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U-Turn Annual Program Report Year 2025-2026

About Us

PLEA has a long history of providing specialized family caregiver services for young people within family settings in the community. The success of these services reflects our strong commitment to care that recognizes the unique strengths, abilities, needs, and circumstances of every young person placed with us. Our U-Turn program provides family care placements supported by dedicated staff teams for youth who have experienced limited success in other resource programs and who face significant challenges in their lives. While the circumstances leading to placement vary, every young person is welcomed into a safe, nurturing, and healthy family environment and receives services tailored to their individual needs.

Placements within U-Turn are typically planned and long-term, often lasting more than 12 months. Young people are referred to the program by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the Department of Health and Social Services of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), and Aboriginal Delegated Authorities. Since 2003, PLEA has partnered with Family Caregivers across Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley to provide these supportive homes.

In collaboration with referring authorities and other service providers involved in each young person's care, we work to ensure that our services remain youth-centered, effective, and inclusive. Together with each young person, we develop comprehensive service plans that reflect their strengths, interests, ideas, culture, and lived experiences.

Our staff teams maintain strong relationships with the Family Caregivers we contract with and deeply value the time, care, and commitment they bring to supporting the day-to-day lives of the youth in their homes. Operating from the Tri-Cities and Surrey, our three outreach teams focus on direct engagement with youth while providing consistent support to the Family Caregivers who play such a vital role in this work.

Some of the specialized services and initiatives that enhance this experience are cultural programming, that is supported through the leadership of PLEA's Knowledge Keepers who work alongside program staff and participants to ensure Indigenous perspectives and cultural practices are meaningfully and integrated into daily programming. Through cultural teachings, storytelling, land-based learning opportunities, and guidance grounded in Indigenous knowledge participants are supported in strengthening their cultural identity and connection. This work supports participants in exploring their cultural heritage while fostering a sense of belonging, pride, and resilience. Cultural engagement is incorporated into individualized service planning, ensuring that participants have opportunities to maintain and deepen connections to their culture, community, and traditions.

The Cultural Connections Group supported meaningful growth and development for participants through engagement with Indigenous traditions, teachings, and education. Participants deepened

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their cultural awareness and appreciation for local heritage while building confidence to access and participate in community programs and institutions. The group also strengthened peer relationships and supported the development of social communication skills. By encouraging curiosity, reflection, and respectful dialogue. The Outdoor Club provides participants with opportunities to connect with nature, build community, and learn about the traditional territories of the Lower Mainland. Often co-facilitated by local Indigenous Elders, gatherings begin with traditional welcoming and opening ceremonies that ground the day in cultural practices and respect for the land. Participants also contribute to a shared meal, fostering collaboration, inclusion, and a strong sense of belonging.

The Photography Program helps participants develop new skills while capturing the activities, moments, and experiences that matter most to them. Participants can tell their story through pictures and videos. In addition, the Music Group continues to foster creativity and pride, providing participants with opportunities to create and share their own music, beats, and lyrics.

Who we served...

Profile	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
# of cases ¹	50	49	53	48	51
# of youth	50	46	53	48	51
% young women	50	46	47	40	31
% young men	46	50	45	52	57
% self-identified as transgender	4	4	8	8	12
% self-identified as Indigenous	50	63	60	60	61
Average age when cases were opened	14	13	13	13	13

How we did...service delivery

U-Turn MCFD

Profile	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Total participants served	43	41	42	40	43
Average monthly participants	28.5	27.6	29.7	29	28.6
Average days in program for discharged participants	834	826	571	832	731
Total referrals on waitlist	40	36	32	30	47
Total intakes	18	12	13	15	16
Total discharges	17	16	13	11	18

The U-Turn MCFD program sustained a strong level of engagement throughout the year. It continued to provide dependable, youth-centered placements and demonstrated its ongoing value as a trusted support within the community.

