

Safe and Caring Places for Children and Youth

Ontario's Blueprint for Building a New System of Licensed
Residential Services

July 2017

www.children.gov.on.ca

We are youth in care

and this is part of our **story**

Some may say it's our "**#Trajectory**"

We know that some policies are **pre-existent**

However, from experience they remain **inconsistent**

We're representing children from **every age range**

We're using **our voice** to implement **#FundamentalChange**

Please show me I mean **more** than a temporary **smile**

Remind me that I'm important and that I'm worthwhile

We may bring baggage but **don't give up on us**

It will take time to **open up and trust**

We make mistakes like every **human being**

But please look beyond the behaviour **you're seeing**

We know it's not simple **to do what you do**

But just know there are supports **there for you**

Times will get tough and we may **disagree**

But please keep in mind the **effects** restraints have **on me**

Communication **first**, law enforcement **last**

We're really not criminals, we just had to **grow up fast**

Accessibility is beyond what **you see**

Sometimes it's about accepting our individuality

Please implement structure but **include us in the plan**

Be open to flexibility and **we'll be your biggest fan**

So, if you're listening and you're **still on the fence**

Read between the lines,

**this is just
common sense!**

-Written by members of the Residential Services Youth Panel (2017)

MINISTER'S MESSAGE



The greatest responsibility of government is to care for children and youth. For the young people who come into care, residential services can be a long-term or temporary home. Whether it is foster care, customary care, a group home, or another form of care, I want that home to be a place where young people feel loved, respected, cared for, and safe.

That is why I am releasing *Safe and Caring Places for Children and Youth: Ontario's Blueprint for Building a New System of Licensed Residential Services*.

Many youth have worked with my ministry, shared their lived experiences, and advocated for transformation. We have heard you. This Blueprint would not have been possible without the insight and efforts of our partners in the community, across government and most importantly, our children and youth.

The advocacy and collaboration with the Residential Services Youth Panel, Indigenous partners, the Residential Services Review Panel, the Child and Youth Residential Services Reference Group and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth have been invaluable. Your words and recommendations are at the heart of this Blueprint, and will continue to form the basis of our efforts as we move forward with implementing these comprehensive transformations.

It is my job and the responsibility of government to support all young people in Ontario so that they have the services and support they need, when they need them, and as close to home as possible. Along with the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, we are working across government to support the delivery of services that are culturally appropriate and strengthen children's rights. The work we do must empower children and youth and celebrate and respect their individuality - their age, where they live, their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their race, their culture, their religion, and all aspects of their identity that make them unique.

It will take time to achieve this, but we are committed to continuing to build up child and youth-centred residential services in Ontario to empower those who need protection and support.

Michael Coteau
Minister of Children and Youth Services

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INTRODUCTION

All children and youth deserve to be in a place where they are safe, are treated with dignity and respect, feel valued, and have a voice in matters affecting their lives. They deserve to live in a place where their needs are met and where they have the ability to prepare for the next stage of their lives, whether that means returning to their family home, going to an adoptive home or into kinship care, transitioning to adult developmental services, adult mental health services or independent living.

Developing the Blueprint

The ministry developed this multi-year Blueprint using knowledge, evidence and advice from various reviews and reports. Throughout this process, we worked with youth and stakeholders to ensure the ministry's approach to reform results in high quality, inclusive and culturally appropriate services for children and youth. For example, together with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, we established a panel of young people with lived experience of residential services¹ to share their stories and help define quality of care.

These remarkable young people helped to shape our understanding of what high quality care means to children and youth in residential services. Their voices, experiences and expectations serve as a cornerstone of this Blueprint. For more information see Appendix A: Developing the Blueprint.

Co-developing Services and Supports With Indigenous Partners

We have heard from First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous partners through the *Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy* about the need to develop more culturally appropriate services for their children and youth, to improve overall outcomes, and to have services closer to home.

All of the reform activities outlined in this Blueprint will impact First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth that are in care. Concurrently, as we move forward on the implementation of the Blueprint, we will work with Indigenous partners to co-develop Indigenous-specific and culturally appropriate strategies and approaches to better serve their children and youth. The *Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy* will serve as a foundation for this process.

¹ Throughout this document, the terms "residential service", "residential care", "residential placement", and "residential setting" have corresponding meanings and should be understood as licensed child and youth residential services.

THE BLUEPRINT

OUR VISION

High quality residential services in Ontario will effectively meet the needs of children, youth and families, contribute to lasting, positive outcomes and enable the fulfilment of each person's individual and unique potential.

