

# What would a good parent do?

## Youth in the care of Peel Children's Aid need support to succeed

Imagine you reach your 18th birthday and are asked to leave your home. Now imagine you turn 21 and your financial and emotional support is cut off. This is the reality for youth in Ontario who are in the care of Children's Aid Societies.



PHOTO CREDIT: REBECCA LEE

At Peel Children's Aid when we develop programs and services for youth we ask ourselves what would a good parent do? "It is universally understood that youth in care are not ready to leave a safe and stable home and live on their own while still in their teens," says Geoffrey Katumba, Youth Success Coordinator, Peel Children's Aid. "Not only does this increase their likelihood of failure, youth tell us they do better in a family setting and are not ready to live on their own at age 18. For youth to be successful we need to support them until they finish high school and acquire the life skills they need to develop into responsible adults."

Currently, Peel Children's Aid is unable to offer support to our youth past the age of 21. "Our youth tell us that they are not ready to live without our support at the age of 21," adds Katumba. "At this point in their lives, some of our youth are just finishing high school. If we want our youth to be successful adults, we need to continue to work with them to plan for a career, pursue their dreams and have someone to support them through

the major transitions in their lives. We need to provide financial and emotional support and a home to come back to. We don't age out of care in our own families or cut off all supports for our own children when they turn 21. Why should this be different for our children in care?"

Peel Children's Aid has made improving the lives of youth who have been involved with the agency a priority. Together with other Children's Aid Societies we continue to advocate for our youth with the provincial government. We recommend that we:

1. Provide support to youth until the age of 25 instead of 21
2. Raise the age at which a child may be seen to be in need of protection from the current age of 16 years to 18 years of age
3. Allow youth in care to stay in their foster home at least until age 21
4. Provide access to health and dental care benefits to youth who have left care to age 24

### Did you know?

- Peel Children's Aid currently has a Youth Strategy to ensure youth achieve success and offers youth programs in the areas of financial literacy, life skills, job preparedness, housing, education, mentorship and youth justice
- We continue to focus on increasing educational support for children in care so that more of our youth can access post-secondary education
- Less than 40 per cent of youth in care have finished high school at age 18 and less than 15 per cent go on to post secondary learning
- Youth in care have a high school graduation rate of 44% compared to their peers who have an 81% graduation rate
- These statistics relative to the general Canadian population are a staggering indication of the low success rates our youth experience when exiting the child welfare system
- Peel Children's Aid is working closely with partners such as the local School Boards and Children's Mental Health service providers to try and improve the outcomes for our youth



Kanchan

Knowing that you will lose the support from your children's aid worker when you turn 21 is like being on stilts and having one pulled out from under you. I want to get an education and help to break down some of the barriers and perceptions of youth in care. To do this, every little bit of support helps. What is especially important to me is having someone to parent me beyond the age of 21. It's great to have a worker and be around people who want the best for you. I'm not ready for that to end.



Henry

I haven't gone through all of the same experiences as other youth. I'm involved with Peel Children's Aid but I live with my grandmother. I have started saving money and will apply for scholarships and bursaries, yet it means so much to have emotional support from the agency. It would be reassuring to have this help if I need it past the age of 21. Staying involved with the agency gives us the chance to participate in programs that boost our self-esteem and help us realize we can do whatever we want with our lives.



Chris

When you are on your own and you are thinking about paying your rent and putting food in your fridge, education becomes an afterthought. You only have enough money to support yourself day to day. I want what other youth want – the chance to get an education and set out a career path. Additional time with the support of Peel Children's Aid would reduce some stress and give me these opportunities. A job is something you have to do, but a career is something you want to do.



Stephen

I've been in care for about eight years. When you live with your family you have the option of staying with them until you are ready to live on your own. Just because I am in care doesn't mean I will be ready to be on my own at age 21. The amount of responsibility that comes with this birthday is enormous. Support past the age of 21 would provide the stability needed to open up many more doors for my education and give me time to figure out what I want to do.

Peel Children's Aid is celebrating 100 years of protecting children. We invite people who have been a part of our history to contact us at 905-363-6131 ext. 1591 so we can keep you posted about agency events and celebrations throughout our centenary year.



www.peelcas.org



Paul • Peel Children's Aid is dedicated to making positive changes for youth involved with the agency, and what better source is there than youth themselves? I was nine when I came into care and for a long time didn't feel like I really belonged. I felt like I lost my identity – I didn't know who I was or where I was going. When I met my foster mom Ellie I couldn't believe how much love she had to share. Even though we came from different backgrounds, she embraced me and made me feel special. Her love helped me realize that there were – and are – people who genuinely care about others. She helped change the negative perception I had of children's aid. Now I know that my voice matters. By speaking up about issues that matter to youth, I hope to make it better for other youth with similar experiences.