

Rights & Responsibilities



**A Handbook
for Youth in Care**

Youth In Care

Youth are people, too
Others are just the same as you
Use what you've been taught wisely
Teens aren't such bad people
Happiness can bring no harm

Include not only yourself in your future plans
Not only are you good but you're as good
as anyone else

Care and treat others as you wish
to be treated

Allow time to heal from the wrongdoings
of the past

Remember others care about you
Everyone is their own person, allow them
to be who they are!

— Amanda

Introduction

This handbook is a guide for young people living in the care of the Ministry of Social Services. It was originally written for young people entering care for the first time, as well as youth already in care. We hope that you will find the information helpful. The handbook is intended to briefly answer some of the questions commonly asked by young people in care.

Every situation is unique and there is no right or wrong way to feel about being in care. As a young person in care, we encourage you to talk with your worker about your own personal situation.

This handbook also outlines the rights and responsibilities you have while in care.

We are grateful to the many youth around the province who volunteered to read the original drafts and early editions of the handbook and send us their comments and suggestions. We would specifically like to thank the members of the Moose Jaw and Saskatoon Youth in Care Network groups. We would also like to thank Richard, Amanda, and Phoebe for their poetry. Thanks also to the Children's Advocate, the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network and the Ministry of Social Services staff for reading and commenting on the handbook in its draft stages.

What does it mean to be “in care”?

In care means you are living away from home in a place arranged by your worker, under some kind of relationship with the Ministry of Social Services. In care generally refers to child welfare services for young people in need of protection. These young persons are in the care of the Minister of Social Services and have been placed in an out-of-home care resource as authorized by *The Child and Family Services Act*.

Your worker and either your parents or a judge determined that you needed to live apart for a period of time.

You will see the word “worker” frequently in this handbook. When a young person is in the care of the Minister, the Ministry of Social Services is responsible for the young person’s basic, developmental and special needs. This responsibility includes not only meeting immediate needs such as safety, food, clothing and a safe place to live, but also planning for the young person’s future. Every effort is made to involve in planning all individuals who have a significant role in that young person’s life. Think of your worker as the Ministry staff person assigned to work with you and who is responsible for carrying out these many tasks and activities.

What is legal status?

There are many different types of relationships that a young person can have with the Ministry of Social Services, but being in care usually has to do with legal status. Legal status is the authority under which you are in care. There are several different kinds of legal status. *The Child and Family Services Act* is the legislation under which children and young people come into care in Saskatchewan.

How do I find out what my legal status is?

Your worker can explain what your legal status is and what it means to you.

Who makes the decisions about my legal status?

In order for a young person and family to receive help from the Ministry of Social Services, a child must first be identified as in need of protection as defined by *The Child and Family Services Act*. Sometimes young people are “apprehended”. Although this does not really mean you are in care, it does mean that you have been temporarily removed from the care of your parents, because of concerns for your safety.

The worker may then sign an agreement with the parents or apply to Court for an order. This agreement or order describes the child's legal status. There are several different agreements or orders that can be put in place depending on the needs of the child and his or her family.

In those situations, when a worker applies to Court, legal status is decided in a Family Court hearing. Your worker can explain what a Family Court hearing is and how the decision about status is made there. Basically, a judge will decide whether you should be in care or not, and under what legal status.

Your worker and your parents may make an agreement for you to be in care under Section 9 of *The Child and Family Services Act*. Your status is called "Section 9". If you are 12 or older, you should be asked to sign the Section 9 agreement, along with your parents.

If you are at least 16 years of age, you may have signed an agreement called a "Section 10" for your own care.

Do I get a chance to say what I think should happen to me?

You can expect to have your wishes listened to and considered by those making the decisions. If you want to tell the judge what you think would be best for you, tell your worker you want to have the opportunity to speak in Court.

What kinds of decisions can the judge make about me?

Although a judge has many legal options, there are three different Orders that the judge can make. They are temporary wardship, permanent wardship and long-term wardship.