Guiding Principles

The reform is underpinned by the following guiding principles. They reflect the voices of young people and guide the changes outlined to achieve quality of care as defined by youth themselves.

- Anti-oppression and inclusion
- Cultural relevance, diversity and accessibility
- Consistent, responsive and high quality care
- Strong oversight and a commitment to improvement
- Respect for the knowledge, customs and rights of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities
- Child and youth voice at the centre, with a family-focused approach
- Services in the right place, at the right time, for as little time as necessary
- Data-driven transparency and accountability
- A home for now

The guiding principles are described in Appendix B: Guiding Principles.

Three Quality Pillars for Reform

Enhancing the quality of care that children and youth receive is at the heart of this reform. The success of these changes will be measured by how children and youth experience services and the fulfilment of their individual and unique potential.

PILLAR 1: Safe and Healthy Places

Children and youth are physically safe. The physical space in which services are provided is welcoming and meets the needs of children and youth, including food, shelter and clothing, in the context of what is culturally appropriate for them. Their physical space supports their ability to thrive and to be healthy. It provides space for play and leisure in a comfortable and caring environment.

PILLAR 2: A Sense of Belonging

All children and youth in residential care feel at home, are supported to form and maintain attachments, and to be the best they can be. They are supported by caring, qualified adults to have a sense of stability, continuity and hope for the future. Children and youth are supported to have a voice in decision-making about their care, and matters that affect them. Residential settings are inclusive and accepting places that provide culturally appropriate services to meet the needs of a diverse population.

PILLAR 3: Places and Services to Meet the Needs of Children and Youth

All children and youth have the right placement at the right time. Access to services is as close to home as possible, and appropriate for their needs. A range of services are in place in the community to meet their needs. Decisions about their care are made with them using sound clinical and evidence-informed practice and high quality data. Multi-sector professionals work together to support them moving into, through and out of residential services.

In Their Own Words:

A Youth-Developed Definition of Quality of Care

The Residential Services Youth Panel told us specifically what quality of care means to them. We will use their quality of care domains to anchor our thinking as we develop regulations and policies on all aspects of licensed residential services. Their work will also guide the training of staff working in the residential services sector. It will help us to begin new conversations about the quality of care children and youth are receiving in licensed residential settings.

“The purpose of the domains is to demonstrate the most important areas of quality of care identified by the panel members. These six domains provide an overview of the key elements that must be visibly, reliably, and consistently present in the lives of young people in residential care at all times. These domains will ensure that the experience in care is a positive one ... These domains come from lived experiences, and are what we wish we had.”

(Excerpt from *Envisioning Better Care for Youth: Our Input into the Blueprint (2017)*.)

QUALITY OF CARE DOMAINS	ELEMENTS	
Voice, Rights and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice and Choice Resulting in Action • Understanding and Upholding the Rights of Children and Youth • Complaints Mechanisms • Access to the Internet and Technology 	
Homes and Ongoing Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed Placement Decisions • Continuity of Care • Supported Transitions 	
Individual Paths and Fulfilment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualization • Plans While in Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life Skills • Outcomes
Belonging, Relationships and Accepting Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of Belonging • Respect and Dignity • Meaningful Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and Accessibility • Transparency of Rules/ Procedures
Identity and Culturally Relevant Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Identification • Cultural Respect and Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to Community(ies)
Service Providers and Caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Relationships • Recruitment and Qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Accountability

HOW WE WILL GET THERE

Building a New Child and Youth-Centred Service System

This Blueprint lays out our immediate and short-term actions and outlines our longer-term plans. **We are not waiting.** We have started by modernizing the legislation that governs licensed residential care. It is essential that the work to improve residential services is collaborative, given the differing and complementary roles and responsibilities of the ministry and our sector partners. The commitment of all partners working together will be central to achieving these changes. For more information see Appendix C: Roles, Responsibilities and Modernized Legislation.

IN PARTNERSHIP...

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and the Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario are undertaking immediate work, with a specific focus on Indigenous children and youth, to:

- Develop a new training program for staff that focuses on how their role can improve the everyday experiences of young people living away from home.
- Strengthen information sharing between children's aid societies (societies) to support appropriate placements.
- Enhance supports for children and youth that are placed away from their home communities to ensure that, on an ongoing basis, their needs are being met.

Short-Term Actions

PILLAR 1: Safe and Healthy Places

We begin this work with a focus on making sure that children and youth are living in safe, healthy and welcoming places, and addressing some of the key factors youth told us will improve their everyday experiences and outcomes.

