



Section 2-Voluntary Support Services Agreements

Tool 2.1.2

Philosophy of Voluntary Support Services and Agreements

Voluntary Support Services Agreements are intended to promote the safety, health and well-being of families and/or individuals. Voluntary Support Services Agreements can be provided for many reasons such as:

- Ensuring the health and well-being of children, youth and families;
- Providing services to an expectant parent before the birth of their child
- Preventing or reducing the risk of child maltreatment;
- Improving parenting capacity;
- Providing support services to youth 16 to 18 years old who cannot live safely with their parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) and are making efforts to care for themselves; and
- Extending voluntary services to youth with a Permanent Custody Order up until their 23rd birthday to assist with their independent adult living needs (ESSA).

Early intervention with families is critical to promoting positive outcomes for children and youth. The provision of support services that identify and build on strengths and resiliency of the family may assist them in allowing the child/youth to remain safely at home is of utmost importance. When it is impossible to keep children in the home, it is important to ensure that the child/youth has an ongoing connection to their siblings, family, community and culture. It is important to explore what type of supports may be helpful in mitigating any risk factors while considering the safety, health and well-being of the child/youth as the primary consideration.

When assessing what support services would best meet the child/youth, young adult, expectant parent(s) or families' needs, you will need to explore formal and informal supports such as housing, income support, self-help groups, extended family, friends, neighbours, the family's spiritual and cultural community and educational and recreational programs. When providing formal supports such as treatment, counselling, respite, etc., approval must be provided by the Supervisor/Manager.

Service delivery should be tied to specific outcomes and monitored by the Child Protection Worker/Designate to determine if the services are having the intended effect, and if they continue to be needed or adjusted.



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Case Plan Evaluation and Assessment

Case Plans acknowledge the need for support and provide the direction, timelines and plans for that support. Revisiting each Case Plan regularly provides the opportunity to evaluate goals in relation to achievements, determining changes in the family's situation and requirements for Case Plan updates.

Evaluation

Evaluating Case Plans helps to determine the child/youth's safety and whether activities and timelines are being met. Through the evaluation process, the Child Protection Worker/Designate (including Authorized Persons, or Supervisor/Manager) can assess the effectiveness of the Case Plan concerning the family achieving the desired goals and reducing any potential risks towards the child/youth.

The evaluation must be done throughout the process of providing services. This evaluation process is an ongoing process that assists the Child Protection Worker/Designate in providing relevant and needed services to the family. Consider questions such as:

- Is the concern still apparent?
- How does the family feel about things that have happened as a result of the Case Plan?
- Are they hopeful about whether change is possible?
- How do they feel about the Case Plan as it stands, and what do they think should change, if anything?
- What results or changes have occurred because of the Case Plan?
- What updates do you believe are required for the Case Plan?
- Are there significant changes in the situation, such as changing the level of risk to child/youth to require a review?

When Progress is Hindered

From time to time, individual goals will be difficult to accomplish. When progress is hindered, it is useful to apply these rules:

1. If what you are doing doesn't work, don't do it again; do something different.
2. Once you know what works, do more of it.
3. Consider another perspective, consult with the Supervisor/Manager and peers.

Further, if the responses lead to a lack of progress, in collaboration with the family (extended family, Aboriginal Organizations, Indigenous Governing Bodies and other cultural organizations (if applicable)) determine:

- If the assessment of the family is accurate.
 - *Ask yourself: What works for safety? What works against safety? How does the family's support system (formal and informal) support the Case Plan?*



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- If the timelines and expectations are realistic.
- If everyone understands what is written in the Case Plan and assess whether the tasks are appropriate and useful in achieving the outcome.
- What changes are required in the Case Plan for the family to reach the goal(s)?
 - *Ask yourself: Who is the agent of change? Who is able to change? Who wants to change? What is the benefit of changing?*
- If the participants are completing the tasks outlined in the Case Plan and if not, what are the barriers to completing them and the consequences of not completing them?
- If everyone believes the required changes can be made.
- If new concerns and/or challenges have surfaced that increase risk to the child/youth and determine what needs to be added to the Case Plan to address the concerns.

