create a plan for strengthening it. While many practitioners are used to thinking about engaging youth on an individual level, the concept of youth engagement is about engaging youth as partners and allowing their expertise and ideas to penetrate and change the organization as a whole (MCFD Toolkit, 2009).

Ingredients of Youth Engagement

The basic requirements essential to engagement with youth are warmth, empathy, and sensitivity (Leeson, 2007). Encouraging youth participation is often called the “empowerment movement” and it supports youth to not only give their input regarding decisions that affect them, but to also play leadership roles. Similarly, by understanding the power structures of the system, they can navigate the system in their best interests (Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014). A promising practice emerging in the USA—“*Kidspeak*” forums—give youth in foster care the opportunity to provide insights about various issues affecting them, such as barriers to education and mental health to policy makers, legislators and service providers. They are also encouraged to provide ideas and solutions about how to overcome these challenges (Riebschleger et al., 2015).

These forums are often held in conjunction with two-week-long pre-college programs that allow high school youth to visit universities and learn more about campus life. Often, these high school students are paired with FYIC who are currently attending post-secondary education (Day et al., 2012). This practice not only gives voice to youth in policies that affect them, but also fosters connections necessary for success in post-secondary pursuits. To summarize, resilient FYIC who attend post-secondary institutions typically have three things: adequate preparation, a gradual transition out of care, and at least one stable relationship with a positive adult figure (Hiles et al., 2013).

4.3 Resources

Access to more financial resources emerges in most studies that survey FYIC about what they need to have successful transitions to adulthood. While there are multiple avenues through which resources to young adults can be extended (i.e. independent living programs, parenting support, housing support and social assistance, medical support, support with the cost of post-secondary) some jurisdictions are extending the ability for youth to remain in care past the age of 19 as a means of providing social and financial support. The rationale behind this practice is that many young adults in the general population live at home as they gain independence, or to offset the costs of post-secondary, and youth in care should be extended the same opportunities, if they wish to remain in care.

Extending supports past the age of 19 improves post-secondary educational attainment (Courtney, Dworsky, Pollack, 2007; Hass et al., 2014; Lee & Berrick, 2014). For example, in the United Kingdom the *Staying Put 18+* initiative extends full foster care to youth until the age of 21. This allows young people to maintain and develop their existing relationships and gradually move towards independence while also pursuing education, employment or other training. An evaluation of the *Staying Put 18+* initiative revealed that young people who choose to “stay put” are twice as likely to attend post-secondary as those who do not (55% versus 22%) (Munro, Lushey, Maskell-Graham, Ward & Holmes, 2012).

Post-secondary institutions have also recognized the positive role they can play in providing resources for FYIC through campus support programs, bursaries and scholarships, mentorship programs, and tuition waiver programs (see glossary). FYIC are 50% more likely to attend post-secondary education if they receive financial support to cover their tuition costs (Vancouver Island University, 2015).

The investments made to support FYIC to attend post-secondary institutions are minimal in comparison to the economic costs of not doing so. According to the Conference Board of Canada, FYIC typically earn \$325,000 less over their lifetime than the general population. Without support to attain post-secondary and break the cycle of poverty and unemployment, some FYIC cost the government \$126,000 each in lower tax revenues and social assistance payments (Conference Board of Canada, 2014). While the economic case for investing in the educational futures of FYIC is compelling, it is equally important to empower and support these young people to reach personal fulfillment and attain the same opportunities as their peers in the general population.

-Info Box 10- The Effects of Extended Care in USA

Almost all states in the USA have extended some form of provisions past the age of 18, with 12 states fully extending foster care until the age of 21 (Stein, 2012).

A cost-benefit analysis indicated that the lifetime earnings for FYIC increase by two dollars for every dollar that is spent on keeping them in care beyond 18 (Peters, Fworsky, Courtney & Pollack, 2009).

Moreover, allowing a youth to remain in care until the age of 21 doubles the percentage of those who will earn post-secondary credentials (from 10.2% to 20.4%).

Summary

- In order to succeed in adulthood, FYIC indicate that they need relationships, opportunities for voice/participation in decisions that affect them and more financial resources. By succeeding in their transitions to adulthood they are more likely to access post-secondary education.
- Relationships: healthy relationships allow youth to develop intellectually, emotionally, physically and morally. However, the literature suggests that not all youth in care are provided with the social support they need to thrive.
- Voice: youth want to have a voice in decisions that impact them. The more opportunities a youth has to make decisions, the more confident and proficient they become—a core ingredient for resilience in adulthood.
- Resources: the need for more financial resources emerges in most studies that survey FYIC about what they need to have successful transitions to adulthood. While there are multiple avenues through which resources to young adults can be extended (i.e. independent living programs, parenting support, housing support and social assistance, medical care, support with the cost of post-secondary) some jurisdictions are extending the ability for youth to remain in care past the age of 19 as a means of providing social and financial support.
- A conceptual framework outlining the major themes that promote post-secondary educational outcomes for FYIC is included in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

1. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to identify the factors that increase post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC. This was accomplished through an extensive literature review that identified the personal characteristics of FYIC and environmental factors that promote access to and retention in post-secondary.

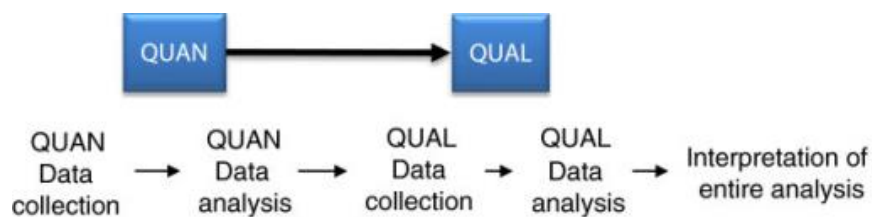
The second element of this research, and the main focus of this section of the paper, engaged 43 young adults who were formerly in government care in BC, and asked them to reflect on their post-secondary educational experience and identify what worked, what didn't, and what they think could be done in BC to improve supports and services for youth leaving care who wish to pursue higher education. Cumulatively, this research answered the following research questions:

- 1. How can the post-secondary completion rates for former youth in care be increased?**
- 2. What types of supports do former youth in care in British Columbia view as being important for success in their post-secondary educational outcomes?**

2. Methods

Upon receiving approval from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria and an internal MCFD privacy and security review, this research was carried out in two phases using a mixed methods methodology, specifically a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2003). The first phase was a comprehensive 30-40 minute *quantitative* online survey. Upon the analysis of phase one results, the findings were further explored using *qualitative* semi-structured open-ended key informant interviews. FYIC who participated in phase one had the option to contact the researcher via email if they wished to participate in a 60-90 minute phone based interview.

Figure 5: Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell, 2003)



A mixed method refers to “all procedures collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in the context of a single study” (Driscoll, 2007, p.19). The main rationale for using this approach is that there is very little known about the post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC in BC. As such, the collection and analysis of structured survey and open-ended key informant interviews in an iterative analytic process can provide important information on emergent and unexpected themes.

A mixed methods approach also provides a more comprehensive method of explaining what is being studied because it allows the same entity to be analyzed from multiple angles. Moreover, it mitigates the danger of drawing incorrect conclusions as utilization of both approaches ensures validation of findings (Carl & Belanger, 2012; Ostlund et al., 2011, p. 371). For example, because FYIC are such a small proportion of the overall post-secondary student population, using both methods allowed for conclusions to be strengthened through triangulation (Creswell, 2003). A more comprehensive analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of mixed methods is provided in the limitations portion of this paper.

3. Sampling

A non-probability purposive sampling procedure was used for this study (McDavid & Huse, 2013). A core characteristic of non-probability sampling is that participants are selected based on the judgement of the researcher, rather than a probabilistic selection. This means that not every FYIC had an equal chance of being selected to participate. Therefore, it is possible that the sample used in this study is not representative of the entire FYIC population; this makes it difficult to generalize the results of the research.

While some academics view probability sampling as a golden standard in research, it is sometimes impractical to employ because it can be expensive and require a lot more time and effort to generate a sample. In this case, because MCFD does not keep records of the private information of youth once they leave care, the researcher had to rely on purposive sampling because there was no comprehensive list that would allow for a probability sampling technique. As this is an exploratory study, a probability sample is not paramount.

To be eligible to participate in this study FYIC had to meet the following criteria:

- Be at least 19 years old; *and*
- Have lived in the care of the MCFD (foster care, group care, or other arrangement) for at least a year; *and*
- Have attended, or be currently attending post-secondary, *and*
- Have been the recipient of any of the following supports: Youth Education Assistance Fund Grant; a tuition waiver program at a post-secondary institution; participated in an Agreement with Young Adults or Independent Living Program through MCFD; *or* received a combination of any of the aforementioned supports *or* received another form of support (financial or non-financial) not included above.

4. Recruitment

The Strategic Priorities Branch at MCFD, currently responsible for the youth transition agenda, emailed a recruitment poster to all youth-serving stakeholders and organizations and encouraged them to post a recruitment poster on their social media pages or other high traffic areas where a FYIC is likely to see it (see Appendix C). The researcher also distributed the poster to universities, research institutes and youth-serving agencies.

The recruitment poster included a brief highlight of the purpose of the survey, eligibility criteria, and a link to the online survey. When participants accessed the survey they were first required to read an information page that outlined the research objectives, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality/anonymity, and consent procedure. Links to resources like AgedOut.com, AYA, YEAF and campus-counselling services were also included. To compensate participants for their time and expertise, all who completed the survey were entered in a draw for a chance to win an iPad. Those who participated in key informant interviews were entered a second time. The survey was open for a total of four-and-a-half weeks.

5. Measures

5.1 Phase 1: Survey Questionnaire

The online survey questionnaire unfolded in six main sections. Participants were asked a total of 105 questions ranging from yes/no, multiple choice, Likert, check-all that apply, ranking and open-ended questions. The majority of the questions were based on internal and environmental factors that emerged in the literature. This was done to examine to what extent the experiences of BC's FYIC align with existing research. Table 1 outlines the six major sections of the survey along with the types of questions that were asked in each section.

A hybrid survey approach was used in generation the questions used in this research. This means that while the majority of questions were created by the researcher, the measurement of some constructs was done using existing validated instruments. For example, stress was measured using the *Perceived Stress Scale*, the measurement of campus connectedness was adapted using *Hemingway's Measure of Adolescent Connectedness*, and the measurement of certain mental health questions was done using the McCreary Adolescent Health Survey questions. The survey was then piloted by three former youth in care who attended post-secondary and revisions were made based on their feedback.

5.2 Phase 1: Composite Scales

Several variables from the survey were amalgamated into composite scales to allow for descriptive and statistical testing (Table 3). The specific items used in the scale corresponded to a grouping of Likert scale questions or yes/no relating to: (1) MCFD supports and services accessed, (2) experience of transition out of care scores, (3) self-assessment of academic skills, (4) campus connectedness, (5) campus services accessed, (6) social supports, (7) stress scores, (8) coping scores, and (9) resilience scores. The specific breakdown of these items is described in the results section. Mental health and independent living skills were not collapsed into

composite scores because the measurement for these questions did not allow them to be summed. See Appendix D for questions that were used in the scales.

5.3 Phase 2: Key Informant Phone Interviews

This phase of the study was focused on exploring unanticipated results through the use of a semi-structured open-ended interview. FYIC were asked to talk about their experience transitioning out of care, what motivated them to attend postsecondary, their greatest challenge(s) in attending post-secondary and what potential solutions they think may alleviate these obstacles, helpful strategies they are using, and to give practical recommendations to MCFD and their schools. They were also asked about what they think could improve the post-secondary completion rates of FYIC.

Table 1: Measures Used in Phase 1

SECTION	TYPES OF QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE SURVEY
1. MCFD HISTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics • MCFD history: placement stability, type of homes, length of stay in care, connection with biological family, legal status when leaving care • Experiences surrounding the transition out of care • Types of supports accessed to attend post-secondary (i.e. tuition waivers, YEAF grant, AYA, post-secondary specific supports) • The receptivity, utilization and perceived effectiveness of services • Current connection with biological and extended family
2. ACADEMIC PROFILE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary/high school stability • Academic readiness and preparedness (i.e. grades, upgrading) • General post-secondary questions: school, program, grades, course-load • Specific post-secondary questions: types of supports accessed and perceived effectiveness, self-assessment of academic skills (time management, stress management, problem-solving, leadership etc.) • Stress management: using <i>Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale</i> (10 questions) • Temporary or permanent withdrawal from program
3. CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus connectedness: engagement in campus activities, connectedness to peers and teachers, extra-curricular activities, cultural support, satisfaction with program and post-secondary institution
4. HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment of general, mental health and self-esteem • Coping skills (i.e. healthy eating, exercise, seeking support etc.) • Experiences with mental health services on campus
5. SOCIAL SUPPORTS & INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory of current social supports and assessment of helpfulness • Number of dependents • Assessment of independent living skills (housing, transportation, health, money management, employment)
6. RESILIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience: autonomy and independence, resourcefulness, optimism, humor, view of self, view of future, goals, internal locus of control

6. Procedures for Analysis

The Fluid Survey platform was used to collect data for Phase 1 and to generate descriptive statistics. Then, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct statistical analyses. Chi-Square, T-test, and Correlation were undertaken using a 0.05 confidence level. The analysis of Phase 2 data was conducted in three stages using Richie & Spencer's (2002) "framework model" to sort, classify and map the data. The first phase of the analysis involved transcribing the interviews into a Word document. Next, a document with five columns was developed to organize the 100+ pages of raw data. The table below outlines the purpose of each column in the second stage of data analysis.

Table 2: Process of Analysis of Qualitative Data

	PURPOSE OF COLUMN
1.	The first column contained the verbatim transcription of the interview.
2.	As the researcher sifted through the transcriptions, the second column was used to document subthemes or patterns that emerged within the data. The general items that were coded in this column included: events, behaviours, activities, strategies, states, meanings (i.e. norms, symbols, and feelings), participation, relationships, conditions or constraints, consequences, settings and context.
3.	The third column was then used to amalgamate the sub-themes into general categories. The major themes were: academic supports, campus connectedness, mental health supports, social supports, and independent living supports.
4.	The fourth column was dedicated to documenting Ryan & Bernard's (2003) techniques to identify themes. This was done in the fourth reading of the data as a means of justifying the themes. These techniques used to justify themes included: repetitions, use of indigenous typologies or categories (i.e. looking for local terms that are used in unfamiliar ways), metaphors or analogies, transitions, similarities, differences, linguistic connections (i.e. "cause" "since" "as a result" which often indicate causal connections), missing data (inferring a theme based on what was not said), and theory related material (i.e. the themes identified in the literature).
5.	The last column was used as a space for the researcher to document any questions or considerations for the analysis.












CHAPTER 4: Results

Part 1 Findings: Descriptive Statistics

1.1 Participants

In total, 43 FYIC participated in this study: 28 fully completed the survey, 5 partially completed, 10 were “terminated” due to a glitch in the fluid survey platform. Of the 28 students, 5 volunteered to participate in key informant interviews. All 43 responses were used in the descriptive statistics portion of the analysis but only the 28 respondents who fully completed the survey were included in statistical analyses. Three quarters of participants identified as female (71.4%, n=30), a quarter identified male (23.8%, n=10), and two identified as transgendered (4.8%). Their ages ranged from 19-61, with an average age of 28 and a modal and median age of 24. The three most common ethnicities were: European, Aboriginal, and East Asian. Many of the “other” categories were various mixes of European or Aboriginal.