To immediately support the safety and health of children and youth in residential care we are:

- Increasing the number of **unannounced inspections** of licensed residences. We are using information such as complaints and data, for example, from serious occurrence reports, to help identify and prioritize areas of risk or concern.
- Enhancing scrutiny to confirm that all **licensed residential settings are compliant** with required Fire Code regulations.
- Establishing **Intensive Site Review Teams** to conduct enhanced inspections of licensed residences, including interviews with staff and youth, and case file and program reviews.

In addition, we are improving oversight by:

- Implementing the **new authority for the Minister of Children and Youth Services to appoint inspectors** to conduct announced and unannounced inspections to improve oversight and monitor the safety of children and youth.
- Developing approaches to support **better monitoring and tracking of the placement and movement** of children and youth.
- Using new analytic tools to assist with the development of a **risk-based licensing framework**.
- Automating the **Youth Justice Services experience survey** to increase response rates.
- **Enhancing inspection interviews** with children and youth.
- **Examining Residential Placement Advisory Committees** to assess whether these local bodies are best placed to review placements.

PILLAR 2: A Sense of Belonging

All children and youth need to feel like they belong. The second pillar of our Blueprint focuses on our commitment to establish new standards to improve the quality of care provided by licensees so that children and youth see a difference in their daily experiences. For the first time in the province, we will define quality of care in regulation. We will set minimum expectations related to quality of care, and monitor compliance.

Our framework for quality of care, including the development of regulations, will be based directly on the work of the Residential Services Youth Panel and the quality of care domains they developed.

Youth are key partners in the journey to reform residential services. We want to make sure they are aware of what we are committing to in this Blueprint to improve their everyday experiences. For this reason, we are releasing a **child- and youth-friendly resource** that uses clear and accessible language so that children and youth can understand what changes are coming in the immediate, short- and long-term as a part of this reform. This resource will be available in English and French and several Indigenous languages (Oji-Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut).

In addition, we will:

- Implement **quality of care standards** based on the domains of quality developed by the Residential Services Youth Panel, to improve the daily experiences of all children and youth (for example, access to the Internet and reinforcement that food must never be restricted as a punitive measure).
- Develop a **Rights Resource** for all children and youth to help them understand and exercise their rights.
- Develop **mechanisms for child and youth feedback and complaints** regarding their service experience (for example, youth councils).
- Develop a **mechanism to enable the ministry to continue to hear the voices of youth with lived experience** of residential services at a provincial level.
- Review **licensing requirements through a culturally appropriate lens** to support the use of customary care.
- Explore how to **better support Indigenous service providers** (especially in the Ottawa area and northern Ontario), including examining service delivery approaches that **focus on prevention**, consistent with the *Ontario Indigenous Child and Youth Strategy*.
- Engage with stakeholders to develop a renewed approach to inclusion, as well as recognizing the unique needs of various groups including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or two-spirited (LGBTQ2S) children and youth. We will **release a resource guide to increase the capacity of the child welfare system to better meet the needs of LGBTQ2S children and youth**, and provide training on the guide.
- Implement ***A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan*** and the ***Ontario Black Youth Action Plan*** to improve the experiences of Black, Indigenous and racialized children and youth in residential care and work to reduce their over-representation in the child welfare system.

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

Youth need the ability to have control and agency in the decisions that are being made about them. Feeling like you have impact in your plan of care such as choosing which school you go to or what activities you participate in goes a long way.

PILLAR 3: Places and Services to Meet the Needs of Children and Youth

We are also taking action immediately within the current legislative framework, the *Child and Family Services Act*, to better meet the needs of children and youth in licensed residential care. We are:

- **Expanding the data** already collected and reported by societies and other service providers to better understand where societies are placing children and youth, in order to keep them closer to their home communities and monitor if they move.
- **Working to designate four more Indigenous agencies as children’s aid societies**, in addition to the current 10, to provide culturally appropriate services to Indigenous children and youth, particularly from northern Ontario communities.
- **Building smaller youth justice facilities** within the Greater Toronto Area to support community-based programming and enhance reintegration planning while keeping youth close to home.
- **Mapping residential services** to determine the type and distribution of these services, to better assist service providers in meeting the needs of children and youth with particular attention to addressing service gaps, and with a focus on services for Indigenous children and youth (for example, in northern Ontario) and availability of, and access to, other community resources.

