

Growing. Together.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services
2013-2018 Strategic Plan



Contents

- Message from the Minister **03**
- Message from the Deputy Minister **04**
- MCYS Vision and Mission **05**
- Introduction **06**
- Building on Success **11**
- The New Plan..... **15**
- Principles..... **18**
- Goals..... **22**
- Organizational Health and Excellence..... **31**
- Conclusion..... **35**
- Appendix: Key Concepts..... **36**



Message from the Minister

As Minister of Children and Youth Services, I am honoured to share a strategic plan to better service our children and youth.

For 10 years, this ministry has led the government on child and youth issues, while also acting as a steward of the service system that supports young people and their families. We have worked to build a voice for young people into government policy and program development.

We continue to transform the child and youth mental health, youth justice and child welfare systems so that they are sustainable and young people have the support they need, when they need it. We have also made significant progress in addressing the needs of special populations, such as young people with special needs, youth at-risk, and First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Aboriginal children and youth.

This work can be challenging—but it is always rewarding.

I want to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate ministry staff, past and present, for their valuable contributions to the work that we do. To Ontario families, I want to say: While we have accomplished much, there is still much more we can do.

Growing. Together. is a plan that has been shaped by the voices of families, and supported by experts working in the child and youth sector. It is a thoughtful, evidence-based plan, which is based on best practices, and designed specifically to prepare us for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Our new strategic plan will help us to be champions for Ontario children and youth, and a transformative force in the delivery of outstanding services to young people and their families.

Together, we can make a difference!



Teresa Piruzza

Minister of Children and Youth Services

March 2014

Message from the Deputy Minister

It is a privilege to provide leadership to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and an honour to work alongside the employees of this organization.

Every day I see examples of the passion and dedication that have made it possible for the ministry to improve outcomes for Ontario's children and youth over the past ten years – *we believe in what we do.*

Our previous strategic plan, *Realizing Potential*, set active goals that focused the work of the ministry and gave us a common language for working together. Since that time, we have made great strides in ensuring that the province's children and youth are protected, nurtured and supported throughout their lives. We have also become a catalyst for change across government when it comes to the unique needs of children and youth, and as a result, positive, transformative changes are evident in a number of our partner ministries.

As we approach the 10th anniversary of MCYS, we are proud to launch a new strategic plan: *Growing Together*. Developed over the past year with your input, the new strategic plan builds on our successes, and prepares us for the future. For the first time, it also explicitly challenges us as an organization to focus on the excellence of our own work.

Growing Together prepares us to take on the opportunities and challenges that we know lie

ahead. As we move forward, we need to maintain our focus on the health, well-being and resilience of all young people, and on recognizing what they hold in common and what makes them unique. We must continue to ask ourselves two key questions: Are we improving the lives of children, youth and families? Are we improving their service experience when they interact with MCYS-funded services? This new plan will help us remain focused on funding, overseeing and delivering programs that are efficient, responsive, and leading to the outcomes we know are most important.

As we implement the plan, MCYS will also continue to build new partnerships and collaborate with communities and young people to promote positive development and foster meaningful opportunities to engage, participate and grow.

Looking ahead, I am excited about growing together as an organization. With continued innovation and creativity, we can sustain our roles as champion for the voice of children and youth in government, and as a transformative force in the delivery of outstanding service system experiences for young people and their families.



Alexander Bezzina

Deputy Minister

Ministry of Children and Youth Services

March 2014

Vision

An Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.

Mission

Working with government and community partners to develop and implement policies, programs and a service system that help give children the best possible start in life, prepare youth to become productive adults and make it easier for families to access the services they need at all stages of a child's development.



INTRODUCTION

Ontario is home to over 2.8 million children and youth aged 0 to 18, with over 140,000 born in the province each year¹. These young people all deserve the best opportunities to shape their own lives and to become active and productive members of their communities.

To ensure that our efforts are focused on the priorities that matter most to children, youth and their families, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) regularly renews its Strategic Plan. This new plan – called *Growing. Together.* (2013-18) – presents the ministry’s goals for the coming years. The goals will both orient the activities and decision-making of the ministry, and also signal to our partners where we will be focusing our efforts. These goals will help MCYS to respond quickly, effectively, and responsibly to the evolving needs of Ontario’s young people.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services was created in 2003 to support the young people of Ontario to thrive and succeed. Our commitment is to protect, nurture and support children and youth as they grow – from birth, through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood.

The mandate of the ministry is twofold. The first is to work with, and through, our many partners to establish a system of services and supports that strengthen families and help Ontario’s most vulnerable children and

youth overcome barriers to their success and wellbeing. The second is to lead across government on issues that affect all children and youth. Since its creation, MCYS has developed considerable expertise in the area of child and youth development. This focus on positive development informs our role as a champion and catalyst for the outcomes of all children and youth in Ontario. The ministry actively shares that

1 Ontario Ministry of Finance. 2013. “Ontario Population Projections Update, 2012–2036.” Last modified July 19, 2013. <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/>.



and youth in Ontario. The ministry actively shares that expertise and works in partnership to create opportunities for the voices of children and youth to be heard across government.

Successfully carrying out these roles requires a workforce with a broad range of skills, including: customer service; direct service delivery; policy development; program design; systems design; program evaluation and oversight; partnership development; financial and capital management; human resources; IT; IM and analytics; organizational development; and administration. While not always visible, each of these functions is crucial for serving Ontario's young people effectively and responsibly.

The ministry is accountable for the delivery and/or oversight of a range of programs and services. These include:

- **Child and Youth Mental Health:** Clinical and community-based services delivered directly and by transfer payment agencies and directly-operated facilities.
- **Child Protection Services:** Protection services and support for children who have been, or are at risk of being, abused or neglected, including placement for adoption.
- **Children and Youth with Special Needs, including Autism:** Children's Treatment Centres, community-based agencies, and transfer payment agencies provide rehabilitation services, parent training/

education, respite services, and other supports for children and youth with physical and/or developmental disabilities, chronic illness and/or communication disorders.

