

SUPPORTING
YOUNG
PEOPLE'S
TRANSITION FROM
GOVERNMENT
CARE

RESEARCH
PROJECT

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This project would not have been possible without the assistance and support of a number of people.

First, we are indebted to the young people who participated in piloting the Peer Mentoring and Life Skills workshops. Through their participation in the workshops they provided us with invaluable feedback. In addition, through their weekly and final evaluations they identified what they liked best about the workshops and made helpful suggestions about where they would make changes.

We also like to thank members of our Advisory Committee who have provided support and direction throughout Stage 2. The input and feedback we received from Lise Erikson, Bridgette Webster, Mike Demers, Robin Swets, Annette Harding, Glenda Goertz, Barry Young, Aaron Chew, along with their assistance in liaising with the community have been invaluable.

Finally, we are extremely appreciative of the funding support we have received from the BC Health Research Foundation and the Greater Victoria Child and Youth Advocacy Society.

This report is dedicated to the memory of Vanessa North.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents our findings and reflections on Stage 2 of the *Supporting Young People's Transitions from Government Care* project¹. It follows the Stage 1 report for the same project that was published in February 2001.

The overall goal for the *Supporting Young People's Transitions from Government Care* project has been to use a grass-roots and participatory process to identify and implement ways of improving young people's preparation for and experiences of leaving government care to live on their own. The project was designed to achieve this goal in two stages.

In Stage 1, youth participants recounted their stories of leaving care and identified their support needs; interviews were also conducted with caregivers, government and community-based service providers.

In Stage 2 we developed, pilot tested and evaluated a peer mentoring and life skills workshop series that was co-facilitated by two young adults from care who were members of the project team. This activity had been identified through our Stage 1 research as a strategy that could be implemented through the project in order to promote healthier transitions from care.

Our process of evaluating the workshops involved weekly written evaluation forms by the youth participants, a focus group with the youth following the completion of the workshop series, and a joint interview with the young adult workshop co-facilitators. An analysis of the information and feedback provided by the youth participants revealed that the workshops were successful and viewed as highly useful by the youth participants. In particular, youth valued:

- ***having opportunities to meet and connect with other youth in/from care.*** Youth commented that they tended not to meet youth in/from care in their day to day activities, and that Ministry offices were not conducive to meeting with other youth. Thus, connecting with youth in/from care through the workshops – where youth met for a common purpose, there was a focus to the activity and the activity was facilitated by other youth from care - was especially useful.

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- ***having a group meal.*** Preparing meals together enabled the youth to develop or augment a variety of independent living skills, discuss nutrition, and sample a variety of dishes. As well, during this time many of the youth actively engaged in discussions with each other, which contributed to relationship building.
- ***the hands-on, participatory style of the two young adult co-facilitators.*** Among the attributes that youth appreciated about the two facilitators were: their easy-going, laid-back manner; their non-authoritarian approach; and their connections within the community (e.g. the Victoria Youth in Care Network). Youth maintained that it was very important to them that the two co-facilitators had themselves lived in care. This greatly facilitated the development of trust and rapport that in turn contributed to their positive relationships.
- ***having a variety of guest speakers,*** who complemented one another – and the workshop co-facilitators - in their presentation and facilitation styles, and who thus varied the formats and processes of the workshops.
- ***having an honorarium for the youth participants.*** This represented an acknowledgement of the youths' time and the reality of their lives, that attending the workshops sometimes meant incurring costs (i.e. transportation, babysitting), that many could ill-afford.

Throughout the course of the workshops, the project team continually reflected on ways of modifying and improving what we were doing. These reflections, in combination with the evaluation comments from the youth participants, led to the following lessons learned.

On planning the workshops

Balancing spontaneity, youth's emerging interests and adequate prep time

It is essential to find a workable balance between having flexibility to meet youth's interests and meeting the co-facilitators' needs for adequate planning and preparation time. Based on our experience with this pilot, we thus recommend that the workshop series be planned in advance in four week segments. This will give facilitators enough time to undertake their planning of each segment, including gathering materials and resources, and arranging for guest speakers as required, while still leaving room for participants' emerging interests.

Always have a "plan B"

Our experience with setting up a Ministry guest speaker on a topic that was of great importance to the youth participants, and then having this speaker have to cancel on the day of workshop taught us a crucial lesson: Always have a back-up plan for workshops. We thus suggest that if guest speakers are planned, a back-up speaker needs to be in place; as well, having a back-up co-facilitator for all workshops is also recommended. Again, this lesson speaks to the importance of having enough lead time to plan workshops, speakers and activities well in advance, so that last minute glitches don't turn into stressful scrambles and/or major disappointments.

On the format and content of the workshops

Having more time for the workshop content

It is very important that there is sufficient time within the workshops to cover (at least most of) the content planned and not feel too rushed (while at the same time having enough time to address any issues that arise for participants. Based on this pilot, we thus suggest that workshops be three hours in duration. The first 45 minutes might be allocated for eating the meal, with remaining time allocated for the structured group process.

Focussing on living in and leaving care

In addition to the above, given that a distinguishing facet of these workshops is that they are for youth in/from care, it is important to have opportunities and activities within each workshop to relate the material to participants' experiences in care. We thus suggest that the agenda for each workshop incorporate an activity that more formally links the theme of the week to making a successful transition out of care.

On food as part of the process

Encouraging involvement in making as well as eating the meal

In recognition of the value of hands-on learning through the meal component of the workshops, it may be necessary to find means to encourage more consistent involvement from the youth participants. Several suggestions for ways to encourage participation in the meal preparation that have emerged from our pilot include:

- During one of the first workshops, discuss different ideas for meals that the group would like to prepare and eat. Then, assign each workshop participant a week when it is his or her responsibility to work within the budget to develop a list of ingredients, do the shopping in conjunction with one of the group facilitators and organize the meal preparation.
- Have the youth who complete the task receive some form of additional recognition for their efforts.

On workshop/office space

Recognizing the importance of youth-friendly space

Having a safe, comfortable and youth-oriented/welcoming office or meeting space is essential for projects that involve youth (not only youth in/from care but all youth). It is important to get feedback from youth about the characteristics of a particular office/meeting space that make it either appropriate or undesirable. Chances are that a potential project space that is situated within a large institutional office will not feel accessible to youth.

On Working as a Team

The importance of trusting relationships and honest communication within the team

Working collaboratively and well as a young person-adult team requires checking in with one another on an ongoing basis, to ensure that team members feel supported yet have room to learn, and that project needs are met. Checking in and honest communication, in turn, can only occur when a foundation of a solid, trusting relationship exists. To allow room for learning, it can be necessary for team members with more experience to hold themselves in check and not 'take over'.

On facilitation

Recognizing the importance of strong facilitation skills

It is very important that the group facilitators are adept in working with the group, and feel confident and competent in their role as facilitators. Supporting facilitators to enhance their knowledge and skills in facilitation through (additional) training may be highly recommended.

On the honoraria

Recognizing the value of the honoraria for youth

It is essential to acknowledge the value of youth's time, and to appreciate their life circumstances, which, for many, means poverty. Providing an honorarium for their participation in workshops is a valued means of showing this recognition.

On peer support

Recognizing the value of peer support

There is considerable value in the type of informal peer support that was offered during the workshops, even though both the support and the impacts of this support are not always tangible or visible. Based on our experience with the pilot, we thus recommend that opportunities to offer peer support be a central component of any youth-related workshops series. Opportunities for peer mentoring may include having one or more of the youth “graduates” of the first workshop series attend the subsequent workshop series to act as peer supports for the youth participants and to assist the co-facilitators with some of the support aspects of their roles.

Conclusions and Next Steps

At the conclusion of Stage 2, the project team determined that it wanted to pilot the workshops again, to put into practice many of the lessons learned and to further refine the content and sequencing of the workshops. In addition, some of the youth who had completed the first workshops series expressed interest in continuing their involvement in some way, and the project team wanted to facilitate their continued participation. As such, a number of funding proposals were submitted and several were successful. Consequently the project is now entering Stage 3. In Stage 3, we will focus on three main activities:

- (i) Piloting a second peer mentoring group;
- (ii) Providing community based support for the trained peer mentors;
and
- (iii) Producing a Peer Mentor Training Guide for Youth In/from care.

We anticipate that this Guide and a report on our Stage 3 activities will be available in the spring of 2002.

