Portfolio of Work

The Data Visualisation of Aging Out

An infographic designed to promote awareness about the discrimination against the youth who grow up in foster homes

Data Visualization
Research
Narrative Design
Content Strategy

Preface

This project was a 3 month long group assignment completed in 2021 as part of my Data Visualisation class at Sheridan College. I worked on this project with 4 other designers – I was the visual design lead on this project and supported with narrative design and research.

I learned a lot of lessons about team work and humanising data from this project. A significant facet of my intended design practice is telling stories, and this assignment was an important exercise in finding the right balance between appealing to the intended audience's emotions and need for factual data.

What is aging out?

Aging out is a term used to describe leaving publicly funded systems like foster care after reaching a certain age. Only 4% out of the 61% of youth who are between the ages of 13-18 get adopted. In North America, more than 1 in 5 youth that age out of the system are likely to become homeless.

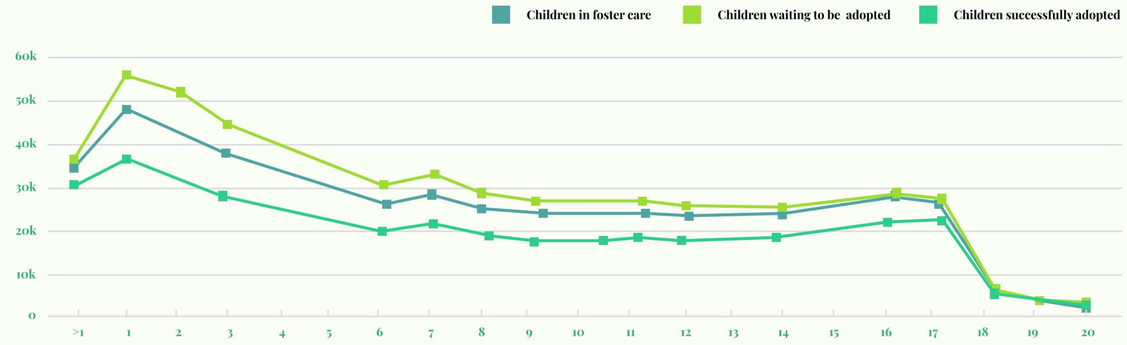
Although the state is their legal guardian, there is little provided for children to survive. In most cases, the provisions provided to these youth are not enough. Welfare cheques, therapy, and support for post-secondary education are limited and often quickly disappear once the youth reaches age 21.

More care needs to be given to children raised by the state. **One way this to achieve is to change the public perception of youth in foster care.**

How might we raise awareness about the systemic challenges youth deal with once they leave foster care?

Older youth in foster care need your help

Ontario has never had so many children cared for by the state. As of April 1st 2019, more than **14,200** kids were in the care of a children's aid society. That's up from about **10,200** in 1996 – a *40%* increase in 4 years.



Research

As a group, we conducted desk research to learn different ways in which older youth face discrimination after aging out. Due to the limited care that older youth receive, they are more vulnerable during their teenage years and their transition to adulthood, making them significantly disadvantaged in fulfilling the milestones that their non-foster care peers achieve.

Our narrative was formed by researching data and articles in areas of homelessness, education opportunities, unemployment, and violence.

70%

of foster kids have expressed that they would like to go to college

3%

of foster kids who age out earn college degrees

1 in 4

won't graduate from high-school or get a GED

65%

of youth leaving foster care need immediate housing upon release

32%

of children who turned 18 in foster care had already spent 3 years in the system

1 in 5

will become homeless after age 18

1/2

will be employed at age 24

60%

of boys who age out have been convicted of a crime

7 in 10

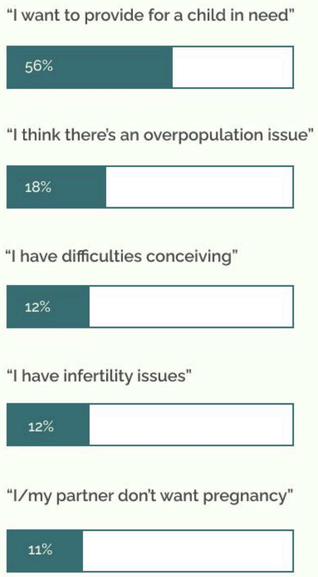
girls who age out will become pregnant before the age of 21