¹ # of cases is greater than the # of youth because some youth received multiple services or were re-referred

U-Turn NWT

Profile	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Total participants served	7	8	11	8	8
Average monthly participants	5.3	5.5	6.2	6	6.3
Average days in program for discharged participants	327	1409	736	1258	947
Total referrals on waitlist	12	9	11	3	8
Total intakes	2	3	5	4	2
Total discharges	2	3	6	2	4

The U-Turn NWT program continues to demonstrate strong engagement outcomes, with participants maintaining long-term involvement in the service. On average, even among discharged participants, youth engage with the program for close to one year, reflecting sustained connection and continuity of care throughout their placement.

This level of engagement highlights the program's capacity to build meaningful, stable relationships with participants over time, supporting both consistency in service delivery and improved continuity of care planning.

A recent program audit further identified U-Turn NWT as a first-choice service provider for out-of-territory placements. This recognition speaks to the program's reputation for reliability, responsiveness, and its ability to meet the complex needs of youth placed outside of their home territory.

How we did...against the goals we set ourselves

1. To increase the MCFD global contract average of occupied bed days from 28 to 30 for 2025.

Not achieved: However, the U-Turn MCFD program maintained a strong occupancy rate throughout the year, averaging 28.5. This reflects consistent demand for the program and ongoing engagement with youth requiring support. While slightly below the projected target, occupancy remained close to the contract average and demonstrated the program's continued role in providing stable placements and responsive care.

2. To recruit at least one new full-time caregiver into the MCFD global contract.

Achieved: U-Turn MCFD is excited to welcome a single caregiver home with 2 beds in Maple Ridge, a 2-parent caregiver home with 2 beds in Surrey as well as a 2-parent caregiver home with 2 beds in Coquitlam.

3. For U-Turn MCFD to have at least 1 youth graduate high school in the coming year.

Achieved: Three youth successfully graduated during the year, exceeding the program's goal. This achievement reflects the dedication of the youth involved as well as the consistent support provided by the U-Learn/U-Turn team in helping young people stay engaged in their education and work toward meaningful milestones.

4. To implement Outcomes Tracking for both U-Turn MCFD and NWT by March 31, 2026.

Achieved: U-Turn MCFD and U-Turn NWT implemented an outcomes tracking system based on individual program frameworks. This has improved consistency in documentation across both programs and strengthened the ability to measure participant progress, assess program outcomes, and support informed decision-making.

5. To recruit at least one new full-time caregiver into the NWT contract.

Achieved: U-Turn NWT successfully recruited and onboarded one new full-time caregiver in January 2025. This addition strengthened program capacity, supported consistent coverage within the home, and contributed to maintaining stability and continuity of care for youth participants.

6. For all NWT U-Turn youth to have access and support to specific Indigenous programming and guidance. This will be supported by PLEA Knowledge Keeper and community programs.

Achieved: All U-Turn programs continued to receive support from the PLEA Knowledge Keeper, who provided guidance to staff and participants and facilitated connections with Elders and Knowledge Keepers within the Northwest Territories, based on identified needs. Engagement in Indigenous programming and supports is being tracked through quarterly updates in CAMS, aligned with the program's Outcomes Framework.

7. For all NWT youth participants to have immediate access to any required assessments including FASD, ASD or psychological assessment testing.

Achieved: All NWT youth participants received timely and consistent access to required assessments, including FASD, ASD, and speech and language assessments. This ensured that individual needs were clearly identified and understood, enabling more responsive and appropriate service planning, targeted interventions and improved overall support for participants across the program.

Selected accomplishments...

1. Several youth were accepted into post-secondary education, marking important milestones in their academic journeys.
2. Multiple youth successfully secured employment, building skills, and independence.
3. Six sibling groups were placed together in shared homes, with an additional three sibling connections actively maintained to support ongoing relationships.
4. Three participants graduated in 2025, with up to four additional youth on track to graduate in 2026.
5. Several youth obtained their driver's licenses, increasing their independence and mobility.
6. One youth achieved a significant personal milestone by learning to swim for the first time through dedicated lessons.