To set the foundation for transformational change within the residential services sector in the short-term, we will:

- Work with Indigenous partners, young people and other stakeholders to immediately explore options to **replace the term “residential.”**
- Establish an **expert group on workforce development** to examine a path forward on:
 - Pre-service requirements or equivalencies and mandatory competencies to raise the quality of caregivers.
 - Caregiver screening requirements (for example, police record checks and child welfare record checks).
 - Improving retention within the residential services workforce.
- Pursue the goal to **minimize the use of physical restraint**. Training programs will be updated so that they are based on current evidence-informed research on behaviour management and intervention techniques, and are clear that these practices are only to be used when there are no less intrusive options available. Narrow requirements will also be established for the use of physical restraint for all service providers.

-
- **Implement new information sharing provisions** in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, 2017 that will help protect privacy, increase accountability and transparency, and ensure that information follows children, youth and families across sectors.
 - Under the *Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy*, **work with Indigenous partners to co-develop strategies and approaches** to meet the needs of Indigenous children and youth in residential care, and their families and communities.

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

Youth should be connected to resources, services, opportunities in the greater community to help shape identity. Belonging is connected to feeling like you have a place in your greater community.

Long-Term Actions

Our short-term work will enhance the services currently provided to children and youth. Our long-term work will build from there, to create a new child and youth-centred service system.

The three quality pillars for reform will continue to guide this work. We will continue to leverage transformations underway in the mental health, child welfare, special needs, and youth justice sectors.

1. Effective Service System Planning and Management

Equipped with a greater clarity of definition and scope of residential services, we will develop a provincial service model that will take into account the appropriate variety and distribution of licensed residential services across the province. This work incorporates four major initiatives.

A. Defining the scope of licensed residential services

A wide variety of service providers are licensed to provide care. We will further define the specific types of residential care requiring a licence while continuing to explore service delivery approaches that focus on prevention.

Through the *Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy*, we will work with Indigenous partners to develop specific approaches focused on residential services that meet the unique needs of Indigenous children, youth, families and communities. This will result in First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities having greater ability to care for, and make decisions regarding their children and youth.

B. A provincial approach to service delivery

Working with our sector partners, we will develop a provincial approach to the planning and delivery of services. This approach will be guided by the principle of prevention and focused on making sure that the right services are available to children and youth at the right time and as close to their home community as possible. As part of this work, we will examine current and emerging trends such as bed capacity, patterns of service provision, and program access and availability.

Residential services will also be examined to address equitable distribution and to support children and youth to remain in their home communities, particularly for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and youth.

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

Systems need to work together. Different workers are assigned to help young people with different things – for example, tutor, mental health worker, et cetera. But if all these supports worked together to create a coordinated plan, the care would go in one direction and be better. Mental health and education need to work together in this sense especially.

C. More effective data and information management

A new approach to data and information will focus on developing performance indicators to help measure quality across the three quality pillars. They will be publicly reported and inform best practice and continuous improvement in agencies' placement and programming decisions. They will also support the development of a risk-based approach to licensing, and service providers' enhanced ability to monitor children and youth across residential placements to better support continuity of care.

We will examine data that is currently collected, identify what data or information may be needed to measure quality as defined in our new framework, and move forward on standardizing specific data elements across child and youth sectors that provide residential services.

D. A comprehensive funding review

The current approach to funding residential services for children and youth is complex. We are committed to creating greater consistency, transparency and equity in funding services.

To this end, we will undertake a funding review of residential services. It will include an examination of what is currently being funded and to what level, an assessment of the cost of service and the current funding models (including per diems and special rate agreements).

Any new funding approaches will be in line with proposed changes to service planning and delivery of residential services that are evidence-based and outcomes-focused. A funding review of youth justice services will take into account the unique judicial context within which the sector operates.

2. Accountability and Oversight

We are taking action to improve the quality of care in licensed residential settings in Ontario by strengthening and modernizing licensing, compliance and enforcement. The ministry will:

- Develop and implement a risk-based licensing framework that includes the publication of licensing and compliance information to better support informed placement decision-making. A risk-based licensing framework will also enable us to invest licensing resources efficiently and to direct attention and resources where they are needed the most.
- Explore other types of residential care that should be required to have a licence.
- Through the co-development of Indigenous approaches, examine options for increased accountability to First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities (for example, developing protocols between Indigenous communities and the agencies that serve their children and youth to help ensure access to appropriate services).

3. Workforce Development

Some children and youth accessing residential services may have mental health or behavioural challenges, psychiatric disorders, complex medical conditions and/or developmental disabilities. Staff in residential care settings must be competent, skilled, engaged and caring in order to effectively meet the needs of these children and youth.