You must assess whether you believe the family can make changes considering the child/youth's safety and best interests. What has changed in the situation and its impact on the family's ability to make the required changes (e.g., employment, finances, interest in making change, physical or intellectual abilities)?

Your reassessment of the situation and Case Plan should consider:

- Any noted new concerns and/or challenges.
- Whether the current safety plan works for the family, and if not, what needs to happen to ensure the child/youth's safety?
- Other service needs that have arisen since the previous evaluation and assessment.
- The family's lack of progress on addressing the issues despite the intensive support/services put in place and long-term planning for the child/youth.
- Whether all other case management standards are being met.

Following your evaluation of the current Case Plan, you need to decide the next steps:

- Change and update the Case Plan or close the file.
- If an out-of-home placement is required, identify the best place for the child/youth and their long-term plan.



Elements of a Transition Plan

The Child Protection Worker, the assembled team and resources, and the youth will work collaboratively to build an effective and reflective transition plan through steps as follows:

(1) Assist the youth to develop a vision statement: A vision statement is a description of a desired outcome that inspires and energizes and helps you create a mental picture of your target. It could be a vision of part of your life, or the outcome of a project or goal. Capturing the essence of your vision using a simple memorable phrase can greatly enhance the effectiveness of your vision statement.

The purpose of the vision statement is not to serve as a “real” target that you are going to measure against to determine if you have succeeded to your best expectations. You should use your plan goals to do that. Instead, the purpose of the vision statement is to open your eyes to what is possible.

(2) Describe/Define the youth's goals and ambitions through identifying concrete implementation steps (educational, work, and developmental) they will need to follow.

(3) Define education and employment needs including:

- Key education, specialized training or career options
- Training for entering the workforce with a focus on topics such as interview skills and workplace etiquette

(4) Life skills development including:

- Youth's needs in order to live independently such as budgeting, cooking, life skills, household management. Basic and practical skills must not be overlooked.
- Skills for coping with stress from sources such as social anxiety, emotional challenges or social isolation.
- Assistance and training on how to obtain a Social Insurance Number, Birth Certificate, NWT Health Care Card, Picture Identification.

(5) Placement Objectives including:

- Development of the specific goals and tasks to work towards the youth living independently.
- Determination of whether the current placement can offer permanency and stability on a long-term basis. If another placement is required to meet the long-term needs, identification of location and type of living situation will be required.

(6) Service/Program Supports Including:

- Financial support and what will be covered; youth's contribution or other financial resources (family, student assistance, other financial resources).



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- Development of youth's awareness of how to access available community services. A key factor in decision making should be the readiness and acceptance of the youth to access these services.
- Support groups, counselling for a youth overcoming addictions issues.
- Special considerations in planning where youth will require specialized supports as an adult. This will apply to a range of youth who live with challenges such as a developmental disability or a temporary state with special health considerations or other needs that require high levels of program supports.

(7) Connections (confirmation, encouragement, facilitation to be healthier where applicable) including:

- Specific goals and tasks to facilitate cultural, spiritual, familial, community and other identified connections. There must be an emphasis on connection with immediate and extended family who are willing to become re-involved with the youth in a positive way. Where appropriate, involve family members in transition planning.
- Develop strategies for resolving relationships with peers or others who don't support the youth's positive goals (learning how to say "no" and let go in a caring way, until stronger or both parties share the same vision).
- Other relationship considerations the youth may be experiencing (termination of relationships, strengthening, guidance/support regarding sexual orientation).

(8) Legal Considerations including a plan for resolution of any outstanding legal requirements (including creditor issues).

(9) Plan implementation summary including referrals needed, primary contacts and contact information (frequency/purpose of the meeting), secondary contacts, monitoring agreements between the Child Protection Worker and the youth, financial accountability expectations, timelines etc.