Temporary wardship is when the Family Court judge decides that a child or youth needs to live away from home for up to six months. Temporary wardship can be extended. However, your worker does need to know that this is in your best interest. You need to know where you are going to be living and with whom you are going to be living permanently. Although your worker has responsibility to plan for your immediate needs, your worker will be planning for your permanency needs if you are still in temporary care after 12 months.

Permanent wardship is when the judge decides that the parent connection should be ended because the parent is unwilling or unable to care for a child or youth. This order is usually made for children 12 years of age and under. Young children are usually registered for adoption, but there are situations when older youth want to be adopted, especially if it is by someone they know or already have a connection with.

Long-term wardship may be ordered when a parent is able to remain involved in some ways in planning for their child's future, but is not able to provide the care and supervision needed. The young person is cared for by the Ministry of Social Services but the parent is still very involved. Young people in care through a long-term wardship order cannot be registered for adoption. They are often over 12 years of age.

Where will I live while in care?

There are several places where children or young people in care might live. Your worker will discuss with you, and possibly with your family, what type of home is best for you.

The following describes some of the places where you may live, while in care:

A foster home is an approved family home in the community that provides care for children and youth who must be away from their own families.

A therapeutic or treatment foster home is a family home which provides treatment services to help the young persons living there deal with some of their fears, issues and behaviours that are causing them problems.

A group home is a home where several youth live together. Group home staff or “house parents” provide supervision, guidance and care.

There are also staffed residential resources including Dales House in Regina, Red Willow Centre in Saskatoon, or PAGC – Child Care and Education Centre in Prince Albert.

Depending on where you live in Saskatchewan, there are peer homes, where young people have some input into the rules, and are supported and guided by a mentor in the home.

You may want to discuss the possibility of living with other people who are important to you, such as extended family or friends of your family. If you are First Nations, there may be someone of importance to you from your Band.

As you near 16 years of age, you may want to consider other kinds of living arrangements. Discuss this with your worker, since they can tell you what all the options are.

How long will I be in care?

This depends upon the circumstances in your family and the reason you are in care.

Your worker is the best person to explain the situation and how it is likely to affect you. Being in long-term or permanent care can mean that you are in care until you are either 18 years old, adopted, or until a Family Court judge orders differently.

If you are attending school beyond age 18, or are in need of or want training, support and the assistance from the Ministry of Social Services, you can sign an agreement called a Section 56. A Section 56 agreement, commonly referred to as an “extension of care or supports agreement”, is available to you between the ages of 18 to 21. All youth in long-term or permanent care that approach their 18th birthday should be informed, in writing, of the extended care agreement.

A Section 56 can help support you to complete high school, attend university or trade school, receive supports/ courses for entering into the workforce, etc. Make sure to talk to your worker to find out what can be covered and what is available under a Section 56 agreement. You will be required to develop a plan to achieve the goals you set out to accomplish while on a Section 56. This agreement does not mean you are in care, but will allow the Ministry to continue to provide services until you turn 21 years old.

Can I talk to my parents? How about my brothers and sisters?

Contact with all your family members is encouraged unless there is reason why not to have contact. This generally has to do with your safety. If you are not being allowed contact with your family, talk to your worker.

What if calling my family is long distance?

The Ministry of Social Services will pay for some long distance calls. Ask your worker how often you can phone your family. If your parents agree to pay for the calls, check with them to find out the best time to call.

Must I have contact with my family?

No. If you don't want to have contact with your family, be sure to tell your worker. Your wishes will be respected. If you change your mind later, contact can begin at that time. Generally, contact with family members is important so that you can see how everyone is doing, and to let your family know how you're doing. Even if you are feeling angry with your parents, or with brothers and sisters, it's good to keep in touch — they are your family and will always be a part of your life, even if you do not return home to live.

Visits with family members are a chance for you to see what changes your parents and others are making, and to talk about and demonstrate the changes you have made for yourself.