Therefore, we will develop an **action plan** that will explore:

- Establishing minimum postsecondary education requirements and pre-service qualifications for the sector. Working with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, we will review the existing college program standards to reflect the learning outcomes required to work in this field today and in the future.
- Introducing in-service training and professional development to build and maintain a confident, resilient and highly qualified workforce. This will include access to comprehensive orientation and training through ongoing professional development.
- Creating effective supervision practices to enable the provision of high quality care in social service settings, through mentoring, teaching, supporting, monitoring and evaluating staff performance.
- Recruiting and retaining qualified and diverse employees, including in rural and remote areas and in northern Ontario, to strengthen the capacity of the child and youth residential services workforce.

The provision of foster care and culturally appropriate placement options are also critical components of residential services, and maintaining an adequate number of foster parents must be a priority. Individuals who are motivated to take on this crucial role in a young person's life must be supported. Therefore, we will develop a provincial plan to **modernize foster care in Ontario**, in partnership with stakeholders and youth, including enabling a strong voice for foster parents and clarifying the rules and procedures for fostering. It will address barriers for the recruitment of foster parents from Black and other uniquely situated communities, and caregivers from Indigenous communities.

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

Staff in facilities need better training and understanding of the systems of child welfare and how they intersect. All parties involved must understand the intersection between the systems – like child welfare, education, health care access, and public transit.

TAKING ACTION – Realizing the Vision

This Blueprint sets out the path for our work over the coming years to bring Ontario's child and youth residential services in line with our vision, goals and guiding principles. This will be a collective effort, reflecting – and requiring – the insights, experience and commitment of our partners within government, the broader child and youth services community, and Indigenous partners. The reform of residential services works in conjunction with the transformations that are underway in other child and youth serving sectors:

- In the **youth justice sector**, we are providing more community-based services that divert youth from incarceration. Since 2003, youth justice custody admissions have declined more than 80 per cent.
- For ***children and youth with special needs***, we are moving toward a system that is more accessible, co-ordinated and centred on their needs and the needs of their families.
- In the **child welfare sector**, we are strengthening, modernizing and transforming the child protection system so that children and youth in care have better opportunities to succeed.
- Through Ontario's ***Moving on Mental Health*** plan, we have defined a set of common mental health services that are to be available to children, youth and families in the province, no matter where they live.
- Under the ***Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy***, we are working with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous partners to co-develop culturally appropriate services.

These transformations are at different stages and phases, but taken together, they are building a strengthened and aligned service system in Ontario for children and youth. As we move forward to build a child and youth-centred residential service system, the youth-developed definition of quality of care will serve as a cornerstone of our work.

This reform must continue to be informed by the experiences of those involved in these services. Children and youth bring valuable insights based on their lived experience that will shape continuous enhancements to services. They must be supported to have their voices heard throughout this process. The perspectives of parents, families and communities of children and youth receiving residential care are important and will inform a new and responsive service system.

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

*It may not be my permanent home,
but it is my "home for now."*

The success of this reform is predicated on the child and youth experience in the future. It will be measured by how children and youth tell us they experience services and the fulfilment of their individual and unique potential.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

To children and youth in residential care: we have heard you. You told us these services affect every aspect of your lives, that your experiences in foster care, group care, custody and/or respite care need to support you and contribute positively to your lives, and that programs and services have to help you to deal with the difficulties that brought you into care. We have heard that what is currently happening in foster care, group care, custody and/or respite care is not meeting the needs of all children and youth. You have told us there is an urgent need to change the way residential services are delivered. You have told us these changes must begin immediately.

You told us that you need to leave care better off than when you came.

Each and every day, your experience in residential care needs to show you that you matter, and that your voice is heard. We want you to feel that those who look after you are committed to your safety and to supporting you to build a future with hope and confidence.

This Blueprint is the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' commitment to you.

Our plan is designed to thoroughly examine every aspect of residential services, and to take a child and youth-centred approach to building a new system together. We are working to make services more responsive to your needs. This includes services that are culturally appropriate for Indigenous, Black and racialized children, youth and their families.

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

If you let your guard down, and listen, and hear what young people have to say, you will learn in ways that you wouldn't have otherwise. Let youth create the space they need and want.

We commit to working closely with you and with service providers and experts across the mental health, child welfare, special needs, and youth justice sectors. Together, we will improve your everyday experiences and support you to prepare for the future.

