

Pushed, Dropped, or Fleeing from Care: The Narratives and Adulthood of Black Youth Who Have Aged out of Ontario's Child Welfare System



JUST SIX
QUESTIONS
RESEARCH
SUMMARY

“...youth aging out of care are often unsupported and experience vulnerability, isolation, a unpredictability and are left out of decision making... Although some youth in care look forward to the increased autonomy of independence, many of these youth continue to face hardships in several domains in their life well after their transition... This may be particularly heightened for Black youth transitioning to independence whose care experience may be impacted by structural inequalities and anti-Black racism” (p. 3).

1. WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Due to racism and systemic inequities, Black youth are more likely to be involved in the child welfare system compared to their white counterparts. This research acknowledges the disparities faced by Black youth transitioning from Out of Home Care to independence, including lack of support, exclusion from decision making, loneliness, and vulnerability towards an uncertain future. Out of Home Care (OOHC) involves the removal of a child or youth from their home due to abuse and neglect, and their placement into residential, foster, kinship or community care. The study highlights the significant challenges Black youth face due to hardships within the child welfare system and systemic anti-Black racism.

Researchers explored the following questions:

- What is the process for Black youth who transition out of the Ontario child welfare system?
- Are Black youth adequately supported in transitioning into independence?
- What are some of the challenges that arise for Black youth living independently?

2. WHERE DID THE RESEARCH TAKE PLACE?

This research took place in Ontario; specifically, participants were recruited from across the Greater Toronto Area.

3. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about Black Caribbean (Jamaican, Trinidadian, Guyanese, St. Lucian, and St. Vincentian) youth, and was conducted with 27 participants between the ages of 16 to 26. Seventeen participants identified as female, 10 participants identified as male, and seven participants identified as members of the LGBT2SQ+ community. All of these youth had experience in maneuvering through Ontario's child welfare system.

4. HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE?

Researchers used two sampling approaches: The first was a **purposeful sampling** method (the researchers used their social and professional networks), and the second was **snowball sampling** (participants recruited others through their networks). Participants all had lived experience with going through OOHC.

To collect data, researchers used a **narrative inquiry** approach that predominately focused on storytelling using an informal style of one-on-one interviewing. This approach allowed for deeper connection with the stories being told and helped to mitigate power imbalances between the researcher and the participant. Participants could also choose the location for their interview to maximize their comfort. All interviews were **recorded** and **transcribed** (written out word-for-word).

Software was used to assist with managing the data, and a **coding process** was used for organizing the data and identifying common narratives. The author listened to the audio recordings during the coding process to get a deeper understanding of the conversations with participants.

5. WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS?

The research identified three narratives (p. 10):

i. The Need for Finances and Financial Literacy:

Youth transitioning out of care need to be supported in understanding how much things cost and how much money it takes to survive. Some participants found that workers were focused on goals that were less relevant to their independence; for example, the reasons why participants were living in a group home. Although some financial literacy courses were offered, many participants found that these courses focused on what to avoid rather than on how to manage their daily financial needs.

ii. Narratives of 'Aging Out' (Being Too Old to Access the Supports of the Child Welfare System):

Many youth who were living in child welfare found that they were not properly informed about or prepared for living independently. Many Black youth stated that this process was challenging because there was a lack of support for their transition out of care. In particular, one participant explained that the lack of transitional support made him feel as though he were being 'dropped' from the system or had to 'flee'.

iii. The Challenges of Navigating Funding:

Unfortunately, many Black youth often face challenges once the child welfare system no longer provides assistance. These challenges include precarious living circumstances and income discrimination. Additionally, many youth found it challenging to understand the eligibility for continued care and support, such as through social assistance (Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program).

6. WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER FOR YOUTH WORK?

This research is crucial because Black youth are at a higher risk of experiencing unpredictability and loss, making their transition to independence more difficult. The placement of Black youth in predominantly white homes, which often overlook their cultural needs, further affects their sense of self and identity. Despite some existing support programs, many Black youth feel that the level of support provided is insufficient to meet their basic needs.

Youth who are placed in the child welfare system are put there to be protected from experiencing harm. Yet these same youth are moving to independence without the critical support and resources they need to be successful. This research provides a deeper understanding for youth workers on the challenges that Black youth face when transitioning to independence from the child welfare system, and offers strategies to better support these youth:

- a) Ensure that youth have a practical understanding of financial competency and are aware of funding assets and supports.
- b) Offer Black youth an intentional transition plan from the start of their care.
- c) Give youth monetary and extended social support after they 'age out' of care.
- d) Provide youth with information about their housing and tenant rights.
- e) Stress the importance of continuing connections with family, whenever possible.

Black youth who receive these necessary supports will be more likely to succeed in life. It is vital to support Black youth as they navigate a society embedded with white supremacy, and where discrimination and racism against Black people is prevalent.

- 🔍 Edwards, T., Chowdhury, R., Laylor, A., Parada, H., & King, B. (2023). [Pushed, dropped, or fleeing from care: The narratives and adultification of Black youth who have aged out of Ontario's child welfare system.](#) *Child & Youth Services.*