Figure 6. Ethnicity

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Aboriginal		28.6%	12
b. African		0.0%	0
c. European (British, Irish, German, Dutch, Ukrainian, Russian, etc)		54.8%	23
d. East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc)		7.1%	3
e. South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc)		4.8%	2
f. Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian, Vietnamese, etc)		0.0%	0
g. West Asian (Afghani, Iranian, Arab, Kazakhistani, etc)		0.0%	0
h. Latin American, South American, Central American		0.0%	0
i. Australian, Pacific Islander		0.0%	0
j. Other (Please Specify)		16.7%	7
k. Don't know		7.1%	3
		Total Responses	42

1.2 The Composite Scales

Eight composite scales were created and are outlined in the chart below. Essentially, what this means is that the answers from a range of questions measuring similar constructs were collapsed into one scale. For example, the “*MCFD Supports*” scale had eight items: AYA, YEAF, YTC, AgedOut.com, Kinnections Mentoring, Social Worker, Youth Transition Worker, and Individualized Education Plan. In a yes/no question format, participants indicated if they received that support, with 0 indicating “no” and 1 indicating “yes”. Subsequently, the composite score for this scale ranged between 0-8, meaning that a youth accessed between 0 and

8 supports. For this sample, 0 was the least amount of supports accessed (sample min), 4 was the most supports accessed (sample max), and 2.2 was the average number of supports accessed (sample average). The same logic followed the rest of the scales.

Table 3: Composite Scales

Scale	Items	Scale Range	Sample Min	Sample Max	Sample Average
MCFD Support (n=26)	8	0-8	0	4	2.2
Transition (n=28)	7	7-35	6	29	18.0
Academic Skills (n=28)	6	6-30	13	30	20.7
Campus Connectedness (n=26)	14	14-70	29	70	52.4
Campus Services (n=26)	4	0-24	0	12	5.0
Social Support (n=14)	13	13-52	20	48	34.1
Stress (n=28)	9	9-45	17	41	28.3
Coping (n=28)	10	1-40	16	30	23.7
Resilience (n=26)	18	18-90	54	88	69.8

1.3 MCFD History

Age Participants Came into the Care of MCFD (n=36): A quarter of participants came into MCFD care between the age of 1 and 5 (25.0%, n=17), 16.7% between the age of 6-10 (n=6), 47.2% between the age of 11 and 15 (n=9), and 11.1% between the age of 16-18 (n=4). Almost a third (29.4%) went back to live with their biological parents. Of these, half went back at least once (n=6), and a third went back 5 or more times (n=4).

Total Years in Care (n=41): The total number of years participants spent in care ranged between 1 and 19, with an average of 7.8 years. The largest proportion of participants reported that they spent 1-3 years in care (31.3%, n=10).

Type of Living Arrangements (n=43): Participants were asked to identify which living arrangements/placements they lived in for the longest period of time. Over half (53.5%, n=23) cited foster homes, a quarter (23.3%, n=10) cited independent living, 14.0% (n=6) cited supports to live with relatives, and 9.3% (n=4) cited group homes.

Number of Placement Changes While in MCFD Care (n=42): While half of participants had less than three placement changes (50%, n=21), almost a quarter (23.8%, n=10) had 7 or more changes. Of 39 participants, close to a third (27.8%, n=5) noted that the longest time they stayed in any living arrangement/placement without interruption was less than a year, 20.2% (n=4) reported between 1-3 years, and 20.2% (n=4) reported between 6-8 years.

Figure 7: Number of Placement Changes While in MCFD Care

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. 1		11.9%	5
b. 2		28.6%	12
c. 3		9.5%	4
d. 4		9.5%	4
e. 5		7.1%	3
f. 6		9.5%	4
g. 7 or more		23.8%	10
Total Responses			42

Contact with Family of Origin (n=43): Participants were asked to identify to what extent they are currently in contact with their family and extended family. The majority of participants were “not at all” or “somewhat in contact” with their biological families (58.1%, n=25). Roughly the same was true for contact with extended families, with 64.9% (n=28) reporting that they are “not at all” or “somewhat in contact.”

Figure 8: Current Contact with Biological Family

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Not at all in contact		39.5%	17
b. Somewhat in contact (special occasions)		18.6%	8
c. Occasionally in contact (monthly contact)		11.6%	5
d. Frequently in contact (daily or weekly contact)		30.2%	13
Total Responses			43

Homelessness While in Care (n=15): More than a third (36.6%) of all participants experienced ‘unstable housing’ or homelessness while in MCFD care. Almost a quarter (26.7%, n=4) noted that it happened at least once, 46.7% (n=7) noted it happened between 2-5 times, and the remainder cited more than 6 times (26.7%, n=4). Unstable housing was operationalized as not knowing where one will stay/sleep that night. The length of time participants experienced unstable housing is depicted below.

Figure 9: Length of Time Experiencing Homelessness

Response	Chart	Percentages	Count
1 month		13%	2
1-5 days		20%	3
7-10 days		33%	5
More than a month		33%	5
Total Responses			15

Legal Status at Age 19 (n=43): The majority of participants were on a Youth Agreement when they aged out of care (34.9%, n=16), followed by a Continuing Custody Order (27.9%, n=12). Roughly a fifth (20.9%, n=9) did not have a status, suggesting that they either returned to live with their biological parent(s) or were adopted. 4 individuals identified as being adopted in the “other” category. Three were adopted as a sibling group, and all three completed the survey.

Figure 10: Legal Status at Age 19

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Continuing Care		27.9%	12
b. Temporary Care		0.0%	0
c. Special Needs Agreement		0.0%	0
d. Voluntary Care Agreement		0.0%	0
e. Youth Agreement		34.9%	15
f. I don't know		16.3%	7
g. “Other”		20.9%	9
Total Responses			43

The Transition out of Care (n=34): Participants were asked to identify their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements on a five-point Likert scale. Questions focused on how prepared they felt to leave care, whether they knew who their social supports were going to be when leaving care, whether they felt included and acknowledged in decision making as they were leaving care. They were also asked if they felt that social workers cared about their future, encouraged them to attend post-secondary and provided them with necessary information about supports available.

The composite scores for these questions are also included in the “Transition” Composite Scale in Table 3. In general, youth who transitioned out of care reported the following:





- 44.0% (n=16) did not feel like they were prepared to transition out of care, while a third (35.3%, n=12) felt “prepared” or “very prepared” to leave.
- 50.0% (n=17) knew whom their social supports were going to be when they transitioned out of care. 35.2% did not know who their social supports were going to be (n=12).
- 47.0% (n=16) felt that social workers cared about their future and 50.5% (n=17) were encouraged by a social worker to attend post-secondary (53.0%, n=18).

- 50.0% (n=17) did not receive information about post-secondary from their social workers. Only a third (29.4%, n=10) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were given enough information about financial supports for post-secondary.
- 48.8% (n=16) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were given adequate support to fill out financial aid applications like YEAF, AYA, or tuition waivers.
- 47.1% (n=16) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that their opinions and thoughts were recognized during transition planning, a quarter (23.5%, n=8) were neutral, and the other third “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” (29.3%, n=10). The same trends were true when asked whether they felt involved in decision making as they aged out of care.

Tuition Waiver or Community Supports (n=35): Roughly 20.6% (n=7) of participants received a tuition waiver, and 31.4% (n=11) indicated that they received services from a community or other type of government agency that supported them to access post-secondary. The most cited community agency was the Federation of BC Youth in Care Network. Additionally, the overwhelming majority (85.3%, n=29) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that receiving financial support was a good incentive to attend post-secondary. However, only 41.2% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they received enough financial support to cover their post-secondary expenses.

Types of MCFD Supports Accessed (n=28): Participants were asked to check all the MCFD supports they received to attend post-secondary from a list provided. Their responses are depicted in the chart below. The most commonly accessed supports were Agreements with Young Adults (AYA), Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAF), and talking to social workers. Additionally, as indicated by the MCFD Supports Composite Scale in Table 3, on average, participants only accessed 2.2 types of services.

Figure 11: Types of MCFD Supports Accessed

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. AYA		71.4%	20
b. YEAF		57.1%	16
c. YTC		0.0%	0
d. AgedOut.com		0.0%	0
e. Kinnections Mentoring Program		0.0%	0
f. Talking to my Social Worker		57.1%	16
g. Talking to my Youth Care Worker		25.0%	7
h. An Individualized Education Plan		3.6%	1
Total Responses			28

Helpfulness of Supports (n=31): Participants were asked to rate each support they accessed from “not helpful at all” to “extremely helpful.” They also had the option of choosing “didn’t access this service” or “didn’t know this service existed”. By far the most helpful supports were AYA, YEAF, and Tuition Waiver. However, a considerable amount of respondents did not know many of MCFD’s supports existed or heard about them for the first time while filling out this survey. The table below outlines general trends.

Table 4: Helpfulness of MCFD Supports

	Extremely helpful	Helpful	Average	Extremely unhelpful	Did not access	Did not know existed	Count
a. AYA	14 (45%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	11 (35%)	31
b. YEAF	16 (50%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	9 (28%)	5 (15%)	32
c. YTC	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	5 (17%)	23 (79%)	29
d. AgedOut.com	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (27%)	21 (72%)	29
e. Kinnections	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	26 (89%)	29
f. Tuition Waiver	7 (24%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	17 (58%)	29
g. Community Service	4 (13%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	8 (26%)	14 (46%)	30
h. IEP	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	6 (20%)	20 (66%)	30
i. Social worker	5 (16%)	6 (19%)	9 (29%)	4 (12%)	2 (6%)	5 (16%)	31
j. Youth care worker	0 (0%)	7 (23%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)	8 (26%)	6 (20%)	30

1.4 Academic Profiles of Participants

Grades in High School (n=29): Roughly about a third of students reported being an “A” or “A and B” student (30.0%, n=9). About a half reported being a “B” or “B or C” student (48.2%, n=14), and a fifth reported getting “Cs and incompletes” (20.7%, n=6).

Elementary and High School Changes (n=29): In elementary school, the number of school changes ranged between 1 and 15, with a mean number of 4, and a median number of 3 and a modal number of 1. This number dropped in high school, and the number of changes ranged between 1 and 5, with a mean number of 2.21, a median number of 2 and a modal number of 1.

Social Supports During Transition to Post-Secondary (n=34): The majority of participants (28.0%, n=6) reported that nobody helped them transition to post-secondary; rather it was their own internal drive to succeed that motivated them to apply and navigate the application process. However, 23.0% (n=5) noted that a biological family member helped them (grandparent, mom, sibling), 9% said a foster parent (n=4), 9% high school staff (n=4), and 9% MCFD social worker (n=4) helped them.

Preparation for Post-Secondary (n=29): Only over a quarter of students reported feeling “very prepared” or “prepared” (27.5%, n=8) to attend post-secondary. In fact, almost half (41.4%, n=12) had to upgrade English, Math, Science, or all three in order to attend post-secondary education. Participants reported that family members (n=5), friends (n=5), and MCFD workers (n=5) were the most helpful advocates to help them in their transition to post-secondary studies. Other helpers included foster parents, high school staff, and significant others.

Figure 12: Preparation for Post-Secondary

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Very Prepared		3.4%	1
b. Prepared		24.1%	7
c. Average		37.9%	11
d. Not Prepared		17.2%	5
e. Not Prepared at all		17.2%	5
Total Responses			29

Post-secondary Institution (n=28): Most participants are attending or have attended University of Victoria (n=6), Langara College (n=5), and Vancouver Island University (n=2). The “other” universities represented were: Sprott Shaw College, Northwest Community College, Surrey Community College, College of New Caledonia, and North Island College.

Figure 13: Post-Secondary Institutions of Participants

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Capilano University		3.6%	1
b. Kwantlen Polytechnic University		3.6%	1
c. Royal Roads University		0.0%	0
d. Simon Fraser University		0.0%	0
e. Thompson Rivers University		3.6%	1
f. University of British Columbia		3.6%	1
g. University of the Fraser Valley		7.1%	2
h. University of Northern British Columbia		0.0%	0
i. University of Victoria		21.4%	6
j. Vancouver Island University		7.1%	2
k. Camosun College		3.6%	1
l. Douglas College		10.7%	3
m. Langara College		17.9%	5
n. British Columbia Institute of Technology		0.0%	0
o. Justice Institute of British Columbia		0.0%	0
p. Nicola Valley Institute of Technology		0.0%	0
q. Other, please specify...		17.9%	5
Total Responses			28

Credential: Almost three quarters of participants (71.4%, n=20) are pursuing a degree program, 14.3% a diploma (n=4), 3.6% (n=1) a trade, 3.6% a certificate (n=1), and 2 were undecided. One participant completed 3 credentials and was working on their 4th.

Year of Study and Courses Taken (n=28): Half of respondents were in their 1st and 2nd year of study (53.6%, n=15), 7.1% (n=2) were in their third year, and the remaining already completed post-secondary (n=11, 39.9%). The number of courses participants were enrolled in ranged from 1-5, with an average of 2.

Hours Worked per Week (n=29): About half of students worked while attending post-secondary (55.2%, n=16). The average number of hours worked per week ranged from 2-40+ hours per week, with an average of 20, median of 20, and mode of 10.

Time Spent Studying and Grades (n=29): Students were asked to estimate how many hours a week they spent studying or working on course-related work (not including lecture time). The majority indicated that they spend between 5-9 hours (31.0%, n=9). Additionally, self-reported grades in post-secondary were higher than in high school, with the majority of students indicating that they were “A” or “A and B” students (77.8%, n=21). None of the students reported failing grades in post-secondary.

Figure 14: Time Spent Studying/Course Work

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. 1-4 hours		10.3%	3
b. 5-9 hours		31.0%	9
c. 10-15 hours		20.7%	6
d. 16-20 hours		27.6%	8
e. More than 21 hours		10.3%	3
Total Responses			29

Assessment of Academic Skills (n=29): Participants were also asked to self-assess on several micro skills identified in the literature as being important for post-secondary academic success (macro skills being reading and math comprehension etc.). In general, students self-assessed as having average to very strong skills on all factors, except for time management and managing stress. Also, as seen in the composite scale in Table 5, the average self-assessed score was 20.7 (scale ranged from 6-30). This indicates that students generally have a positive view of their academic skills.

Table 5: Assessment of Academic Skills

	Very strong	Strong	Average	Weak	Very Weak	Count
a. Time Management	4 (13%)	6 (20%)	11 (37%)	6 (20%)	2 (6%)	29
b. Study skills	3 (10%)	8 (27%)	10 (34%)	7 (24%)	1 (3%)	29
c. Leadership	10 (34%)	9 (31%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	29
d. Problem-solving	11 (37%)	10 (34%)	7 (24%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	29
e. Communication	7 (24%)	10 (34%)	11 (37%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	29
f. Managing Stress	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	9 (31%)	12 (41%)	4 (13%)	29

1.5 Campus Connectedness

Access of Supports on Campus (n=28): Participants were asked to identify whether they participated in certain events that the literature suggested improves campus connectedness such as orientations, mentoring, campus support programs to find housing, scholarships, mental health, career counselling, and programs specifically tailored for FYIC. For this sample, the most accessed supports were: campus support programs to find housing, scholarships, mental health and career counselling (42.9%, n=12), campus orientations (39.3%, n=11), and support programs specific to FYIC (7.4%, n=2). Only 1 individual participated in a mentoring program.