By 2025, our goal is to have a child and youth-centred service system where:

1. **Safety:** All children and youth in care are safe and feel safe.
2. **Youth Voice:** All children and youth receiving residential services have the right to express their own views freely and safely about matters that affect them.
3. **Greater Accountability:** Better data is available to help make better decisions and increase transparency of licensed residential services.
4. **Quality of Care:** Standards are informed by young people and reflected in the care they receive.
5. **Consistency:** The same standard of care is maintained in every part of the province.
6. **Inclusivity:** All language used to describe services is inclusive.
7. **Strengthened Workforce:** All children and youth are cared for by qualified, well-trained and responsive staff.
8. **Respecting Cultures and Identities:** The needs of all children and youth are met and supported, including those of Black, racialized, First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services will lead the implementation of this Blueprint with sustained, integrated leadership and a relentless focus on quality in accordance with what is at stake: the futures of young people.

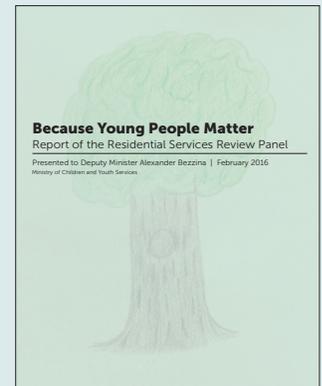
YOUTH: In Their Own Words

Youth should feel comfortable wherever they are living, and be able to call it home.

Appendix A: Developing the Blueprint

Residential Services Review Panel

In May 2016, the ***Residential Services Review Panel*** provided advice to the ministry in its report, ***Because Young People Matter***. The panel's mandate was to build on the foundational work of previous reviews and reports, and to provide advice on improvements to residential services for children and youth. The review provided a crucial perspective on the needs of children and youth in residential settings. The panel made recommendations in 10 key areas focusing on improving the everyday experiences of children and youth, including quality of care, which were critical in shaping this Blueprint.

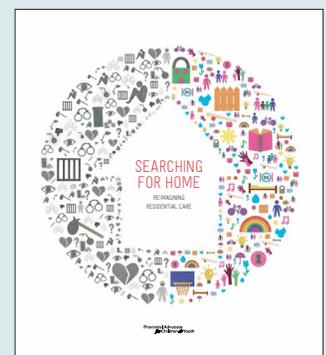


The provision of residential services for some of the most vulnerable children and youth in our society is fundamentally important. Collectively and collaboratively, we must ensure that the experience of young people in out-of-home care and their long-term outcomes are such that the opportunities for a rich and meaningful life are just as real for young people facing enormous adversities as they are for those living in the relative comfort and safety of their family homes.

(Residential Services Review Panel, *Because Young People Matter*, 2016, p.6)

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth undertook extensive engagement with youth with lived experience. The voices of these young people were captured in the report, ***Searching for Home: Re-imagining Residential Care***. The report and its recommendations were also influential in developing this Blueprint.



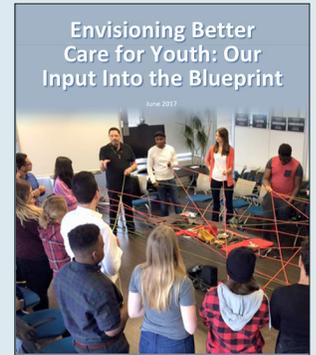
The Child and Youth Residential Services Reference Group

The reference group, comprised of representatives from the mental health, child welfare, special needs, and youth justice sectors, including the voice of an Indigenous partner, helped to shape and frame the Blueprint. There was a strong commitment of the reference group to ensure the voices and needs of children and youth are at the core of our reforms. Our continued partnership and collaboration will be essential as we implement this Blueprint.

The Residential Services Youth Panel

Together with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, we established a panel of young people with lived experience of residential services to share their stories and help define quality of care.

These remarkable young people helped to shape our understanding of what high quality care means to children and youth in residential services. Their voices, experiences and expectations serve as a cornerstone of this Blueprint. Every dimension of this Blueprint for reform is anchored by the work of the youth panel. The youth panel's input into this Blueprint can be found in its entirety in its report *Envisioning Better Care for Youth: Our Input to the Blueprint*.



We will continue to engage with these young people as we move forward.

Our thanks and best wishes for a bright and successful future to:

- Allison Caroline Guzman
- Amanda Owusu
- Ashley Jack
- Chloe Hockley
- Chrednick Kakekagumick
- Christopher Cottle
- Kiki
- Lisa Klassen
- Lucie Langford
- Mónica-Margurita Rosas
- Shyanne
- Standing Hawk, Niibawi Gekek from Saugeen First Nation Ontario

YOUTH: In Their Own Words

*Nothing about us,
without us.*

The youth panel members have been identified here in their chosen manner.