7. Multiple youth successfully transitioned into adulthood, securing stable housing through supportive programs.
8. One participant from the NWT, who initially faced literacy challenges, began school and made meaningful progress in reading and math with support from U-Learn instruction and their Youth Worker team.
9. A long-term NWT participant is on track to graduate from high school in June, demonstrating sustained growth and commitment.
10. One NWT participant successfully transitioned from the U-Turn Program to the Transitions Program, maintaining consistent supports that have greatly strengthened their transition into adulthood.
11. The program continued to prioritize and strengthen family connections by actively supporting family visits, recognizing their critical role in youth well-being and reunification.

Selected stories...

U-Turn MCFD:

Calvin entered the PLEA U-Turn program around six years ago eager to build connections and develop feelings of safety and personal growth despite the challenges associated with multiple neurodevelopmental diagnoses and history of trauma and loss, which has served him well as he navigates his journey to a bright and successful future.

Calvin's education journey began with many challenges but highlighted his immense growth and resilience since grade 8. Class time began slowly, starting with only an hour a day and as the time increased at Calvin's insistence, he would rely on sleeping part way through the school day to maintain his endurance and personal goal to remain at school for a whole day. In 2021, Calvin began working with an instructor through the U-Learn program as his teachers had identified that academics were not being focused on at school, as they were still building Calvin's socialization and regulation goals. Calvin has been extraordinarily consistent with attending these sessions and maintaining regular school attendance as his determination to graduate was unwavering. Throughout Calvin's progress from grade 10-12, he demonstrated incredible strides in growth and maturity. Making strong connections with staff and peers, Calvin has been credited for showing strong positive leadership in the school setting. He has caught up on his academics and is on track for graduating with his full Dogwood diploma for June 2026. His skills have shown such growth that he was also accepted into a specialized technology program as a second-year student, despite not having taken the program previously. As Calvin is wrapping up his grade 12 year, he has also applied and been accepted into a local post-secondary University program for the fall of 2026, that included being awarded an entrance award of more than a thousand dollars.

Calvin's strong work ethic and resilience have also been demonstrated through his consistent engagement with youth workers, counselling, and volunteer work experience. He has successfully completed the youth employment program with Strive, earning multiple certificates such as Food Safe and WHMIS. Calvin demonstrated community focus and continued to build his employability skills by completing a winter season volunteering at a tree farm lot in 2025 as well as completing ongoing volunteering work supporting PLEA sponsored events. He is also dedicated in his ongoing employment search as he looks to hold his first part-time job, successfully securing his first job interview in March 2026 with the prospects of summer

employment. Calvin remains determined to set himself up with the skills needed for his transition into adulthood.

U-Turn NWT:

Molly came into the U-Turn NWT program just over two years ago, transitioning from a highly restrictive, facility-based setting that had not met their needs for connection, relationship-building, or a sense of permanency. The move into the program marked a significant turning point in their life—one that opened the door to stability, trust, and meaningful engagement.

Since joining the program, Molly has made remarkable progress in several areas of their life. They are now close to completing high school graduation and have successfully participated in an eight-week employment readiness program, building practical skills and confidence for future independence. Beyond structured programming, Molly is consistently engaged in group activities and continues to show up for opportunities that support personal growth and connection.

One of the most notable shifts has been the development of healthy, trusting relationships within the home. Even when new boundaries have been introduced, Molly demonstrates an understanding of their purpose and reflects an awareness of the intention behind the structure and support being offered. Staff describe Molly as quiet and sometimes reserved in presentation, but consistently thoughtful, with moments of deep insight during one-to-one conversations.

Outings in the community have become particularly meaningful experiences for Molly. On several occasions, they have reflected on the stark contrast between their current life and what they believed their path might have been without the program. During a recent visit to a museum in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Molly paused to take in their surroundings and shared with staff that, without this placement, they likely would have ended up in a very different and much more precarious situation. In that moment, they expressed gratitude, acknowledging that the program, their caregiver, and staff have "saved their life."