- **Healthy Child Development:** Community agencies, public health units, local hospitals and Children's Treatment Centres provide screening, assessment and intervention services (e.g., Preschool Speech and Language Program) and supports to both the child and family (e.g., Healthy Babies Healthy Children).
- **Ontario Child Benefit:** Financial benefit provided to low-income families with children under the age of 18.
- **Youth Justice Services:** A continuum of diversion, community and custodial programs for youth who are, or are at risk of being, in conflict with the law to: improve outcomes; reduce re-offending; prevent youth crime; hold youth accountable; and contribute to community safety.
- **Youth Opportunities:** Programs and supports to help at-risk youth successfully achieve the key developmental outcomes that are needed for life success (e.g. jobs for youth and youth outreach workers).
- **Poverty Reduction:** Government lead for coordinating initiatives to reduce child poverty and developing and renewing the five-year strategy.

ONTARIO'S YOUNG PEOPLE

Young Ontarians between the ages of 0 and 18 make up more than a fifth of the province's population (21.3%)². As a group, they are healthy, creative, resilient, vibrant and engaged.

Most of Ontario's young children arrive at school ready to learn, and are on track in key developmental milestones including physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills³. Ontario youth have outstanding high-school graduation rates⁴ and very high postsecondary graduation rates compared with countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁵. Our young people also have strong skills in emerging fields such as technology and social enterprise. They succeed because of the wide range of foundational, interpersonal and creative skills they gain at home, at school and in their communities.

Ontario is home to one of the most multicultural and diverse populations in the world. Our diversity is one of our key strengths, and MCYS

strives to develop programs and policies that celebrate and reflect the multi-faceted diversity of the province's children and youth. To provide the best supports for each young person, we work to deliver services that are barrier-free, inclusive and culturally responsive.

Though most of Ontario's young people thrive, we know that many face one or more barriers to success and need more targeted or intensive supports. Some specific populations who may be at greater risk due to historical or social issues include: First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Aboriginal children and youth; francophone children and youth; young people living in poverty; those in, or leaving, the care of Children's Aid Societies; those living in rural and remote communities; those with special needs; LGBTTQ young people; newcomer children and youth; racialized children and youth; and youth in conflict with the law⁶. To achieve greater equity for all of Ontario's young people, MCYS works with partners to close the gaps in opportunities and positive outcomes.

2 Ontario Ministry of Finance. 2013. "Ontario Population Projections Update, 2012–2036." Last modified July 19, 2013. <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/>.

3 The Offord Centre for Child Studies, McMaster University. 2010. "Early Development Instrument: School Readiness to Learn Ontario SK Cycle 2 Results based on the Early Development Instrument Data Collection for Senior Kindergarten Students in Ontario, 2010."

4 Statistics Canada. 2012. "Labour Force Survey."

5 Statistics Canada. 2012. "Education Indicators in Canada: An International Perspective." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-604-x/81-604-x2012001-eng.pdf>

6 See Appendix for further discussion of each of these populations.

ONTARIO'S YOUNG PEOPLE – A SNAPSHOT

- Most of Ontario's children and youth live in the southern and central areas of the province⁷
- In 2011-12, 83% of high school students graduated, up 15 percentage points from the 2003-04 rate of 68 per cent⁸
- In 2010, 58% of Ontario's youth aged 15-24 participated in volunteer activities⁹
- In 2006, 3.8% of children and youth 0-14 years in Ontario were reported as living with a disability that limited their daily activities¹⁰
- Approximately 31.7% of children and youth are visible minorities¹¹
- 3.4% of Ontario's young people are Aboriginal, and they are the fastest growing child and youth population in Ontario¹¹
- 4% of the child and youth population are francophone¹²
- 7.5% of Ontario's children and youth are newcomers who have arrived in Canada in the last 10 years¹¹

12.1%
of children
and youth live in
rural areas¹¹

There are over
2.8 million
young people
in Ontario⁷

- 7 Ontario Ministry of Finance. 2013. "Ontario Population Projections Update, 2012–2036." Last modified July 19, 2013. <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/>.
- 8 Ontario Ministry of Education. 2013. "High School Graduation Rate Continues to Climb". <http://news.ontario.ca/edu/en/2013/04/high-school-graduation-rate-continues-to-climb.html>.
- 9 Imagine Canada. 2010. "Giving and Volunteering in Ontario: Findings from the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating." http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/reports/Ontario_report_en_2007_21122010.pdf.
- 10 Statistics Canada. 2008. "Participation and Activity Limitation Survey of 2006: A Profile of Education for Children with Disabilities in Canada." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-628-x/89-628-x2008004-eng.htm>.
- 11 Statistics Canada. 2013. "National Household Survey, 2011-Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011001."
- 12 Office of Francophone Affairs. 2013. "Data based on the Inclusive Definition of Francophone (IDF) from the 2011 Census". <http://www.ofa.gov.on.ca/en/franco-census-2011.html>.



PREVIOUS PLANS

Over the last 10 years, a number of founding documents have shaped the work of MCYS. These have helped to align our program areas under common objectives and a common language. They have shaped how MCYS sets priorities, develops policies, conducts licensing, implements and oversees programs, and evaluates services.

The first of these documents defined the ministry's vision and mission, while our most recent strategic plan – *Realizing Potential* (2008-. 2012) – defined a set of principles and established our role as government's champion for children.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

MCYS is one of a network of partners that are focused on improving the lives of Ontario's children and youth. It is through these partnerships that positive, transformative change for young people is achieved.

The role of families and caregivers – in all their forms – is integral to the healthy development of children and youth. Families are essential partners for MCYS. They are the primary influence on young people, and are often in the best position to understand what their children need. To support families and caregivers, the ministry aims to make the right information and services available when and where they are needed.

In addition, community organizations are a gateway to the supports children, youth and their

and youth. *Realizing Potential* also included five goals that galvanized the ministry and our partners around the shared purposes of better service experiences and improved life outcomes for children and youth.