Appendix B: Guiding Principles

ANTI-OPPRESSION AND INCLUSION

- Those from marginalized social locations may not have the same access to power and resources as more dominant groups, and they can often be over-represented in child welfare and other social service sectors. In order to address power imbalances, caregivers and organizations involved in residential services should continuously reflect on their own social location so as to not inadvertently act in ways that recreate patterns of systemic oppression during their interactions with children, youth and families.
- An anti-oppression approach includes a professional and organizational analysis of power imbalances based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and identity, including Indigenous identity, ability, age, class, geographic location and other social factors. These factors can affect a person's social location, and in particular their access to power, privilege and resources. Key strategies for working from an anti-oppression approach include taking into consideration the impact of historical and systemic oppression on marginalized groups, authentically listening to the identified needs of children, youth and families, and not taking the position of “expert” when working with children, youth and families (*Standards for All Phases of Child Protection Service Delivery, Ontario Child Protection Standards (2016)*).

CULTURAL RELEVANCE, DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Children and youth must have meaningful opportunities for learning about and engaging with their family history, heritage, culture, race, religion, identity and orientation, and language and Indigenous communities. Every child and youth must be given the freedom to embrace, express and engage with their chosen identities and cultures.
- The care and services that children and youth receive must, in all cases, be culturally relevant and reflect the principles of diversity, inclusion and accessibility. Francophone children, youth and families must be able to access French-language services, where possible. Children and youth wishing to maintain connections with their heritage must be supported to do so. In order to facilitate this, all service partners must work together to improve the access and availability of culturally relevant care and create accepting environments.

CONSISTENT, RESPONSIVE AND HIGH QUALITY CARE

- Children, youth and families must receive consistent, responsive and high quality residential care that provides children and youth with the best opportunity to succeed. No matter which sector is serving the child or youth, the services must be provided in a way that responds best to the unique needs of the child or youth and will most positively affect their outcomes.
- Their needs may require brief or extended placements. Services must, therefore, be provided in a manner that responds best to the unique needs of the child or youth and positively impacts their outcomes. Children and youth will be served by appropriately qualified, experienced caregivers and foster parents who are supported to deliver the best care and service. Residential services will also support children, youth and their families, where appropriate, as they transition between service sectors and out of residential services. Effective transition supports will help ensure that the gains made during their placements continue to be maintained post-placement.

STRONG OVERSIGHT AND A COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT

- The ministry must support the delivery of services through strong oversight and enforcement practices that result in compliance and, in turn, ensure that children and youth are receiving high quality care and services. The ministry will also work with stakeholders and partners in the mental health, child welfare, special needs and youth justice sectors to continuously implement improvements in an effort to provide the best care and service possible for children and youth.

RESPECT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE, CUSTOMS AND RIGHTS OF FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, INUIT AND URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- Given the unique history, geography, legal status and socioeconomic realities of Indigenous communities, licensed residential services must give consideration to Indigenous knowledge, customs and rights.
- Further, service partners must be mindful of the current and historical relationships Indigenous communities have with government child welfare and youth justice systems and deliver services to Indigenous children and youth in partnership with their communities.

CHILD AND YOUTH VOICE AT THE CENTRE, WITH A FAMILY-FOCUSED APPROACH

- A child and youth-centred and family-focused approach to service delivery is critical in order to create environments where children and youth feel that they are included, belong, are safe and respected, and are able to have their voices heard. Children and youth must be viewed as active participants in the decisions that impact them. A core component of child and youth-centred care requires incorporating the voices of children and youth in a meaningful way at every stage of their care journey. Family involvement and capacity building is also an important influence on a child's or youth's outcomes and these voices must be heard before and throughout residential care, where it is appropriate.
- Children and youth must also be supported to develop and maintain safe, nurturing and long-lasting relationships with their peers, caregivers, family, and members of the community, as appropriate. These relationships play an important role in advancing a child's or youth's development and facilitating positive self-awareness and wellbeing.
- Services must also engage and respond to the needs of the families, as appropriate, in recognition that family involvement is an important influence on a child's or youth's outcomes. As services are provided, consideration must be given to the needs of the entire family. This builds the capacity of the family to support the needs of the child and prevent placement into residential services, where possible, or maintain the gains made when the child or youth returns to living with the family following a placement.
- Collaboration and partnership with children and youth, as well as their families, caregivers and communities as appropriate, is essential to securing their best outcomes during and after placement.