Proposing the adoption of older youth as the best solution

Without any support, resources, and permanent families, older youth will face numerous difficulties throughout their livelihood in the foster care system and thereafter. A positive permanent relationship with adults can serve as a powerful factor in enabling these youth to succeed in different areas of life.

WHY PARENTS ADOPT

Typical reasons a parent will consider adopting child:



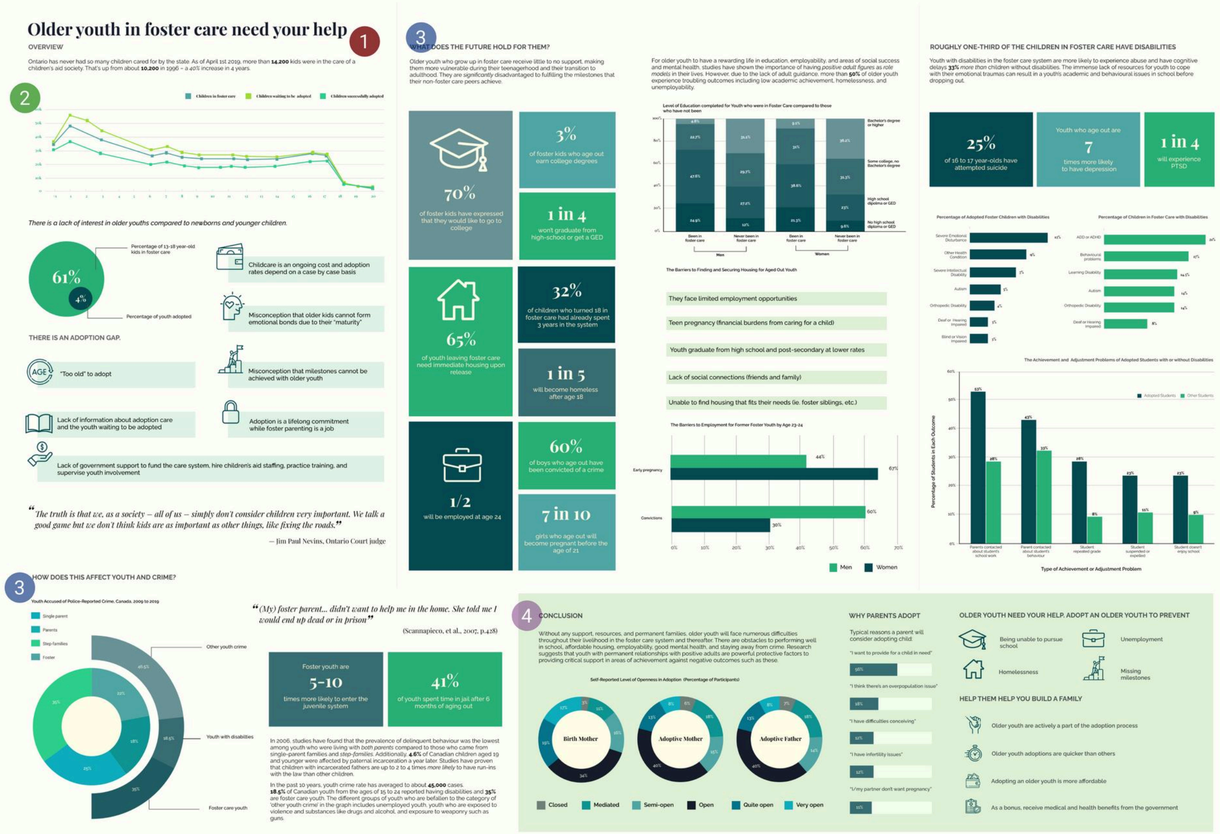
ADOPT AN OLDER YOUTH TO PREVENT

- Being unable to pursue school
- Unemployment
- Homelessness
- Missing milestones