INTRODUCTION

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In Stage 1, youth participants recounted their stories of leaving care and identified their support needs; interviews were also conducted with caregivers, government and community-based service providers. In Stage 2 we developed, pilot tested and evaluated a peer mentoring and life skills workshop series that was co-facilitated by two young adults from care who were members of the project team. This activity had been identified through our Stage 1 research as a strategy that could be implemented through the project in order to promote healthier transitions from care.

This report on Stage 2 is organized as follows:



- **Section I... Background and Overview of Stage 1.....Page 3**
In Section I, we discuss the background and history of the project, as well as the project's objectives for Stage 1 and 2;
- **Section II... Workshop Planning, Development and Delivery...Page 6**
In Section II we describe how the workshops were planned, developed and delivered
- **Section III...Participant Evaluations of the Workshops.....Page 13**
In Section III we present the evaluations of the workshops by the youth participants; and

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• **Section IV....Reflections and Lessons.....Page 20**

In Section IV we provide our reflections and lessons learned through the process of undertaking Stage 2 of the project. While we have not framed our lessons as specific policy and practice recommendations, the insights have relevance and ramifications for those working with youth and seeking to involve youth in a variety of government and community based initiatives.

Section I Background & Overview of Stage 1

The existing literature on youth who had “exited” from the government care system, while scant, clearly indicates that young people who have lived in care typically experience a number of health problems due to their lack of resources, practical living skills and supportive relationships.² They are asked to do more, sooner and with fewer personal, social and material resources than are youth who have not lived in care.

To address these issues, the *Supporting Young People’s Transitions from Government Care* project was conceived and developed by a team composed of the Coordinator of the Victoria Youth in Care Network, a University of Victoria-based researcher and a community-based researcher.

In Stage 1, the project's primary objectives were to provide youth in/from care with opportunities to:

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- thinking, problem solving and consensus building and writing; and
- providers.

During Stage 1, approximately 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with both youth in and from care, and with social workers, community service providers, and foster parents. Youth participants recounted their stories of leaving care and identified their support needs through in depth personal interviews. Interviews were also conducted with caregivers, and government and community-based service providers.

Our interviews with youth suggested that “youth who have left care generally have limited or no contact with the people in the government care system who formed their social support network during their time in care”³. Consequently, many youth described feeling let down by the ‘system’ rather than supported by it. Moreover, many could not identify having a positive, ongoing connection with someone who

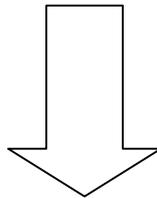
² Rutman, D., Barlow, A., Hubberstey, C., Alusik, D. & Brown, E. (2001) *Supporting Young People’s Transition From Government Care: Stage 1 Report*. p 3.

³ Ibid. Executive summary p 2.

was interested and able to help them in their transition into adulthood. This was in sharp contrast with youth not in the care system, who typically can identify ongoing and supportive connections with adults and/or family members.

Our project findings were highly congruent with those of Mann-Feder and White (2000) who found that “emotional support was repeatedly emphasized as the most critical component of services for youth in the transition to independent living and consistently emerged as more important than programming per se.”⁴ Clearly, young people place a high priority and value on being connected with someone who can provide ongoing emotional support, mentoring and help as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood and from being in care to living independently.

Stage 2 of the current project was designed to build on the work and findings of Stage 1. During Stage 2, the plan was to pilot test at least one strategy designed to support the transition from government care. In keeping with the participatory approach of the project, and the desire to involve youth as much as possible, the objectives for Stage 2 were to:

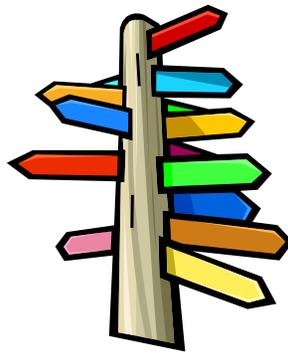


- Examine and document the process of implementing selected practical interventions aiming to improve the process of young people's leaving government care;
- Through a participatory process involving youth in/from care, caregivers and human service providers, to plan and conduct an evaluation of the selected strategies, focussing on young people's and workers' perceptions of the value and effectiveness of these strategies and interventions; and
- Through a participatory process, to critically reflect upon and document the project's processes, outcomes, challenges and lessons.

An analysis of the interviews conducted in Stage 1 yielded several possible strategies. A Forum to select a strategy to pilot test was held April 26, 2000 (see Appendix A for the agenda and list of identified strategies). The Forum included members from the Steering Committee for the project, other community leaders, youth who had participated in the interviews and project staff. One of the primary considerations in selecting a strategy was that it needed to be feasible within the context of the existing resources, staffing and locale.

⁴ Mann-Feder & White. (2000) page 7

Based on the Stage 1 findings and input from the Forum, the strategy that was considered to be most within the scope and objectives of this project was a peer mentoring and lifeskills workshop series that would be co-facilitated by two young adults who were part of the project team. The co-facilitators had prior experience of living in care and thus knew firsthand some of the challenges facing youth leaving care. In addition they had some experience with group facilitation. Perhaps most importantly though, by having the young adult members of the project team take on the co-facilitation role, they were in a position to act as role models for the youth participants.



Section II Workshop Planning, Development & Delivery

Workshop planning

To begin the work of developing a framework of workshop topics, the youth co-facilitators researched various models of peer support/mentoring training and life skills and independent living training with input from the project Steering Committee. As a result, the co-facilitators came up with a number of possible workshop topics, processes (i.e., interactive group exercises) and resources. The project team then developed a draft framework for the workshops: the series would begin with several sessions focussing on team/relationship building, values and goal setting, then move into several workshops on a number of independent living skills (e.g. different facets of communication, conflict resolution and budgeting), and then conclude with several sessions on various dimensions of peer mentoring/support. As we continued to plan, we increasingly recognized that there wasn't a clear separation between independent living and peer mentoring training and/or skill development, and that a number of core skills such as communication were central and foundational to both living on one's own and providing peer support to others. In conceptualizing the workshops, the co-facilitators proposed that the workshop series would be 14-16 weeks in duration, and that each session would last two and a half hours.

Participant recruitment and demographics

Following development of the workshop framework, attention was turned to recruitment of participants. After much discussion the project team determined that we needed to have a set of criteria for selecting potential participants. Specifically we decided that we were looking for youth who were in the process of getting ready to leave care or who were living independently but wanted or needed to gain more skills associated with living on their own. Furthermore, because of the nature of the workshops, we were not in a position to accept as participants any youth who were in crisis, had serious substance or mental health issues, or were several years away from living independently. This meant that they needed to be within a couple of years of leaving care and able to make a commitment to attend for 15 to 16 weeks. A recruitment flyer was drawn up (See Appendix B) and distributed in several locations.

The recruitment process involved:

- meeting with school counsellors,
- preparing and distributing one page recruitment flyer,
- personal networks of advisory committee members,
- personal networks of project team

- discussions with guardianship and other Ministry workers

As a result of this process, eight youth who met our selection criteria expressed interest in participating in the workshops. Six were female, two were male, and they ranged in age from 17-20. One of the youth was parenting an infant, one self-identified as being Aboriginal, and one was a visible minority. Most youth were in the process of completing their high school; as well, several held part-time jobs. Three of the participants were on the Ministry's Independent Living program and had been living on their own, though often with roommates, for at least several months. Three participants were still living in foster care and two were living on their own and receiving income assistance.

Involving youth in the planning process

The workshop co-facilitators (i.e., two of the young adult members of the project team) met with youth who indicated an interest in the workshops and who met the criteria, to discuss the workshop series and determine the best day of the week for everyone to attend. The project team was committed to involving the youth participants in some way in the workshop planning process, especially in determining the nature and range of the topics covered. The team placed tremendous value on having the workshops be relevant and thus able to address participants' particular needs and interests in terms of independent living and peer mentoring skill development.

Thus, prior to the start of the workshop series, the prospective youth participants were shown the draft framework of workshop topics and asked for their feedback on the relevance and prioritization of the proposed topics. The youth did not have a lot to say about the proposed framework, although a couple did indicate some topics in which they had no interest. The co-facilitators adjusted the workshop topics accordingly and decided to be open to new ideas and to finalize the planning of the workshops on a week by week basis.