What about contact with other relatives and friends?

Contact with friends and other family members is okay unless there is a reason not to have contact with a certain person. Talk with your worker about the people you want to have contact with, and make a list of them.

Untitled

thank you for loving me
thank you for hearing me
thank you for seeing me

thank you for each day
and thank you for the words you say

thank you for everything you do
i wouldn't be here if it weren't for you

i never met anyone who gave a damn
about the true person that i am

so in the end i say to you
Thank You for everything you do

— Phoebe

SCHOOL

A place to grow
both personally and intellectually
by other's advice
in order to learn
the values of which
to try and live your life
to your fullest potential.

— Richard

Contacts

Have your worker help you fill-in the names and phone numbers for people that you may need to call.

| Organization | Name | Telephone |
|--|------|----------------|
| Ministry Worker assigned to me. <i>Make sure to ask your worker for the next 3 phone numbers!</i> | | |
| Unit Supervisor | | |
| Area Service Manager | | |
| Regional Manager | | |
| OTHERS (Legal Aid, Foster Parents, etc.) | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| Children's Advocate | | 1-800-322-7221 |
| Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network | | 1-888-528-8061 |
| Kid's Help Phone | | 1-800-668-6868 |



On the web

Ministry of Social Services
www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca

Saskatchewan Children's Advocate
www.saskcao.ca

Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network
www.syiccn.ca

National Youth in Care Network
www.youthincare.ca

Saskatchewan Foster Families Association
www.sffa.sk.ca

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm

Contacts

Minister of Social Services

Room 346, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3
Phone: 306-787-3661



On the Web: Ministry of Social Services
www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca

Another good person to contact with any concerns is the Children's Advocate. Call 1-800-322-7221. You can also write to the Children's Advocate. The address is:

Children's Advocate

315 – 25th Street East
Saskatoon, SK S7K 2H6

On the Web: Saskatchewan Children's Advocate
www.saskcao.ca

You may also want to discuss your situation with your local Youth in Care and Custody Network, or contact the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network office. Call the toll-free Youth Line at 1-888-528-8061. You can also write to the SYICCN. The address is:

Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network Inc.

Macro Business Place
205A – 2505 11th Avenue
Regina, SK S4P 0K6

On the Web: Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network Inc.
www.syiccn.ca

What is a plan of care?

Shortly after, or just before you come into the care of the Ministry of Social Services, you, your parents, your worker, and other people important in your life meet to discuss a plan of care. If your worker does not bring up this topic soon after you come into care, feel free to ask about it.

The plan of care should include what is expected of everyone important in your life. It should also include some time to make any changes that might be necessary. In other words, “who is going to do what” and “by when do they have to do it (a date)” and “what are the signs that the changes have been made.”

What is in my file?

There is information in your file about you and your family. You can ask your worker to go over your file with you and give you personal information about yourself. You are entitled to your own information.

What if I think something in my file is wrong?

There are usually two sides to every story. Tell your worker that you do not agree with the information in your file. You can ask your worker to put a note you have written in your file describing what you do not agree with and why you disagree.

What kinds of things can I discuss with my worker?

If you have questions about any of the following topics, talk with your worker. He/she can help:

- sexuality
- pregnancy
- drugs and alcohol
- spending money
- privacy
- school
- special activities (hockey, music, gymnastics, etc.)
- getting a driver's licence
- getting a part-time job
- getting a social insurance number
- any special needs

What is the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network?

The SYICCN is a non-profit organization that advocates and supports youth, aged 14-24, in or from foster care/young offender systems. Located in Regina, the SYICCN is mandated to help set up local "networks" throughout Saskatchewan and develop strategies that empower youth in and from the system.

