PRINCIPLES DOCUMENT:
Systems that Discharge Children and Youth to Homelessness

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General Comment Language

Comprehensive child protection system
17. Within a legislative and policy framework, budgeting for, developing and strengthening holistic child protection systems, on the basis of a child rights approach, forms the basis of the practical measures required for prevention and response strategies. Such national child protection systems need to reach children in street situations and should incorporate fully the specific services they need. The systems need to provide a continuum of care across all relevant contexts, including prevention, early intervention, street outreach, helplines, drop-in centres, day-care centres, temporary residential care, family reunification, foster care, independent living or other short- or long-term care options… Administrative burdens and delays in gaining access to child protection systems should be reduced. Information should be made available in child-friendly and accessible formats and children in street situations should be supported to understand and navigate child protection systems.

Service provision
19. States should take action to secure the ability of children in street situations to gain access to basic services such as health and education, and to justice, culture, sport and information. States should ensure their child protection systems provide for specialized services on the street, involving trained social workers with good knowledge of local street connections and who can help children reconnect with family, local community services and wider society. This does not necessarily imply that children should renounce their street connections, but rather, the intervention should secure their rights.

Draft Strategies for Implementation

• States should have laws in place that prohibit state-funded service systems (e.g. child protection, health care, justice) from discharging children and youth that do not have safe, stable housing plans in place.
• States should have laws in place that enable children and youth, up to a certain age (at least 18), to access child protection services if they are at risk of abuse/neglect (i.e. mandating an “age of protection”).
• States should have laws in place that enable young people who have been involved with the child protection system to receive extended supports/resources, up to a certain age (at least 24/25), to support their successful transition to adulthood. These laws should be clear that the state is compelled to provide such supports/resources (i.e. it is not discretionary/voluntary) and ensure adequate levels of funding.

• States should have laws in place affording children and youth the right to representation, whether by an Advocate, Children’s Lawyer, etc.

• States should have laws and policies in place that focus on prevention and early intervention – family reconnection, conflict resolution, mental health supports.

• Children and youth involved in state-funded systems (e.g. child protection, youth justice) often have complex needs and interact between and across various service systems. States should therefore work to promote greater coordination, collaboration and interaction across these service systems (e.g. mental health, child protection, justice, education, health care) to create a more seamless continuum of care for vulnerable young people.

• States should ensure that their laws governing child protection, family matters, civil matters, etc. are aligned and consistent.

• States should be compelled to provide an adequate level of funding to support communities in creating safe, stable housing arrangements for young people transitioning out of state systems.

**Sample Statutory and Policy Language**

• The Province of Ontario (Canada) has introduced a number of new resources and supports for youth exiting the child welfare system in the last five years:
  o Youth-in-Transition Workers (YITWs) – funding for community agencies to hire full-time staff that work with youth to prepare them for the transition to independence – life skills supports, finding/keeping an apartment, pursuing education/employment, accessing mental health supports, etc. Total of 66 across the province.
  o Post-secondary Education – tuition grants and reimbursements for youth formerly in care. Also a “Living and Learning Grant” which provides former youth in care with $2,000/month to support them with living expenses while attending school.
  o Benefits provision – a benefits program which provides former youth in care with access to prescription drug, dental and counselling services.
  o Mandatory provision of financial support ($850/month) to youth transitioning out of care (aged 18-21) along with ongoing case management from their child protection agency.

• Raising awareness of these available supports is key. While Ontario has invested significantly in these new supports, many youth still do not know what is available to them and how to access. The province of BC has invested in a youth-friendly website to provide such information: [https://agedout.com/](https://agedout.com/)

• The work in Ontario was driven by youth in and formerly in care – organized hearings at the Provincial Legislature; spoke about their experiences in care and

- Ontario has introduced new legislation that prescribes the rights of children and youth, including their right to express their own views freely and safely, to be engaged through honest and respectful dialogue, to have their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity and to be informed, in language suitable to their understanding, of their rights and of the existence and role of, and how to contact, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17c14

- Training and professional development of staff is key, particularly in the areas of anti-oppression, anti-racism, trauma-informed, etc. – this is a constant recommendation from youth… more staff training!!

- A number of laws and policies have been implemented in the U.S. to address the needs of system-involved youth who exit to homelessness. They include:

  - **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008**
    States can receive additional funding when they implement the Act by passing legislation that allows States and Tribes to provide and/or extend Title IV-E (federal funding) foster care, adoption assistance, and kinship guardianship payments for youth up to age 19, 20 or 21, when those youth meet certain education, training, or work requirements. States may implement portions or all of the federal act. This funding allows youth to remain in foster care and/or access stabilizing resources such as housing, education, college tuition, health care, and job training that helps these youth to avoid homelessness.

  - **Local jurisdictions using federal housing subsidies to help former foster youth avoid homelessness**
    The Housing Choice Voucher Rental Assistance program administers Housing and Urban Development (HUD) federal funds designed to provide assistance to low-income families, the elderly, the disabled and other special populations to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Through the HCV Program, the Housin Authority of DeKalb County (HADC) pays a portion of eligible families' rent each month directly to the Property Owner/Manager. The DeKalb County Georgia Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher Program for Homeless and Former Foster Youth provides vouchers to former foster youth, who are defined as “homeless” when they reach the age of majority while in the custody of the states foster care system. The program targets a specified number of vouchers for former foster youth each year. If the youth meet criteria and adhere to program requirements, Section 8 financed housing can provide free or significantly reduced rate housing so long as the resident’s income justifies assistance.