Frequency of Access of Supports on Campus (n=28): Students were also asked how often they accessed supports. The most utilized service was the *Writing Centre*, followed by *Other Campus Support* services, which students indicated were mental health and counselling supports. As with the MCFD supports, a considerable amount of students did not know these services existed.

Table 6: Access of Supports on Campus

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never	Didn't know existed	Count
a. Writing Centre	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	4 (14%)	12 (42%)	5 (17%)	28
b. Math Centre	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	16 (59%)	6 (22%)	27
c. Special Ed.	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	21 (75%)	3 (10%)	28
d. Tutoring	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	19 (65%)	3 (10%)	29
e. Other Supports	4(19%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	11 (52%)	4 (19%)	21

Campus Connectedness: To assess the student's overall campus connectedness, students were asked a series of 14 questions on a five-point Likert scale. The questions adapted from the *Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness*. The questions ranged from satisfaction with program/campus, engagement on campus, connection to peers, connection to professors, etc. A composite score was created (see Table 3) to determine level of campus connectedness. The lowest score a student could get was 14 and the highest was 70. The scores for this sample ranged from 29-70, with a mean score of 52.42, and a median score of 53.0. This indicates that students feel "averagely" connected to their post-secondary institutions.

1.6 Health and Mental Health

Self-assessment of Overall Health, Mental Health and Self-esteem (n=28): About half of participants (53.6%, n=15) described their overall health as "excellent" or "good" and the remainder described it as "fair" or "poor." When asked to describe their mental health, 3.6% (n=1) cited "excellent", 46.4% (n=13) "good", 46.4% (n=13) "fair", and 3.6% (n=1) "poor". However, when asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statement "*I usually feel good about myself*" the majority (71.4%, n=20) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they felt good about themselves, indicating a strong positive self-image.

Health Conditions and Disabilities (n=26): Health conditions, disabilities and mental health were assessed using the McCreary Society’s Adolescent Health Survey (2013) questions. The majority of students (50.0%, n=13) did not report a condition, 42.3% (n=11) reported a mental health or emotional condition, and 19.2% (n=5) reported “other” which included: kidney stones, surgery recovery from gender re-assignment, cancer, asthma and chronic back pain.

Figure 15: Health Conditions and Disabilities

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. No, I do not have a health condition or disability.		50.0%	13
b. A physical disability (i.e. cerebral palsy, use a wheelchair).		0.0%	0
c. A sensory disability (i.e. hearing impaired, vision impaired).		3.8%	1
d. A long term/chronic medical disability (i.e. diabetes/asthma).		15.4%	4
e. A mental health or emotional condition (i.e. depression).		42.3%	11
f. A learning disability (i.e. dyslexia).		0.0%	0
g. A behavioral condition (conduct disorder, problems with anger).		0.0%	0
h. A severe allergy requiring an EpiPen.		0.0%	0
i. Other, please specify...		19.2%	5
Total Responses			26














Mental Health (n=25): Consistent with findings from the literature, the majority of mental health conditions that were reported included depression (32.0%, n=8), PTSD (28.0%, n=7), and anxiety or panic attacks (28.0%, n=8). See Figure 16 for more details.

Figure 16: Mental Health

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. FASD/FAS/FAE (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder)		8.0%	2
b. Autism or Asperger’s		0.0%	0
c. Depression		32.0%	8
d. PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder)		28.0%	7
e. Anxiety Disorder or Panic Attacks		28.0%	7
f. ADHD/ADD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)		16.0%	4
g. I have none of these conditions or disabilities		40.0%	10
h. Other		0.0%	0
Total Responses			25

Access of Mental Health Services (n=28): Participants were asked whether they felt that they needed emotional or mental health services in the last 12 months, but did not get them. Almost two-thirds (60.7%, n=17) indicated yes. They were also asked what their reasons for not accessing services were in a “check all that apply” list. The top five reasons included: they thought the problem would go away (47.1%, n=8), they were busy (47.1%, n=8), they couldn’t go when the service was open (29.3%, n=5), they had negative experiences before (29.3%, n=5), and they didn’t know where to go (n=23.5%). Figure 17 displays the trends.

Figure 17: Reasons for Not Accessing Mental Health Support

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Didn't know where to go		23.5%	4
b. Had no transportation		11.8%	2
c. Didn't think I could afford it		23.5%	4
d. Couldn't go when it was open		29.4%	5
e. Afraid someone I know might see me		11.8%	2
f. Afraid of what I would be told		17.6%	3
g. Thought or hoped the problem would go away		47.1%	8
h. The service was not available in my community		5.9%	1
i. The service was not available at my post-secondary institution		0.0%	0
j. On a waiting list		17.6%	3
k. I had negative experiences before		29.4%	5
l. I was too busy		47.1%	8
m. I don't want help		5.9%	1
n. Other, please specify...		23.5%	4
Total Responses			17

Access of Mental Health at Post-Secondary (n=28): Of the 17 students (39.3%) who accessed a mental health support at their post-secondary institution, the majority found it helpful (45.5%, n=5) or extremely helpful (18.2%, n=2) and the remainder found it not helpful (n=27.3%, n=3) or extremely unhelpful (9.1%, n=1). However, it is important to note that when students were asked if they knew where to go if they had a mental health problem almost half (46.4%, n=13) indicated that they would *not* know where to go. Additionally, only 50% (n=14) had someone who they trusted on campus to discuss a mental health challenge if they felt that they were struggling.

1.7 Social Supports and Independent Living Skills

Social Support (n=27): Participants were asked to identify whether 13 statements were “very accurate,” “accurate,” “somewhat accurate,” or “not at all accurate” of their social support situation while attending post-secondary education. Statements ranged from agreement about having adults who care, someone to talk to, friends, foster parent connections, bio parent connections, significant others, Aboriginal connection to community, having someone to borrow money from in emergencies, mentors/guides etc. The responses of students were collapsed into a composite score, as indicated in Table 3. The scale range was 13-52, and the average score was 34.1, indicating that in general students oscillated between “somewhat accurate” and “accurate” on the majority of statements.

When asked if they had an adult they felt comfortable talking to if they had a serious problem, virtually all participants said yes (96.3%, n=26). When asked to assess the “helpfulness” of supports from a list provided, the most commonly cited “helpful” supports were friends (53.8%, n=14), significant others (48.0%, n=12), and professors on campus (23.1%, n=6).

Dependents (n=26): Roughly a fifth of participants (15.4%, n=4) had dependents while attending post-secondary education. Three had children, and one had younger siblings that they were simultaneously taking care of.

Assessment of Support for Independent Living (n=27): Participants were asked to identify to what extent they felt that they had sufficient support in a range of independent living factors when transitioning to post-secondary education. More often than not, participants indicated that they had insufficient support.

Table 7: Independent Living Factors

	Sufficient Support	Insufficient Support	Support not Needed	Count
a. Financial management (budgeting)	6 (22.2%)	14 (51.9%)	7 (25.9%)	27
b. Financial aid (bursaries/scholarships)	9 (33.3%)	15 (55.6%)	3 (11.1%)	27
c. Life-skills coaching/activities	5 (18.5%)	13 (48.1%)	9 (33.3%)	27
d. Finding housing	9 (33.3%)	8 (29.6%)	10 (37.0%)	27
e. Transportation	13(48.1%)	5 (18.5%)	9 (33.3%)	27
f. Cultural or spiritual support	5 (18.5%)	7 (25.9%)	15 (55.2%)	27
g. Child Care/Parenting (if applicable)	2 (7.4%)	2 (7.4%)	23 (85.2%)	27

Most Challenging Independent Living Factors (n=20-24): Participants were also asked to rank (from 1-8) which independent living areas continue to challenge them as it relates to their ability to participate in post-secondary. The top 3 areas that continue to be a challenge are: financial management, financial aid, and finding housing. The remaining ranks include: transportation, cultural and spiritual support, child-care, balancing school and work, and life-skills.

1.8 Stress, Coping Skills and Resilience

Stress (n=28): To measure stress, Sheldon Cohen's *Perceived Stress Scale* (1989) was used. This is the most widely used instrument for measuring the perception of stress. The 10 questions ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month, and in each case, respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way using a five-point Likert scale. This instrument has shown strong reliability (alpha of 0.82). However, since questions pertaining to resilience were also asked, this scale was slightly modified to prevent asking participants the same types of questions twice. The composite scale in Table 3 indicates that the scale range was 9-45. The lowest score scale was 17, and the highest was 41. The average stress score was 28.3, indicating that students had an average level of stress.

Coping (n=28): Students were also asked to identify how often (never, sometimes, often, always) they participate in activities that maintain their physical, mental and emotional health on 10 activities (i.e. how often they exercise, follow a healthy diet, sleep, participate in activities that are relaxing, maintain a sense humour, ask for help, attend spiritual or religious services

etc.). The scale range was 1-40, the lowest coping score was 16, the highest was 30, and the average was 23.7 (see Table 3). This indicates a slightly above average coping score.

Resilience (n=28): To test resilience a series of 18 questions were asked that asked participants to identify their level of agreement or disagreement on items that the literature identified as resilient behaviour (i.e. personal strengths, problem solving, decision making, autonomy etc.). The scale range was 18-90, the lowest resilience score was 54, the highest was 88, and the average was 69.8, indicating that this sample of students displayed high levels of resilience (see Table 3).

To conclude the survey, several open ended questions were included to give FYIC the opportunity to identify their number one challenge in participating in completing post-secondary, their main strategies to finish school, and to offer recommendations to their post-secondary institution and MCFD. The recommendations from the survey and the interviews were analyzed and are provided in the recommendations section of this report.

Challenges and Strategies (n=26): The main challenges identified were continued financial hardship and/or financial management, difficulty in balancing school, work and other responsibilities and anxiety/stress management. Students were also asked to identify their main strategies. The majority indicated that their own personal motivation, drive and passion is their main strategy for success. Many cited that they did not want to be a FYIC “statistic” and wanted to beat the odds. Other strategies include: hard work and focus, planning and time management, realistic goal setting, creative problem solving and asking for help, staying positive, practicing self-care and other “tricks” they developed along the way. For example, one student mentioned that they never study with their cell phone or other items that distract them.

Summary: Phase 1, Descriptive Statistics

Participants

- In total, 43 FYIC participated in this study. 28 fully completed the survey, 5 partially completed and 10 were “terminated” due to a glitch in the Fluid Survey platform. All 43 students were used in the analysis of Part 1 of the Findings, but only the 28 who fully completed the survey were used in statistical tests (Part 2 of Findings).
- Three quarters of participants were female (71.4%, n=30), a quarter male (23.8%, n=10), and two transgendered (4.8%). Their ages ranged from 19-61, with an average age of 28 and a modal and median age of 24.
- The three most common ethnicities were: Caucasian (n=23), Aboriginal (n=14) and East Asian (n=3).

Highlights

- Roughly half of students came into care between the age of 11-15, and the average years spent in care was 7.8 years.
- While half of participants had three or less placement changes while in care, about a quarter had seven or more.
- On average, out of a list of eight types of MCFD supports, students only accessed two (AYA and YEAF). A very high proportion of students did not know supports from MCFD existed.
- Most students were pursuing a degree in post-secondary and the three most represented schools were University of Victoria, Langara College and Vancouver Island University.
- The most commonly accessed supports on campus were financial aid, housing support and counselling/mental health support.
- 42.3% of students reported having a mental health condition. However, of these students, 60.7% did not attempt to get help within the last 12 months. When asked why they didn't get help, their top answers included: “I thought the problem would go away”, “I was too busy”, “I couldn't go when the service was open” and “I had a negative experience before.”
- 96.3% of students said they had an adult they trusted who they could speak to if they had a serious issue or problem. In general, students reported having adequate social support.
- The three most pressing problems that continue to challenge FYIC in post-secondary are: financial management, financial aid (accessing scholarships, bursaries, filling out application) and housing.
- Students in this sample had high resilience scores, above average coping scores, and average level stress scores.

Part 2 Findings: Statistical Analyses

Three types of statistical tests were used to assess relationships between different variables: *Chi-Square Test*, *Independent Sample T-test*, and *Bi-variate Correlation*. The Chi-Square test was used to examine whether Aboriginal status and gender was associated with completion of post-secondary or temporary withdrawal. T-tests were used to test the mean differences between gender and all composite scales as well as Aboriginal status and all composite scales. Finally, correlations were computed to assess the associations between all composite scales, as well as specific variables that were identified in the literature as being important for successful post-secondary completion (more details later). All results were interpreted using an alpha of 0.05. This means that for statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) there was only a 5% chance that the results occurred by random chance alone.

2.1 Results of Chi-Square Tests

- **Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal Completion Rate:** Aboriginal students appear to complete post-secondary education at higher rates than their counterparts. Of the 9 Aboriginal students who participated, 4 (44.4%) completed post-secondary education, in contrast to 6 of the 19 (31.6%) non-Aboriginal students. However, this finding was not statistically significant.
- **Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal Temporary Withdrawal:** There was no statistically significant association between Aboriginal status and temporary withdrawal from post-secondary education. However, judging merely by the numbers, Aboriginal students in this sample withdrew at lower rates. Of the 9 Aboriginal students who participated, 5 (55.5%) withdrew from their program at least once, compared to 11 of the 18 (61.1%) non-Aboriginal students.
- **Gender and Temporary Withdrawal:** There was no statistically significant association between gender and temporary withdrawal from post-secondary education. However, it appeared that males were more likely to temporarily withdraw than females. Of the 7 males who answered this question, 4 (57.1%) withdrew at least once, compared to 7 of the 19 (36.8%) females.

2.2 Results of Independent Sample T-tests (2-tailed)

- **Gender:** Several T-tests were computed to test the mean differences between male and female on each of the 8 composite scales. There was no statistically significant association between gender and any of the composite scales.
- **Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal:** T-tests were also computed to test the mean differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants on each composite scale. The only statistically significant finding was that Aboriginal students experienced more stress than non-Aboriginal students ($p = 0.04$). See Table 8 for the results of all the t-tests.

Table 8: Composite Scale T-test Results for Aboriginal vs. Non Aboriginal

COMPOSITE SCALE	1=Aboriginal 0=Non-Aboriginal	N	Mean (x)	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Significance (2 tailed)
RESILIENCE COMPOSITE	1.00	9	65.6667	6.40312	2.13437	.132
	.00	17	72.0588	10.96854	2.66026	
STRESS COMPOSITE	1.00	9	31.0000	3.39116	1.13039	.040
	.00	19	27.0526	6.92398	1.58847	
CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS COMPOSITE SCORE	1.00	9	51.2222	5.93249	1.97750	.341
	.00	17	53.0588	10.36503	2.51389	
MCFD SUPPORT COMPOSITE	1.00	8	2.6250	.74402	.26305	.157
	.00	18	2.0000	1.23669	.29149	
ACADEMIC SKILLS COMPOSITE SCORE	1.00	9	18.5556	3.64387	1.21462	.640
	.00	19	21.7368	4.39497	1.00828	
SOCIAL SUPPORT COMPOSTIE SCORE	1.00	6	30.6667	6.59293	2.69155	.668
	.00	8	36.6250	7.28869	2.57694	
COPING COMPOSITE SCORE	1.00	9	22.2222	4.11636	1.37212	.823
	.00	19	24.2105	3.66028	.83973	
CAMPUS SERVICES COMPOSITE SCORE	1.00	8	3.1250	2.94897	1.04262	.719
	.00	18	5.7778	3.13529	.73900	
TRANSITION COMPOSITE SCORE	1.00	9	17.3333	6.42262	2.14087	.848
	.00	19	18.3684	6.32640	1.45138	

2.3 Results of Bivariate Correlation

Bivariate correlations were conducted on all the composite scales. Additionally, eight other items were included in the tests because they have been shown in the literature to be theoretically important for successful completion of post-secondary. The additional items were:

- Age of coming into care;
- Number of placement in care;
- Number of high schools attended while in care;
- Current contact with biological family;
- Academic preparedness;
- Temporary withdrawal from post-secondary; and
- Independent living factors and mental health.