Case Closure Guidelines

Adapted from *the Yukon CFSA Policy Manual (2012)*.

The casework process with the family and child over 12 years should illustrate what steps are in place to address the child protection concerns, mitigate risks as well as to provide support services.

Decision to Close a Case

The decision to close a case is based on a thorough examination of the family circumstances.

When deciding to close a case, you must:

- Consult with your Supervisor about the progress of the case.
- Review the case plan progress with the family and child over 12 of age.
- Determine that the child is no longer in need of protection as per section 7 (3) of the *Child and Family Services Act*.
- Determine that the child and/or the youth over 16 years of age are no longer in need of voluntary support services as per sections 5 (1) and 6 (1) of the *Child and Family Services Act*.
- Ask yourself the following SAFETY questions:
 - Have the safety concerns been addressed by the parent(s) and/or guardian(s)?
 - Has there been a significant change in the family to address safety?
 - Has the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) been able to show the capacity to maintain the safety of their child?
 - Has the youth over 16 years of age been able to show the capacity to care for him or herself?
 - Has the parent(s), guardian(s) and/or youth over 16 years of age, shown that they are capable of making decisions and solving their problems?
 - Can the parent(s), guardian(s) and/or youth over 16 years of age, predict future challenges to safety and well-being as well as have the skills to address these challenges?

The following criteria can be used to justify case closure:

- The family and child over 12 years of age, successfully completed the goals/tasks of their case plan.
- The family and child over 16 years of age can demonstrate that they can function at a minimally acceptable level based on family and community standards.

- The parent(s) and/or guardian(s) refuse to accept support services and there is not enough evidence for court intervention or the court has dismissed your application.
- The parent(s), guardian(s) and/or youth over 16 years of age are not fulfilling their responsibilities in the Voluntary Support Agreement and/or Support Services Agreement.
- The parent(s), guardian(s) and/or youth over 16 years of age cancel the Voluntary Support Agreement and/or Support Services Agreement.
- The family is not making any further progress, and the current risk factors are low.
- The family has moved out of the territory. In this situation, please consult with your Supervisor to determine if the Department of the Health and Social Services, Interprovincial Coordinator needs to submit an interprovincial alert to the receiving province.

Extended Support Services Agreement (ESSA) – Support Schedule

Introduction:

The Extended Support Services Agreement (ESSA) program is intended to assist in planning and arranging a wide range of activities and opportunities to support young adults whose Permanent Custody Order has ended and are in the process of transitioning to adult independence. This tool has been developed to assist the child protection workers, in consultation with the young adult, which represents a balance of providing support, promoting autonomy and independent decision making.

The ESSA program is intended to guide and support the young adult in identifying and making use of available resources as the first option. Where individual, family or community resources have been explored and utilized, the ESSA program can provide supplementary support (both financial and non-financial) to support a successful transition to adulthood. The unique circumstances and ability of each young adult should be considered including their ability to contribute financially to their livelihood.

In determining eligible support services to be provided to young adults under an ESSA, the following should be considered:

(1) Education:

- Tuition fees and books if not covered by NWT Education Culture and Employment's Student Financial Assistance or other similarly funded programs;
- Resume development and employment counselling.

Note: If participating in school/training, part-time or full-time attendance is required to receive funding for subsequent semesters above what Student Financial Assistance will provide.

There are numerous options available such as:

- i. If the young adult has employment and is attending school part-time (ie.: less than 60% full course load).
- ii. If the young adult is attending non-academic courses for gainful employment preparation (i.e.: Warehousing, CPR/First Aid, WHMIS, Driver's Education courses).
- iii. If the young adult is engaging in educational training supports (ie.: such as attending high school to obtain a diploma or upgrading to attend College or University).

