

Stacey Greenough

Introductory speaking notes- Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights

“Aging out of Care”

October 21, 2024

I am honoured to be invited to speak with you tonight about youth transitioning from care.

As noted, my name is Stacey Greenough, and I am a Director with Child and Family Wellbeing with the Department of Community Services in Nova Scotia, where I am joining you tonight from Halifax in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. The people of the Mi'kmaw Nation have lived on this territory for millennia and I acknowledge them as the past, present and future caretakers of this land.

30 years ago, I had the great privilege to begin my work in Nova Scotia as a youth worker where my passion for supporting young people in care was ignited. I moved into the field of social work with the hopes to improve their circumstances, experiences, and outcomes. Today I am pleased to share with you information about our work to effect positive change in our province

In Nova Scotia, we know that the best place for a child is with their family and community, and every effort is made to prevent a child from entering care. As you will have heard from the previous panel members, the needs of youth in care who are unable to safely remain or return to the care of their parents or guardians are extensive and complex.

Despite Child and Family Wellbeing's ongoing, thorough, and exhaustive efforts to find permanent loving families for children and youth in care when unable to be reunified with family, young people may leave permanent care and custody at the age of majority, without family supports, despite their circumstances and their challenges, with brand new adult responsibilities. We know that youth leaving care are acutely vulnerable to experiencing poverty and homelessness and research clearly tells us that youth in care reaching adulthood experience significantly worse health outcomes than their peers.

For over 15 years, Nova Scotia's Child and Family Wellbeing services have been offering post care and custody agreements to those transitioning from permanent care while these young adults pursue their education. There are approximately 120 youth currently supported in this way, with living expenses, tuition fees, as well as other supports that may be identified. This type of post care support can be initiated at any time up to 25 years of age and includes the extended involvement of a social worker. However, given the complexities care experienced youth face, many are not in a place of readiness or ability to successfully participate at such a stressful time, while they deal with drastic and disruptive life changes.

In 2020, we developed our Youth in Transition Framework, with the vision that Youth are safe, healthy, connected to healthy families and communities, and are supported to reach their full potential as they transition to adulthood. Connection became one of our primary focuses, considering risk, protective and promotive factors and Nova Scotia moved forward with an infusion of supports to include community-based, culturally attentive youth outreach, spanning beyond a youth's time in care.

In 2021, as the *Equitable Standards for Transition to Adulthood for Youth in Care* Public Report was released by the Child Welfare League of Canada, and all provinces and territories were called to action, we too were considering how to best promote youth in care to thrive, not to struggle to survive. We acknowledged that young people overall are taking progressively longer to transition to adulthood. It is noteworthy to site that Census Canada data told us that in 2021, 35.1% of young adults aged 20 to 34 were living in private households in Canada with at least one of their parents- an opportunity that most youth transitioning from care do not have.

I am proud to say that Nova Scotia responded to the call to action.

Between 2022-23, we initiated project work to consider how to best support young people at their time of transition

We looked at post care supports programs that had already been implemented in other provinces, such as British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, and found there were various ways supports were offered, such as housing/supports, income supplements and enrollment criteria.

We considered first voice input and available data and in January 2024 we rolled out our new Path Program, of which I will now share some of the key pieces:

The objective of Path is to build a support system for youth to ensure that they:

-Are safe, healthy, and have positive connections to their communities,

and

-Have equitable opportunities to access supports needed to thrive and reach their fullest potential as they journey into adulthood.

Path includes community-based youth outreach to provide dedicated supports, with increased intensity as a young person wishes, with 24-hour on-call access to a community based social worker.

Path also includes transitional supports for living costs. Annual financial support is able to span six years (ages 19-25) decreasing each year as their transitional journey continues.

Path is made available to:

youth transitioning to adulthood from permanent care and custody of the Minister of Community Services in Nova Scotia at the age of majority

Or

Those youth transitioning from youth services in Nova Scotia, when they ere supported to live outside of their family home when they reach 19 years of age

And

To those who are agreeable to youth outreach check ins, as provided by our community provider, Family Services of Nova Scotia.

Participants enroll voluntarily and agree to check-ins with youth outreach as determined by their age (19-20 year olds have check-ins every 3 months and 21-24 year olds have check-ins every 6 months). Community based support can be accessed as frequently as the individual chooses.

Path participants aged 19-years will receive an annual funding amount of \$20,000.00, in the amount of \$769.23 bi-weekly. Funding amounts decrease by \$2,000.00 annually.

Given the design of Path, with this supplementary funding provided to all those eligible, it is not considered income and is not reportable nor taxable. Funds do not impact eligibility or funding for other programs such as Income Assistance, Disability Support, or Post Care and Custody Agreements.

There is no need to demonstrate need, nor report on use of funds.

The Path program is still new for everyone, and we are working through learnings in our implementation and our current phase of this work is focused on evaluation, with particular attention to Path participant feedback, considering factors that are meaningful to them. We are also considering the work being done in other jurisdictions, with much positive work underway with our colleagues in the other Atlantic provinces.

In closing these initial comments, if we might be allow the time, I wish to read a note we received from a current Path participant who became eligible through past Youth Services' involvement:

"I'm writing today to share my thoughts on the Path Program. I'm thankful to be part of this program, it's helping me in so many ways. Originally my case was stressful but the Path Program was the good that came out of it. As a Young Black Nova Scotian youth, opportunities are harder for me to come by and the financial assistance from this program gives me the opportunity to be independent and is helping me to take my education to a higher level. I don't have the worry of how things will be paid for; I'm taking the Home Inspection course at Dalhousie University and I no longer have the stress of not knowing how I'm going to pay for the course. Drivers Ed has been on my to do list for awhile, never registered because of the cost, this is no longer an issue now that I'm part of the program. I booked an appointment with the dentist last year but decided to cancel and put it off because of the cost. Because of the financial assistance from the program, I have a dentist appointment booked next week. Oral health is extremely important and if not taken care of can be linked to other health issues and I'm thankful I'm able to book regular appointments now and be proactive with my dental health.

I've always worked but due to a recent injury I'm limited with the type of work I can do. I've been working with the social worker to find and apply for jobs. She has been very helpful and supportive, and I appreciate all her help.

The Path Program has also given me the ability to help with other things financially like groceries and bills. I've taken over my cell phone bill from my aunt; she paid my bill for years and I truly appreciate this but now I can learn some responsibility and how it feels to pay for my own things. Occasionally I treat the family to take-out and it

feels good to be able to do this, to give back to my aunt who has helped me all my life, to give her a break means so much to me.

In conclusion, the Path Program has been a valuable asset in my life, Its one of the biggest opportunities that has been granted upon me. The Path Program is helping to pave a new path, even in a stressful situation there's some hope. “

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about youth transitioning from care. This is incredibly important work with much to consider, and I am grateful for your care and attention to the needs of these young people on a national level.