Overview of workshop topics and format

The group came to a consensus that Wednesday evenings from 4:30pm to 6:30pm worked best for everyone. The first part of the evening (roughly 4:30 - 5:30) was spent eating food that had been prepared at the beginning of the session and socializing (see below discussion on "Food as part of the process"). The second part of the evening involved the more structured workshop which followed a basic format of:

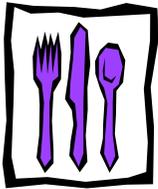
- Opening/Check-in, which involved the group updating each other on what had been going on for them
- Activity, a game or task that was used to "warm up" up the group
- Content/activities related to the session's topic
- Closing, sometimes cleaning up or a wrap up discussion to end the evening

- Evaluation, a form that each youth in the group filled out evaluating the workshop.

The schedule of workshop topics, determined collaboratively by the co-facilitators and the youth participants as the workshop series unfolded, was as follows:

Workshop #1	Nov. 1, 2000:	Introductions
Workshop #2	Nov. 8, 2000:	Group Building
Workshop #3	Nov. 15, 2000:	Community Resources
Workshop #4	Nov. 22, 2000:	Communication Part 1
Workshop #5	Nov. 29, 2000:	Communication Part 2
Workshop #6	Dec. 6, 2000:	Goal Setting Part 1
Workshop #7	Dec. 13, 2000:	Goal Setting Part 2
Workshop #8	Jan. 10, 2001:	Social
Workshop #9	Jan. 17, 2001:	Communication Part 3
Workshop # 10	Jan. 24, 2001:	MCF & Independent Living
Workshop #11	Jan. 31, 2001:	MCF & Independent Living
Workshop # 12	Feb. 7, 2001:	MCF & Independent Living
Workshop #13	Feb. 14, 2001:	Budgeting/Taxes
Workshop #14	Feb. 21, 2001:	Peer Mentoring Part 1
Workshop #15	Feb. 28, 2001:	Conflict Resolution
Workshop #16	Mar. 7, 2001:	Peer Mentoring Part 2
Workshop # 17	Mar. 14, 2001:	Evaluation & closing

Appendix C ("Overall Workshop Framework") provides a detailed agenda and description of each workshop, including the interactive group activities used.



Food as a part of the process

Prior to the workshops we decided that it was important to include food as a part of the process. We recognized that youth leaving care, living on their own, often do not have the means to afford much quality food at home. They are often hungry. Living in care, food tends to be an issue for a variety of reasons. Thus, having food - of the youth's choice - be part of the workshops seemed both a good incentive for participation and also an enjoyable way to combine skills development (e.g. budgeting, nutrition, meal preparation, timeliness) with socializing.

The meal component of the workshop series was envisioned (and endorsed by participants) as follows: The youth would meet with one of the co-facilitators in the kitchen space of the youth centre that was used for the project, at 2:30 on the day of the workshop. The group then would choose a menu and would work out a budget for shopping. After buying groceries, the group would return to the youth centre and together prepare the meal. This would be a time for the youth to (re)connect informally and unwind before the more structured component of the workshop. After the meal was prepared, the group would head over to the downtown project office/workshop space for the remainder of the session.

Initially the youth showed great enthusiasm for using and enhancing skills such as budgeting, shopping and preparing the meal. However, after a few weeks, youth often did not show up to help with the preparation until the meal was completed. As a result the workshop co-facilitators often had to cook the meal alone, which involved a substantial amount of time and effort.

Even though participants' involvement in the meal preparation diminished or wavered over time, it was evident that a great deal of socializing and sharing of information, tips and "tricks" happened while eating, as well as before or outside of the workshop. For the youth, hearing one another's stories and socializing were important means to feeling more connected to a group of peers with similar experience.

Seeking Information about Independent Living

Early on in the workshop series, the youth participants expressed their desire for information regarding the Independent Living program and/or the transition from care. In informally sharing and comparing their experiences, it became evident to them that they had differing, and incomplete, information regarding what their rights

were, especially in relation to spending allowances; the amounts of the allowances that they had received while in care also differed. The youth participants thus sought clarity regarding the apparent discrepancies in their workers' practice in this regard and others, and wanted to inform themselves about Ministry policy and practice guidelines. Accordingly, the young adult co-facilitators invited a well-respected Ministry line worker to be a guest speaker at one of the workshops. In preparation for this, the youth participants and the workshop co-facilitators decided to have the workshop that preceded this one focus on "Respectful Communication"; in this workshop the youth brainstormed questions that they wanted to ask the Ministry guest, and then they talked about respectful ways to frame and discuss these questions (See Appendix D for a list of these questions, as well as a summary of participants' discussion about what the Independent Living Program meant to them). While this process made good sense, the Ministry line worker unfortunately was called to court on the day of the scheduled workshop and had to cancel. Even more unfortunately, the co-facilitators and the project team did not have another Ministry speaker as a back up, and thus the youth had an unscheduled "social" in place of the Ministry speaker on Independent Living. Despite everyone's interest in re-scheduling this workshop, the Ministry guest was not available for subsequent workshops, and so the topic of youths' rights on Independent Living was never fully covered.

Peer Support/Mentoring by the Workshop Co-facilitators

The workshop co-facilitators split the list of youth participants in half and were responsible for calling the youth on their list each week in between the workshops. The facilitators would not only remind the youth of the upcoming workshop but would also encourage them to share their thoughts on the workshops and on things that were going on in their lives.

Through this process one of the co-facilitators developed a trusting relationship with one youth who early on in the workshop series was diagnosed with a serious illness. The youth had to withdraw from the group to attend lengthy and difficult medical treatments in Vancouver. At her request, the facilitator with whom she had a close relationship made several trips to Vancouver to provide support and encouragement. Arranging and making these trips was difficult for the young adult facilitator and clearly took an emotional toll. The rest of the project team attempted to provide emotional support for the facilitator so she did not feel quite so alone with her thoughts and feelings. This was clearly an unanticipated event, but even more importantly, it was a demanding and highly moving experience. No amount of planning could have prepared the project team for this eventuality.

Working together as a team

As a project team, we mainly worked together during team meetings (generally held on Thursdays) and workshop planning meetings (generally held on Tuesdays), both of which were held on a weekly basis. The team meetings provided an opportunity to discuss what was happening during the workshops and to reflect upon both the



positive things that were happening as well as what we were learning from this experience. The workshop planning meetings were times to pull together ideas and resources for the planning and organizing of the workshop series on an ongoing basis. The team also worked together recruiting youth for the workshop series, finding guest speakers, facilitating evaluations and doing other miscellaneous tasks.

As indicated in the Stage 1 report, the project staff continued to employ a team approach. However, in Stage 1, it was the adult members of the team who took the lead in terms of conducting the ‘research’, whereas in Stage 2, it was the young adults who took the lead as co-facilitators of the peer mentoring workshops. This shift in roles took some time to settle into. For example, the adult members of the team took their cues from the young adults regarding the type of support required. At the same time, it was apparent to all that the adult members of the team had more experience in group facilitation, workshop organization and planning, fundraising and public presentations. As Stage 2 unfolded we worked through, on an ongoing basis, how to divide up tasks, when to “back off” (for the adult team members) and when to step in. Further discussion of youth-adult partnerships in a participatory action research framework is the focus of a forthcoming paper.

Facilitating the Workshops

The workshop co-facilitators worked extensively together both during and in between the workshops. They collaborated on ideas for the agendas, and took equal responsibility for researching and preparing the content of each workshop. The facilitation during the workshops was shared equally as well, and the facilitators reflected many times on how much they appreciated this co-facilitation approach. In terms of debriefing the workshops, the workshop facilitators similarly appreciated that there were two people involved, because they seemed to pick up on different things that were happening over the course of the session (e.g., group dynamics). In addition, their styles of facilitation were somewhat different yet highly complementary. As the co-facilitators commented:

I don't see how you could do it by yourself. There's no way...

I have watched E's facilitation style and have noticed that our facilitation style can be the same in a lot of ways, but also different...

The young adult co-facilitators also commented upon the challenges in attempting to balance their desire to adhere to the agenda for the workshops with being receptive to the youth participants' interests and input.

It's hard to facilitate a workshop that you want to be youth-led. I mean, we came in with our agendas, and we learned really quickly that the agenda can just be wiped away really quickly, just like that. ...given that youth have a different idea about what they want to talk about.