It is important to acknowledge that since this is an exploratory study, outcomes were not tested. Rather, associations among predictive factors were analyzed. Only statistically significant associations are reported in Table 9. Appendix D provides a breakdown of statistically significant correlations.

Table 9: Statistically Significant Bi-variate Correlations

ITEM 1	ITEM 2	r and p-value (Pearson's r)	Strength of Correlation
AGE OF COMING INTO CARE	Academic skills composite score	r=0.39, p=0.042	Weak positive relationship
	Academic preparedness	r= -.42, p=0.027	Moderate negative relationship
PLACEMENT STABILITY	Number of high schools attended	r=0.44, p=0.018	Moderate positive relationship
NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOLS ATTENDED	Academic preparedness	r=-0.59, p=0.001	Moderate negative relationship
	Transition composite score	r=-0.40, p=0.034	Moderate negative relationship
	Disability	r=0.41, p=0.037	Moderate negative relationship
CONTACT WITH BIOLOGICAL FAMILY	Transportation	r=-0.42, p=0.042	Moderate negative relationship
ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS	Cultural and spiritual support	r=0.52, p=0.022	Moderate positive relationship
CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS COMPOSITE SCORE	Perception of positive mental health	r=0.40, p=0.042	Moderate positive relationship
TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL FROM POST-SECONDARY	Mental health diagnosis	r=0.415, p=0.03	Moderate positive relationship
	Resilience composite score	r=-0.55, p=0.004	Moderate negative relationship
	Stress composite score	r=0.444, p=0.02	Moderate positive relationship
SUFFICIENT SUPPORT WITH FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	Finding housing	r=0.48, p=0.018	Moderate positive relationship
	Cultural and spiritual support	r=0.57, p=0.011	Moderate positive relationship
	Stress composite score	r=-0.051, p=0.009	Moderate negative relationship
	Transition composite score	r=0.053, p=0.003	Moderate positive relationship
	Mental health diagnosis	r=-0.43, p=0.033	Moderate positive relationship
SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FINDING HOUSING	Transportation	r=0.45, p=0.027	Moderate positive relationship
	Access of campus supports composite score	r=0.46, p=0.027	Moderate positive relationship
RESILIENCE COMPOSITE SCORE	Stress composite score	r=-0.79, p<0.001	Strong negative relationship
	Academic skills composite score	r=0.44, p=0.024	Moderate positive relationship
	Social support composite score	r=0.634, p=0.015	Strong positive relationship
	Coping composite score	r=0.52, p=0.007	Moderate positive relationship
	Mental health diagnosis	r=-0.56, p=0.003	Moderate negative relationship
	Disability	r=-0.48, p=0.018	Moderate negative relationship
	Perception of positive mental health	r=0.75, p<0.001	Strong positive relationship
STRESS COMPOSITE SCORE	Mental health diagnosis	r=0.44, p=0.022	Moderate positive relationship
	Disability	r=0.41, p=0.037	Moderate positive relationship
	Perception of positive mental health	r=-0.72, p<0.001	Strong negative relationship
SOCIAL SUPPORT	Perception of positive mental health	r=0.78, p=0.002	Strong positive relationship

Summary: Phase 1, Bivariate Statistics

Highlights

- The fewer placement changes a student had while in high school, the more likely they were to view their transition out of care as positive.
- The more cultural support a student had, the more academically prepared they felt to attend post-secondary. These students also reported having had sufficient support with financial management before leaving care.
- Students who regularly kept in touch with their families of origin reported having less transportation support.
- The higher the campus connectedness of a student, the more likely they were to report positive perception of their current mental health.
- High stress, low resilience and mental health diagnosis made a student more likely to temporarily withdraw from post-secondary.
- Students who had sufficient support with financial management were more likely to report: a positive transition out of care, finding housing, no mental health condition, and lower stress scores.
- Students who had sufficient support finding housing were more likely to report having sufficient support with transportation, and more likely to access campus support programs.
- There was a very strong correlation between resilience scores and stress. Students with high resilience reported lower stress and a positive perception of current mental health.
- Students with adequate social support were also more likely to report a positive perception of current mental health status.

Part 3 Findings: Key Informant Interviews

Following the analysis of the online survey, 60-90 minute key informant interviews were conducted with five participants, three of whom were females, one male, and one transgendered male. Their ethnicities were Caucasian, Aboriginal and South-Asian and the post-secondary institutions they attended were: BCIT, Douglas College, Langara College, Thompson Rivers University, University of Victoria, and University of the Fraser Valley. While most of the themes that emerged in the interviews echoed the findings in Phase 1, participants were given the opportunity to explore what worked for them, what could have been better, and how they think post-secondary education completion rates of FYIC can be improved in BC.

3.1 The Transition Out of Care and Into Post-Secondary Education

The transition out of care was mixed for the youth interviewed. Two noted that it was a very isolating and dark experience, to the point that they were not even sure that they wanted to keep living. Some had very neutral experiences, citing that their transition success was due to their determination not to become another foster care statistic. On the other hand, others noted that they had great experiences living with “well-adjusted” foster parents and social workers who were personally invested in seeing them succeed: *“I had the best social worker when I was in care, I felt like he really cared about me and would often text me... He would always ask if I needed anything, and I would show him my grades, and he would say, “Oh my gosh, that is amazing.”* However, two students reported having multiple social workers while they were transitioning out of care, making it difficult to connect and build trusting relationships.

For some it was personal relationships with caring adults that helped them transition into post-secondary studies. In fact, one of the participants who was adopted as a ten-year-old noted that he felt like his transition to post-secondary education was *“no different than any other person applying and going to school,”* suggesting that the personal investments made in him by his adopted family made him feel secure and like any other young adult pursuing an education. Another participant noted that she knew she was going to go to a post-secondary institution since she was young because it was something that was culturally expected of her: *“I wouldn’t say that I had any support throughout my transition, it was just I did it on my own, because growing up, I knew not going to post-secondary wasn’t an option, it was just something I had to do if I wanted to be successful.”* In fact, she mentioned on several occasions that it was the expectations from one of her aunts that continually pushed her to overcome challenges and press on to succeed in post-secondary studies. She noted that it was not programs that will help FYIC attend post-secondary education, but rather, *“how you work with people and the foster parents you have,”* suggesting that relational capital is just as important to youth as programs or tangible supports to help them succeed.

Most participants did not feel academically prepared to attend post-secondary education. Many recalled that they were naturally smart and were able to “slide by” in high school, but when they got to post-secondary studies they were faced with overwhelming stress and anxiety, as they did

not have foundational academic skills. Some had to temporarily withdraw, and others sought out support from supportive partners or others in their social networks. The most cited challenges related to academics included time management and stress management. When asked why high school did not matter, many noted that they were simply trying to survive, and did not even consider that they may one day want to go on to post-secondary education. One student believed more FYIC do not attend post-secondary schools because they associate their trauma and negative experiences that they experienced while attending school: *“Many of us had bad experiences or were dealing with a lot of s*** in high school, so why would we want to pay to do more?”* However, while many of the students faced considerable adversity before returning to school, almost always, it was their sheer determination to “beat the odds” that motivated them to pursue higher education along with a champion or supportive adult who helped them along the way.

3.2 What Worked

Resilience Factors at the Individual Level

The resilience factors at the individual level allowed this group of students to succeed in post-secondary education. The students interviewed held beliefs their success depended on themselves, suggesting an internal locus of control. For some, despite setbacks and temporary withdrawals, they found the strength to return to their studies. They held on to hope, and believed that it was normal to take breaks from school to deal with more pressing matters like family deaths, crisis, or trauma. Additionally, these students were motivated and driven by personal values, hard work and dedication. Even when surrounded by students who were “slacking” or “not taking studies seriously” they remained focused. One student noted: *“I sacrifice my personal life and try to get good grades, and hope that I can make up for my social life later.”* One student noted that since a young age she wanted to be a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, even if it sounded unrealistic to those around her. This motivation stemmed from wanting to *“make a decent amount of money, have the power that I crave, and make a difference.”* Attending post-secondary education to some was its own form of power and gave them the ability to change the negative narrative that often surrounds FYIC.

All participants who were interviewed displayed high levels of resilience. Not only were they self-confident, but also strategic and resourceful problem-solvers. For example, one student noted that she knew that if she was going to do well in classes she needed to make the most of her professor’s office hours. Another student mentioned that when she did not find the advice from an academic counsellor useful, she sought out older students in her program for advice. All students were willing to ask for help and often did not give up until they had an answer. They also went out of their way to research supports. One participant noted: *“That’s the one thing that led to success for me... I’ve had to put my tail between my legs and ask for help. It sucks to ask for funding because I was in care, or to acknowledge that I need financial and emotional help...and I know a lot of other youth in care aren’t comfortable with it, but I had to learn how to advocate for myself. I learned how to do this through having to do it for myself, but also from having good advocates.”* Another participant noted that her upbringing in an immigrant family had major impacts on her. She was required to be self-reliant at a young age and took on adult responsibilities like navigating the Canadian system on behalf of her family.

Social supports

All participants noted that they had supportive relationships when attending post-secondary education. Whether they were relationships with foster families or extended family members who expected them to attend post-secondary education - or deep meaningful mentoring relationships with teachers or coaches - all students had a sense of relational permanence with at least one caring adult. Several participants also noted that their personal relationships with adults helped them navigate challenges in post-secondary education. In fact, one suggested that it is not enough to just have “relationships” but rather they need to matter to someone and *be known* by them. Another student who returned to school a few years after transitioning recalled that it was his relationship with his hockey coach that inspired him to change his life course: *“I met some folks who had that mom/dad setting, a more normal life where you can explore different things, and I really was like “Wow, there’s another way of living.” Their guidance and support made me realize there’s so much more to life. They gave me that stability, housing and guidance where I was able to explore different things, including school... Meeting people who had goals for their life made me want to pursue that kind of stuff.”*

Engaged Faculty and Staff at Post-Secondary Institutions

Once in post-secondary education, many participants noted the impact that engaged faculty and staff had on their educational trajectory. Particularly, Child and Youth Care Programs and Aboriginal specific tracks had the highest level of student satisfaction because faculty were flexible and patient, adopted various learning pedagogies, understood the barriers of FYIC, and were willing to go above and beyond their duties to help students succeed. It was the attitudes and dispositions of helpful staff that made students feel comfortable in their programs. However, some students recalled that in non-CYC classes, professors often coldly referred them to the learning centre if they reached out for help. Two students described disengaged teachers as *“sick of what they are doing”* and not passionate about their jobs: *“I kind of get the feeling that a lot of them don’t put in the effort to learn new things. They got out of school, and think, okay, this is my job now; I am just going to preach the only thing I know.”* Another youth noted that she had an extremely difficult time getting into her program due to low grades, and believes that a youth in care should be offered some form of affirmative action, similar to Aboriginal status, to make it easier to attend post-secondary.

AYA, YEAF and other FYIC Specific Supports

Two participants explicitly used phrases like *“AYA saved my life.”* In addition to the social supports they had, these tangible supports were important on many levels because, as one youth put it: *“they touched on basic needs, human connection, and keeping a roof over my head, and being able to access education at all. If I didn’t have those resources I wouldn’t have made it.”* Two students also mentioned how helpful the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (the Federation) was in helping them in learning about awards, and connecting them with people who understand their life stories. Additionally, the Federation provided opportunities for recreation that allowed youth to learn other valuable skills, like self-care and balance. One student noted that participating in events prevented stress and provided a sense of family and community:

“being connected to people who know what it’s like [to be in care] ... I think that would help other youth in care.” This is consistent with resilience theory, which states that in order to develop the ability to “bounce back” children and youth need to be given opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities.

3.3 What Could Have Been Better

Having Financial Management Skills

All students referenced their lack of financial management skills as a stressor in post-secondary education. Specifically, many did not know how student loans or taxes worked, and some relied on credit cards to make up their shortfalls. One student noted that many FYIC have a fear of student loans simply because they do not know what it means, and have very little information about basic things such as interest rates. One student disclosed being \$50,000 in student debt - meaning that the monthly debt repayment was \$550 - almost as much as their rent. Another student who entered post-secondary while still in care mentioned that her social worker’s lack of knowledge of resources forced her to take out student loans: *“My social worker had me apply for loans, and he actually co-signed on the loans but on behalf of the province. I later learned that it never should have happened. Other people who were going to school had their regional offices pay for their tuition if they were still under 19.”* With improved financial management skills and knowledge about supports available to them, this group of FYIC may have been able to avoid accumulating large debt to attend post-secondary.

Another issue that was brought up was that those receiving subsidized funding were not allowed to work, as it would put them in a financial situation where they would no longer qualify for welfare: *“That kind of poverty bleeds through into other areas... While it didn’t happen to me personally, for other FYIC, living in such tight parameters meant that some were pushed to sell drugs or engage in other illegal activities in order to survive... I think that a welfare program should allow young people to work so they can build their resume and confidence, and I mean, how much more can you really be making in minimum wage jobs anyway?”* Having flexibility when attending independent living skills programs, or while receiving financial support from the government is important to FYIC.

Having Stress and Time Management Skills

Lack of academic preparedness and other personal emergencies (sick family members, death in families, triggers of past traumas) caused three students to temporarily withdraw from their studies. One student mentioned that she constantly had panic attacks, especially in her first couple of semesters until she was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and received extra time for writing exams. Another challenge that caused stress for many students stemmed from a lack of basic skills like time management and study skills, which are typically learned in high school. A different student noted that many FYIC miss a lot of school because of their placement disruptions. Then, even if they have aspirations and dreams for post-secondary studies, they are simply unprepared, which takes a huge toll on their confidence. To add to this,

many often have multiple mental health diagnoses and the career counselling at post-secondary institutions is not equipped to handle such complex cases.

Having Helpful Mental Health Supports

Most students sought out mental health supports on campus, but only one student found it helpful. One student recalled: *“The doctor’s office on campus is completely unwelcoming, I don’t even go there anymore. I even tried counselling a bit. I was in an abusive relationship last year, and I went to talk to someone, but it felt very surface, and she just said to go be with my parents, and for a lot of FYIC, that’s not even an option. I just felt like they didn’t even get to know me. I would want someone more enthusiastic and innovative... and less by the book.”* Another student also had a similar experience and noted the importance of trauma informed mental health practitioners and *“people that have an understanding of social work and the effects of certain trauma, and being trusting and trustworthy, because those are two different things.”* To this student, informal mentoring relationships served as her outlet when faced with difficult situations. The importance of self-disclosure and mutual openness was cited as an ingredient for good practice: *“For example, social workers aren’t supposed to Facebook their clients, but they might have to cross that line to truly connect. Keeping in mind safety and boundaries... Sometimes things that are set up to protect people actually hinder people and real connections.”* Relational mental health practitioners are important to FYIC.