Growing Together. (2013-2018) remains true to MCYS's original vision, mission and purpose, and builds on the goals from *Realizing Potential*. It reflects the ministry's achievements, positions us to respond to changing needs, and provides momentum towards new successes.

families need. The ministry works with a broad range of partners to provide services, including: funded agencies; service providers; non-profits; educators; and youth-led organizations. MCYS maintains strong partnerships with other Ontario ministries, philanthropic organizations, advocacy groups, researchers, and federal and municipal governments, and is exploring opportunities with the private sector. All of our partners help to inform the design and delivery of MCYS programs and services for Ontario's young people.

MCYS will continue to pursue promising relationships that help us respond to the complex developmental needs of all children and youth and ensure positive outcomes.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

An enduring example of the impact the ministry has had on the positive development of children and youth in Ontario are two key resources: *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings*¹³; and *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development*¹⁴.

Developed in collaboration with service providers, front-line staff, researchers, provincial ministries, other levels of government, and young people themselves, these resources have contributed to the body of knowledge about how young people develop from early childhood and through adolescence to adulthood. They have created a common understanding in Ontario about child and youth development, so that all who work with young people are prepared to help them achieve their full potential.

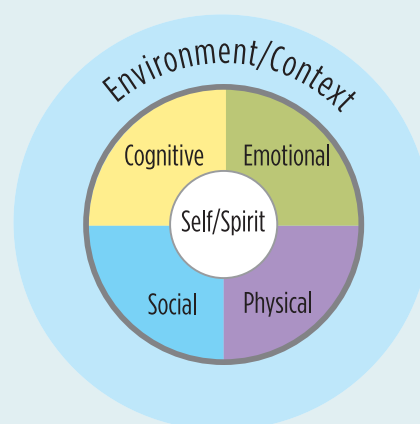


Figure 1

Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development depicts the cognitive, emotional, social and physical domains of youth development as a circle which demonstrates that these domains are interconnected and that both context and a person's sense of self matter.

13 Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. 2007. "Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings." http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/earlychildhood/early_learning_for_every_child_today.aspx.

14 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2012. "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development." Last modified June 13, 2012. <http://www.ontario.ca/steppingstones>.

PREVIOUS GOALS

Every goal the ministry set out in *Realizing Potential* has directly contributed to positive change for children and youth. Examples of these achievements include the following:

Goal: Every Child and Youth Has a Voice

In recognition of the importance of young people being part of any decision that affects them, we have increased the extent to which children and youth are engaged in government planning and decision-making.

→ **The Youth Leaving Care Working Group represents an innovative model, giving youth a strong voice at the policy development table.**

With input from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, MCYS established the working group to build a plan for fundamental change to the child welfare system that would improve outcomes for youth transitioning from care. Young people with lived experience in the child welfare system joined community agencies, child welfare organizations and MCYS staff to develop an action plan for change. Many of the recommendations made by the working group in their final report are being put into action in communities across the province.



Goal: Every Child and Youth Receives Personalized Services

Children and youth are a distinct but diverse population who have specialized needs, and require services designed with them in mind. MCYS has worked with partners to embed this approach in our policies, programs and services.

→ MCYS expanded the role of probation officers to support community reintegration planning for youth being released from detention. These are some of Ontario's most vulnerable young people, often coming into conflict with the law for reasons such as mental health issues, drug or alcohol problems, financial difficulties, lack of ties to school or employment, or instability in their home situation. Earlier intervention with these youth is helping to support smoother transitions to their communities and foster improved outcomes.

Goal: Everyone Involved in Service Delivery Contributes to Achieving Common Outcomes

Transformative and positive changes can be achieved for children and youth when partners come together to focus on shared outcomes. MCYS has built a record of excellent collaborative, cross-government work towards establishing and measuring common outcomes.

→ To create *Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed*, **18 provincial ministries came together to identify 20 shared, evidence-based outcomes and related indicators that matter to Ontario's youth** and that the government and its partners can use to track collective progress. *Stepping Up* will guide Ontario to do more to support the success of youth. The ministry will report on youth outcomes each year by tracking *Stepping Up's* outcomes and indicators, and the implementation of Ontario Youth Strategy initiatives.

Goal: Every Child and Youth is Resilient

Every time a young person comes into contact with MCYS services, it is an opportunity to help them build their resilience. The ministry has increased its focus on both preventing adversity and fostering the skills and resources children, youth and families will need when they do face challenges.

→ MCYS supported the development of a guide on formal customary care for children's aid societies and First Nations, to promote culturally appropriate placements for First Nation children and youth in need of protection. Formal customary care arrangements are intended to foster a strong cultural identity in First Nation children and youth by maintaining a connection to culture, heritage, language and community – all of which are critical to building and maintaining resilience.

Goal: Every Young Person Graduates From Secondary School

Doing well in school sets young people up for future success, and helps them build the skills they need to fully participate at home, school, and in their communities. Making high school graduation a priority for the ministry made educational success a focus across the ministry.

→ *Strengthening the Culture of Education in Youth Justice Services: the Youth Justice Education and Skills Training Success Strategy* reflects the ministry's enhanced focus on supporting youth in conflict with the law to achieve success in school, prepare for future success, and reduce re-offending. By emphasizing education goal planning in the case management process, front-line staff build on each young person's strengths and establish goals for education, training and/or employment.

But there is no question that even with all of the accomplishments of *Realizing Potential*, there are still children and youth who do not have the supports and the opportunities they need to thrive and to reach their full potential. And as long as that remains true, we have work to do.

THE NEW PLAN *Growing Together. (2013-18)*

This new plan communicates our continued commitment to Ontario's children and youth.

Over the next five years, emerging challenges (e.g., increasingly complex social problems, rising public expectations and ongoing fiscal restraint) will require MCYS and its partners to work in new and creative ways. While research and staff input into *Growing Together* confirmed

that MCYS is on the right path to meet these challenges, they also indicated that a renewal of the organization's goals and principles was needed to keep the ministry focused on the priorities that matter most for young people and their families.



MCYS Strategic Plan Map

Our Vision

An Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.

Our Mission

Working with government and community partners to develop and implement policies, programs and a service system that helps give children the best possible start in life, prepare youth to become productive adults and make it easier for families to access the services they need at all stages of a child's development.