HELP THEM HELP YOU BUILD A FAMILY

- Older youth are actively a part of the adoption process
- Older youth adoptions are quicker than others
- Adopting an older youth is more affordable
- As a bonus, receive medical and health benefits from the government

Our goal was to spread awareness in **families and adults looking into parenting to encourage adoption among older youths**



Telling the story, giving context to the data

Stories are the best way to transmit human experience. Using a narrative structure, we presented the data in the form of insights and arguments in favor of youth who age out.

1 - A title embuing action

Our narrative begins with an active voice to spark action. We contextualise our voice to shift the attention to older youth, the crux of our narrative.

2 - Introduce Statistics

We introduce data in a way thats more relatable, and human to our intended audience.

3 - Emphasising the affected areas of life

We emphasize the subsequent consequences following the discrimination which inevitably shapes the future milestones and experiences of older youth. The narrative showcases the interactions between each milestone through statistics and graphs to emphasize the hardship that older youths encounter on a daily basis.

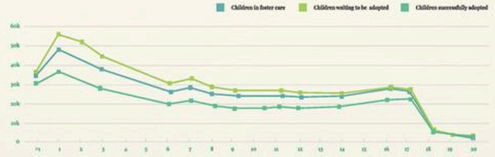
4 - Conclusion

Our narrative ends with a gesture to raise awareness of how people looking to adopt and older youths can help each other build a family.

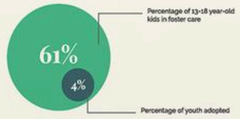
Older youth in foster care need your help

OVERVIEW

Ontario has never had so many children cared for by the state. As of April 1st 2019, more than **14,200** kids were in the care of a children's aid society. That's up from about **10,200** in 1996 – a *40%* increase in 4 years.



There is a lack of interest in older youths compared to newborns and younger children.



Childcare is an ongoing cost and adoption rates depend on a case by case basis

Misconception that older kids cannot form emotional bonds due to their "maturity"

THERE IS AN ADOPTION GAP.

"Too old" to adopt

Misconception that milestones cannot be achieved with older youth

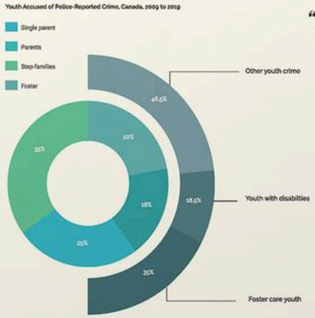
Lack of information about adoption care and the youth waiting to be adopted

Adoption is a lifelong commitment while foster parenting is a job

Lack of government support to fund the care system, hire children's aid staffing, practice training, and supervise youth involvement

> *"The truth is that we, as a society – all of us – simply don't consider children very important. We talk a good game but we don't think kids are as important as other things, like fixing the roads."*
>
> — Jim Paul Nevins, Ontario Court judge

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUTH AND CRIME?



> *"(My) foster parent... didn't want to help me in the home. She told me I would end up dead or in prison"*
>
> (Scannapieco, et al., 2007, p.428)

Foster youth are **5-10** times more likely to enter the juvenile system

41% of youth spent time in jail after 6 months of aging out

In 2006, studies have found that the prevalence of delinquent behaviour was the lowest among youth who were living with *both parents* compared to those who came from single-parent families and *step-families*. Additionally, **4.6%** of Canadian children aged 19 and younger were affected by paternal incarceration a year later. Studies have proven that children with incarcerated fathers are up to 2 to 4 times *more likely* to have run-ins with the law than other children.