At a deeper level, the SYICCN mandate sees to it that youth in care and/or custody are able to find their voices within the system(s), and to encourage them to speak out on issues and services in the system based on their own experiences. The SYICCN strives to offer services to all of Saskatchewan's youth in care and/or custody by working closely with regional offices of the Ministry of Social Services, the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, the Children's Advocate office and many other youth friendly agencies. Many of our adult supporters come from these professions. Most of all we are a "by youth, for youth" organization. All of our members, staff, and some of our volunteers are people who are currently in or have had experience with child welfare, foster care, and young offender systems.

Local networks are where the "stuff" goes down! Local networks get together at different times throughout the year. This could be as often as every week to as little as once a month, depending on what the youth participants decide and how much support is offered through the region they reside in. Local networks are youth-run, with the help of excellent adult support people! Each network's activities vary as it is up to the participants to decide what they want to do. The following communities have local youth networks in their area:

- Regina
- Weyburn/Estevan
- Prince Albert
- Saskatoon
- Moose Jaw
- Lloydminster
- Melfort/Nipawin
- Meadow Lake
- Yorkton

For more information on local youth networks in Saskatchewan or how to start one in your area, please contact the SYICCN office 1-888-528-8061.

The SYICCN also encourages young people to check out Youth in Care Canada, formerly named the National Youth in Care Network for additional information and resources. Youth in Care Canada is like a parent organization for the provincial networks. They have many publications and resources that may be of interest to youth. Check out their website at www.youthincare.ca

Rights & Responsibilities of Young People in Care

You have the **right** to know what your rights and responsibilities are.

It's your **responsibility** to learn about these rights, and to be sure you understand them. If you are not certain what your rights are, how will you know if they are being violated? For more information on where to learn about your rights please refer to pages 19 and 20.

You have the **right** to expect to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is your **responsibility** to treat others with dignity and respect.

You have the **right** to be heard.

It is your **responsibility** to listen to others.

You have the **right** to participate in your local youth in care network.

You have the **right** to be included and involved in all decisions that affect your life. You have the **right** to a plan of care that meets your needs. The Ministry of Social Services must have a plan for your care. This means:

- You have the **right** to be involved in the planning process; you have the **right** to know the plan and to see it.
- You have the **right** to express your opinions and ideas about your care and treatment.
- You have the **right** to be informed of, and involved in, decisions about your guardianship, custody and legal status.

You are **responsible** for talking with your worker about your needs and concerns or if there is something you are having a problem with, or disagree with in your care plan.

You are **responsible** for telling your worker what you would like to do after you turn 18. You may receive financial support, allowing you to continue your education or train for a job.

You have the **right** to as much stability as possible, and to express your opinion about where you live.

You are **responsible** for respecting the rules of your placement, provided they don't violate your rights. This might mean sharing household duties, or telling your foster parents or caregivers when you are going to be late. If you feel these rules violate your rights, you are responsible for speaking to your worker and caregivers or foster parents.

You have the **right** to reasonable privacy and possession of personal property. Specifically you have the **right** to:

- speak in private with family, extended family (kin) and friends (if you wish to, and it is safe)
- speak in private with your worker
- speak in private with a lawyer, the police, the Children's Advocate, etc.
- receive and send mail privately
- have a personal place for your belongings

You are **responsible** for respecting the rights, privacy, property and special needs of other residents, staff, foster parents and neighbours. You must ensure that your belongings do not include anything illegal, and do not violate the safety of yourself or others. Also, your relationships should not threaten your own safety, or that of others.

You have the **right** to discuss your rights and choices with your worker.

It is your **worker's responsibility** to:

- treat you with respect
- make sure you know your rights
- listen when you have concerns
- make sure you are aware of choices and options
- involve you in your plan of care
- provide you with information on services available from the Ministry of Social Services and in the community
- make sure you know how to call a worker 24 hours a day (note that it won't necessarily be your own worker and that some communities have emergency duty workers or Mobile Crisis agencies)

- make sure you know you can ask for a different worker (note that this isn't always possible)
- make sure you know you can ask to be moved from where you are living (note that this isn't always possible)
- make sure you know you can contact the worker's supervisor and others if you have a complaint or disagreement. Make sure you know the Ministry of Social Services appeal or conflict resolution processes.
- make sure you are informed about and know how to call the Kid's Help Phone, the Children's Advocate, your MLA or MP, other people who can help, and your local or provincial Youth in Care and Custody Network.