Finally, both young adult co-facilitators appreciated the importance of having lived in care themselves. Their lived experience enabled them to authentically relate to participants' feelings, perspectives and experiences, and also enabled them to recognize and anticipate the types of information and resources that participants would seek out as part of their journeys out of care.

I can't imagine not being in care and doing this. You wouldn't know what they were talking about. You wouldn't know how to relate to them. You wouldn't be able to give them information.

Or even just that feeling of, "been there, done that". There were quite a few times when they'd say something or talk about someone you knew. That's where I sometimes felt as a facilitator that I was half facilitator, half participant....I wanted to get right in there and talk with them about things that we shared or had in common.



Section III Participants' Evaluation Of The Workshops

The project team was committed to learning from the experience of piloting the workshop series. As well, written evaluations, based on one-page evaluation forms, were completed by the youth participants after each workshop session. An evaluation focus group was held with the youth participants upon completion of the workshops. An analysis of the information and feedback provided by the youth participants revealed the following.

1. What did youth like (most) about the workshops?

Connecting with other youth (in/from care)

The youth participants really valued having opportunities to meet and connect with other youth in/from care. Youth commented that they tended not to meet youth in/from care in their day to day activities, and that Ministry offices were not conducive to meeting with other youth. Thus, connecting with youth in/from care through the workshops – where youth met for a common purpose, there was a focus to the activity and the activity was facilitated by other youth from care - was especially useful. Participants commented that this was one way in which our workshop series differed from other independent living skill-building workshops with which they were familiar.

I found it really helpful (to) connect with other people that are in the same situation.

I think it's hard to meet people outside of, like in the 'real world' that are in, like, this situation. So if I hadn't come to this group I would have known no one else except for my sister. It's weird, how that is. You just don't come across people, other than seeing them in your social worker's office, but I've never

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Connecting with other youth– that was “always” useful

Cooking

Workshop participants really enjoyed the meals and the meal preparation that was the start of each workshop. Cooking and eating a meal together was extremely important to the youth for a number of reasons: most fundamentally, for young people living on their own, most often in poverty, hunger can be a grim reality; thus, the meals fulfilled a real need and were an incentive to the youth's participation. Second, preparing the meals together enabled the youth to develop or augment several key independent living skills (e.g. meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking), discuss nutrition in a very informal and supportive atmosphere, and sample a variety of dishes – many that they would not otherwise have had. Third, meals afforded

opportunities for informal socializing and sharing within the group. Participants noted that cooking/eating together was preferable to simply having “munchies”. Participants also noted that the meals and preparation processes that were part of our workshop series were another of its distinguishing features.

Awesome. So awesome! Cannot live without the cooking thing! It's a must. If it's anything, it's your first attraction right there. (everyone heartily agrees.)But it's good. I think it's very, very important.

You learn skills from cooking as well... and it's good to try a little of what everyone likes to eat. Better than Kraft dinner every single day.

Value of Erinn and April as co-facilitators

Youth participants appreciated the workshop co-facilitators' style of facilitation, which was characterized by their participatory, hands-on approach. That is, the co-facilitators typically took part in group activities, role plays, interactive games, and so forth. Youth valued this approach both because it was non-hierarchical and it also served to remind the group that the co-facilitators each had lived in care and had to deal with the same independent living issues and challenges as the youth were currently facing. Having the co-facilitators take part in exercises and activities also sometimes served as an ice-breaker, allowing the group to ease into discussion of an issue while not having any individual youth disclose his or her personal experience until he or she felt ready to do so. In addition, it became apparent that April and Erinn also served as role models for group members, both in their leadership of the group, and in their experiences of having made successful transitions out of care.

I'd say that it's great that A. and E. go into the situation and take part in it. Um, you know, it really gives that little edge. When all of us just sit there and say nothing that's what they're good for. To spice the group up, get the energy going, that sort of thing. We're all too shy, you know, we throw them up there, we make them say their problems and we say our problems. So yeah, it's intimate with all of them and I think that's really good to have.

Having guest speakers

Youth participants enjoyed having a variety of guest speakers, who complemented one another – and the workshop co-facilitators - in their presentation and facilitation styles, and who thus varied the formats and processes of the workshops.

It was great cause it made everything, not more interesting but like added a little spice to it I guess I'm saying. 'Cause, you know, you're used to seeing each other every week, the same people, it's good to bring in new faces with different opinions. Some people have better strengths in some areas.

Honoraria for youth participation

Finally, but not necessarily least importantly, the youth appreciated the honoraria they received in recognition of their time and commitment to participating in the workshops. Even though the amount of the honorarium was relatively small

(\$10./session), it appeared to make a difference to the youth. Clearly the combination of a meal and an honorarium were features or characteristics of the group that distinguished it from other comparable local groups. The youth also received a completion bonus that provided some incentives for some, but certainly not all members of the group.

Learn helpful skills, get dinner and then leave with some money! It's wicked!

2. What did participants learn? How did youth envision using the information?

According to the youth participants, the workshops that stood out for them in terms of learning useful information included:

- ✧ *building relationships;*
- ✧ *communication;*
- ✧ *goal setting;*
- ✧ *conflict resolution; and*
- ✧ *budgeting.*



3. In what ways did the training help youth in their transition from care?

While participants did not offer specific ideas about ways that the workshops helped them in their transition from care, they maintained that the workshops were quite useful to them. At the same time, several participants reflected that the workshops would have been even more helpful to them had they been able to access them when they were younger (i.e., on the brink of their exit from their foster home and/or in the earliest days of being on their own through the Independent Living program). In this regard, participants observed that most youth actually made transitions from care at two times: when they first left foster care to go on the IL program at age 17 or so, and then at 19 when they no longer were wards of the Ministry or received resources/services from MCF.

4. What was youth's experience of working with the other youth participants involved in the workshops?

Learning from peers enables the development of a variety of complementary skills.

Youth expressed that they enjoyed having opportunities, built into the workshops, to share information and learn skills from one another. For example, preparing meals together afforded the youth opportunities for peer teaching and learning. Learning from peers also allowed youth to help and support one another by sharing their

knowledge. Youth spoke of valuing this peer support/mentoring role, and of wanting to do more of it in their interactions with other youth in/from care.

It's good 'cause everyone knows different things, and we all share, so we always learn something new. And how to help our friends, and people. Yeah, you can't really find that from your social worker, they don't really tell you what 'we' know, or what other people know.

5. What was youth's experience working with the facilitators involved in the workshops?

The youth participants were extremely positive about the two young adult co-facilitators. Among the attributes that youth appreciated about the two facilitators were: their easy-going, laid-back manner; their “approachability” – it was easy to connect with them and to develop a “friendship-like” relationship with them; their non-authoritarian approach; and their connections within the community (e.g. the Victoria Youth in Care Network). Youth maintained that it was very important to them that the two co-facilitators had themselves lived in care. They reported that this greatly facilitated the development of trust and rapport that in turn contributed to their positive relationships. The youth also enjoyed that the two co-facilitators had, in some ways, different styles and demeanors. They also appreciated that one of the co-facilitators, who had two young children, had occasionally brought them to the workshops, as this signified to the youth that they were seen as trustworthy and responsible enough to be around children. The facilitator's sharing of her experiences as a young mother made her seem more “real”, in ways that eluded professional service providers or social workers. Indeed, participants emphasized that one of the reasons that they so liked the two facilitators was because they seemed real, which youth linked to being “non-professional”, and which enabled the youth to open up and feel as though they could truly be themselves.

Oh they're great people. In the very first meeting, I walked in there and I met A. and E. I don't know, I got this totally different vibe from what I thought they'd be. More authority figures, not like your friend but in the end they're like friends and really connect. And that helped a lot. It did.

It's a good thing that they also have the background experience and information so that they can feel a bit.

And I like how they both had different personalities. Like E. seems more alternative or whatever and A's more laid back or something like that. It's not like two 'sophisticated ladies' or whatever... Clothes aren't businessy.

Yeah. It just made you feel like you could be yourself more, goofy or whatever you wanted to be.

Definitely real people. ...No, they don't have that sort of professionalism behind them, it's more themselves and that's good. It's the real person that way.

But it really brings out the whole person ...It's really good to feel comfortable with that vibe that she's, she trusts us with her kids being there. It's such a good sort of setting where it feels really comfortable- she's all OK with it and everything.