OUR PRINCIPLES

Principles reflect MCYS's core values and how employees approach their day-to-day work.

Child-and youth-centred

Responsive

Inclusive

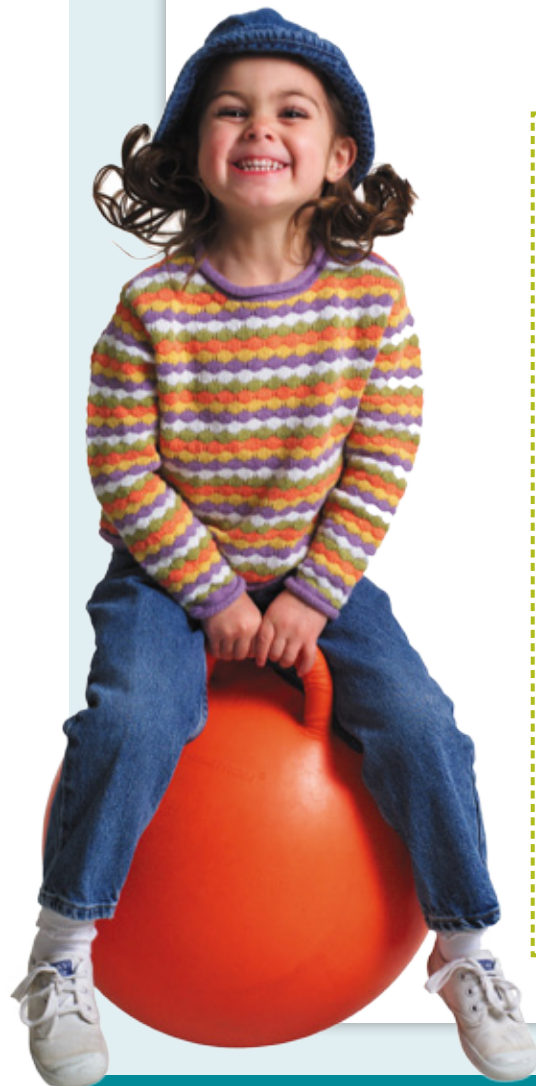
Collaborative

Outcomes-driven

Accountable

OUR GOALS

Goals keep MCYS focused on the priorities that matter most for Ontario's young people and their families.



1

Children and youth are resilient

Resilience is a dynamic process that allows children and youth to adapt to change, take on challenges and embrace new opportunities.

2

Children and youth have the skills and opportunities needed to shape their own future

Educational success and the right learning opportunities help children and youth develop the confidence and competencies they need to fully participate at home, at school, and in the community.

3

Children and youth have a voice

Giving children and youth a voice in the decisions that affect them enhances policies, programs, and the service system. It also builds young people's confidence and capacity to lead and influence the world around them.

4

Children and youth experience high-quality, responsive services

The best outcomes for children, youth and their families come from services that are accessible, responsive, grounded in respect and dignity, and embedded in a system that is easy to navigate.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH & EXCELLENCE

A strong organization is the foundation for service system excellence and achieving the best outcomes for Ontario's children and youth.

→ Healthy, Skilled & Inspired Employees

→ Knowledge & Information Management

→ System Stewardship & Partnership

→ Robust Internal Controls & Resource Oversight

→ Leadership & Innovation at All Levels

PRINCIPLES

In the context of a strategic plan, principles communicate the enduring values that underpin an organization's culture. MCYS employees are proud to work for this ministry and know that they make a real difference for the children, youth and families of Ontario.

Reflecting input from employees, the following six principles reflect our core values as an organization. They are also aspirational; that is, they speak to who we are, as well as who we want to be. In some cases, we know there is more the ministry can do to embody these principles. Over the next five years, MCYS employees will be supported and encouraged to reflect these core principles in how they think about and perform their day-to-day work. These principles stand as our commitment to the people of Ontario that the province's young people are in good hands.

Child-and
youth-centred

Responsive

Inclusive

Collaborative

Outcomes-driven

Accountable

Child-and youth-centred

We put children and youth at the centre of everything we do.

MCYS acknowledges that individuals are unique, that children and youth have distinct rights, and that they are best supported within their families and communities. By working in partnership and supporting programs that are individualized, strengths-based and developmentally appropriate, MCYS supports the optimal development of all children and youth.

What we do:

- Build on the unique strengths of the children and youth we serve
- Respond to the needs of children and youth through engagement and personalization of services
- Support families, caregivers and communities to foster the positive development of children and youth

Responsive

We respond and adapt to the complex and evolving needs of Ontario's young people.

MCYS works to stay abreast of emerging trends and changes, and to be agile enough to respond quickly and effectively to promote the best outcomes for children and youth. We support an innovative and creative environment where people can act to prevent problems before they arise, and intervene early when they do.

What we do:

- Promote and learn from innovation, and seek input from our partners, to improve service systems over the long term
- Manage risk to take action that benefits children, youth and families

Inclusive

We reflect diversity and support inclusion in all that we do.

MCYS strives to design and deliver policies and programs that enhance equity, are barrier-free and respond to the diversity of Ontario's children, youth and families. By harnessing the unique contributions of every employee, we create an inclusive workplace culture where everyone feels welcome, valued and respected.

What we do:

- Design and deliver policies, programs and services in a manner that is inclusive, culturally-responsive and supports equity
- Support and leverage the diversity of our workforce by developing inclusive workplace policies and procedures

Collaborative

Collaboration and partnership are essential for the best outcomes of children and youth.

We succeed when we share, understand and learn from all of our partners in order to improve alignment, access, navigation, delivery and engagement. At MCYS, our partners include other ministries and levels of government, stakeholders, communities, and children, youth and families.

What we do:

- Build relationships of mutual understanding and trust
- Integrate and align work with partners to prevent silos, improve productivity and enhance knowledge-sharing
- Leverage the knowledge and experiences of children, youth and their families to inform policy and program development

Outcomes-driven

We foster the best outcomes for children and youth through evidence and data.