You are **responsible** for asking questions if you are unsure of something or need advice.

You have the **right** to live in a safe, caring, secure, nurturing environment, with adequate food, clothing, shelter, spending allowance and medical and dental treatment.

You are **responsible** for showing up for, and taking part in, meetings that are necessary to fulfill your plan of care. These can include medical and dental appointments, or meetings with your worker or community youth officer.

You have the **right** to know why you came into care and to personal information about yourself and your family that is in your file. This includes the right to comment about what is in your file, and have your comments written down in your file.

You are **responsible** for ensuring that you understand why you came into care and knowing what personal information about yourself and your family is in your file.

You have the **right** to be free from and protected from mental, physical and sexual abuse. This includes the **right** not to be spanked, hit, locked up, or deprived of your basic needs.

If you have been abused, you have the **right** to be given the support you need.

You are **responsible** for telling someone if you have been abused.

You are also **responsible** for ensuring that your behaviour does not violate the rights of others.

You have the **right** to have your religious, cultural and linguistic heritage respected.

You are **responsible** for respecting differences of race, colour, culture, religion and disabilities of other residents, staff, caregivers and neighbours.

What if I disagree with my worker?

Chances are you will disagree at some point, especially as you grow older and want to make decisions that affect and reflect on your growing independence.

As a first option, always discuss the matter with your worker so you understand each other's concerns. Sometimes by simply talking you can solve any disagreement.

Is there anybody else I can go to for help?

Yes there is. If you've talked with your worker and you still disagree, you should contact your worker's supervisor. You should write the phone number in the centre pullout section of this book.

If you still have problems after talking with the supervisor, you should contact the Area Service Manager or Regional Manager of the region where you live. You should write the phone number in the centre pullout section.

Being in care means that you are not living at home. The Ministry of Social Services may be responsible for your well-being or may share that responsibility with your parents or other persons important to you. The situation could last for a short time or a long time, depending upon your family's circumstances.

Sometimes the answers in this handbook might seem like they don't fit what is happening to you. If you don't understand something in this book or anything about your plan or care, please discuss it with your worker, your caregiver or someone else you trust.

If you are still not satisfied, you can write to the office of the Minister of Social Services. The Minister is in charge of the whole Ministry. The address is:

Minister of Social Services

Room 346, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3
Phone: 306-787-3661

On the Web: Ministry of Social Services
www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca

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On the Web: Saskatchewan Children's Advocate
www.saskcao.ca

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**Saskatchewan Youth in Care
and Custody Network Inc.**

Macro Business Place
205A – 2505 11th Avenue
Regina, SK S4P 0K6

On the Web: Saskatchewan Youth in Care
and Custody Network Inc.
www.syiccn.ca

These contacts and additional information can be found in the centre pullout of this handbook.

My True Love

A lifetime of love
An eternity to learn
To right the wrongs
In order to obtain
Certain goals and dreams
Which I have set out
To accomplish
For my true love
The love of life

To err is human
To admit your wrongs
Is the work of a
Greater being
The possibility for serenity
Exists in all of us
For my true love
The love of life

The past is gone
I cannot change
The mistakes I've made
Are the lessons for the future
The choice becomes mine
As I meet the trials of life
For my true love
The love of life.

— Richard



Please feel free to contact the Provincial Office
for more information on the SYICCN:

SYICCN Inc.
205A – 2505 11th Avenue
Regina, SK S4P 0K6

Tel: 306-522-1533
Fax: 306-352-3133
Toll Free Youth Line: 1-888-528-8061

On the Web: www.syiccn.ca

Email: info@syiccn.ca