SERVICES IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME, FOR AS LITTLE TIME AS NECESSARY

- When a residential service placement is necessary, an appropriate placement must be arranged in the right place and at the right time. The right place means that the placement must be responsive to the needs of the individual child or youth, which may change over time and require a placement change. Placements must be made only for as long as necessary, with the ultimate goal of securing permanency and a stable home for the child or youth. Children and youth must be supported to transition into permanent and stable living situations that fit their care and needs.
- Respite placements must also be arranged with the same degree of care and consideration given to the suitability of the setting. The right place may be as close to or as far away from home as necessary, depending on the comfort, safety and individual needs of the child or youth, and reflecting their voice and perspective. The right place also means that the placement must be responsive to the needs of the individual child or youth.
- As the needs of a child or youth change over time, a placement change may become necessary. In these instances, care must be taken to ensure placement changes are in the best interests of the child or youth and that the decision is informed by consultations with the child or youth, as well as their family, their Indigenous community or band, and caregivers, as appropriate.

DATA-DRIVEN TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- The right data must be collected, validated, and used in a transparent and responsible manner to inform placement decision-making, to assess the performance of individual service providers, and to monitor and improve the quality of services. The ministry, and service providers and caregivers, share accountability for the impact residential services has on children, youth and their families.
- Data is required to measure the quality of residential services and assess both whether the needs of the children, youth and families are being met and whether services are available where they are needed across the province. Performance of services and key outcomes for children and youth must be measured and reported on regularly to promote transparency in the provision and management of services. As partners, we must work together to foster a culture of continuous improvement aimed at increasing the quality of services and securing better outcomes for children and youth.

A HOME FOR NOW

- Whether they are staying in residential care for a few days or years, children and youth must have their needs met, and be treated with dignity and respect. Where appropriate, children and youth will be supported to return to living with their families as soon as they are ready to do so, and should receive the necessary supports required to make this transition successful. If returning to home is not possible, children and youth should receive the necessary supports to achieve permanency in a stable setting.

Appendix C: Roles, Responsibilities and Modernized Legislation

Roles and Responsibilities

The **Ministry of Children and Youth Services** has an overall responsibility for licensing, including enforcement and compliance, currently under the *Child and Family Services Act*. The ministry licenses service providers to deliver residential services. The ministry does not directly provide services to children and youth, except in the case of youth justice and the Child and Parent Resource Institute.

Licensees are responsible for operating in compliance with the requirements of the *Child and Family Services Act*. They have a responsibility to provide residential care in a manner that promotes children and youth's health, safety and welfare.

Agencies, such as Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child Well-being Societies, place children and youth in licensed residential settings. They are responsible for choosing a placement for the child or youth appropriate to their needs that also meets all requirements of the *Child and Family Services Act*. The placing agency is responsible for the planning and continuity of services while the child or youth is in care.

Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017

The Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, which received Royal Assent on June 1, 2017, is an important step towards achieving the transformation envisioned within the three quality pillars. This legislation focuses our attention on children and youth — on their voices, their opinions and their goals, not just the issues facing them. It sets the course for bold changes to residential services in Ontario, including enhancing our licensing and oversight mechanisms and strengthening adherence to new expectations. The ministry will also develop an implementation and training plan to support the sector to put these new changes in place.

The act strengthens the rights of children and youth, supports enhancements to the quality of services, improves the consistency of supports offered to children, youth and their families, and increases the accountability and oversight of service providers.

The act also acknowledges Ontario's unique relationships with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities and provides opportunities for their involvement and decision-making in the care of their children and youth. The act will help to make services more inclusive and culturally appropriate for all children and youth, including Indigenous and Black children and youth, so that every child receives the best possible support.

Under the act, children and youth will have the right to:

- Express their views freely and safely about matters that affect them.
- Have their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Be consulted on the nature of services provided to them, and advised of the decisions made in respect of those services.
- Raise concerns or recommend changes about the services provided to them without fear of coercion, discrimination, or reprisal.
- Access their personal information held by service providers.
- Be informed of their rights and about the existence and role of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

The legislation also sets new rules about privacy, protection and information sharing between service providers in order to, among other things, give children, youth and families more control over how their personal information is shared among service providers, and to help them avoid having to tell their story repeatedly.

The act provides a framework for strengthening and modernizing oversight for licensed residential settings for children and youth and for enhancing the quality of care provided in those settings. These changes help to better promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of children and youth in licensed residential care.

One notable provision enhances the authority to conduct unannounced licensing inspections by allowing a broader range of inspectors to conduct them. This will support the monitoring of residential services to assess compliance with licensing requirements. The act will enhance the criteria to obtain and keep a licence for residential settings, as well as the criteria for refusing to issue, renew or revoke a licence.

Collectively, these changes are intended to strengthen safety, quality of care and accountability of licensed residential services. These changes will enable the related regulatory, policy, program and operational changes detailed in this Blueprint.