3.4 Youth Voices: What FYIC Say They Need to Succeed in Post-Secondary Education

Quality Placements While in Care

Most students felt that having fewer disruptions when in care and being surrounded by adults who value education is important. Students also pointed out that academic and independent living skills have to begin early in life. While programming is helpful, one student noted that the skills he learned were gathered through informal relationships and that *“more is caught than taught.”* While permanency is important, relational stability has powerful effects as well. One student recalled, *“When I graduated and moved out, my foster mom always said she was never going anywhere. For kids in care, permanency is an important thing. She never pushed me away no matter how much I pushed her boundaries. We are still in contact, and she adopted me as an adult.”* On a similar note, a different student emphasized on multiple occasions the importance of having foster homes that set the bar high for kids and having expectations from an early age: *“The discussion shouldn’t be if you go to post-secondary, but when you go to post-secondary.”* As seen in the literature, children who grow up in homes with environments that encourage educational attainment, and with adults who hold high expectations for education, are significantly more likely to attend post-secondary education.

The importance of recruiting foster parents who do not give up when it gets tough was also highlighted. *“The thing is, a lot of kids, they have issues. And the difference between a biological child and a foster child is that when a teenager comes to you and they’re your own children you don’t give up. But when your foster child is a teenager, you can just say, ‘I can’t handle this, I*

need this kid gone.’ And so, if we train foster parents a little bit better it may be better. No system, no program is ever going to replace the love of a family, or what a family environment can do for a child.” On this same note, she noted that it is important that the Ministry place kids in homes that value education, and who help students with basic things, like getting to school.

One student recalled having a close friend who was placed in a remote home where she had an hour-long bus ride to school. If she missed the bus, which was a 30-minute walk from her home, she had no other way of going to school because her foster parents were unwilling to drive her. She also felt that schools, foster parents, and the Ministry need to stop pulling children out of school for meetings or check-ins. Missing school can have negative effects on learning and it is important that the Ministry hire counsellors and social workers who work around the academic calendars of students, even if it means they relinquish their 9am to 5pm working hours. Finally, two students noted the importance of having Ministry workers who help them maintain connections with their biological families in a safe space. Both felt culturally disengaged and that they missed out on relationships with siblings because the Ministry did not make reconnection a priority.

Better Transition Planning and Engaged Social Workers

Two students mentioned the need to ensure that if a bond is formed between a youth and a social worker the Ministry should do everything possible to preserve that relationship. One student had five different social workers involved in their case as they were leaving care. Others recalled feeling like they were simply a “paycheque” to their social worker and even told them not to bother following up with them. Acknowledging that some social workers have large caseloads, some students felt frustrated by the difficulty they had in setting up meetings, especially while on AYA. Beginning transition planning at an earlier age and having engaged social workers was identified as a practice that would improve the post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC.

Visible Resources

When asked about what would increase the post-secondary educational outcomes for FYIC, almost all students said creating highly visible points of entry for obtaining information about financial resources, and making sure that the application process is simple. While one student noted that AgedOut.com is a great avenue for the dissemination of information, she felt that it would still be helpful to physically print handbooks of resources available, especially since some students may not always have access to the internet. One student noted that post-secondary institutions should also display posters and information on their bulletin boards/television screens about information available to FYIC (like AYA, YEAF and bursaries/scholarships). Additionally, social workers should have the key responsibility for educating foster parents on what is available for students and making sure that students have every opportunity to apply before they age out.

Flexible Eligibility Requirements for Funding

Many spoke of the critical role YEAF and AYA played in their ability to succeed in post-secondary education; however, others who missed out on these opportunities due to their legal status and age felt that this is an area that needs serious attention. For example, one student only accessed AYA for one semester because she turned 24 and was no longer eligible. Another student felt that these programs did not “*honour the life path that some travel on.*” Particularly, she felt that students who were on a TCO had similar traumas and experienced a range of unsafe situations, but had never reached the threshold in the Ministry’s view to be made a CCO, and therefore did not qualify for YEAF or AYA. One student felt that youth on Youth Agreements are the highest functioning youth to begin with (since they are being allowed to live alone) but that those who struggle the most often do not get the support they need to go to school.

Students suggested that program eligibility be opened to anyone who lived in care for at least one year, and that the eligible age be increased to 30. Another student proposed that the five-year eligibility window (which is now 19-24) begin whenever the student decides to go back to post-secondary education, since many students take years to decide to return to school: “*I think everyone should have access to education, and there should be no age caps. It should end depending on when you begin... Most people don’t finish school until they are almost 30 anyways so it would be more aligned with the way our society currently works.*” She also mentioned that tuition waivers should apply to any type of degree. For this student, tuition waivers were only introduced in her last semester of school, and she was advised that she would not be eligible to apply if she chose to pursue a graduate degree because it was only available for undergraduate students.

Finally, two students mentioned that financially they would have been able to focus more on school had they had the opportunity to offset the costs of attending post-secondary education by remaining in care until they were 24 or 25: “*I think it’s a no-brainer, and if I remember correctly, a lot of folks in my class who grew up in Canada said that they live at home and work part time, but their rent and food are covered by their parents.*” Resources alone will not promote positive post-secondary educational outcomes, but nurturing good homes and allowing youth to continue to live in them may be a positive first step.

Sense of Community on Campus

Three students emphasized the need for establishing youth hubs on campus where FYIC can have opportunities to know and support each other. One student benefitted tremendously from being part of an Aboriginal gathering centre. He noted: “*What would be helpful for FYIC is something like an Aboriginal program. It’s a gathering place with a coordinator who helps support Aboriginal students. It’s a really cool place to hang out, separate from bigger common areas. [It’s a] smaller group, and my anxiety was significantly reduced there. Having a FYIC ‘section’ or ‘department’ or ‘network’ where people could go for support with people who understand their barriers and challenges would be great, even though some don’t want to identify as FYIC.*” Another student recommended the Ministry explore having a homework club at MCFD regional offices, where high school students and university students meet together and

the older students can mentor the younger ones. This would help high school students feel more prepared for the rigours of academia and gain the confidence for post-secondary education. Furthermore, by meeting other FYIC who are attending post-secondary, high-school students may feel less intimidated to apply to post-secondary institutions, because they “*already have an ally there.*”

Opportunities for Mentorship

To create community for FYIC, one student was very passionate about seeing mentoring programs for FYIC get off the ground. However, she was convinced that the program should not fall under MCFD’s umbrella, but rather, it should take a “*collective impact approach.*” Collective impact is an innovative and structured approach to making collaboration work across government, business, philanthropy, non-profit organizations and citizens to achieve significant and lasting social change. She also felt strongly that opportunities for mentorship would improve the educational outcomes of FYIC, and that there was “*no need to re-invent the wheel,*” but rather to partner with existing agencies like Big Brother and Big Sisters, who already have established infrastructures, policies and protocols. The same student suggested that governments and private companies step up and establish internship programs, or co-op opportunities specific to FYIC, and encourage their executives and leaders to mentor students.

Awareness about Barriers FYIC Face

One student beautifully articulated that just as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission shed light on the challenges faced by Aboriginal peoples, this same effort needs to be initiated to shed light on the trauma and barriers FYIC face. This student believed that post-secondary institutions were genuinely trying, but that there is room for improvement. As it stands, many wear shame and refuse to disclose that they were in care, preventing them from seeking and accessing supports that could potentially change their life course. This is particularly needed for Aboriginal students: “*I felt like an outcast being transgendered, being Aboriginal, and being a FYIC. I lost that identity when I was in care. I didn’t know I was Aboriginal until I was 13, and I didn’t have any connection to my biological family. So it was something that I wanted to learn about and something I became passionate about.*” By creating compassionate and safe places to learn, students will gain the confidence to succeed and feel empowered to give back. One student noted: “*I thought there was no light at the end of the tunnel, but then I realized that I could do much more than society said I could do and I kept the ball rolling.*” Again, it comes down to *how* people interact with FYIC, rather than what they do, or offer to help them. The latter is also important, but it is more likely to be helpful if done sensitively and with compassion.

Summary: Phase 2 Interview Results

- 60-90 minute key informant interviews were conducted with five participants. Students were given the opportunity to explore what worked for them, what could have been better, and how they think post-secondary education completion rates of FYIC can be improved in BC.
- The transition out of care was mixed for participants; some felt the transition dark, overwhelming and lonely, while others felt supported by their social workers. Almost all participants did not feel prepared to attend post-secondary education.
- All participants displayed high levels of resilience. Not only were they self-confident, but they were also strategic and resourceful problem-solvers and held beliefs that their success depended on them, suggesting an internal locus of control. Additionally, these students were motivated and driven by personal values, hard work and dedication.
- The three main things that most students referred to when asked “what worked” for them and promoted their ability to succeed in post-secondary studies were:
 - The presence of social supports;
 - Engaged faculty and staff at post-secondary; and
 - AYA, YEAF and other supports.
- On the other hand, the things that “could have been better” included:
 - Support with financial management (i.e. budgeting, how loans and taxes work);
 - Support with managing stress and time; and
 - Access to trauma informed mental health supports on campus.
- Finally, students were asked to identify what they think FYIC need to succeed in post-secondary education, and their answers suggested that more attention should be given to their success before they leave care. For example, to succeed, they need:
 - Quality foster placements while in care;
 - Better transition planning and engaged social workers;
 - Higher visibility of information and resources available to them;
 - Flexibility in the eligibility criteria for AYA, YEAF or other financial supports;
 - Sense of community on campuses;
 - Opportunities for mentorship; and
 - Generating awareness on campus about the barriers and challenges faced by FYIC.

Limitations of Research

Despite the application of rigorous methodologies and academic supervision, limitations in research exist. The main limitations of this research include: cross-sectional design, recall bias, reliability of measures, sample size and lack of comparison groups.

Situating Myself

Every researcher brings their values and bias to their work by mere virtue of the types of questions they choose to explore. However, transparency and active introspection can overcome this limitation. As a practitioner who has worked extensively with youth my innate tendency is to step into an advocacy role. For this reason I explicitly asked youth to identify the recommendations they want MCFD and their post-secondary institutions to address. I also solicited the input of FYIC in the design of my instruments, and sought their comments on the final analysis of the report to ensure that results and recommendations accurately and respectfully reflect their experiences. Finally, as an employee of MCFD, I wanted to pursue this research question so I might be a part of the positive change making a difference for children and youth in our province. I strongly believe in using academic research to ensure evidence informed policy and practice.

Strengths and Limits of Mixed Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have their strengths and weaknesses, and proponents of each use the opposing side's weaknesses as evidence that their approach is superior. In quantitative research, the nature of experimental methodology gives it the advantage of control. The manipulation of variables and statistical testing allow researchers to make statements of causality, predict and generalize. Despite this strength, there is concern that this approach risks sacrificing social complexities for the sake of simplicity and experimental control (Long, White, Friedman & Brazael, 2000). Furthermore, this control element may actually compromise findings because it ignores people's natural contexts. Another problem with reducing complex entities, like human subjects, to numbers is that it is difficult to interpret their responses; the researcher may know what occurred, but not be able to understand why (Drew et al., 1996).

Qualitative research also has strengths and weaknesses. Its exploratory nature is advantageous in early stages of research when not much is known about a given subject (Creswell, 1998). Furthermore, its flexibility allows the inquiry to unfold in a fluid manner and provides more comprehensive information. Unlike quantitative research, a qualitative researcher is able to dig deeper into why phenomena occurred because their approaches and instruments are open-ended. However, because the researcher is actively engaged in the research process, their subjective biases may skew the data. Another disadvantage is that this research method is very time-consuming and can last for months or even years. By looking at the strengths and weaknesses of both, one can see that advantages of quantitative research represent disadvantages for qualitative research, and vice versa. This is precisely why some researchers recommend combinations of mixed methods (Drew et al., 1996).

Cross-sectional Design

One of the main strengths of using a survey is that it allows for many individuals to participate, and with an appropriate sample size, for results to be generalized to the general population. However, Davidson et al. (2010) point out that: “Social surveys are often criticized for fitting individuals into predetermined categories rather than allowing individuals to describe their own reality and perception of outcomes,” thereby not allowing for a genuine representation of their realities to emerge (p.379). For this reason, key informant interviews were used to ensure that the experiences of youth were accurately reported. Finally, given that survey responses were collected at one point in time rather than longitudinally, the results generated may not be as accurate as if they would be if tested on several occasions (i.e. low test re-test reliability).

Recall Bias

Given that this research relied largely on participants’ self-reported experiences, there is a possibility that events from the past were not recalled accurately, thus posing a risk to the internal validity of findings. Internal validity has to do with establishing cause-and-effect relationships between dependent and independent variables of interest (McDavid & Huse, 2013). However, since this exploratory study was not concerned about testing outcomes this concern is not pressing. Research tells us that 20% of critical details of a recognized event are irretrievable after one year from its occurrence and 50% irretrievable after five years (Hassan, 2013). This has implications for this sample, as a large proportion completed post-secondary education and were reporting older memories of their experiences.

Reliability and Validity of Measures

Reliability is the degree to which measurement is free from measurement error. Construct validity is the degree to which a test measures what it claims, or purports, to be measuring (Lee, 2012). Cohen’s *Perceived Stress Scale* and *Hemingway’s Measure of Adolescent Connectedness* are two previously validated measures. However, the *Hemingway Measure* was adapted because the author of the scale required rights to all data collected using this method. As this research is a preliminary exploratory study it was decided that it would be best to co-create the questions in collaboration with Ministry staff and FYIC. The key informant interviews served as another form of validation for the results that emerged in the survey.

Sample Issues

Self-selection bias arises in any situation in which individuals select themselves into a group (non-probability sampling), potentially causing a biased sample. It is possible that by using social media as a primary recruitment method, students who have attended post-secondary education but do not have access to social media, or associated technologies, may have been overlooked. Additionally, the risk of using social media is that unless the recruitment poster is periodically refreshed, it becomes less visible on the main pages of participant social media feeds as it becomes older. Also, data collection for this study happened at the beginning of the school year (September-October 2015). It is possible that some students did not participate because they had other more pressing issues to deal with. On the other hand, it is possible that if the survey was implemented at a different time there would have been a lower turnout because students are more excited and alert about school at the beginning of the semester.

While on the surface it appears that the sample was small, 43 is a large turnout, considering that FYIC are under-represented in the post-secondary education population. Additionally, there was representation from 16 post-secondary institutions, generating a large variation in the sample in terms of geographic location and student experiences. As there were no control groups, or comparison groups used in this study, it is difficult to say with certainty if the findings are unique to this sample, thus limiting external validity. External validity is about making generalizations of the results of a study to different programs, times, places, and people (McDavid et al., 2013). Future research on this topic should consider the use of control groups: first-generation students, FYIC who did not attend post-secondary education and first-year post-secondary students in the general population.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

This study has implications for both social work and education policy and practice. Many of the results from this study align with what has previously been found in the literature. There were, however, some interesting findings that were unique, and would warrant future examination using comparison groups. The findings of this research will be discussed under the same headings as the literature review to illustrate the extent to which results align with what has previously been found in the literature.

