

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week: A Bold Proposition – Lifelong Engagement for Youth in Foster Care

Surrey, British Columbia As a child, Sarah* lived with her drug-addicted mother. She remembers coming home from school every day to find her mother passed out on the couch. Until one day when her mom just wasn't there. Sarah, just eight years old at the time, never saw her mother again. For the next four years Sarah lived with her grandmother. When her grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and died in only three short weeks, Sarah was devastated. Ever since, Sarah has lived in foster care. **It is B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week, and lifelong engagement with foster youth is something that differentiates SOS B.C. from the provincial system.**

Vulnerable young people in communities of British Columbia, unprepared for life on their own, are being cut off from the supports they need when they turn 19 years of age – and they are dying because of it. Instead of teaching them the skills they need to build their own lives, the foster care system abandons these kids to live in barren single room occupancy (SRO) hotel rooms, shelters, and detox centres. It's no wonder that, alone and unsupported, so many former foster kids choose suicide, die of overdoses, or cause themselves terrible harm.

But the local chapter of a global charity is here to change that. SOS Children's Village B.C. is the only Canadian location of the world-renowned SOS Children's Villages charity, and **they offer programs and therapies for foster children and youth that aren't found in any other Canadian foster program.** They have recognized for years that youth aging out of care need extra support, and they have developed an intensive, client-centred program of support for high-risk youth, delivered by a multidisciplinary team of experts, that has an astonishing success rate. SOS B.C. works with kids in crisis – living on the streets, struggling with addiction and mental health challenges – and they give these youth the support and guidance they need, until they are ready to try life on their own.

“We believe that like any parent, 19 is an important birthday, but not the end of parental support,” explained Douglas Dunn, executive director of the charity.

That is a bold proposition in British Columbia: lifelong engagement for youth in foster care. But one SOS B.C. hopes the provincial foster care system will embrace. Their high-demand Transition to Adulthood Program was developed as an ongoing relationship with youth aging out of care, with the ability to return for more support if required in the future. To SOS B.C., this is simply part of the global SOS Children's Villages commitment to supporting their 'SOS Alumni', as they call their youth that have aged out.

The charity's **Aftercare Program** was designed and put forth by one of the four pillars of the organization: permanency. SOS Children's Village B.C. has made a commitment to ensure youth who have aged out of care, and are involved with any of the youth programming services, are always in touch and have somewhere to turn if they need any further support.

“We want our youth to be healthy and doing well in their own lives, but should any youth face challenges, we want to be a place for them to turn,” said Douglas Dunn. “Aftercare youth are entitled to all the supports in our Transition to Adulthood Program, and are introduced to the idea of mentoring youth who have had similar hardships, creating a sense of belonging and community.”

Aftercare youth can always come back and get the help they need, no matter if they are 30, 45, or even 55. Some of the supports available include: trauma-informed counselling, neurofeedback training, arts and expressive therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, music lessons, academic support, volunteer and mentorship, a hot meal when meeting with youth workers, access to funding opportunities to help with school and living costs, and referrals to suitable neighbouring organizations.

When a child is placed in the care of the province, the province of British Columbia becomes their parent. A parent should be there for their kid for the rest of their life.

Today, after completing the Transition to Adulthood Program at SOS Children's Village B.C., Sarah can look back on the great strides she has taken. Her youth worker helped her find a job, and thanks to academic support, she is one of the rare foster youth attending university. Sarah received therapy that helped her work through the traumatic childhood issues that were preventing her from moving forward. Even after a successful aging out process, Sarah is always welcome back to SOS B.C. as part of the Aftercare Program – SOS has become her new family.

**Name has been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of the youth involved.*

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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