It's definitely a trust thing. The fact that she trusts you to be a bad influence on her children says a lot.

6. What challenges/difficulties did youth experience in participating in the workshops?

Several participants noted that the time of day of the workshops (4:30 – 6:30) was somewhat problematic, since at the end of the afternoon their energy was often lagging.

Participants also felt that not having a consistent place for the workshops was a challenge, both because it sometimes led to confusion, and because neither of the workshop locations were really optimal (for some, one site was too far from downtown and transportation, while the other site did not have cooking facilities).

In addition, several participants found it challenging to disclose personal information about themselves. Although they found the games and other techniques used by the co-facilitators to “break the ice” and develop relationships within the group to be fun, engaging and effective, they nonetheless found it difficult to share with the group.

7. What, if anything, would youth change about the way the workshops were offered and/or the content of the workshops or the way that the content was covered?

The youth participants made a number of suggestions about ways that the workshop series could be structured differently and/or the types of content covered. These ideas pertained to:

1. Workshop time
2. Workshop duration
3. Workshop location
4. Ordering of workshop topics
5. Youth-selected and researched topics
6. Workshop content focussing more specifically on how to make the transition from care

As noted above, some youth felt that late afternoon was not ideal in terms of participants’ energy levels. At the same time, youth acknowledged that school and other day-time commitments made any other time of day problematic. Youth thus suggested that workshop sessions begin with some sort of “energizer” to help participants get a second wind:

I noticed whenever we all come here we're always tired. And it's not generally because of the time because 4:30 is not that late, but all of us, we're always tired. And I think an energizer would be a good thing to do at the beginning of every session.

The majority of youth believed that two hours was not enough time to eat and adequately cover the material planned for a workshop; three hours was suggested as a preferable amount of time. At the same time, the youth seemed to think that an even more concentrated block of time – e.g. a half day or full day, held on a weekend – would be too intense; they couldn't see this working well for them.

Participants also emphasized the importance of having a single location for the workshops. They also observed that they felt “more awake” in the downtown office. The comfortable chairs in the Youth Centre were “too comfortable” and thus too conducive to nodding off, especially after a good meal.

Youth were in favour of the notion of re-ordering the workshops such that all the ones relating to topics such as relationship building, communication, and conflict resolution would be covered early in the workshops series, leaving time at the end for youth-selected and other topics. One participant also recommended that youth select a workshop topic and then be responsible for covering that topic, either by bringing in a guest speaker, or by researching and presenting on it. This format was used by a similar youth-oriented workshop series (the Peer Support Project at the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society) that several of our participants were attending, and the youth were generally quite positive about it as an approach to learning.

It's really interesting because then it also helps you learn more about it because you're actually doing the research yourself.

Finally, some participants noted that they would have liked to learn more about “how to make the transition from care”. This included obtaining more information about their rights while on Independent Living, the entry criteria and types of supports available through post-majority programs, and practical skill-building information relating to budgeting. Participants really regretted not having an opportunity to meet with the MCF social worker who had been scheduled to come to a workshop session. Similarly, they felt there were still large gaps in their knowledge of how to access resources from MCF and why there might be discrepancies in the kinds and amounts of support that different youth were able to access.

Like learning about the SPY program and different steps to actually prepare you for when you're not going to get any money for your rent and your spending.

Section IV Reflections & Lessons Learned

Throughout the course of the workshops, the project team continually reflected on ways of modifying and improving what we were doing. These individual and group reflections were discussed upon completion of the workshop series, and, in combination with the evaluation comments from the youth participants, led to the following reflections and lessons learned.

On planning the workshops

Reflections

In reviewing the workshops we found that planning the workshops on a week to week basis was very difficult. While we wanted to be flexible and meet the needs and interests of the youth - the original reasoning for going with weekly planning - we found that this did not leave sufficient time to adequately plan, gather information and organize guest speakers.

Lesson a: Balancing spontaneity, youth's emerging interests and adequate prep time

It is essential to find a workable balance between having flexibility to meet youth's interests and meeting the co-facilitators' needs for adequate planning and preparation time. Based on our experience with this pilot, we thus recommend that the workshop series be planned in advance in four week segments. This will give facilitators enough time to undertake their planning of each segment, including gathering materials and resources, and arranging for guest speakers as required, while still leaving room for participants' emerging interests.

Lesson b: Always have a "plan B"

Our experience with setting up a Ministry guest speaker on a topic that was of great importance to the youth participants, and then having this speaker have to cancel on the day of workshop taught us a crucial lesson: Always have a back-up plan for workshops. We thus suggest that if guest speakers are planned, a back-up speaker needs to be in place; as well, having a back-up co-facilitator for all workshops is also recommended. Again, this lesson speaks to the importance of having enough lead time to plan workshops, speakers and activities well in advance, so that last minute glitches don't turn into stressful scrambles and/or major disappointments.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

On the format and content of the workshops

Reflections

Both co-facilitators found that having a meal to start the group worked well. However, they also found that in the course of preparing and eating the meal it turned into a social event that then tended to spill over into what was considered group time. When this happened, they did not have enough time to complete the material planned for the session. Even when the meal ended on time, the group often ran out of time to complete the planned activities.

In addition, some participants noted that they would have liked more time within each session to discuss their experiences of being in care and leaving care. They suggested that this would have helped them to better appreciate each others' skills, strengths and experiences and would have provided them with more insights into how to successfully make a transition from care to living independently.

Lesson a: Having more time for the workshop content

It is very important that there is sufficient time within the workshops to cover (at least most of) the content planned and not feel too rushed (while at the same time having enough time to address any issues that arise for participants. Based on this pilot, we thus suggest that workshops be three hours in duration. The first 45 minutes might be allocated for eating the meal, with remaining time allocated for the structured group process. The facilitators need to ensure that the meal ends on time and the group begins on time so that everyone has time to fully engage in the planned activities and discussion.

Lesson b: Focussing on living in and leaving care

In addition to the above, given that a distinguishing facet of these workshops is that they are for youth in/from care, it is important to have opportunities and activities within each workshop to relate the material to participants' experiences in care. We thus suggest that the agenda for each workshop incorporate an activity that more formally links the theme of the week to making a successful transition out of care. Moreover, we recommend tailoring these "transition out of care" -related activities to the specific demographic characteristics of each particular group of participants, since we increasingly appreciated that different types of transitions from care occur at different points in time over the course of a youth's journey out of care (i.e., "leaving care" discussions and activities likely will or should differ for a group of 16/17 year olds as opposed to a group of 18/19 year olds).

On food as part of the process

Reflections

Despite several significant challenges relating to meal preparation (e.g., inconsistent participation on the part of the youth in shopping and cooking resulting in last minute scrambles for the co-facilitators, an inadequately equipped kitchen, and having the kitchen and the project office/workshop space be in different locations!) the co-facilitators found that the group meal was a valuable component of the workshop format. During this time many of the youth would actively engage in discussions with each other. This gave the facilitators additional insight into the lives of the participants and was a time for socializing and relationship building.

Lesson: Encouraging involvement in making as well as eating the meal

In recognition of the value of hands-on learning through the meal component of the workshops, it may be necessary to find means to encourage more consistent involvement from the youth participants. Several suggestions for ways to encourage participation in the meal preparation that have emerged from our pilot include:

- During one of the first workshops, discuss different ideas for meals that the group would like to prepare and eat. Encourage participants to incorporate new and different foods, vegetarian/vegan food, food/meals from various regions of the world, and so forth. Then, assign each workshop participant a week when it is his or her responsibility to work within the budget to develop a list of ingredients, do the shopping in conjunction with one of the group facilitators and organize the meal preparation.
- Have the youth who complete the task receive some form of additional recognition for their efforts.



On workshop/office space

Reflections

From the beginning, the project has maintained an office in a youth-friendly downtown location, in view of our appreciation that the University's location and atmosphere did not make it a comfortable or accessible meeting/working place for many youth in/from care. However, for Stage 2 we quickly came to see that one major drawback of our project office was that it did not contain a kitchen. Thus, the workshop-related cooking was done at a kitchen-equipped youth-serving centre about a kilometer away from the project office, and the cooked meal was then either transported back to our office to be served (followed by the remainder of the workshop), or the workshop was held in the youth centre. Not surprisingly, this made for considerable confusion from week to week, and not infrequently several of youth participants would appear at the "wrong" workshop location. We also learned through the focus group evaluation with the youth that the youth centre setting and its lighting/furniture were "too comfortable" – prompting youth to seek a snooze after a good meal rather than fully participate in the workshop activities.