1. General Factors that Promote Resilience

Stress management has been shown to be a predictor of academic success. Engaging in positive coping strategies like optimism, physical and mental self-care and social supports, have also been found to promote success in post-secondary education (Leary & DeRosier, 2012; Sawatsky, Ratner, Richardson, Washburn, Sudmant, & Mirwaldt, 2012). In this study, stress was correlated with a number of items. Specifically, the higher the stress scores of a student, the more likely they were to report a mental health diagnosis or a disability. The same was true for the perception of mental health, which reflected that the higher the stress scores, the less likely a student was to report a current positive mental health status. Conversely, resilience was negatively correlated with stress, meaning that the higher the resilience score of the student, the less likely they were to report stress. This is important because research shows that how a student handles stress, especially in their first year of post-secondary education, is directly related to their ability to succeed academically.

Not surprisingly, high resilience scores were positively correlated with coping, meaning that students with high resilience scores reported stronger coping skills (like humour, exercise, help seeking, healthy eating etc.). High resilience scores were also positively correlated with academic skills, meaning that students who scored high on resilience were more likely to report stronger academic skills (e.g. time management, study skills, communication, problem solving etc.). All of these findings are supported by previous research. When students were asked what they struggled with the most in post-secondary education, they often cited stress and time management. Additionally, this study found that there was a correlation between temporary withdrawal from post-secondary education and mental health, resilience and stress. That is, students with low resilience, high stress, and a mental health diagnosis were significantly more likely to withdraw from their studies at least once. Offering workshops and support groups to continue promoting practical skills (independent living skills, resilience, stress management, coping etc.) may serve as a positive way to ensure retention in post-secondary.

2. Specific Factors that Promote Resilience

2.1 Individual Level

The FYIC in this study displayed high levels of resilience, a finding that is confirmed by other studies. At the individual level, students in this sample displayed self-confidence, motivation,

self-reliance, social competence, a determination to beat the statistics, flexibility, and the most salient: the ability to ask and receive help (Flynn, 2014; Hass et al., 2014; Hines et al., 2005; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Jones, 2014; Mallon, 2007; Parker, 2015; Williams, Lindsey, Kurtz & Javis, 2001). These Students also displayed an internal locus of control (Gomez et al., 2015), meaning that when faced with challenges, most of these youth believed they had control over what happened. For example, several students cited that even though they had to temporarily withdraw from their studies, they knew it was just for a short period of/period of time, and that it was normal to take breaks to take care of themselves.

This also suggests that students held the belief that they can affect future events - a marker of academic resilience (Coksun et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2015; Leary & DeRosier, 2014; Mak et al., 2011). Other studies have also found relationships between gender and resilience (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007), but no such correlations were found in this study. However, applied against the *Campus Fit* scale, and the *MCFD Support* scale, the standard deviation for females was much smaller than for the males. This may indicate that females generally experience *MCFD Supports* and *Campus Fit* factors more similarly than males. The small sample size may also explain why no statistical significance was observed.

2.2 Family Level

At the family level, most youth in this sample reported having supportive relationships with adults, such as teachers, mentors or extended family members (Hines, 2005; Jones, 2012). While the literature is mixed in regards to whether connection to biological family produces resilience, in this study there was no statistically significant correlation between resilience and contact with extended family. In fact, in this study students who kept in contact with their biological families were less likely to feel like they had transportation support. This aligns with Samues & Pryce's study that found that when FYIC maintained connections with biological families, they were often the providers rather than the receivers of support - and this is often correlated with higher levels of stress.

Additionally, lack of caregiver support and low educational expectations from foster parents negatively impacts academic achievement (Cheung et al., 2012; Davis-Kean, 2005; Dworsky, Smithgall & Courtney, 2014; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Mallon, 2007; Rios, 2009). This was a theme that was echoed by several participants in key informant interviews. Students believe that the bar for education is not set high enough, and that by recruiting and training foster parents who value education, the outcomes of children can be improved. Additionally, some students highlighted the important role permanency and placement stability played in their ability to succeed in post-secondary education.

2.3 Community Level

At the community level, research indicates that having strong relationships with teachers, schools, or other positive adults promotes academic resilience (Hines et al., 2005; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Rios, 2009). This was certainly corroborated by this sample. Bivariate correlations suggested that the more social supports the student had, the more likely they were to

report having positive current mental health. While no statistical significance was found between social support and many items (like lower stress, or high resilience) it may be because the social support scale was at the end of the survey and students may have experienced survey fatigue by that point and did not fill out the questions (only 14 students completed this scale). This low sample size may also be why no significant observations occurred. However, when interviewed on the phone, all participants cited social support as being pivotal to their success in post-secondary education. Therefore, in future studies, it may be worthwhile exploring the specific characteristics that students see as valuable in their social networks.

2.4 Cultural Level

Culture, spirituality and religion can play a critical role in the development of resilience (Malindi & Theron, 2010). There were interesting findings at the cultural level in this study. Particularly, students who reported feeling academically prepared to attend post-secondary institutions were significantly more likely to have cultural and spiritual support. Additionally, while not statistically significant, Aboriginal students appeared to withdraw from post-secondary education at lower rates than their counterparts. Additionally, when the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were tested on each composite scale, no statistically significant mean differences emerged. This is a positive finding, suggesting that in this sample there is no disparity between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students on the scales tested. Another interesting observation was that the mean scores of Aboriginal students were higher on the *MCFD Support Scale* than for non-Aboriginal students (see Table 8) meaning that Aboriginal students accessed more supports from MCFD. However, the mean differences between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students were smaller on all the other composite scales. Again, it is possible that the small sample size may be what is preventing an observation of statistical significance.

3. External Factors

3.1 Academic Support

Previous research has also found that stable placements, especially in high school, are predictive of post-secondary education attainment. One finding that emerged in this study was that students who came into care at a younger age self-reported having weaker academic skills in post-secondary education (like time management, study skills, communication etc.). Additionally, the degree to which the student felt prepared to enter post-secondary education was negatively correlated with the age of coming into care, with those who came into care at an older age feeling less prepared to attend post-secondary education.

This contradiction may have more to do with how the student felt. For example, the academic skills composite scale has more to do with the hard skills necessary to do well in post-secondary education and that “academic preparedness” has more to do with how prepared the student felt to enter post-secondary education. It may be that students who do not feel prepared simply feel overwhelmed with the transition to post-secondary studies, but actually do have the skills necessary to do well. Students who reported having a disability were more likely to have more

high school changes. This may require that policy makers pay special attention to students with complex care needs.

Research has also shown that placement stability affects educational outcomes (Batsche et al., 2014; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Johansson & Hojer, 2012; Mallon, 2007; Strolin-Goltzman, 2014; Topitzes et al., 2013). Students with fewer than two placement changes in high school were twice as likely to graduate high school and attend post-secondary education (Merdinger et al., 2005; Johansson & Hojer, 2012). In this study, placement stability was also correlated with the number of high schools a student attended, with the more placement changes a student had corresponding to more schools attended. Moreover, the number of high schools attended was correlated with academic preparedness. Students with fewer placement changes were more likely to feel academically prepared to attend post-secondary education. They were also more likely to feel that their transition out of foster care was positive.

3.2 Campus Connectedness

Many post-secondary institutions are recognizing their role in helping FYIC succeed in post-secondary studies, particularly through generalized and specific campus support programs. Research has shown that elements such as campus satisfaction and engagement are predictors of retention (Parkin & Baldwin, 2012; Salazar, 2012). While in general the average composite scores of students indicated that they were “averagely connected,” statistical tests revealed that campus connectedness is correlated with a student’s perception of mental health. The higher the score of the *Campus Connectedness*, the more likely a student is to report a positive mental health status. Additionally, when students felt that they had sufficient support to find housing, they were significantly more likely to access campus supports such as the writing or math center, or other learning supports. This may suggest that when their basic needs are met, they are able to focus on conquering their academic challenges.

Students who participated in key informant interviews indicated that post-secondary institutions could be doing more to promote academic success for FYIC. Some felt that the faculty at their post-secondary institutions were cold and unresponsive to their unique needs. Conversely, staff who were engaged and had an understanding of their unique needs (for example, CYC faculty) were highly regarded by students. Students also spoke of the need to raise awareness on campus of the unique needs of FYIC in a manner similar to the recognition of Aboriginal students’ needs. Specialized supports specific to FYIC, like resource centers, were also seen as a positive way to generate a sense of community and connectedness for FYIC attending post-secondary education.

3.3 Mental Health

Another significant barrier to FYIC’s successful completion of post-secondary education is mental health challenges (Duncan, 2000). Roughly one third of FYIC have a mental illness, in contrast to 19-23% of the general population (Jones, 2012). While these youth were not pursuing post-secondary education, these same mental conditions undoubtedly play a role in the interference of learning; more than 50% of students with mental health challenges drop out of

school (Keller, Salazar, & Courtney, 2010; Xie et al., 2014). In this study, however, 42.5% of students reported a mental health condition, with PTSD, depression and anxiety being the most commonly cited. In Jones' (2012) study, the students were not enrolled in post-secondary education, suggesting that in BC, despite mental health challenges, students attend post-secondary education. As previously mentioned, this study also found that students who reported mental health problems were more likely to experience more stress and temporarily withdraw from their studies.

When it came to seeking out help, almost half of the students in the survey indicated that they were willing to seek out mental health support on campus. In general, about two thirds indicated that the service was helpful. However, of the students who did not reach out for help, when asked if they even knew where to go if they had a major mental health concern, almost half indicated that they would not know where to go. Given that there is a correlation between mental health and post-secondary retention it is critical that post-secondary institutions do more to promote their services and also make sure that helpers are aware of the complex and unique needs of FYIC. In fact, many students in the interviews cited that they felt that the mental health supports on their campus were not trauma informed.

3.4 Social Support

Lack of continuity in relationships after transitioning out of care is a significant risk factor for poor outcomes (Mallon, 2007; Xie et al., 2014; Jones, 2014). Relationships with caring adults are important because they are a significant conduit through which youth can build competencies, receive social support and develop resilience (McCreary, 2015; Rogers, 2011). Some students mentioned that most of the independent living skills they learned were acquired through informal relationships. Other students also spoke about the need for foster homes to begin teaching students skills like financial management from earlier ages. This aligns with what other research has found to be helpful. Approaches should be holistic, begin in pre-adolescence, be tailored to the unique needs of the youth, and focus on building on their existing strengths (Bernard, 2014; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Dworsky, Smithgall & Courtney, 2014; Masten, 2014).

In this study, like in other studies, many youth who have transitioned out of care reported that supportive relationships, inside and outside of the foster system, were central to their success (Lavin, 2013; Hiles et al., 2013; Jones, 2014; Krinsky, 2010, Liebmann & Madden, 2010; Nesmith & Christophersen, 2014; Riebschleger, Day & Damashek, 2015). While practical and instrumental help is necessary, the most impactful relationships are characterized by "the helper's willingness to extend support beyond what the expectations were" (Lavin, 2013, p. 90). The characteristics that youth find most helpful in their relationships are those that are consistent, reliable, nurturing, compassionate, respectful and genuine (Hiles et al., 2013; Lavin, 2013; Riebschleger et al., 2015; Storer et al., 2014). This was also the case in this study with one student in particular noting the importance of mutual openness in relationships.

3.5 Independent Living Skills

Research indicates that independent living skills translate to positive determinants in adulthood (Barnow et al. 2013). Other studies have found that factors such as money management, work, parenting skills, transportation, cooking, a high school degree, good mental health, utilizing services after discharge and stable living arrangements or housing predict resilient outcomes in adulthood (Barnow et al., 2013; Courtney et al., 2011; Jones, 2012; Pecora, 2012; Xie et al., 2014). In this study, when students reported having sufficient support with financial management they were also more likely to feel like they had sufficient support with finding housing, cultural and spiritual support and a positive transition out of care. They were also less likely to report having a mental health condition and had lower levels of stress.

Having support with finding housing was also correlated with transportation; students who had support with finding housing were more likely to feel like they also had support with transportation to attend post-secondary institutions. This may be because their supports ensured that they secured housing close to school. Also, students were more likely to access campus services - again, highlighting that when basic needs are met, students are able to concentrate on their academic demands.

Implications for Practice

Academic success begins well before a student attends post-secondary education, and what this research serves to illustrate is that students with high resilience have better outcomes in a range of areas. While there is no “right” model for building resilience, promising practices that promote resilience acknowledge the importance of using strengths-based approaches to build social connections/community and autonomy in youth (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Hass et al., 2014; Sanders & Munford, 2014; Ungar, 2013). While informal supports can easily be lost during times of transition, transition planning processes are more likely to be successful when delivered through consistent relationships with trusting adults (Driscoll, 2013; Jones, 2014; Storer et al., 2014).

Therefore, it is the job of those who work with youth to believe in them until they can believe in themselves (Saleebey, 2008; Osterling & Hines, 2006). Practitioners have a duty to “systematically investigate the coping and survival skills, talents, knowledge, social capital, and wishes of foster youth and to mobilize these factors to help youth to accomplish their goals” (Hass et al., 2014, p. 392). To do this, social workers can: “(a) develop a roster of resources and assets, (b) celebrate lessons and successes, (c) seek out survivors’ pride, (d) dream for and imagine the future, (e) think small but think success, (f) seek out and employ a youth’s theory of success, (g) look around and ahead, but not behind” (Watt, Norton, & Jones, 2013, p. 1410).

Providing youth with choices is a key predictor of autonomy, a foundational element of resilience (Bernard, 1993; Flynn et al., 2014). With relationships as the guiding principle, some promising practices to build autonomy include: providing youth with daily opportunities to develop critical thinking and self-management and making school tasks meaningful/relevant (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Gomez et al., 2015). Exposing foster youth to vocational and educational opportunities will also help build their confidence (i.e. through campus visits and college prep courses). However, confidence and autonomy is not enough without independent living skills (Courtney et al., 2011). Adults can help youth gain important life skills by encouraging them to work, drive, maintain their own schedules and finances, make choices about friends and begin to make contact with their biological families so they can learn from mistakes in the presence of a support system (Cheung et al., 2012; Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Jones, 2012).

Schools also play an important role in the development of resilient trajectories because they promote supportive relationships with positive adults, opportunities for extracurricular activities, and encourage the development of children’s autonomy (Driscoll, 2013; Thorton & Sanchez, 2010). For example, Merdinger et al., (2005) studied the factors that contributed to the post-secondary educational success of 216 FYIC. Most of the youth in the sample mentioned the role of teachers in their decision to pursue post-secondary studies. In fact, in a large scale European study researchers found that a strong educational identity, formed in interaction with birth parents, peers, teachers, and care givers was one of the largest predictors of post-secondary educational attainment for FYIC (Johansson & Hojer, 2012). Yet other research suggests lack of empathy among teachers (and other school personnel) about the unique challenges of FYIC (i.e. mental health, trauma) as a barrier to academic achievement (Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Mallon, 2007; Rios, 2009).

Engaging educational institutions in promoting better outcomes for FYIC will have tremendous impacts for society at large. For example, criminality among youth in care is eight to ten times higher if they have low educational attainment by the time they reach grade nine. Conversely, educational attainment for this same group can serve as the strongest protective factor against social disadvantage and delinquency (Johansson & Hojer, 2012). This implies that educational leaders at all levels of education should seek out materials and staff training regarding the influences that impact educational achievement among foster care youth.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the identification of foster youth in school, showing these young people empathy, monitoring their educational progress, providing mentoring/social supports, and a challenging academic environment (Merdinger et al., 2005; Rios, 2009). One simple, and inexpensive practice may be to designate a specific teacher at each school to be the point of contact for youth in care about all issues related to post-secondary education, grants, scholarships or other child welfare benefits/supports (Batache et al., 2014).