By focusing on outcomes, MCYS works across sectors and seeks new and innovative approaches to address the root causes of problems facing young people.

What we do:

- Incorporate the best available research, data and practice knowledge into policy and program development, implementation and evaluation
- Balance high-quality evidence with the need for innovation to experiment with novel approaches
- Design policies, programs and services that address the root causes of problems, rather than simply treating symptoms

Accountable

We plan and act to honour the public's trust and confidence in our work.

By planning for the present and the long-term, exercising fiscally prudent and ethical decision-making, and publicly reporting on our work, MCYS demonstrates its accountability to all Ontarians. We will continue to work to earn and keep the public's trust.

What we do:

- Set measurable goals and monitor progress to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of our services
- Integrate a culture of open data and information-sharing into all of our work

GOALS

In establishing its goals, MCYS must strike a balance between its role as catalyst for the success of all Ontario’s young people, and providing the supports needed by those young people who face barriers. We believe that we have achieved that fine balance, and that as we plan

for the future, the four goals in this plan will drive us to do better for the children and youth of Ontario.

The four goals in *Growing. Together.* do not reflect a change in direction from the ministry’s previous strategic plan – in fact, two of the goals remain the same. Rather, the goals have been refined and updated to reflect our achievements to-date and the changing needs of the province’s children and youth.

NEW GOALS

1

Children and youth are resilient

2

Children and youth have the skills and opportunities needed to shape their own lives

3

Children and youth have a voice

4

Children and youth experience high-quality, responsive services



1

Children and youth are resilient

Resilience is a dynamic process that allows children and youth to adapt to change, take on challenges and embrace new opportunities.

Individual strengths, family and personal connections, and community supports and services come together to help young people adapt and persevere in the face of adversity. MCYS recognizes that every time a young person comes into contact with a program or service, it is an opportunity to foster resilience. We will continue to work together with partners to build the resiliency of Ontario's children and youth.

For example:

Ontario's Youth Action Plan: Youth Outreach Workers

As part of Ontario's Youth Action Plan, the Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) program supports resilience by engaging and supporting youth who face multiple barriers to success and/or are disengaged from their community. YOWs act as pro-social mentors and support youth and their families to better navigate and connect with opportunities and services in their communities. Using an assets-based approach, YOWs help youth identify and articulate their needs, and support, mentor and encourage youth to build resilience and make positive changes in their lives.

For every individual, the ability to adapt to change and to successfully navigate through challenges depends not only on personal strengths, but also learning from and being able to rely on family and personal connections and community supports and services.

Young people are better able to develop resilience if they are physically, mentally, and spiritually well, safe and secure, supported by families, guardians and caring adults with

the skills and resources to help them thrive, and able to form and maintain healthy, close relationships with their peers¹⁵.

As a society, we can't anticipate or eliminate every challenge and difficulty that each child and youth may encounter. What we can and will do is work with those connected to young people's lives to promote wellness and positive development, and help them to manage difficult issues and embrace new opportunities.

15 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2012. "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development." Last modified June 13, 2012. <http://www.ontario.ca/steppingstones>

Health and wellness

Positive physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development provides a strong foundation for a young person to become a contributing member of his or her community. By encouraging and enabling good nutrition and physical activity, and by supporting positive mental health early in life, we can go a long way towards ensuring that young people are resilient and lead healthy, happy and productive lives.

MCYS will continue to work with our partners inside and outside government to foster the well-being of all of Ontario's children and youth. The ministry will address the social determinants of health, promote health throughout the developmental trajectory, and help young people take safe risks and build healthy habits, thereby limiting the challenges they face.

Safety and security

Children and youth who have at least one consistent, supportive, caring adult in their lives have an easier time developing a strong sense of identity, empathizing and regulating their emotions¹⁶. The relationships young people build with adults and peer role models can play an important role in determining their choices in the future.

Everyone who supports young people needs to have the right information and resources to build resilience through all phases of development. MCYS will work to increase knowledge amongst parents, families, caregivers and community partners of ways to support healthy development and positive relationships, and where to seek additional support when it is needed.

FOSTERING RESILIENCE

Fostering resilience takes place across the developmental trajectory. Research suggests three key ways to support resilience in children, youth and families:

- Prevent significant threat – for example, support infant health, reduce bullying, reduce child maltreatment, and build families' skills and capacity.
- Support positive development – for example, promote young people's attachment relationships, development of agency and mastery, problem-solving, and self-regulation.
- Support strengths and protective factors – for example, provide culturally appropriate and accessible supports, and foster the voices of young people¹⁷.

16 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2012. "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development." Last modified June 13, 2012. <http://www.ontario.ca/steppingstones>

17 Reaching IN...Reaching OUT. 2010. "Resilience: Successful navigation through significant threat." Report prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Toronto: The Child & Family Partnership.

2

Children and youth have the skills and opportunities needed to shape their own lives

By supporting educational success and providing the right learning opportunities, MCYS and its partners help children and youth develop the confidence and competencies they need to fully participate at home, at school, and in the community.

Learning and skills development prepare young people to become creative, active and informed citizens, ready to grow, succeed and contribute to society.

For example:

Living and Learning Grant

Following recommendations from the Youth Leaving Care Working Group, and in partnership with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, MCYS launched the Living and Learning Grant (LLG). Youth aged 21-24 years who were formerly in the care of a children's aid society or informal customary care and who are now enrolled in an eligible post-secondary education or training program may receive \$500/month during the school year to support their living expenses. The LLG complements other post-secondary supports for former youth in care, including the Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards and the 100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care program.

Transition to adulthood

MCYS is working collaboratively with the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Education to establish processes that support integrated transition planning for young people with developmental disabilities, including autism. Through integrated transition planning processes, young people will have a single integrated transition plan that will inform educational planning, help the young person transition from secondary school and child-centred services to adulthood, and help parents or guardians and other family members understand and prepare for these transitions.