Lesson: Recognizing the importance of youth-friendly space

Having a safe, comfortable and youth-oriented/welcoming office or meeting space is essential for projects that involve youth (not only youth in/from care but all youth). It is important to get feedback from youth about the characteristics of a particular office/meeting space that make it either appropriate or undesirable. Chances are that a potential project space that is situated within a large institutional office (especially a government building) will not feel accessible to youth. We also learned through our experience with the workshop series that a single project space should be used, and should be selected so that it can accommodate all project activities. We consider ourselves fortunate that our having used two locations for the workshops over the course of the series didn't prove disastrous (which in turn speaks to the youth participants' maturity and "togetherness")!

On Working as a Team

Reflection

Working as a team, particularly as a team with varying skill sets and experiences, can be both challenging, time consuming and rewarding. In our project, the collective nature of the project activities allowed for tremendous reciprocal learning. However, in order to be successful, team members needed to always be attuned to finding the balance between providing support, making room for learning and learning from mistakes, and not being (too) directive.

Lesson: The importance of trusting relationships and honest communication

Working collaboratively and well as a young person-adult team requires checking in with one another on an ongoing basis, to ensure that team members feel supported yet have room to learn, and that project needs are met. Checking in and honest communication, in turn, can only occur when a foundation of a solid, trusting relationship exists.

To allow room for learning, it can be necessary for team members with more experience to hold themselves in check and not 'take over'. This in itself is best achieved in an environment of trust and honest communication so that concerns or questions can be expressed openly and situations worked through in a manner that facilitates continued learning and exchange.

On facilitation

Reflections

Having co-facilitators with experience living in care, and who were regarded as peer mentors for the participants was a model that worked well. The co-facilitators brought different skills to the facilitation process. They provided each other with support and back up during the groups and in between group sessions, and they shared the planning, mentoring and debriefing tasks as well. At times both facilitators struggled with finding a balance between being seen as a peer and group participant and needing to keep the group 'on track'; however, from the youth participants' comments, it seems clear that the participant-facilitator style worked well and contributed to the workshops' success.

Lesson: Recognizing the importance of strong facilitation skills

It is very important that the group facilitators are adept in working with the group, and feel confident and competent in their role as facilitators. Supporting facilitators to enhance their knowledge and skills in facilitation through (additional) training may be highly recommended. In this project, the co-facilitators decided to augment their group facilitation skills by attending two workshops each on group process and facilitation. The information provided gave them additional tips and material to draw on in terms of their roles and how to more consistently achieve a balance between being facilitators and being hands-on workshop participants.

On the honoraria

Reflections

The honoraria that were provided to each participant upon attending a workshop, along with the honorarium bonus that was provided for those who took part in all of the workshops, was well liked by the youth. The honorarium was small, but nonetheless represented an acknowledgement of the youths' time and the reality of their lives, that attending the workshops sometimes meant incurring costs (i.e. transportation, babysitting), that many could ill-afford.

Lesson: Recognizing the value of the honoraria for youth

It is essential to acknowledge the value of youth's time, and to appreciate their life circumstances, which, for many, means poverty. Providing an honorarium for their participation in workshops is a valued means of showing this recognition.

On peer support

Reflections

The co-facilitators found it useful and necessary to keep connected with all of the youth participants on a one-to-one basis, connecting by phone, e-mail or in person in between the weekly workshops. The co-facilitators observed that doing this helped them to develop relationships with the youth and build trust. It also was a fairly time consuming process as many youth were hard to reach by telephone. Ultimately, however, it may be this type of gesture that helped so many of the youth maintain their commitment to attending the workshops.

Lesson: Recognizing the value of peer support

There is considerable value in the type of informal peer support that was offered during the workshops, even though both the support and the impacts of this support are not always tangible or visible. Based on our experience with the pilot, we thus recommend that opportunities to offer peer support be a central component of any youth-related workshops series. Opportunities for peer mentoring may include having one or more of the youth “graduates” of the first workshop series attend the subsequent workshop series to act as peer supports for the youth participants and to assist the co-facilitators with some of the support aspects of their roles.

Conclusions and Next Steps

At the conclusion of Stage 2, the project team determined that it wanted to pilot the workshops again, to put into practice many of the lessons learned and to further refine the content and sequencing of the workshops. In addition, some of the youth who had completed the first workshops series expressed interest in continuing their involvement in some way, and the project team wanted to facilitate their continued participation. As such, a number of funding proposals were submitted and several were successful. Consequently the project is now entering Stage 3. In Stage 3, we will focus on three main activities:

- (iv) Piloting a second peer mentoring group;
- (v) Providing community based support for the trained peer mentors; and
- (vi) Producing a Peer Mentor Training Guide for Youth In/from care.

We anticipate that this Guide and a report on our Stage 3 activities will be available in the spring of 2002.

APPENDIX A

Youth Leaving Government Care Project

Forum

April 26, 2000

9am to 12 noon

James Bay Community Project

547 Michigan Street

- 9:00 - 9:15 Coffee and welcome
- 9:15 - 9:45 Overview of project
Objectives of the day
Introductions
-What interested you in coming today?
-What do you hope to gain?
-What can you contribute?
- 9:45 - 10:15 Highlights of findings from Phase 1 of project
- 10:15 - 10:30 Introduction of strategy ideas for Phase 2
- 10:30 - 10:45 Break
- 10:45 - 11:20 Small Group brainstorming/fleshing out of strategy ideas for Phase 2
- 11:20 - 11:45 Report back to large group
- 11:45 - 12:00 Deciding on a process for choosing strategies
Thank yous and staying involved
Closing round - What can you contribute revisited?

STRATEGY #1: Youth focussed workshops/groups

PURPOSE:

To give youth an opportunity to explore, identify and work on some of the skills needed for moving to independent living.

Through practical experience, contribute to the discussion about the development of “competencies” for youth leaving care.

SHORT DESCRIPTION:

This strategy involves the formation of a group of youth that are interested in working towards independent living. Group members would identify the skills and topics that they each identified as important to independence. They would then work on ways to learn some of those skills. The youth would agree to spend a number of hours per week in the group or working on their topics. Youth participants could take turns facilitating the groups.

The workshops would be:

- Facilitated by someone, week by week (along with guest speakers, possibly)
- In between sessions, there would be “support people” (possibly peer mentors, though not necessarily) to assist with doing the activity of the week
- Foster parents may be “partners” in this, assisting the participants in doing the activity...

The workshops may involve “homework” that might be done with foster parent/social worker or peer assistance or involvement (e.g. cooking a meal; nutrition and knowing your way around a supermarket)

Throughout the workshops there could be one-to-one support (peer mentoring), whereby youth mentors would assist participants in whatever way was needed...

Potential outcomes for workshop series:

- competency/“readiness“ framework - youth-developed “competencies” that could be used to reflect upon/demonstrate readiness for leaving care
- development of a workshop format that could be used again
- youth have the opportunity to demonstrate what they learned and to take charge of their learning
- youth may become peer mentors following completion of the workshops
- peer support

STRATEGY TITLE #2a: One to one support (Doing “Peer” mentoring)

PURPOSE:

To provide young people in care with an opportunity to have the ongoing support of a peer mentor.

SHORT DESCRIPTION:

This strategy involves a peer mentor providing one to one support for youth currently in care or preparing to leave care. The peer mentor would ideally be able to “mentor” the youth by providing one to one support such as emotional support (eg: checking in regularly on how the youth is doing; being a friendly and interested voice; doing things with the youth) and practical support (eg: helping a youth get to appointments, find a place to live that is safe and affordable; get ID, set up a bank account; budget, etc).

Potential outcomes for this strategy:

- A few trained peer mentors in community
- Youth in and from care have access to peer mentors

STRATEGY TITLE #2b: Training Peer mentors

PURPOSE

To create a cohort of trained peer mentors who would then be available in the community for youth currently in care and wanting to connect with a peer advocate.

SHORT DESCRIPTION

The focus is on developing and delivering peer mentor training for approximately 8-10 “youth” and then connecting these trained peer mentors to the appropriate community based programs. The mentors are then available to do one to one support with youth in the community who are currently in care or who have recently left care.

