

Things You Deserve In Your Lives

I am so pleased that May 23–29, 2011 has been declared “B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week.” It gives us all the opportunity to reflect on the lives, the hopes and the futures of the more than 8,300 children and youth in B.C. who are in the care of government.

To the girls, boys, and youth in care, it’s inspiring and to your immense credit that you have stayed strong through the challenges in your lives. Many of you have survived traumatic or abusive situations, or family upheaval or tragedies. And yet so many of you are rising above, remaining remarkably resilient with your eyes firmly focused on the better path ahead.

As your Representative, I have so many hopes and wishes for all of you. But hopes and aspirations are not enough – I give a firm commitment to you to continue to work hard to ensure that the system and services available to you are improved. But it’s a big and complex system, and one of the most difficult aspects of being in government care can be not knowing what is going to happen to you. Uncertainty and confusion can leave you feeling scared and alone. There are ways that you and the people in your lives can help make this better. You can give yourself tools to combat the uncertainty and fear. Here are six things you all deserve in your lives...



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1 Respect For Your Rights

Rights tell you what you are entitled to, so you should have a good idea of what your rights are. There’s an easy way to learn more about your rights – just go to our youth website at www.talktotherep.ca, and click on the “rights of children and youth in care” box. It’s got some great info on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and on your rights under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Knowing and understanding your rights will help you get the fair treatment you deserve.

2 Education

Education isn’t just a noble endeavour – a good education is the great equalizer, and it is your right to have one. This is your surest way to a better future. Education is the key to so many successes, whether graduating from high school or going on to learning a trade or post-secondary education. We know that a solid education is closely tied to future employment and your ability to build a better life. Through education, almost anyone from the humblest of backgrounds can transform their destiny. Don’t pass up this greatest of opportunities. With the right teachers and fellow students, the education system can also be a safe haven that helps you grow into being a better person – seek out role models, friends and school activities that will help you lift yourself up to greater heights.

3 Stability

You all need stability in your foster home or other placements – it’s not fair to constantly move kids around, and multiple placements can leave you with feelings of uncertainty, rejection and anger. In a good care arrangement, you’ll feel safe, accepted, understood, wanted and treated in the same way as other children. Someone will care about your emotions and your practical needs, and you’ll develop trust and respect for and from those you live with. None of these things happen overnight, which is why stability in your placements is so important in your life. If you think this is missing from your life, talk to your social worker or another adult who can help you figure out some ways to make this happen.

4 Strong Adults

You need and deserve caring adults in your lives who will be good role models and help you on your better path. An unconditionally supportive adult, for example a foster parent, a teacher, or a relative, can make all the difference in the world to you. Adults that show you love, patience, and kindness can make wherever you're living feel like a real home to you. You deserve an adult that can help you learn responsibility, and that can offer you a vision of a brighter future, someone who will listen to you and explain things in a way that you can understand. If you don't have an adult like that in your life – seek one out. They are out there, and they will believe in you and care about your future, by helping you feel confident and valued. Find them, if they haven't found you yet.

5 Strength

Every one of you has it within you to overcome the difficulties you have been through, and the ones that may lie ahead. I ask you to focus on strengthening those traits that already live within you: your independence and persistence, your courage to ask for help, your ability to make things change for the better. Despite the adversity you may have been through, you can find the better life that lies ahead for you.

6 Courage To Be Different

Many of your lives have been thrown into chaos by the actions of adults who should have been protecting and supporting you. Fortunately and humbling for us all is the fact that this upheaval often plants the seeds of determination in youth in care to be different from abusive or addictive adults. Recognize within yourselves the need and the desire to be different from those who may have done you harm. Want a better life for yourselves, want more to life than what you may have seen around you, and know that you deserve it. In the child-serving system, we often see individuals who are driven to give back and work to create meaningful change in the lives of others who may follow in government care. Have the courage to want better, for yourselves and for others.

To each and every one of you, please know that the things you have done or the things that were done to you do not have to shape who you will become. What matters is what you do and think tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that. Reflect on these six things in terms of your life, and if something is missing, go after it with the determination and the strength that has brought you this far.

Advocating on your behalf is one of the most important functions of my Office. More than 6,200 advocacy cases relating to children and youth in B.C. have been opened, and through the successes and the challenges, we have learned so much and have helped improve the situations of many. If you're in care or receiving government services, I encourage you to contact our advocates if there's something we can help you with or questions we can answer. It's all private and confidential and unless we have to take immediate action to help you get out of a dangerous situation, no one will tell your foster parents, your caseworker or anyone else that you called, unless you give us permission. All our contact info is on our website – www.talktotherep.ca.

By working together with foster parents, your school, your family and social workers, we can be the support team that you, the children and youth in care, deserve. There may be times you feel like you're all alone. But you're not. This support team can help provide the nourishment – physical, emotional and cultural – you need. We can help give you shelter from the harshness of the world that too often defines your histories. But while we can provide these things, the greatest gift you can give yourselves and those who have helped you is to become your own champion – with your voice, your choices, your strength, and your courage.