Additionally, preparing youth in care to be ready for post-secondary education must be a priority, as academic readiness is a strong predictor of positive outcomes (Unrau et al., 2012). Promising practices include reinforcing the message that education requires hard work, and commitment at the middle school and high school level. Furthermore, students need information about the availability of educational opportunities, concrete guidance, and encouragement to participate in college preparatory classes. In addition to concrete academic skills (analysis, math, reading, writing), students should be taught how to set goals, manage time, and balance multiple responsibilities, and work together with others (Jones, 2013).

Promoting positive adult outcomes for children in care is a balancing act that requires the “system” to question the role it plays in creating barriers for their future wellness, as well as youth themselves taking responsibility for the role they must play in advocating for change. This research is grounded in the youth empowerment philosophy and encouraged youth to have a voice in matters that affect them. The recommendations of this research encompass their ideas for how the post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC can be improved.

Recommendations

In this study students were asked to make recommendations to MCFD and their post-secondary institutions about what would promote better post-secondary educational outcomes for future youth in care. Upon the analysis of the responses, a draft was sent to five FYIC and they were asked to provide feedback. The researcher then articulated the most salient ideas based on alignment with what the literature identified as promoting positive post-secondary outcomes for FYIC. The recommendations are predominantly addressed to MCFD, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education and post-secondary institutions.

The chart below outlines five overarching recommendations followed by a list of specific actions that have been shown in the literature to improve the post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC. The second column indicates the target organization for each respective action. Actions that have a (*) symbol in the right-hand column indicate that immediate action can be taken to build on existing policies and practices. Recommendation 5 was the only one that was not put forth by FYIC.

Recommendation #1 INCREASE THE RESILIENCE AND ACADEMIC SKILLS OF FYIC	
Academic preparedness for post-secondary schooling begins before a FYIC enters post-secondary education. As seen in the literature, there are many factors that impact a child/youth's academic skills and readiness to participate in post-secondary education. Recommended actions include:	Target Organizations
<p>Place priority on permanency for children and youth in care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Research Rationale:</i> Promoting permanency for children will allow them to feel like they matter, a critical element that promotes the ability to connect relationally. Research also shows that children and youth who have permanency experience a more normalized transition to post-secondary education and have a more comprehensive presence of factors that promote resilience, and consequently, academic achievement. Permanent, stable relationships are a major determinant of whether children feel safe and secure, and therefore, of overall well-being. 	MCFD/DAA
<p>If permanency is not achieved, limiting placement disruptions should be prioritized.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Research Rationale:</i> Placement stability is essential for children and youth to develop secure attachments and a sense of belonging. One of the greatest changes that could support youth in building relationships is decreasing the number of times they are moved. Additionally, lack of placement stability impacts learning levels and resilience. The likelihood of a youth in care completing high school is two times greater if he or she has less than one placement per school year in high school. Therefore, recruitment of high quality foster parents must be a priority in order to improve educational outcomes for children in care. 	MCFD/DAA

<p>Aboriginal children and youth must be connected to their community, cultures, and traditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Aboriginal children and youth need cultural safety through an Aboriginal service system that strongly connects them to their community, culture and traditions. This connection is important to their sense of identity, belonging, and well-being. Cultural identity also plays an important role in the development of resiliency, independent living skills and post-secondary academic achievement. <p>Caregiver and practitioner training should include modules on building resilience and modules on improving educational outcomes of youth in-care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Caregivers who provide children with environments that promote resilience and have high educational attainment expectations increase the likelihood that youth will attend post-secondary education. <p>Provide the option for youth to remain in foster care until 21 if they wish to pursue post-secondary education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> In the UK and USA, when youth were allowed to remain in care until the age of 21, it doubled the percentage of those who earned a post-secondary credential, from 10% to 20%. Many young adults in the general population are living at home to offset the increasing costs of pursuing post-secondary studies, and FYIC should be afforded the same supports to be successful. <p>MCFD partner with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education to develop an action plan to improve the high school graduation rates of youth in care as well as transition to post-secondary education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> In the UK when the child welfare system partnered with the education system to create multi-professional “leaving care teams ” the number of youth in care graduating high school and attending post-secondary institutions increased 20 fold in five years. Also, students who have caring, flexible and empathetic teachers are more likely to successful complete high school. 	<p>MCFD/DAA</p> <p>MCFD/DAA*</p> <p>MCFD/DAA</p> <p>MCFD, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education</p>
<p>Recommendation #2</p> <p>IMPROVE TRANSITION PLANNING AND INFORMATION/ACCESS TO RESOURCES</p>	
<p>Without a positive transition out of care FYIC are less likely to access and succeed in post-secondary education. FYIC also need to be aware of the resources available to them. Recommended actions include:</p>	<p>Target Organizations</p>
<p>Strengthen policy/practice guidelines and training for social workers regarding effective transition planning. Social workers must understand the importance of transition planning and connecting youth to supports and resources that are available to them <i>before</i> they age out of care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Lack of perceived interest, advice and information from social workers about educational opportunities and independent living supports are consistently cited as barriers to post-secondary educational achievement for FYIC. Many studies, including this one, demonstrate that youth leave care without knowing about the extent of supports available to them to attend post-secondary education. Early transition planning ensures youth understands and accesses the supports and 	<p>MCFD/DAA*</p>

<p>services available to them for post-secondary studies. When youth have information about post-secondary education, financial aid, and participate in university preparation classes they are more likely to make the decision to attend a post-secondary institution.</p>	
<p>As part of transition planning, ensure FYIC receive independent living/life skills training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Research indicates that possessing independent living skills significantly promotes self-sufficiency, decreases homelessness and increases successful post-secondary educational attainment for FYIC. Programs should include competency development in the following areas: stress management, time management, coping and resilience skills, learning how to utilize community and Ministry supports and services, healthy relationships and parenting skills, employment skills, transportation support, financial management, housing support and cultural support, with the last three factors having the highest priority for inclusion. 	MCFD/DAA
<p>Amend the age eligibility criteria for major supports (like AYA and YEAF) to allow for funding to be available to older FYIC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Provide greater flexibility for accessing educational supports and make financial support to attend post-secondary institutions available to older youth (beyond the existing age limit of 24). Social trends indicate that in the general population parents provide significant financial and non-financial support to their children into their late twenties, and youth from care should be extended the same opportunities. Youth from care need a longer period of time to resolve their family of origin issues or other traumas before they are ready to take on post-secondary. 	MCFD
<p>Raise awareness of financial and non-financial supports available to students (provincial and campus-specific).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> FYIC often are not aware of the supports available to them to participate in post-secondary education. FYIC need to be actively supported to ensure they access information and resources. It is important that organizations develop marketing and communication strategies targeting FYIC to raise awareness of existing supports that are available to them. Information should be advertised on an ongoing basis and be visible in central locations where FYIC are likely to see it (AgedOut.com, regional MCFD offices, posters on campus, cafeterias, and libraries.) 	MCFD, Post-secondary Institutions *
<p>Provide more financial support (i.e. bursaries, scholarships), reduced cost of on-campus student housing, and full tuition waivers whenever possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> In this study, the three main areas that FYIC continue to struggle with as it relates to their ability to complete post-secondary education are financial management, accessing ongoing financial aid, and affordable housing. 	Post-secondary Institutions

Recommendation #3

PROMOTE CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS & SOCIAL SUPPORT

The extent to which a student “fits” or is “connected” within their university, college, or trades program promotes their academic achievement and retention in post-secondary education. Conversely, when a student does not feel a sense of community they are more likely to drop out. For this reason, attention should be given to improving their formal and informal social supports before they access post-secondary, as well as during their studies. Recommended actions include:	Target Organization(s)
<p>Expand and promote existing programs that bolster the social supports of FYIC with non-paid and caring adults (i.e. Mentoring programs, Youth Transition Conferences).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Relationships with caring adults are important because they are a conduit through which youth can build independent living competencies, receive social support, and develop resilience. Youth with strong social networks are significantly more likely to succeed in post-secondary education. 	MCFD*
<p>Continue investing in community-based programs that support FYIC once they leave care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Resilience theory states that children and youth need to be given opportunities to participate in recreational and extracurricular activities and to be given the space to form relationships with caring adults and positive peers. In this study, many FYIC cited that the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks was akin to a community that provided formal and informal supports that empowered them to attend and complete post-secondary education. 	MCFD*
<p>Partner with MCFD to work together on improving transition to post-secondary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Exposure to information and participation in college preparation courses increases the likelihood that a youth in care will pursue post-secondary education. Organize campus tours for grade 11 and 12 students as a means of encouraging participation in post-secondary education among youth in care. Encourage FYIC at the university campuses, especially those on tuition waiver programs, to be part of tours as “hosts.” 	MCFD, Post-secondary Institutions
<p>Provide professional development for staff on university/college/trades campuses about the unique challenges faced by FYIC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Empathetic, knowledgeable and flexible teachers/professors promote the retention of FYIC in post-secondary settings. FYIC want teachers/professors who understand the unique dynamics of being raised in the child welfare system and to adjust teaching styles and expectations accordingly. 	Post-secondary Institutions *
<p>Create specialized campus support programs that promote a sense of community and provide formal and informal support for FYIC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> FYIC are less likely to drop out from post-secondary education if supported by campus programs specific to FYIC. They can be akin to Aboriginal centres, allowing FYIC to meet other youth with common experiences and have access to informal social support. 	Post-secondary Institutions

<p>As part of specialized campus support programs offer workshops that promote mastery of independent living skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Mastery of independent living skills occurs in the early to mid-twenties. Formal training and workshops on topics like stress management, time management, study skills, and employment readiness are important formal supports for ensuring success in post-secondary studies. 	Post-secondary Institutions
<p>Recommendation #4 ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS</p>	
<p>A significant barrier to FYIC's successful completion of post-secondary education is mental health challenges. Post-secondary adjustment is often accompanied by stress, which, for some FYIC, may trigger pre-existing childhood traumas and mental health problems such as PTSD, anxiety and depression. It is important youth in care have access to mental health support before they leave care, and also that post-secondary institutions have the capacity to support their mental health needs using trauma informed approaches. Recommended actions include:</p>	Target Organization(s)
<p>Provide counselling support before youth leave care in order to work towards resolving family of origin issues, mental health, and other ongoing trauma.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rationale:</i> Research shows that upon leaving care many youth return to their family of origin, and this <i>may</i> negate any positive gains (or future planning goals) a youth may have had while in care if issues are unresolved. <p>Provide more mental health supports on campus that are trauma informed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> The stress that accompanies post-secondary studies often triggers pre-existing mental health challenges for FYIC. This population may require ongoing mental health support to deal with the trauma they experienced before (and sometimes during) care. FYIC want on-campus mental health facilities that use trauma-informed practice and that create welcoming and relational atmospheres. 	MCFD Post-secondary Institutions
<p>Recommendation #5 CONTINUED RESEARCH</p>	
<p>In Canada each province administers its own child welfare system; there is no national database that systematically collects outcome data on FYIC. To ensure policies and practices are evidence based more systematic data collection efforts must be pursued. Recommended actions include:</p>	Target Organization(s)
<p>Partner with the Ministry of Advanced Education to develop a performance measurement strategy and implementation plan to collect data on youth once they leave care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> Collection of longitudinal data will allow decision makers at all levels of government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and community programs to make evidence based decisions about how to improve the adult outcomes of FYIC. 	MCFD, Ministry of Advanced Education

<p>Support the development of more academic research on improving the adult outcomes of FYIC in BC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research Rationale:</i> As research on this topic is in its infancy in BC, researchers have a unique opportunity to contribute to academic literature, as well as inform government policy and program development pertaining to improving the educational outcomes of FYIC. 	<p>Post-secondary Institutions</p>
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Concluding Remarks

Exploring the topic of post-secondary educational outcomes of FYIC in BC is important for several reasons. On a macro level, research indicates that investment in FYIC's educational attainment can act as a buffer against social disadvantage (Jackson & Cameron, 2012). Specifically, encouraging their higher educational pursuits has a compensating effect because it prevents the taxation of other public systems, such as the welfare, health, and criminal justice systems in the future (McCoy, McMillen & Spitznagel, 2008; McCreary Centre Society, 2013; Salazar, 2013). Also, while there have been significant advancements in the discourse surrounding supporting the post-secondary educational attainment of FYIC in the USA, in Canada there is minimal academic literature that examines this topic. As such, this study is the first of its kind. Finally, this study may help MCFD and many post-secondary institutions to better understand how to leverage the supports that optimize completion of post-secondary education for FYIC.

This study also provides compelling evidence that individual, family, community, and cultural factors work together to promote or hinder the development of resilience for youth in care. This is important to consider because resilience is at the core of academically successful FYIC. Once FYIC are in post-secondary institutions, additional supports, including academic support, campus connectedness, mental health support, social support and continued development of independent living skills promote retention and completion of post-secondary studies. However, the strongest argument, which underpins this research, is that by promoting resilience, all other areas of a youth's development may benefit. This is encouraging because it illustrates that positive gains can be made by simply promoting the resilience of children and youth while they are still in care.

However, building resilience for youth in care is not the role of any one system. If operating from the perspective that the child welfare system is the "parent" of the child, then all other systems are by default the extended family. The cliché: "it takes a community to raise a child", holds tremendous promise to build resilience for vulnerable youth and ensure their successful educational outcomes. However, it will require that each system take responsibility for the part it can play in making this happen. Equally important is remembering that post-secondary education goes beyond increased employment and wage opportunities to providing a powerful vehicle through which personal fulfillment can be realized. Supporting FYIC to succeed in post-secondary education will ensure that as a society we do our part in the succession planning that will undoubtedly impact our collective humanity.