The main difference between 2a and 2b is that in 2a we are actually planning to “do” one to one support with youth; in 2b, we are only developing the training” program and then delivering that with a group of “peer” mentors.

Potential outcomes for this strategy:

- Several youth will be trained as peer mentors
- A peer mentoring training package will be developed for use by others in the community after the project is completed

STRATEGY TITLE #3: Creative outlet/performance related to leaving care/independent living

PURPOSE

To provide youth with an opportunity to explore and develop skills related to independent living through creative expression.

SHORT DESCRIPTION

Youth in care who are interested in using creative expression to communicate with others will work as a group to identify the type of project they want to undertake and to then work towards completion of the project. Some examples are: doing a play, making a video, painting a mural, writing and producing a song, etc. It is anticipated that through their participation, youth will learn about: budgeting, conflict resolution, team work, decision-making, communication, commitment, negotiation, etc.

The potential outcomes for this strategy are:

- Youth in care have an opportunity to take part in a creative production of their choosing
- Youth acquire skills for independent living
- Others in community have opportunity to support youth through contributing their time, knowledge, skills, etc.
- Possible production of materials such as a video, mural or play that can be enjoyed by others even after the project is over

APPENDIX B

PEER MENTORING TRAINING

August 1-November 30

We are looking for 8-10 youth that are either in care or have just left care and are moving towards independence (ie. independence from their foster home and/or independence from the Ministry for Children & Families). This training will provide opportunities for youth to learn skills necessary to become peer mentors to other youth who are either in care of who have recently left care.

Things we will be looking for in these youth are:

- commitment: to participate in and complete mentoring training, to mentor other youth once trained
- readiness: to leave care, to learn skills, to learning about themselves
- maturity: able and interested in being a role model, having existing social support networks, being able to demonstrate some level of independence

The PEER MENTORING TRAINING will take place once a week for 15-16 weeks, and will include topics such as:

- Î peer mentoring: listening, empathy, boundaries, dealing with anger/conflict
- Î life skills: budgeting, cooking, finding housing, etc.
- Î community resources: learning about existing resources, making referrals

Benefits for youth participants are:

- opportunity to learn skills
- opportunity to connect with other youth who are facing similar issues
- opportunity to be supported in their move towards independence by project staff
- opportunity to participate in a youth-focused and youth-driven creative product/production
- opportunity to become a peer mentor for other youth
- honorarium for weekly participation and a bonus upon completion of training
- certificate for completing the training
- opportunity to get letters of reference for employment situations, etc.

APPENDIX C

OVERVIEW OF WORKSHOPS

INFORMATION SESSION - October 11, 2000

Agenda:

- Information on our project
- Times & Places
- What do they want to learn?
- How do they want to participate?
- Ideas for space
- Ideas for a 'creative project'

WORKSHOP #1- Introductions - November 1, 2000

Description

This first workshop would introduce everyone to each other and to the project. It is important that we spend this time doing group building and allowing the youth to get involved in the project design by brainstorming ideas for the workshops and for the Creative Project piece.

Agenda

- 1 Welcome and Introductions: name tags, round of introductions, introduction to the project, introduction and background of facilitators
- 2 Getting to Know U - Paired-up Interview Activity: Everyone pulled a number from a jar and were paired up with whomever had the same number, then each pair were given an interview sheet and money for something to drink, and while they went to get something to drink they interviewed each other based on the questions. After they came back (it took about 20 minutes), they were asked to introduce their partner to the group.
- 3 Input into Workshops: getting the youth's ideas on workshop topics, field trips, speakers, games/activities, etc., what they want to get out of the workshops, and also how they want to learn. We showed them a draft schedule so they could have a sense of what we were planning.

Materials & Resources

Getting to Know U Questions:

- 1 Tell me something about yourself that I maybe wouldn't guess by looking at you.
- 2 What is your favorite hobby/thing to do?
- 3 What is something you're proud of?
- 4 What does independence mean to you?
- 5 Make up your own question.

WORKSHOP #2 - Group Building - November 8, 2000

Description

More group building will be done by allowing everyone to share their experiences and to then have a group discussion about what is independence and what is mentoring.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-Ins: we also asked them to fill out a contact sheet with their phone #, email, address, etc.
- 2 Spin the Bottle Activity; we filled a bottle full of questions and asked them to spin the bottle and whomever it pointed at had to pick a question and answer it, continuing until all the questions were answered.
- 3 Group Guidelines: a group discussion about what they need from each other, what they need from us and what we need from them.
- 4 Personal Murals with a Discussion about Independent Living: time was spent working on their own personal murals to be hung up on the walls while discussing independent living circumstances, these workshops and the Ministry for Children and Families.

Materials & Resources

Spin the Bottle Questions:

- 1 What skills are/did your foster parent teach you?
- 2 How many social workers have you had?
- 3 Whose your favorite person in your life and why?
- 4 What do you think the best part of living on your own is?
- 5 What do you want to be when you grow up?
- 6 If you could change on thing about being in care what would it be?
- 7 Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- 8 What was your first impression of this group?
- 9 Tell us about a day when you had the most fun.
- 10 What is your favorite book or movie?

WORKSHOP #3 - Resources - November 15, 2000

Description

This will include an overview of youth, community and government resources, time to share experiences youth have had with these resources, and guest speakers from selected resources.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Spin the Bottle Game: they came up with the questions this time (2 each).
- 3 Resource Exercise: they were paired up and given 2 different scenarios each where they had to come up with resources that would help. This exercise is meant not only

to inform them about resources, but to also practice being in a mentoring type of role. They could use a phone book, resource manuals, and the Resource Wall we created to help them with this. Afterwards they shared their answers with the group, and also shared some of their own experiences with some resources.

- 4 Homework: we talked with them about bringing in next week some brochures, etc. on other resources to add to the Resource Wall.

Materials & Resources

Resource Activity Scenarios:

Pair #1

- 1 A youth you know has just confided in you that they tried to commit suicide last weekend. This person mentions casually “Oh well, maybe next time!” You have never heard anyone talk about suicide in this way before and want some help in knowing the best way you can support this person. Where can you go for help?
- 2 A youth you know that is in care is having difficulties in their foster home and they feel that their Social Worker is not listening to their concerns. Where can they go for help to figure out what their rights are and what the rules are about changing your Social Worker?

Pair #2

- 1 Another girl in your foster home just found out that she’s pregnant, and she’s scared. She doesn’t know what to do or who to talk to. You tell her that you’ll be there for her and will help her find the right person to talk to. Who do you find?
- 2 Your friend is living in an apartment and has recently discovered the plumbing (sink and toilet) is not working properly. They have informed the landlord but they have refused to do anything about it. What resource(s) could help them figure out their rights as a tenant?

Pair #3

- 1 You’ve noticed that your girlfriend has been drinking all the time, almost every time you see her. You’re concerned and you say something to her. She admits that it has become a part of all of her social activities, but all her peers do it so why can’t she. You suggest that there are also peers of hers who have stopped drinking, and that there are resources available for them to meet and support each other. Which resources are these?
- 2 You want to get tested for HIV and other STD’s and you do not have or you do not want to go to a family doctor. You also want to go somewhere after 4pm on a weekday. Where would you go?

Pair #4

- 1 One of your class mates ran away from home to go live on the street. He says it’s better than living at home. He says he wants to keep going to school but doesn’t know how that will work if he’s homeless. He doesn’t know what any of his options or

- where he can go for help. Can you help him by sending him to an appropriate resource?
- 2 A friend had someone close to them pass away and was looking to get counseling. This person is a youth in Victoria. Where would you direct him/her?

WORKSHOP #4 - Communication Part 1 - November 22, 2000

Description

This workshop will focus on the skills needed for good communication, and will cover verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, probing and questioning, values and roadblocks to effective communication.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Guest Speaker: Overview of Communication; Yarn Activity, Role Playing (i.e., ordering/commanding, moralizing, advising/giving solution, judging/criticizing, etc.), and the basics of verbal and non-verbal communication (see Appendix D).