(2) Housing:

- Financial assistance for living expenses and housing support (i.e.: rent/room and board costs based upon SSA rates by community or as otherwise negotiated, furnishing allowance or housing setup costs) may be considered;
- Determine whether payment will be made to the young adult or the caregiver/landlord (i.e.: room and board arrangement, rent or damage deposits, Supported Independent Living programs). In the event of a rental agreement, a three-party agreement may be needed between the worker, service provider and the person that describes the responsibilities of each.
- The decision to fund independent housing will be based on the young adult's personal level of responsibility, life skills and ability in financial management.

(3) Child care:

- Child care expenses if the young adult has a demonstrated need for child care while engaged in employment, schooling or other activities.

(4) Counselling and community support programs:

- Counselling and community support programs to maximize the young adult's wellbeing i.e.: mental health counselling, family support;

(5) Health care:

- Health care services above what Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) will not provide if Aboriginal or for those who are non-Aboriginal (i.e.: prescriptions, optical care; assistive aides/devices, dental care/dental surgery);

(6) Incidentals:

- Incidental expenses not otherwise covered by government or community services i.e.: food, transportation (bus passes or other forms of public transportation); personal needs (toiletries, laundry), clothing.

(7) Independent life skills training:

- Assistance in matching and linking young adults with relevant services to promote independence i.e.: Supportive Independent Living programs, work experience programs, household management/life skills development.

(8) System navigation:

- Assistance in system navigation through government and community agencies/services as required i.e.: steps/tasks required in order to obtain a driver's license, health care card; how to apply for housing and/or address rental issues with a landlord.

(9) Any other support as approved by the Supervisor.

Extended Support Services Agreement – FAQ's

Youth that had an existing permanent order at the age of 19 are entitled to services as they transition into adulthood and can opt in and out of services up until their 23rd birthday.

Best practices across Canada clearly identify that increasing the age of support for former permanent children is directly related with the amount of success the young adult will have as they transition into adulthood. The Extended Support Services Agreement (ESSA) is intended to support a former permanent youth in the transition to independence, as well as to provide them with emotional and financial support. This change will allow staff to the opportunity to build and promote resilience, to help create positive and enduring relationships and to help pave the way for success.

The ESSA is not intended to act as a replacement for other government services or resources. It is intended to act as a guide and a supplement. It is the social worker's responsibility to ensure that they work with the young adult and assist them to access various resources. Every community has its own support network, and it is important to teach young adults how to use that network once a social worker is no longer involved. This could include Housing, Income Support, Disabilities Support, etc.

Each young adult will have a unique plan specific to themselves. An ESSA should not be completed in a matter of minutes – instead, the document should be developed as a part of transition planning resulting in an ESSA outlines what the young adult's specific needs are and what their plan is to accomplish those needs.

The following FAQ is intended for the young adult, to better understand the services that are available to support the transition out to adulthood. This list is not meant to be exhaustive – every young adult's needs will be different, and will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Am I eligible for an Extended Support Services Agreement (ESSA)?

A: On your 19th birthday, were you a permanent ward of the Director of Child and Family Services? If the answer is YES, then you are eligible for an ESSA.

Q: If I don't sign an ESSA at the age of 19, am I able to sign one at a later date?

A: Yes. An ESSA can be signed at any point between the ages of 19 and 22 inclusive.

Q: What can I expect from an agreement?

A: A social worker will work together with you to develop an independence plan as part of your ESSA. The agreement will identify your needs and how they will be supported, such as:

- Your educational, housing and financial goals;
- Your current support network;
- Any other item that you feel would help you with your short-term and long-term goals.

While the social worker will assist you with this, meeting the goals in the plan is your responsibility. As it is an agreement, there are certain expectations that you will need to complete in order to continue to receive support through an ESSA.

Q: What happens if I do not follow through with the terms of my agreement?

A: Your social worker will be working closely with you to ensure you are able to meet the terms of your agreement. If at any point you feel you are no longer able to meet the agreements, you can talk with your worker about modifying your agreement. This would avoid any disruption in service.

If, for example, your agreement clearly states you will receive financial assistance while you attend school, and you drop out, you will need to notify your worker immediately of your change in situation. By not telling your worker, you run the risk of having your agreement cancelled.