Children and youth need to be prepared to make decisions about their future, and have the skills, experience and supports to help them achieve it. MCYS will continue to work with partners so that all young people arrive at school ready to learn, have educational experiences that respond to their needs, and see high school graduation as an attainable goal. MCYS will also continue to work with partners so that all young people develop skills for independent living and community participation, have access to skill development and training opportunities, and find opportunities for meaningful employment.

Academic success

A strong education can help young people become successful, confident, creative, active and informed citizens. Supportive learning environments are also linked to student achievement, better paying jobs, and enhanced wellbeing¹⁸.

We will work with our partners throughout the developmental trajectory so that young people have the supports they need to successfully transition through school. This includes

supporting continuity in education for children and youth as they transition through school and between service systems (mental health, youth justice, child welfare and special needs).

Training and employment

Having a job contributes to a young person's sense of identity and wellbeing. Employment is an important venue for young people to build social skills and networks, gain self-efficacy and develop the life skills needed to contribute to society. In this province, we see higher-than-average unemployment and underemployment rates for Ontario's Aboriginal youth, young newcomers to Canada, visible minority youth, youth with special needs, youth leaving care, and those in conflict with the law. Targeted efforts to engage and support these young people to successfully transition to adulthood will equip them with the skills needed for the current and future labour market, and allow them to participate in their communities.

Transition to adulthood for young people with special needs

Making the transition to adulthood is a challenge for many young people. Integrated transition planning helps young people with developmental disabilities prepare and plan for adulthood, including choices about future living arrangements, education, employment, finances and community activities.



18 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2013. "Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed." <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf>.

Through integrated transition planning, young people with developmental disabilities and their families have better access to information about the full range of service and support options, including other community and health services and supports and residential options, improved planning for service continuity at transition and more control over decisions that affect the young person and his or her family. The young person is involved in the planning process and,

as much as possible, decisions about his or her care and services are driven by his or her needs, preferences, interests and strengths.

MCYS will continue to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Education, as well as other ministry partners, to establish processes that support integrated transition planning for young people with special needs.

3

Children and youth have a voice

Giving children and youth a voice in the decisions that affect them enhances policies, programs, and the service system. It also builds young people's confidence and capacity to lead and influence the world around them.

MCYS will continue to work together with partners – including families – so that children and youth have meaningful spaces to voice their needs, concerns, preferences, and priorities.

MCYS will also continue to emphasize fostering the leadership skills of children and youth, and foster opportunities for social inclusion.

Children and youth are experts in their own lives, and have unique insights and experiences to share¹⁹. It is our goal that young people have meaningful and safe opportunities to express their needs, concerns, preferences, and priorities, and that they engage in their communities to inform the decisions that affect them.

Community involvement

Young people who are actively involved in their communities are better prepared to take on leadership roles. We will continue to engage young people and help them develop their identities, improve confidence, and increase their social networks. Increased participation of

19 Lansdown, G. 2005. "Can you hear me?: The rights of young children to participate in decisions affecting them." Bernard van Leer Foundation. <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/can-you-hear-me-right-young-children-participate-decisions-affecting-them>

children and youth – whether directly or through their adult allies – will bring valuable insights and perspectives to guide policy development, program design and evaluation.

Social inclusion

Supporting Ontario’s young people to feel safe, included and accepted contributes to overall community health and safety. We will

continue to support opportunities for all young people to participate fully in their society, regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or potential special needs. We will work to bring down barriers to access, and together with our partners, will provide Ontario’s young people with the responsive and culturally-appropriate supports they need.

For example:

Premier’s Council on Youth Opportunities

The Premier’s Council on Youth Opportunities was created as a permanent advisory body to government on how to improve the design and delivery of government programs and services for youth, to report on specific challenges and to share ideas on how to best support youth. These twenty-five youth and young professionals from a variety of cultures, communities and background are helping to give a voice to youth and inform government initiatives so they reflect the needs of all young people across the province.

Parent and Youth Panel on System Change

As part of the implementation of Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, MCYS launched *Moving on Mental Health: A System that Makes Sense for Children and Youth*. This work to transform the community-based child and youth mental health system has been guided by the feedback and recommendations of the Parent and Youth Panel on System Change. The panel has provided advice on the development and implementation of service principles and family engagement in the service framework for child and youth mental health.



4

Children and youth experience high-quality, responsive services

The best outcomes for children and youth come from services that are accessible, responsive, and embedded in a system that is easy to navigate.

MCYS will work with its partners to provide young people and their families with high-quality services that are responsive, personalized, based on evidence, and grounded in respect and dignity.

For example:

Aboriginal Children and Youth Strategy

MCYS is working with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Aboriginal partners across the province to develop Ontario's first- ever Aboriginal Children and Youth Strategy. The strategy will support and enhance community-driven, culturally appropriate, and culturally based approaches to service design and delivery to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and youth.

Child Welfare Accountability Framework

As part of the Strategy to Further Transform Ontario's Child Welfare System, MCYS has introduced a new Accountability Framework that includes measuring and reporting on outcomes for children and youth. A key part of this framework has been collaboration between the ministry, sector associations, academic experts, child welfare practitioners and Aboriginal partners to collect performance indicators for measuring safety, permanency and wellbeing across all children's aid societies, and to implement public reporting of a subset of these indicators. This work will help support better outcomes for children and youth through a culture of ongoing learning, quality improvement and stronger accountability.

A complicated and confusing service system is a barrier for young people and their families as they try to access the supports they need. In collaboration with our partners, MCYS is building a coordinated service system that is accessible, accountable, reliable, predictable, responsive, and evidence-informed. It will listen to and serve children, youth and their families with courtesy and respect. We will review, evaluate and report on our performance regularly so that resources are managed effectively and efficiently.

MCYS is working with partners across government to make programs and services more connected and easier to access. Ministry staff and local providers continue to work together to find innovative ways to meet the needs of children and families as efficiently and effectively as possible.

First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Aboriginal children, youth and families need services that reflect their cultures and values and respond to their unique challenges and priorities. Recognizing that it is essential for children and youth to develop positive self-identities and pride in themselves and their families, communities, and cultures, MCYS will continue to work closely with Aboriginal partners to enhance community-driven, integrated and culturally appropriate opportunities and supports for children and youth.



ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH & EXCELLENCE

The success of any strategic plan depends on the strength of the organization carrying out that plan. For the first time, the MCYS Strategic Plan includes a specific focus on organizational health and excellence.

The following foundations of organizational health and excellence are intended to endure over the long term and to guide the actions, decisions and behaviour of every employee. They are aspirational, but by working together we believe they are also achievable.





FOUNDATION 1:

Healthy, Skilled & Inspired Employees

At MCYS, we are committed to being a diverse and inclusive organization, where employees are motivated to make a difference and inspired to develop and apply their skills and knowledge every day. Employees are also supported to be healthy, mentally well, and have the flexibility to develop and maintain a positive work-life balance.

An effective learning and development strategy for the ministry, combined with individual learning and development plans, provides employees with the advanced skills and knowledge to deliver on the ministry's priorities. It also fosters overall professional growth and career progression.

We recognize the passion and commitment of every MCYS employee for improving the outcomes of children, youth and families in Ontario. These contributions are valued, and employees are supported to understand how their work is connected to the success of the organization.



FOUNDATION 2:

Knowledge & Information Management

At MCYS, everyone has a role to play in knowledge and information management. We gather, develop, analyze, share, and effectively use ministry and global knowledge to drive positive outcomes for children and youth.

MCYS works towards an integrated approach to managing, protecting, improving, and sharing ministry data and information. Through this approach, the best available information and evidence – including data, research, performance measurement and practice wisdom – are mobilized into meaningful actions and decisions to support children and youth.

This approach also gives our partners, our clients, and ourselves confidence in the quality of our work.



FOUNDATION 3:

System Stewardship & Partnership

Stewardship is the careful management of something entrusted to one's care. MCYS and its employees perform their duties remembering that they are guardians of the public's trust, and stewards of the resources invested to support and serve all of Ontario's children and youth. They do this by working with, and through, partners to establish a system of services and supports for Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth. This is a role the ministry takes seriously.

At MCYS, strong partnerships are also an important part of our mandate to provide leadership across the government and the children and youth sector. MCYS will continue to pursue promising relationships that respond to the complex developmental needs of children and youth, and achieve better outcomes and experiences for all young people.

By embracing the roles of steward and partner, MCYS and its employees provide leadership for a high-quality and cost-effective service system, dedicated to continuous system improvement. Through insight from local communities and accountability tools for transfer payment oversight (e.g., performance indicators) the ministry is able to support public confidence, and achieve the best outcomes for children and youth.



FOUNDATION 4:

Robust Internal Controls & Resource Oversight

At MCYS, we strive for the alignment of assets and resources with strategic goals, so that systems and processes are working effectively, and goals can be met. In this context, robust controls and resource oversight are essential for the ministry's ability to deliver the best outcomes for children and youth through smart investment of limited resources.

Accountability is also important for the use of public resources, whether this is internal to MCYS or by organizations delivering services on the ministry's behalf. Aligning investments with government priorities, establishing clear

expectations of performance, and monitoring and reporting on results will ensure the ministry and service system are achieving the best outcomes for children and youth in Ontario.



FOUNDATION 5: **Leadership & Innovation at All Levels**

At MCYS, we are all committed and passionate leaders who have a role to play in facilitating, reinforcing, and spearheading change for the better.

Leadership at all levels is possible when an organization's values are deeply held by all, and the priorities and risks are clearly understood. A common understanding and approach empowers MCYS employees to be leaders, innovate, and take action for the benefit of children, youth and families.

Leadership is not reserved to a function or a job title. At MCYS, outstanding leaders build relationships based on trust by combining integrity, inclusion in decision-making, and a willingness to nurture leadership in others. MCYS employees are encouraged to seek opportunities to demonstrate leadership with their peers, managers, and partners.

We know this new strategic plan is ambitious. To achieve success over the next five years, MCYS will need to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of its internal operations.

By thoughtfully working towards organizational excellence, MCYS is committed to building a strong and sustainable foundation to achieve our vision of an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.

MCYS will develop annual Operational Plans to identify and track the progress of key activities in support of the ministry's goals. The next Operational Plan (2014-2015) will introduce key indicators to monitor success in achieving the goals of *Growing. Together*. Subsequent Operational Plans will report on these indicators and demonstrate the improvement that MCYS is making in child, youth and family outcomes.

CONCLUSION

At MCYS, our commitment is to the success of all of Ontario's children and youth. As an organization, we are proud of the contributions we have made towards achieving this vision. But there is more work ahead of us.

The ministry's new plan will help us to stay focused on what matters most for young people, and be nimble enough to respond as the world around us changes.

Growing Together is being released at a time when governments everywhere are contending with constraints on new spending and the enduring need for high-quality public services. MCYS is confident it can meet these challenges by focusing on innovation and creativity, and rethinking how government and communities can work together in a complex operational environment to achieve the best for Ontario's young people.

To keep us on track for success, the goals we have set out in this new plan will be actively implemented, evaluated and measured. MCYS will develop and update an operating plan to identify and track the activities underway that relate

to each goal. An evaluation framework and related indicators will also help us to monitor our progress.

We look forward with optimism to another five years of growing and working together for the young people of Ontario. We invite all those who work with and care for children and youth to join us in this important work.



APPENDIX: KEY CONCEPTS

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Vision

Communicates what an organization wants to see in the world; its desired future state. For employees, a vision statement gives direction about what they are working towards and inspires them to give their best. The vision statement also communicates to others what the organization's central focus is.

Mission

Defines an organization's fundamental purpose and its key approaches to achieving its vision. The prime function of a mission statement is to guide internal planning.

Principles

Reflect what an organization values most, provide a guideline for how the organization will operate, and define how staff are expected to carry out their day-to-day work.

Goals

State the objectives that an organization works to achieve. Goals are meant to focus the efforts and activities of the organization towards defined objectives that will help to fulfil its vision.

Foundations of Organizational Health and Excellence

Support the underlying characteristics that make an organization successful. An excellent organization is innovative, effective, efficient, continually improving, and gets the results it strives for. Strong organizations are often characterized as healthy, inclusive, sustainable, and responsible.