Cultural programming has also played a significant role in Molly's journey. Participation in a local carver and artist mentorship workshop has offered not only creative engagement, but also a sense of cultural grounding, friendship, and spiritual guidance. These experiences have become a highlight of their time in the program, strengthening both identity and connection.

As Molly approaches a pivotal transition into adulthood, they have expressed a strong desire to remain connected to the program in order to continue building skills, stability, and readiness for the future. The care team recognizes this commitment and remains equally invested in supporting Molly through this next stage. Together, they look forward to continuing this journey toward independence with the same consistency, care, and opportunity that has shaped Molly's progress thus far.

***Names have been changed to protect client privacy and confidentiality**

Feedback from Participants and External Professionals

From Youth:

1. "I'm supported in my day-to-day life very well."

2. “[PLEA is] helping me reach my goals.”

From Caregivers:

1. “The wrap-around approach provides a feeling of a village and as care providers we never feel alone or isolated”.
2. “We are so happy to be care providers with Plea and are always so impressed with the quality of service for the youth as well as the support provided for care providers”.
3. “I am proud to work with PLEA, after a few years I see the extra steps, we go to help the youth. Nothing is more rewarding than bumping into my youth at Walmart that have aged out and seeing them do well”.

From External Professionals:

4. “PLEA goes above and beyond to create individualized, client-centered support plans that are unique to each person. It is not a cookie cutter approach, and the team provides dynamic solutions to complicated cases”.
5. “Good pre-planning happens prior to our youth coming down to ensure that 1) the placement is the right fit and 2) there are sufficient supports in place for them when they do arrive. Wraparound supports are extensive without being overwhelming for youth”.
6. “Appreciate the continued collaboration.”

Biggest challenges...

1. Access to affordable housing for youth transitioning to independent living and adulthood remains limited, underscoring the continued need for expanded housing options and supportive resources.
2. The availability of specialized homes for youth with autism remains insufficient, highlighting an ongoing need to increase targeted resources and specialized supports to ensure successful placements.
3. Recruitment and approval of new caregivers continues to be a key operational challenge, as demand for safe, qualified, and supportive homes consistently exceeds current capacity.

Our team...personnel²



Our team...learning undertaken

- LivingWorks Suicide Prevention Training – Equips staff with the skills and confidence to recognize, respond to, and support individuals at risk of suicide, helping to save lives.
- Trauma Informed Practice – Builds understanding of how trauma impacts behavior and development, allowing staff to provide safer, more empathetic, and effective support.
- Charmaine Hammond’s “Having Difficult Conversations” – Strengthens communication skills to navigate challenging conversations with clarity, respect, and positive outcomes.
- Attachment Theory – Enhances understanding of how early relationships impact youth behavior and emotional regulation, informing more responsive care approaches.
- Indigenous Canada (University of Alberta) – Increases awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures, and ongoing impacts of colonization to support culturally respectful and informed practice.

² Number of caregivers and staff connected to the program, not full-time equivalents (FTEs)

- Mandt De-escalation – Provides practical strategies to safely de-escalate conflict and reduce risk during crisis situations.
- Privacy and Information Sharing – Ensures staff understand legal and ethical responsibilities in protecting personal information while supporting appropriate collaboration.
- Naloxone Administration – Prepares staff to respond effectively to opioid overdoses, potentially saving lives in emergency situations.
- Human Trafficking Awareness – Helps staff identify signs of trafficking and respond appropriately to protect vulnerable youth.
- Medical Assistance Training – Ensures staff are competent in supporting and responding to the medical needs of youth in care.
- OHS – Incident Investigations – Strengthens the ability to assess, document, and learn from workplace incidents to improve safety practices.
- Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace – Promotes staff well-being and resilience by fostering a mentally healthy and supportive work environment.
- Children of the Street – It Can Happen to Anyone – Raises awareness of sexual exploitation risks and equips staff to prevent and respond to the exploitation of children and youth.
- ASD, FASD & PDA – Builds knowledge of neurodevelopmental differences to better support youth with diverse cognitive and behavioral needs.
- ASD Health Survey and Sensory Awareness – Enhances understanding of sensory processing and health considerations for individuals with FASD, improving individualized care.
- De-escalating Children and Youth in Crisis – Develops skills to safely and effectively support youth during emotional or behavioral crises.
- ASD Training through the Canucks Autism Network – Provides practical, evidence-informed strategies to support youth with autism in building skills and engaging in daily activities.
- *Reclaiming Youth at Risk* (by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern) presents a strengths-based model for supporting troubled youth by addressing their unmet needs rather than just punishing negative behaviors. It merges indigenous philosophies with modern psychology to create the Cricle of Courage model, focusing on four core needs: Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity.

