

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SOS Children's Village B.C. Responds to Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond's Special Report *On their own: Examining the need of B.C. youth as they leave government care*

Surrey, British Columbia On April 28th, 2014, British Columbia's Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, released a report titled *On their own: Examining the need of B.C. youth as they leave government care*. Research and recommendations on this topic are long overdue as youth leaving government care in B.C. have long been ill-prepared for this transition and the results have been devastating.

Teens leaving government care have poor graduation rates, are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, have trouble finding and maintaining employment, end up homeless or in poor living conditions, and suffer from mental health challenges.

As pointed out in the report, many youth leaving care at the age of 19 receive little planning and preparation by those who are charged to be their caretakers and legal guardians. This is mostly not an issue that lays with individual social workers, but instead with a governmental system that does not provide enough funding or priority for foster care to adequately support children and youth from broken families. **Many social workers simply do not have the time to guide youth through transition to adulthood due to massive case loads.**

“After working with high-risk youth and young adults in care for over 10 years, **it has certainly been the experience of SOS Children's Village B.C. youth workers that some teenagers are simply dropped off at a shelter on their 19th birthday and told to fend for themselves.** I find this unacceptable. Often social workers simply do not have the time to help youth transition successfully because of unmanageable case loads,” staff member Katie Perkins said.

In addition to inadequate planning taking place to help youth transition, there is much research to suggest that youth at the age of 19 are too young to be leaving care and the cost of them leaving care to society is just too high – exemplified by The Tyee's *Failure to Launch* series. Studies on brain development show that youth are not ready to make all the big life decisions that they need to make on their own at the age of 19. Many U.S. states and some Canadian provinces have raised the age of care to at least 21 years. **Financially, it is actually cheaper to pay for care for youth until the age of 21 than it is to pay for the ramifications of them leaving care at 19,** as research by the Vancouver Sun in their *From Care to Where* series clearly shows.

It is SOS Children's Village B.C.'s hope that the province wakes up to the huge cost of poor planning for youth in care, develops a more comprehensive plan of how we prepare youth for

leaving care - including having resources and adult supports that youth can continue to access after their 19th birthday - and raises the age that they leave care. In addition, there absolutely needs to be more government funding, and proper allocation of these funds, to help social workers and other service providers support youth effectively. **This would not only give youth a better and brighter future, but the rest of British Columbia would benefit as well.** These kids have a lot to offer if they are given the proper support. Let's give them a fighting chance to show society what they can do.

About SOS Children's Village BC

SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization for orphaned and abandoned children. It has existed for over 60 years with presence in 133 countries and over 550 villages. British Columbia is home to the only SOS Children's Village in Canada. SOS Children's Village BC provides community-based family care services to improve and sustain the quality of life for foster children and foster families through a variety of programs that address social development and healing. Headquartered in Surrey, the organization actively creates opportunities, programs and services to increase stability and continuity for foster children and their foster parents.

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Stay tuned for an exciting new era in the Transition to Adulthood program, which will be commencing the first week of June.

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