In the past 10 years, youth crime rate has averaged to about **45,000** cases. **18.5%** of Canadian youth from the ages of 15 to 24 reported having disabilities and **35%** are foster care youth. The different groups of youth who are befallen to the category of 'other youth crime' in the graph includes unemployed youth, youth who are exposed to violence and substances like drugs and alcohol, and exposure to weaponry such as guns.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THEM?

Older youth who grow up in foster care receive little to no support, making them more vulnerable during their teenagerhood and their transition to adulthood. They are significantly disadvantaged to fulfilling the milestones that their non-foster care peers achieve.

70% of foster kids have expressed that they would like to go to college

3% of foster kids who age out earn college degrees

1 in 4 won't graduate from high-school or get a GED

65% of youth leaving foster care need immediate housing upon release

32% of children who turned 18 in foster care had already spent 3 years in the system

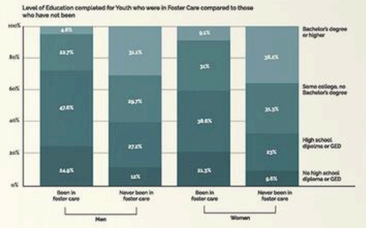
1 in 5 will become homeless after age 18

1/2 will be employed at age 24

60% of boys who age out have been convicted of a crime

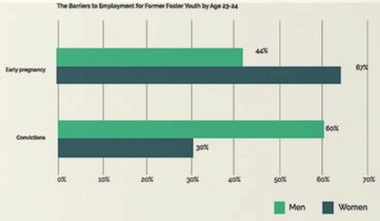
7 in 10 girls who age out will become pregnant before the age of 21

For older youth to have a rewarding life in education, employability, and areas of social success and mental health, studies have shown the importance of having *positive adult figures* as *role models* in their lives. However, due to the lack of adult guidance, more than **50%** of older youth experience troubling outcomes including low academic achievement, homelessness, and unemployability.



The Barriers to Finding and Securing Housing for Aged Out Youth

- They face limited employment opportunities
- Teen pregnancy (financial burdens from caring for a child)
- Youth graduate from high school and post-secondary at lower rates
- Lack of social connections (friends and family)
- Unable to find housing that fits their needs (ie. foster siblings, etc.)



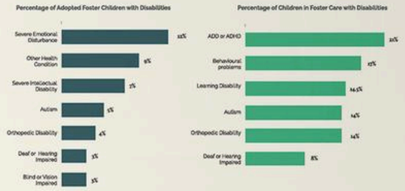
ROUGHLY ONE-THIRD OF THE CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE HAVE DISABILITIES

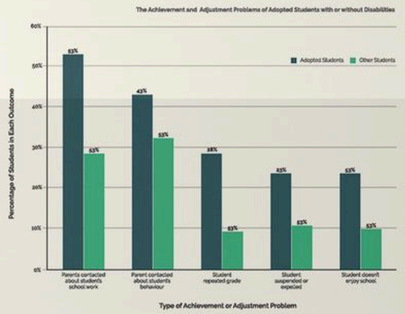
Youth with disabilities in the foster care system are *more* likely to experience abuse and have cognitive delays **33%** *more than* children without disabilities. The immense lack of resources for youth to cope with their emotional traumas can result in a youth's academic and behavioural issues in school before dropping out.

25% of 16 to 17 year-olds have attempted suicide

Youth who age out are **7** times more likely to have depression

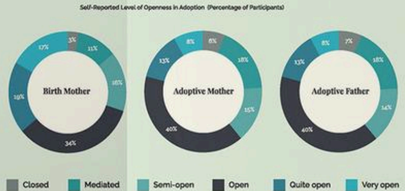
1 in 4 will experience PTSD





CONCLUSION

Without any support, resources, and permanent families, older youth will face numerous difficulties throughout their livelihood in the foster care system and thereafter. There are obstacles to performing well in school, affordable housing, employability, good mental health, and staying away from crime. Research suggests that youth with permanent relationships with positive adults are powerful protective factors to providing critical support in areas of achievement against negative outcomes such as these.



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