Our team... relationships

- Peter Gong – Aboriginal Elder and Carver – Provides cultural guidance and hands-on learning opportunities that strengthen identity, belonging, and connection to Indigenous traditions.
- Duncan Sangris – Dene Knowledge Keeper – Supports youth in reconnecting with Dene culture, language, and land-based knowledge, fostering cultural pride and healing.
- Jonathon Lafferty – Dene Knowledge Keeper – Offers mentorship and cultural teachings that promote resilience, identity development, and community connection.
- Creative Music Therapy (CMTS Inc.) – Uses music-based interventions to support emotional expression, regulation, and mental health in a therapeutic and engaging way.
- The Foundry – Maple Ridge, Port Coquitlam, Surrey – Provides accessible, integrated health and social services that support youth well-being, including mental health, substance use, and primary care.
- Little Buddies Occupational Therapy – Helps youth build essential life skills, improve sensory regulation, and increase independence in daily functioning.
- Happy Herd Animal Rescue – Offers therapeutic interactions with animals that support emotional regulation, confidence, and relationship-building skills.
- Paranoyd Music Studios – Creates opportunities for creative expression, skill development, and positive engagement through music production.

- Friendly Landlord Network – Aunt Leah’s – Increases access to safe and supportive housing options for youth transitioning to independence.
- Spirit of the Children – Support Programs – Provides culturally grounded programming that supports healing, identity, and connection for Indigenous youth.
- WorkBC – Connects youth to employment services, training opportunities, and job readiness supports to build economic independence.
- Elizabeth McWilliams-Hewitt – Behavioural Consultant – Offers expert guidance on complex behaviours, supporting staff in developing effective intervention strategies.
- Ears Forward Coaching – Equine Therapy – Uses equine-assisted learning to build trust, emotional regulation, and self-awareness in a non-clinical setting.
- Complex Trauma Resources – Complex Care and Intervention Program – Provides specialized expertise and intervention strategies for youth with complex trauma needs.
- Triangle Community Resources – Employment and Training – Enhances access to skills development and training pathways that support long-term employment success.
- The 1.1.2 Housing Program – Offers stable, supportive housing for young adults, helping ensure successful transitions to independent living

Next year’s goals...

1. Support the long-term stability of our programs by actively recruiting new Family Caregivers to maintain contractual placement capacity and ensure thoughtful succession planning as experienced caregivers transition toward retirement.
2. Ensure participants have consistent and meaningful contact with their birth families and home communities, fostering strong family relationships, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging.
3. Build caregiver capacity through education and training that promotes trauma-informed, culturally connected, and participant-focused care, helping youth thrive in safe and supportive family environments.
4. Increase partnerships with community housing providers and support programs to expand affordable and stable housing options for youth transitioning to independent living and adulthood. Establish or strengthen 2–3 community partnerships that support youth housing pathways.
5. To enhance participant wellbeing and cultural connection by maintaining ongoing access to the PLEA Knowledge Keeper and culturally grounded programming for all NWT participants, ensuring regular opportunities for land-based learning, cultural teachings, and identity development are embedded within service delivery.
6. To support NWT youth participants transitioning to adulthood by ensuring a seamless and well-coordinated transition into adult services programming within PLEA and appropriate services in the Northwest Territories, promoting continuity of care, stability, and long-term wellbeing.

For more information...

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