

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week: What Elements are Essential to Fixing B.C.'s Failing Foster Care System?

Surrey, British Columbia Former youth in care have been courageously speaking out and sharing their personal experiences about the dire situation of foster children aging out care at 19 years old. So far, their desperate pleas for help have largely been ignored. With the commencement of B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week, it is time for British Columbians to answer the call.

Dylan Cohen, an Indigenous former youth in care, wrote a compelling article in *The Toronto Star* on May 25, 2017, appealing for action: **“In Canada, 60 per cent of young people aged 20 to 24 live at home with their supporting parents. Yet we hold youth with the complex traumas associated with growing up in care to a different standard and expect them to stand alone.** When governments apprehend children and put them in care, they are claiming a responsibility for ensuring the success of vulnerable children. As a society, we aren't living up to the promise or the responsibility.”

Indeed, minors in foster care have been identified as the **most vulnerable and least visible** children in our society.

From a historical perspective, little support has been given to youth transitioning out of care and often they do not have the skills they need to survive. The results are crystal clear in the shocking statistics. For example, **41 per cent of youth who age out of care in B.C. have criminal justice system involvement.** The impact of transitory care experiences leave lasting effects on vulnerable youth. Dylan's five years as a minor in care left him with serious mental health challenges and experiences with homelessness.

But there is a better way.

British Columbia is home to a charity that is leading the way in developing best care practices for children who cannot live with their biological parents.

Through a proven model of care that is separate from the provincial system, **SOS Children's Village B.C. provides the four essential elements that every foster child needs and deserves: foster parents trained in caring for traumatized children, siblings placed together or a sibling-like atmosphere, a home with subsidized rent, and a Village of support staff.** The charity's mission and values are rooted in the belief that traumatized children require professional support, in addition to kindness and nurturing. SOS B.C.'s commitment to breaking the generational cycles of issues surrounding foster care - family breakdown, trauma,

dysfunction, and needless deaths - includes building their own template of care and sharing it with ineffective child welfare systems across North America.

SOS Children's Village B.C.'s alternative model of care is **child-centric**, based on **lifelong engagement** and **embracing the cultural heritage** of each child. The SOS Village creates true permanency: a stable childhood for children who have had abusive parents or parents who are themselves battling issues that have caused the family to break down. Children are able to heal in the trauma-informed environment of professional therapists and programs involving music, recreation, academic support, and life skills development. Clearly, when young people are moved through foster home after foster home, they never have the chance to learn the life skills needed to live independently.

SOS B.C.'s thousands of individual, corporate, and foundation donors (just 6% of the charity's funding comes from the government) know the success that the four elements of the Village model bring. **For example, only 40 per cent of B.C. foster children graduate high school within two years of expected graduation date. At the SOS B.C. Village in Surrey, that rate is 100 per cent.**

With a vision of expanding the Village model to every town in British Columbia and eliminating the need for the very concept of 'aging out of care', SOS B.C. envisions a future where desperate pleas for help from youth are a relic of the past.

About SOS Children's Village BC

SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization and cares for fostered, orphaned, or abandoned children. It has existed for over 65 years with presence in 134 countries and 572 Villages. British Columbia is home to the only SOS Children's Village in Canada. SOS Children's Village BC provides homes, a supportive community, and programs to help foster children and youth in need grow into caring, self-reliant adults.

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