



Improving Access to Post-Secondary Education Among Care Experienced Youth (CEY): The Need for National Standards

Jacqueline Gahagan¹, Kristyn Anderson², Susan McWilliam³, Margaret Robinson², Sarah Blades³, Dale Kirby⁴, Steven Smith⁵

(1) Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, (2) Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, (3) IWK Health, Halifax, Nova Scotia, (4) Department of Education, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, (5) Department of Psychology, St. Mary's University, Halifax, NS

Introduction

Methods

Key Findings

Access to education has direct implications for employment, social mobility, health outcomes, and overall quality of life ^{1,2}. Our recent scoping review ³ describes how Canada is failing to achieve the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Sustainable Development Goal #4: **ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION** and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- **Participants:** 26 care experienced adults or those who support care experienced youth in their roles supporting interventions like a tuition waiver program.
- **Methods:** Utilization focused evaluation using semi-structured interviews
- **Data Analysis:** Verbatim transcription; thematic analysis

- **Additional supports are needed to increase both awareness of and uptake of tuition waiver programs.**
- Supports are critical to care experienced youth in high school
- Greater emphasis on community outreach to child protection services to ensure all available waivers are utilized.
- **Once in a tuition waiver program, key determinants of health need to be addressed from a trauma-informed approach (housing, transportation, food security, mental health and mentorship) and sustainable program supports to assist in developing trusted ongoing relationships in academic programs.**

Key Themes (KT) Identified

- financial barriers beyond tuition
- awareness and promotion of programs
- **holistic and wrap around supports**
- **need for dedicated navigators and Mentors**
- high turnover and instability in support systems
 - **barriers due to lack of long-term planning**
- **imposter syndrome and mental health challenges**
 - cultural and peer supports
- gaps in data collection and evaluation
 - **flexible measures of success**

“I feel like that, because there’s such a shortage in the social workers at [provincial department]...they get pulled into crisis all the time, right. And so that long-term future planning is often not to the point we would like it to be in.” (KT#6)

“I feel like it’s a lot of pressure...I don’t think anyone can really relate to the amount of pressure unless you’re in a similar circumstance where, like, you have no one else to fall back on...it’s you and your brain against the world.” (KT#7)

“Having familiar faces on the inside...having people share their stories, and having, like, that post-secondary mentor...that support network is huge. It’s so, so valuable, especially to our students who are going to post-secondary for the first time and sometimes, more often than not, the first generation to go to post-secondary” (KT#4)

“we should always question the metrics that we use and the quality that we see as excellence...” (KT#10)

“For former youth in care...there needs to be a key contact person, because they no longer have a children in care worker. Other students have a guardian or a supportive adult to stay consistent in their life and help navigate all the different pieces of their life – whether it’s housing, food security, laundry, life skills, tutoring, learning homework habits, and relationships.” (KT#3)

CONCLUSION

- Access to post-secondary education is **an important step in furthering the life opportunities of CEY.**
- Waivers without the needed wrap-around support is **insufficient.**
- The **lack of national standards requires partnership between all levels of government and institutions**
- The **lack of monitoring and evaluating impact**, both on individuals and in relation to **post secondary institutional commitments to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA)** further illustrates the urgent need for national standards.

REFERENCES

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Saint Mary's University



Jacqueline.Gahagan@msvu.ca Kristyn.Anderson@avrce.ca Steven.Smith@smu.ca Dale.Kirby@mun.ca
Susan.Mcwilliam@iwk.nshealth.ca Margaret.Robinson@dal.ca Sarah.blades@iwk.nshealth.ca

CONTACT INFORMATION