



Calgary and Area RCSD Youth to Adulthood Transitions Project Brief Summary of Findings – September 2018

Successful youth transitions to adulthood has become an increasingly important issue for youth-serving organizations. Calgary and Area RCSD has initiated a project on Youth to Adulthood (YTA) transitions (ages 16 – 24 years). Its purpose is:

To identify opportunities in and across multiple initiatives (programs/services) to improve system (i.e. cross-program/sector) effectiveness of processes aimed at assisting youth with transitions to adulthood, with special emphasis on inclusion and identification of opportunities for alignment across existing initiatives.

Work has included a review of selected literature, an environmental scan (listing more than 100 services/programs), and survey and in-depth interviews with 31 organizations (of 33 approached – 91% response) with a central role in serving transition-aged youth with disabilities and/or social vulnerabilities.

Information collected in the surveys and interviews included detailed descriptive information about the structure and operations of the services/programs, and service provider views on issues, gaps, and remedies. Eight of the participating organizations' main work was in health transitions; 12 in education/employment/vocational transitions, and the remaining 11 in housing/income/community integration transitions, although many organizations did not have an exclusive focus on one of these types of transitions.

Service Processes and Collaborations

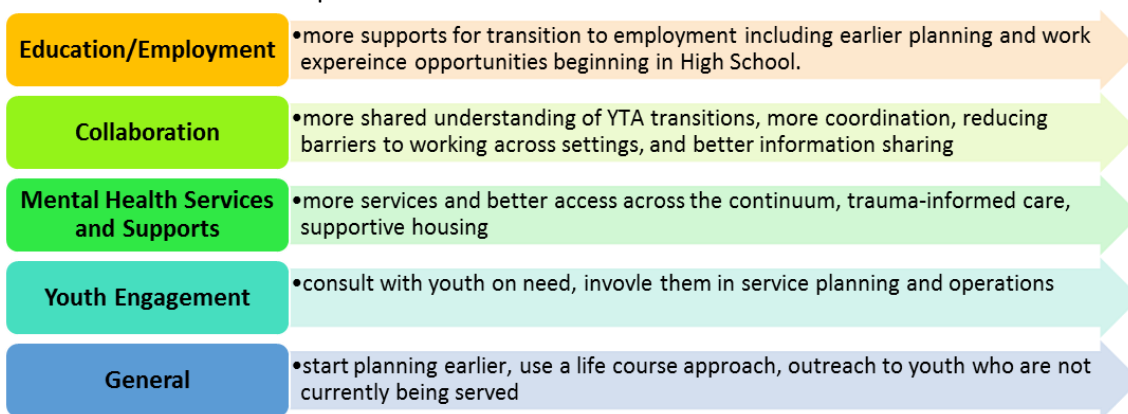
Respondents provided rich and detailed descriptions of their services and collaborations. For example, 67% of organizations allow for self or parent referrals and 63% have active waiting lists (although most try to refer elsewhere rather than have clients wait). More than 75% report that other agencies understand what they do – although that is often the result of extensive communication efforts. About 60% of respondents described their service processes as being youth or family-centred. With respect to collaboration, most were very positive about both the need for collaboration and their experiences with collaborating with other agencies and provided advice on both what assisted and what got in the way of collaboration. There was almost no consistency in what were considered positive outcomes and approaches to measuring outcomes. Greater than 75% of respondents felt that the adult services they worked with did not sufficiently understand the developmental issues of transition-aged youth. They also described specific issues with the hard change to age of majority, as well as some guardianship issues. With respect to inclusion, there was an enormous commitment to its principles despite some minor variation in views of the concept. One dominant theme was the need for service providers and the broader community to see the struggles of youth as being more about the context and environment than about problems with youth themselves.

Barriers, Gaps, and Recommendations for Change

On the topics of barriers and gaps, the responses were so in-depth, detailed and variable that it was difficult to summarize them without losing important content. The most frequent barriers/gaps expressed *for youth themselves* included lack of mental health services; lack of income and funding supports especially for youth with poor functioning despite being above the PDD cut-off; lack of housing and

employment opportunities, as well as a lack of opportunities for meaningful connections to peers and community. *For parents* a common theme was that there is insufficient information, support, and skills to help their youth and young adults and big concerns about how parents with disabilities and vulnerabilities themselves are currently faring. Some of the *service system* barriers identified were intervening too late (both in early life as well as in transition planning), not recognizing trauma-histories, continuing to have strict age limits on services, and trying to fit youth into programs rather than paying attention to what kind of lives the youth themselves want.

Recommendations for change were also extensive and rich; more than 400 specific suggestions were made. For *services and programs* recommendations included improved navigation and coordination, relaxing hard age limits in all programs, more work with parents and natural supports, educating and supporting parents and providers to start planning earlier, and more shared understanding of the transition process, among many other specific suggestions. Suggestions were also grouped according to five other themes with examples as follows:



Suggestions for system alignment were also many and varied, which both echoed previous ideas and expanded further.

Conclusion

Service providers from all sectors and community agencies were very engaged in the survey/interview process. The participation rate was very high for this type of exercise and there was an enormous amount of information provided; both descriptive information about current services and also suggestions for improvement. This level of engagement demonstrates that the needs and expectations of YTA transitions service providers are high, but it also indicates that stakeholders are committed to working together to advance successful transitions for youth and families. We are deeply grateful to those who took the time to give us information about services for transitioning youth and their views and suggestions via the survey and interviews.

Considerations for Further Work

Calgary and Area RCD has initiated a Youth Transitions to Adulthood Systems Connector position to support continued work in this area and efforts have begun on sifting through the suggestions and formulating a Work Plan for first steps of action. The richness of the information collected was far greater than what can be reported in a two-page summary; those desiring more detail are encouraged to contact either: Heather Hayes, Youth Transitions to Adulthood Systems Connector (heather.hayes@gov.ab.ca) or Janice Popp, Regional Manager (janice.popp@cassd.ab.ca).

We look forward to working with organizations who participated in the interviews and other stakeholders on this important work.