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Appendix A: Search Strategy used for Literature Review

The following electronic databases and websites were searched:

- ERIC
- EBSCO
- Academic Search Complete
- Humanities Index
- JSTOR
- Google Scholar
- Lexis Nexis Academic
- Social Sciences Index
- Child Welfare League of Canada
- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- Casey Family Foundation
- United Kingdom Government Website
- United States of America Department of Education Website
- Australia Government Website

A combination of the following search terms were used:

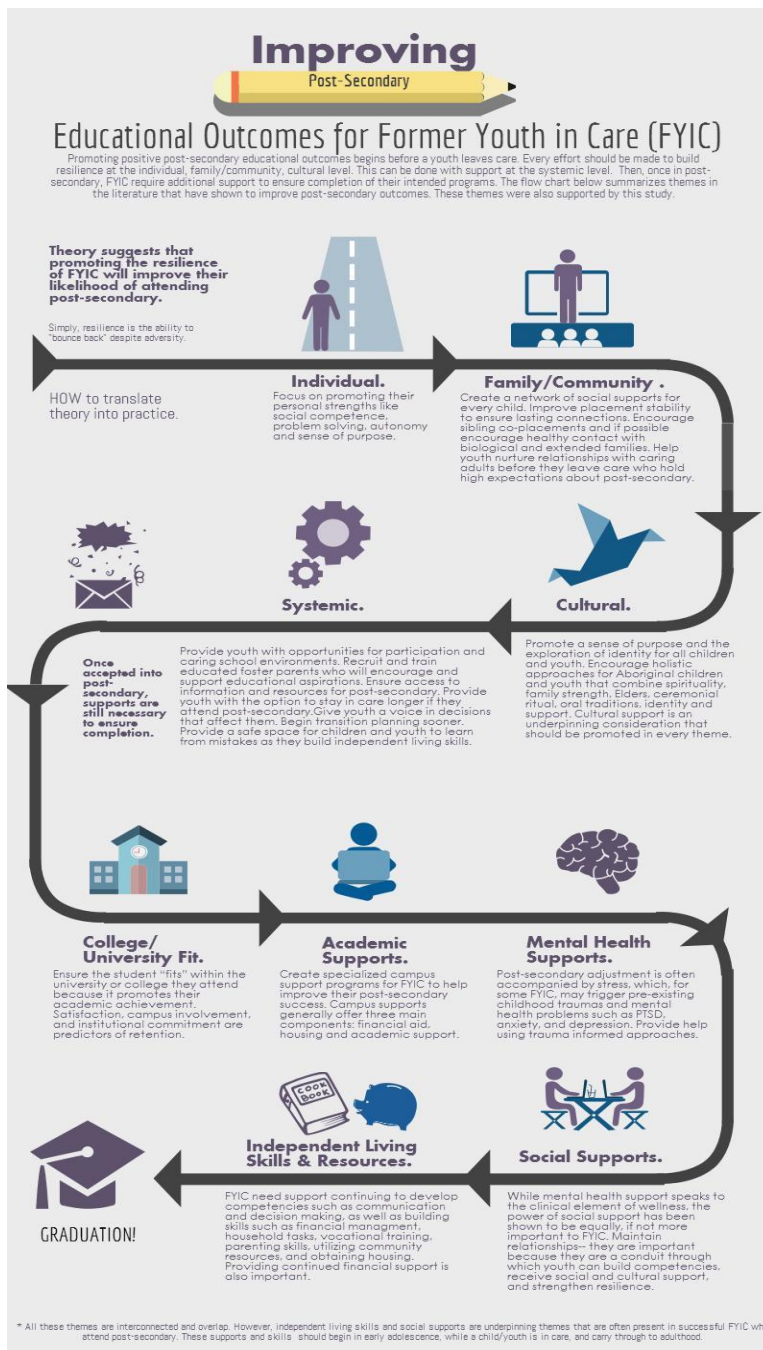
“child welfare, foster care youth, post-secondary educational outcomes, educational attainment, academic resilience, protective factors or resilience, youth transitions, youth transitions out of care, emancipation from public care, and promising practices.”

As literature was generated, more specific search terms were added, such as:

“financial supports, academic readiness, college or university fit, campus support programs, promising interventions, mental health support, independent living programs, social supports, and promising practice.”

In total, 145 peer-reviewed journal articles (published between 2005-2015) were selected and scanned based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts. Other articles and books were then added based on commonly cited authors in the aforementioned articles, resulting in an in-depth analysis of 50-60 articles. While not a systematic review of all the literature, this scoping review serves as the evidence base for the proposed study.

Appendix B: Conceptual Framework



Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

Calling Former Youth In Care



Have you attended a Trades program, College or University? and...

Are you 19 years or older? and...

Are you a former youth in care? and...

Want to tell us about what kinds of supports would help you in school?

Let's TALK!

Chance to win an iPad!!

WHAT
anonymous & confidential
20-30 minute online survey

WHEN
SEPT 2015
1-25

WHY
help improve services & provide advice to MCFD & your school

THE DETAILS

My name is Julie and I'm a Masters student @ UVic.
I'm working on a research project about what helps former youth in care do well in college & university.
I want you to help me.

For more info & to complete the survey, go to:
<http://fluidsurveys.com/s/letstalk-FYIC/>

Questions? contact Julie @ jczeck@uvic.ca

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Appendix D: Composite Scales

MCFD SUPPORT SCALE

Please check all the supports that you have received or accessed as you were aging out of care, or transitioning to post-secondary.

	No	Yes
Agreements with Young Adults (AYA)	0	1
Youth Education Assistance Fund (YEAF)	0	1
Youth Transition Conference	0	1
AgedOut.com	0	1
Kinnections Mentoring Program	0	1
Talking to my Social Worker	0	1
Talking to my Youth Care Worker	0	1
Individualized Education Plan	0	1

TRANSITION SUPPORT SCALE

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was well prepared to age out of care	5	4	3	2	1
I was involved in decision making when I aged out of care	5	4	3	2	1
My social worker provided me with information about post-secondary	5	4	3	2	1
My social worker cared about my future	5	4	3	2	1
My social worker encouraged me to go to post-secondary	5	4	3	2	1
My opinions and thoughts were recognized during transition planning	5	4	3	2	1
I knew who my social supports were going to be when I aged out of care	5	4	3	2	1

ACADEMIC SKILLS SCALE

Please circle rate yourself on the following skill factors.

	Very Strong	Strong	Average	Not Strong	Not strong at all
Time management <i>*Time management</i> refers to managing your time effectively so that you spend the right amount of time on each activity you need to get done.	5	4	3	2	1
Study skills <i>*Study skills</i> refer to your strategies or approaches you use to learn or remember something.	5	4	3	2	1
Leadership skills <i>*Leadership</i> refers to your ability to motivate a group of people toward a common goal. For example, in group work at school.	5	4	3	2	1
Problem-solving skills <i>*Problem solving</i> refers to your ability find methods of dealing with a given challenge.	5	4	3	2	1
Communication skills <i>*Communication skills</i> refer to your ability to convey your thoughts, information, or ideas to others.	5	4	3	2	1
Managing Stress <i>*Managing stress</i> refers to your ability to take care of yourself when you are experiencing situations that make you feel frustrated, nervous, anxious or angry. Taking care of yourself can include: eating healthy, excersising, talking to others, taking a break.	5	4	3	2	1

CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS SCALE

Please, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Generally, I am satisfied with my post-secondary institution.	5	4	3	2	1
I do well at school in my most of my courses.	5	4	3	2	1
I am involved in extracurricular activities at my post-secondary institution.	5	4	3	2	1
I enjoy being at school.	5	4	3	2	1
I get bored in school a lot.	5	4	3	2	1
Doing well in school is important to me.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel good about myself when I am at school.	5	4	3	2	1
Generally, my teachers/professors are understanding and caring.	5	4	3	2	1
I am not afraid to approach my teachers/professors outside the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel connected to some of the peers in my classes.	5	4	3	2	1
I am connected to other former youth in care at my institution.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel like there are people at my school who care about me.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel like my school has a sense of community.	5	4	3	2	1
School is a means to an end for me.	5	4	3	2	1

CAMPUS SERVICES SCALE

How often have you ever accessed the following academic services at your post-secondary institution?

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not sure if my school has this program
The Writing Centre	5	4	3	2	1	0
The Math Centre	5	4	3	2	1	0
Special Education	5	4	3	2	1	0
One on One Tutoring	5	4	3	2	1	0
Other (please specify)	5	4	3	2	1	0

SOCIAL SUPPORT SCALE

Please indicate to what extent are the following statements accurate for you.

	Very Accurate	Somewhat Accurate	Accurate	Not at all Accurate	N/A
I have adults in my life who I feel care about me.	4	3	2	1	0
I have friends who I am really close to and trust completely.	4	3	2	1	0
If I am stressed, I have someone I can talk to.	4	3	2	1	0
I have at least one person in my life who I can turn to if I have questions about everyday problems.	4	3	2	1	0
I am a religious or spiritual person.	4	3	2	1	0
I attend a religious service regularly.	4	3	2	1	0
I have a good relationship with at least one of my foster parents.	4	3	2	1	0
I have a good relationship with at least one my biological parents.	4	3	2	1	0
I have someone who I can ask advice and guidance from.	4	3	2	1	0
I still sometimes talk to a child and youth care worker (like a social worker, mental health worker, family development worker, special needs worker).	4	3	2	1	0
If I am strapped for cash, I have someone who I can borrow \$50-100 from	4	3	2	1	0
I have a significant other who is supportive.	4	3	2	1	0
*For Aboriginal participants: I am connected to my Aboriginal community	4	3	2	1	0

STRESS SCALE

I would also like to ask you a few questions about how you manage stress. The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings during this **last month**. In each case, please indicate your response by clicking how often you felt or thought a certain way.

	Very often	Fairly Often	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you felt nervous or stressed?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you felt that things were going your way?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you felt that you were on top of things?	5	4	3	2	1

How often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	5	4	3	2	1

COPING SCALE

It is not uncommon to feel pressure, or stress while at school. Self-care are things we do to maintain our physical, mental and emotional health- please indicate how often you do the following things:

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I usually limit my intake of junk food.	1	2	3	4
In an average week, I exercise 3-4 times (i.e. running, swimming, other sports).	1	2	3	4
I usually try to follow a healthy diet.	1	2	3	4
I often try to choose salads, fruits and vegetables for snacks.	1	2	3	4
Every week, I try to do things that are relaxing for me.	1	2	3	4
I rely on substances like coffee, alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs to help me cope with stress.	1	2	3	4
Most nights of the week, I get between 7-8 hours of sleep.	1	2	3	4
I laugh a lot and maintain a good sense of humor.	1	2	3	4
Participate in non-school related hobbies on a regular basis (i.e. once a week).	1	2	3	4
I feel connected to something bigger than myself.	1	2	3	4

RESILIENCE SCALE

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have a lot of control over the things that happen to me.	5	4	3	2	1
My work, in general, is at least as good as the work of most others.	5	4	3	2	1
There is usually a way I can solve problems I have.	5	4	3	2	1
There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.	5	4	3	2	1
I often feel confident in dealing with problems in life.	5	4	3	2	1

I am looking forward to the years ahead.	5	4	3	2	1
Sometimes I feel that I am being pushed around in life.	5	4	3	2	1
What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.	5	4	3	2	1
I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do.	5	4	3	2	1
I am creative.	5	4	3	2	1
I am self-motivated to succeed.	5	4	3	2	1
I am flexible and can adapt to change.	5	4	3	2	1
I can stand up for myself.	5	4	3	2	1
When bad things happen, I know they will get better.	5	4	3	2	1
I know how to set realistic goals for myself.	5	4	3	2	1
If I try, I can achieve anything I set my mind to.	5	4	3	2	1
I have made it this far because I don't give up.	5	4	3	2	1
I ask for help when I feel over my head.	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix E: Explanation of Bivariate Correlations

1. Age of Coming into Care is correlated with...
 - **Academic Skills:** There was a statistically significant association between the age of coming into care and academic skill composite scale ($r=0.39$, $p=0.042$). This means that the older the student was when coming into care, the higher their self-reported academic skills.
 - **Preparedness:** The degree to which the student felt prepared to enter post-secondary was also negatively correlated to the age of coming into care, with older students feeling less prepared to attend post-secondary ($r= -.42$, $p=0.027$). This contradiction may have more to do with how the student felt. For example, the academic skills composite scale has more to do with hard skills necessary to do well in post-secondary (time management, study skills, etc) and the “academic preparedness” has more to do with how prepared the student felt to enter post-secondary.
2. Placement Stability is correlated with...
 - **The number of high schools attended:** The more placements a student had while in care, the more high schools they attended ($r=0.44$, $p=0.018$).
3. The Number of High schools attended is correlated with...
 - **Academic Preparedness:** Students who had fewer high school changes, were more likely to feel academically prepared to attend post-secondary ($r=-0.59$, $p=0.001$).
 - **Transition composite score:** Students who had fewer high school changes, were more likely to feel that their transition out of care was positive ($r=-0.40$, $p=0.034$).
 - **Disability:** Students who reported having a disability, were more likely to have more high school changes ($r=0.41$, $p=0.037$).
4. Contact with Biological Parents is correlated with...
 - **Transportation:** Students who keep in contact with their biological parents are less likely to feel like they have transportation support ($r=-0.42$, $p=0.042$).
5. Academic Preparedness is correlated with...
 - **Cultural or spiritual support:** Students who reported feeling academically prepared to attend post-secondary were more likely to have cultural and spiritual support ($r=0.52$, $p=0.022$).
6. Campus connectedness is correlated with...
 - **Perception of mental health:** The higher the score of the campus connectedness, the more likely a student is to report positive current mental health status ($r=0.40$, $p=0.042$).

7. Temporary Withdrawal from Post-Secondary is correlated with...
- **Mental health:** the more likely a student is to report a mental health challenge, the higher the likelihood that they temporarily withdrew from their studies ($r=0.415$, $p=0.03$).
 - **Resilience:** The higher the resilience score of the student, the lower the likelihood that they were to report withdrawing from their post-secondary ($r=-0.55$, $p=0.004$).
 - **Stress:** The higher the stress score of the student, the more likely they are to temporarily withdraw from their studies ($r=0.444$, $p=0.02$). Additionally, the higher the stress score of the student, the more likely they are to permanently drop out of a program ($r=0.520$, $p=0.02$).
8. Sufficient Support with Financial Management is correlated with...
- **Finding housing:** Students who had support with financial management were more likely to have support with finding housing ($r=0.48$, $p=0.018$).
 - **Cultural and spiritual support:** Students who had support with financial management were more likely to feel like they had cultural and spiritual support ($r=0.57$, $p=0.011$).
 - **Stress composite score:** Students who had support with financial management had significantly lower stress scores ($r=-0.051$, $p=0.009$).
 - **Transition composite score:** Students who had support with financial management were significantly more likely to feel like they had a positive transition out of care ($r=0.053$, $p=0.003$).
 - **Mental health:** Students who had support with financial management, were less likely to report having a mental health condition ($r=-0.43$, $p=0.033$).
9. Sufficient Support Finding Housing is correlated with...
- **Transportation:** Students who feel like they have support finding housing, are more likely to feel like they have support with transportation ($r=0.45$, $p=0.027$).
 - **Access of Campus Supports:** Students who feel like they have support finding housing are more likely to access campus services such as the writing center, math center, tutoring, and mental health supports ($r=0.46$, $p=0.027$).
10. Resilience is correlated with...
- **Stress:** The higher the resilience score of the student, the less stress they report ($r=-0.79$, $p<0.001$).
 - **Academic skills composite score:** The higher the resilience score of the student, the more likely they are to report stronger academic skills ($r=0.44$, $p=0.024$).
 - **Social Support composite score:** The higher the resilience score of the student, the more social supports they are likely to have ($r=0.634$, $p=0.015$).
 - **Coping composite score:** The higher the resilience score of the student, the more likely they are to have stronger coping skills ($r=0.52$, $p=0.007$).
 - **Mental health diagnosis:** students who had higher resilience scores reported less mental health problems ($r=-0.56$, $p=0.003$).

- **Disability:** students who had higher resilience scores reported less disabilities ($r=-0.48$, $p=0.018$).
- **Perception of current mental health:** Students with higher resilience reported more positive perceptions of their current mental health status ($r=0.75$, $p<0.001$).

11. Stress is correlated with...

- **Mental health diagnosis:** The higher the stress scores, the more likely a student is to report a mental health diagnosis ($r=0.44$, $p=0.022$).
- **Disability:** The higher the stress scores, the more likely a student is to report a disability ($r=0.41$, $p=0.037$).
- **Perception of current mental health:** The higher the stress scores, the less likely a student is to report positive current mental health status ($r=-0.72$, $p<0.001$).

12. Social Support is correlated with...

- **Perception of current mental health:** The higher the social support score, the more likely a student is to report positive current mental health status ($r=0.78$, $p=0.002$).