Materials & Resources

Hand-outs on Communication:

Non-verbal

- Eye contact
- Body posture towards person talking
- Open posture
- Pay attention, focus on person and not on other things

Verbal

- Listening skills - “Robbery Report”
- Verbal response from the other person shows respect and understanding, summarize or give feedback
- Paraphrasing
- Open-ended questions
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Using “I” statements
- Roles
- Ordering, commanding
- Moralizing
- Advising, giving solution
- Persuading with...
- Judging, criticizing and blaming
- Praising and agreeing
- Name calling
- Reassuring, sympathizing

- Probing and questioning

WORKSHOP #5 - Communication Part 2 - November 29, 2000

Description

This workshop will focus on the skills needed for good communication, and will cover verbal and no-verbal communication, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, probing and questioning, values and roadblocks to effective communication.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Video; National Youth In Care Network
- 3 Guest Speaker: Inappropriate Communication; Overview of previous workshop, Soap Opera video clip (shown as an example of inappropriate communication), Role Playing in small groups (ie. pleading, overbearing, asking question after question, etc.). She also gave suggestions on resources for communication

Materials & Resources

Suggestions on Resources for Communication:

- 1 NEED (Need Crisis Line) training.
- 2 “The Dance of Anger” book
- 3 “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus” book
- 4 “You don’t understand what I mean.” by Debra Tanner
- 5 “9-5” by Debra Tanner
- 6 “Beyond the Power Struggle” book
- 7 “When Anger Hurts” by McKay

WORKSHOP #6 - Goal Setting Part 1 - December 6, 2001

Description

Setting goals will include personal self-assessments and goal setting, as well as learning about things that will help youth to achieve their goals such as decision making, problem solving and time management.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Values Survey
- 3 Goal Setting Booklet
- 4 “Dear Abby” Activity; where everyone would confidentially write down a goal they were having trouble achieving & would put the piece of paper in a container. Then everyone would take turns picking a piece of paper, read it out loud, and then say how they would go about trying to reach that goal. Then everyone else can have the opportunity to add to that if they want.

Materials & Resources

Values Survey
Goal Setting Booklet

WORKSHOP #7 - Goal Setting Part 2 - December 13, 2001

Description

Setting goals will include personal self-assessments and goal setting, as well as learning about things that will help youth to achieve their goals such as decision making, problem solving and time management.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Goal Setting Booklet; con't
- 3 Goal Setting Discussion; based on both goals and values, some of the questions for this discussion included "What's your #1 goal?", "How do your goals relate to your values?", etc..
- 4 Group Evaluation; the evaluation was done as a group this week because we were wrapping up the first half of the workshop series and about to disband until after Christmas. The evaluation was not only about this week's topic, but also about the workshop series so far and what we could be planning for the next half.

WORKSHOP #8 - Social - January 10, 2001

* This workshop was supposed to be on Communication but due to a lot of unforeseen circumstances, it turned into a social instead. This actually turned out to be a very positive experience for everyone because it was the first workshop since Christmas break and it gave everyone a chance to catch up with each other. For next time I would plan to have a social of some kind half way through the workshop series.

WORKSHOP #9 - Communication #3 - January 17, 2001

Description

This workshop will focus on the skills needed for good communication, and will cover verbal and no-verbal communication, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, probing and questioning, values and roadblocks to effective communication.

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Guest Speaker: Practicing Communication; “Robbery Report” (an activity about active listening), and Role Playing situations from the youth’s own experiences (i.e., someone constantly approaching you and bothering who will not take ‘no’ for an answer ie. a social worker who talks about you in front of you).

WORKSHOP # 10 - MCF & Independent Living - January 24, 2001

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Discussion: we had a general discussion about independent living and what that meant to them
- 3 Brainstorming: we brainstormed ideas for developing a booklet of information and resources about Independent Living, which was an idea that some of the youth wanted to see created.
- 4 Developing Questions for MCF: we brainstormed questions they had about leaving care that they could ask the guest speaker scheduled for the following week. The guest speaker is a social worker from the Ministry for Children and Families so the questions were focused on government support throughout the transition.

WORKSHOP # 11 - MCF & Independent Living - January 31, 2001

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Guest Speaker: unfortunately the guest speaker had to cancel at the last minute due to an emergency, and so we continued our discussions from last week.

WORKSHOP # 12 - MCF & Independent Living - February 7, 2001

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Assessments: we had the youth fill out a pretty lengthy life skills assessment that was developed for youth leaving care. We will then be taking the assessments and feeding their answers onto the Internet resource that will calculate their answers and provide feedback for them.
- 3 Discussion: we had an open discussion about the assessments and about leaving care.

WORKSHOP #13 - Budgeting/Taxes - February 14, 2001

Description

We'll be covering topics about how to manage your money; budgeting, banking and taxes. Also, tips on how to save money and free resources in the community (ie. food banks).

WORKSHOP #14 - Peer Mentoring 1 - February 21, 2001

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Guest Speaker: Differences between being a friend and being a mentor, etc.

WORKSHOP #15 - Conflict Resolution - February 28, 2001 (?)

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Guest Speaker: How we communicate, what we're taught about conflict, what good can conflict bring, Nasty opponents and opponents we like, assertion

Materials & Resources

Conflict Resolution (handouts)

How we communicate:

- 7% words we use
- 55% tone of voice
- 38% body language & facial expression

Things to talk about

- Healthy ways of dealing with/diffusing conflict
- Assertive raising of a hard topic
- Dealing with other's anger (someone close to you)
- Physical safety, diffusing
- How it works
- Difference of opinion, stubborn not open
- A person's insecurity, feeling fear and threatened
- A person's reaction to feeling disrespected
- Road rage

What we're taught about conflict:

- Don't rock the boat
- Shut up
- Leads to violence

- It ruins things
- It ends relationships
- Put up with it, swallow it
- Deny it
- Fear
- Resentment
- More distance

What good can conflict bring?

- Initiate change
- New understanding and insight
- Brings people closer, more intimacy
- Can feel more comfortable
- Alleviate tension
- Gets your needs met
- Be real
- Bringing your whole self to a relationship

Nasty opponents

- Blames others, takes no responsibility for their own behaviors, not accountable
- Not willing to talk about it without anger
- Yelling and intimidating
- Bossy, name calling
- Tries to intimidate
- Pushes your buttons
- Being violent
- Condescending
- Doesn't listen

Opponents we like

- Open to listening, hearing you
- Good body language; eye contact, full attention
- Calm
- Keeps positive relationships
- Validating your feelings
- Empathizing, acknowledging, creative, flexible
- Someone who gives you space to think and to talk

Assertion:

Describe

Express

Specify

Consequence

WORKSHOP #16 - Peer Mentoring 2 - March 7, 2001 (?)

Agenda

- 1 Talking Circle/Check-In
- 2 Guest Speaker: this workshop was all about practicing peer mentoring skills, and the guest speaker facilitated a couple of activities that involved the youth in playing the role of a peer mentor.

CLOSING - March 14, 2001

APPENDIX D

What Independent Living means

- Freedom - no rules, friends whenever you want
- Trusted with responsibility
- Budgeting
- Expectation of apartments that are really cheap
- More choices
- Harder to go to school
- More responsibilities
- Youth workers are helpful
- Age may prevent you from getting an apartment

Questions for MCF about the Independent Living program

- 1) How much money can you make at a job before it gets taken off your cheque?
- 2) Why can't 2 people of the opposite sex live together?
- 3) What is the SPY program about?
- 4) What is the grant for education, being a youth in care?
- 5) What is the start-up money for a youth going onto IL?
- 6) Tell us about all the money and resources available to us when we go onto IL?
- 7) What grants in general are available?
- 8) If you spend all your start-up money, and something breaks, do you have to replace it out of your own pocket?
- 9) What is the bare minimum that social workers have to do to support youth in their transition to IL or out of care?
- 10) What is the social worker's experience with supporting youth?
- 11) Why are social workers changed so often?
- 12) Can the ministry pay for the youth's rent by direct deposit on IL?

Ideas for a Booklet for youth on Independent Living

- useful tips about independent living for people on it/going on it
- local resources
- recipes
- add to care package for people going on IL/leaving care
- budgeting/knowing when to ask for stuff/how to grocery shop
- money for recreation activities & religious activities
- know what you're entitled to
- know what to look for in a place
- nutritional stuff
- library resources
- adding thoughts of people on IL to booklet to help other youth
- youth clinics
- ways to improve relationships/communication with social workers and youth (social workers better preparing youth for IL)

- job search resources/techniques
- checklist for social workers to see if a youth is ready for IL
- roadblocks to communication
- goal setting
- suggested grocery list, best places to shop
- taxes