KEY CONCEPTS

Asset-Based View of [Children and] Youth

The social, emotional, physical and cognitive competencies, along with the individual "self" or "spirit" that young people develop prepare them for future wellbeing. We need to nurture these assets to ensure our collective success in the future²⁰.

20 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2012. "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development." Last modified June 13, 2012. <http://www.ontario.ca/steppingstones>.

Culturally Appropriate

Research indicates that creating an environment that is safe and accepting and that allows youth to recognize their cultural strengths and differences supports positive outcomes²¹. Ontario's programs, services, communities and institutions have an opportunity to support a sense of belonging by developing specific social inclusion and diversity policies for youth who are most at-risk. For example, programs and services for Aboriginal youth that are culturally based are important to help youth build strong self-identities. Having decision-makers and front-line workers who reflect diverse populations can provide better opportunities to design and deliver programs that are relevant to young people.

Equity

Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences that are inherent within groups of individuals for achieving substantive equality in all aspects of an individual's life.

Resilience

Resilience is successful navigation through significant threat, within the context of individual/cultural definitions and lived experience, and through the interplay of all levels of the individual and the environment, including assets, vulnerabilities, and the threat itself²².

Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed

A framework to help guide, focus and maximize the collaborative actions that support young people. At its core is a set of 20 outcomes that can help service providers, foundations, community groups, governments, young leaders and families to better align their work with what research and youth themselves say is important for their success. It is a basis for sustained, collective action in support of Ontario's young people.

Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings

An initiative that emerged from the work of the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, a panel of professionals from the early childhood education and the formal education sectors in Ontario. It describes how young children learn and develop, and provides a guide for curriculum in Ontario's early childhood settings.

21 Collaborative community Health Research Centre, University of Victoria. 2002. "Research Review of Best Practices for Provision of Youth Services." http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/pdf/best_practices_provision_of_youth_services.pdf.

22 Reaching IN...Reaching OUT. 2010. "Resilience: Successful navigation through significant threat." Report prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Toronto: The Child & Family Partnership.

KEY CONCEPTS *continued*

SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Some specific populations may be at risk of poorer life outcomes, and may benefit from targeted supports. MCYS strives to recognize and respond to these subpopulations, including²³:

Aboriginal children and youth

First Nations young people living on-and off-reserve, Métis, Inuit, and urban Aboriginal populations represent the largest and fastest growing child and youth population in Canada. Some Aboriginal youth and their families face complex challenges relating to issues such as poverty, housing, and barriers to education and employment. Many also face social issues often resulting from inter-generational effects of residential schools, such as cultural disconnection, mental health issues and addictions, and parenting challenges. Services and programs should be culturally based and holistic in approach to ensure that these children, youth and families are supported and connected.

Francophone children and youth

Young francophones have expressed that they find it challenging to speak French in many situations and when accessing services. Maintaining a francophone identity can be especially challenging when they leave for school or enter the workforce.

Children and youth living in poverty

Young people living in poverty are at an increased risk of a wide range of physical, behavioural, and emotional problems. In a time when most young people are acquiring the skills and experiences needed for a healthy and stable future, a child or youth living in poverty is focused on meeting their day-to-day needs.

Children and youth in and leaving care

Children and youth in, and leaving, the care of Children's Aid Societies face more challenges in reaching the milestones of positive development, including completing education and gaining employment. Youth in and from care are over-represented in the

23 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2012. "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development." Last modified June 13, 2012. <http://www.ontario.ca/steppingstones>.

youth justice system and more likely to experience homelessness. Other vulnerable groups are also often over-represented in the child welfare system. Aboriginal children and youth in care often face additional challenges, and are more likely to come into contact with the child welfare system in the first place.²⁴

Children and youth living in rural and remote communities

Children and youth in rural and remote parts of Ontario often face difficulties in accessing services, education, training and activities such as recreation due to distance and limited public transportation options. In addition, they may face the challenging decision to leave home and move to more urban areas to seek opportunities for school and work.

Children and youth with special needs

Many young people in Ontario live with special needs – including those with a physical or developmental disability, mental health needs, chronic conditions, a learning disability, specific disorders such as autism spectrum disorder, difficulty seeing, hearing or speaking, and with multiple disabilities. These children and youth often face barriers to accessibility and social inclusion. This contributes to poorer outcomes such as higher incidences of abuse, living in poor housing conditions or below the poverty line, being bullied, and being unemployed or underemployed. Timely and effective services can help these young people to participate fully at home, at school, and in the community.

LGBTQ youth

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer young people have important perspectives to offer their communities. But they are more likely to experience discrimination, verbal assault and physical violence than their peers. This often leads to additional challenges with mental health, substance abuse and homelessness.

Newcomer children and youth

The needs and life experiences of newcomer, refugee and first generation youth are unique as they adapt to a new culture and environment in Canada. Those new to Canada may speak English or French as a second language, may have past experiences with trauma, and may have extra responsibilities at home as they are often relied on to support their parents in navigating systems and services in their communities.

24 Ministry of Children and Youth Services. 2013. “Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario’s Child Welfare System: Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group.” <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/childrensaidthechildrensaidsocieties/reports/youthleavingcare.aspx>.

KEY CONCEPTS *continued*

Racialized children and youth

Racialized young people face challenges with marginalization, racism, employment barriers, education setbacks, and social and cultural isolation that can negatively impact development and lead to disengagement and mistrust of public institutions. Addressing racism and improving access to culturally-appropriate services and programs can often provide support to these youth.

Youth in conflict with the law

Youth in conflict with the law come from many different backgrounds. However, some young people – particularly Aboriginal, and racialized youth – face challenges and barriers that may increase their risk of entering the youth justice system. Integration of youth justice within the broader children and youth services system provides opportunities for healthy engagement and inclusion, prevention and early intervention, responsiveness to needs associated with the offending behaviour, building resilience and better choices for youth, and addressing the needs and risks of specific populations.



Growing. Together.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services
2013-2018 Strategic Plan

