

Protection Services for 16 – 17 Year Olds

Information for Youth

January 2018

Introducing a New Service for 16 – 17 Year Olds

On January 1st, 2018 Ontario will increase the age of protection to include all children under the age of 18 years. If you are 16 or 17 years old, and believe you might be in need of protection, a new service has been developed for you.

You may need protection services if you are experiencing physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and/or abandonment, or if you are at risk of any of these things. If you have left home because of concerns about safety or risk of harm at home, or if you are homeless, you may be eligible for services from a children's aid society. If you are not sure about whether you might be eligible, you can contact the [children's aid society](#) in your area.

Increasing the age of protection means that you may be eligible to enter into a new Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA) if you:

- are aged 16 or 17;
- cannot be adequately protected at home or in your current living situation;
- have no other safe options with family, friends or other member of your community or extended family; and
- need an out-of-home placement.

If you enter a VYSA, you will work with a children's aid society to develop a Voluntary Youth Services (VYS) Plan. Part of that plan will be to make sure you have a housing option that is safe and appropriate. The plan will also identify your goals and the supports that will help meet your needs and work toward your goals.

How can a children's aid society help you?

Children's aid societies and Indigenous child well-being societies (societies) provide protection services to youth to help keep them safe and provide support to their families.

Societies begin their work when they receive a request or referral for service. This request or referral can come from you, or from someone in the community who is concerned about your safety. Societies will then consider the information and may begin an investigation. The society will want to hear from you about your experiences and concerns to help them assess whether you are in need of protection and, if so, what services are appropriate for you.

Services available for 16- and 17-year-olds include:

- Where appropriate, societies will work with you and your family (or if you aren't living with your family, in your current living situation) to improve things at home.

This may include referring you and/or your family to community services and programs that can help.

- If you are not safe at home or have left home because you were unsafe, there may be a member of your family or someone close to you who is willing to help. If you can be cared for by members of your family, community or friends, this is called **Kinship Service**.
- If you are an Indigenous youth who needs an out of home placement, a placement can be arranged for your care according to the custom of your band or native community. This is called **Customary Care**.
- If you are in need of protection, and you cannot be adequately protected at home or in your current living situation, and there are no safe options with family or friends, you may enter into an agreement with a society for services and supports, including a housing option that is safe and appropriate. This is called a **Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA)**.

What can you expect service to look like?

If you are 16- or 17-years old and you are in need of protection, a children's aid society will support you to make decisions that help to minimize the risk to your safety and promote your best interests, protection and well-being.

You should expect to be involved in all important decisions that concern you. This includes:

- the plan for your safety;
- your living arrangement;
- your interests regarding education or employment;
- medical care; and
- any programs that will support you in your transition to adulthood.

When you receive services from a children's aid society, you should expect support in identifying and developing relationships that you feel are important and beneficial to you, and that you want to last throughout your life. Services will focus on helping you stay connected to your family – whatever that means to you – and to your community and culture. You should have access to services and supports that respect your culture, as well as access to programs that help you develop personally.

Services are also available to help you participate in decisions that impact you. These include services from the Office of the Children's Lawyer, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, Alternative Dispute Resolution and complaint processes.

The Office of the Children's Lawyer (OCL)

If a society determines that you are in need of protection and an out-of-home placement is being considered, the society is required to make a referral on your behalf to the

Office of the Children's Lawyer (OCL). You will have the opportunity to consult with an OCL lawyer, who may provide advice to you about the options that are available, as well as legal representation if you are entering a VYSA.

The OCL has lawyers across Ontario who represent children and youth in child protection cases in court. The OCL lawyer's role is to independently represent the views and interests of youth. The lawyer provides information to youth about the legal process, gives legal advice about the options that are available, and advocates for youth in court and other processes, such as in Alternative Dispute Resolution, complaints processes about services received from a society, and also provides lawyers for parents who are under 18 years old.

The OCL has a role to support you if you are considering a VYSA, or if you are considering ending the VYSA. If you, or the society, are considering terminating the VYSA, the OCL will also be notified so they can provide you with legal advice.

You can contact the OCL by:

Telephone: (416) 314-8000

Web site: www.ontario.ca/ccnw

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (PACY)

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (PACY) provides an independent voice for children and youth across the province receiving services in Ontario's child welfare system. PACY has the authority to receive and respond to complaints, conduct reviews, represent the views and preferences of children and youth, make reports and provide recommendations.

Prior to entering or terminating a VYSA, or at any time you request, you will be given an opportunity to consult with an advocate and/or another trusted adult and/or to have a support person attend a meeting with you. The society will make all reasonable efforts to include support persons in a planning meeting, where appropriate.

You can contact PACY by

Toll-free: 1-800-263-2841

Web site: provincialadvocate.on.ca

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

If you are working with a society, the society is required to inform you about options to resolve any issue related to the plan for you, including access to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

ADR is an approach to resolving disagreements between you and a society. This approach encourages the involvement and support of the family and extended family, where appropriate, and your community, in planning and decision-making for children and youth. ADR focuses on bringing the right people together to work out the best plan for you. For example, if you disagree with the society about the type of placement that is best for you, ADR may bring the right people together to explore options and develop a plan.

Aboriginal Approaches to ADR, which have been established by First Nations communities or Indigenous organizations, are also available.

You can discuss ADR with your society worker or the OCL if you think it will help or to obtain more information.

If You Have a Complaint

Societies are required to inform you about options to resolve any issue related to the plan for your care, in a manner that you can understand. This includes information about the complaints process and providing you with written information about the complaints process. If you want to make a complaint, you can:

Contact the society directly. All societies must have a [complaint review process](#). You can learn more about this process.

Contact the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth at:

Toll-free: 1-800-263-2841

Telephone: (416) 325-5669

Web site: provincialadvocate.on.ca

Contact the Child and Family Services Review Board. This independent body can review some complaints or society decisions.

The board can be reached at:

Toll-free: 1-888-728-8823

Telephone: (416) 327-4673

Web site: www.cfsrb.ca

The society will provide you with written materials about the complaints processes available to you.

