YOUTH TRANSITIONS
A Review of the Literature

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SECTION 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The youth transitions literature review focused on youth transitions from grade eight to high school and high school to adulthood. In doing so, protective factors and risk factors were explored as they relate to youth development and youth transitions in particular.

The research process resulted in the identification of over 100 articles, reports and studies from Canada, the United States and Europe. Each resource was reviewed and categorized into various themes to form the framework for the current literature review.

SECTION 2.0 YOUTH TRANSITIONS

The term transition is defined as the process of moving from the known to the unknown or the passage from one position, state or stage to another (Green, 1999; Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston & Sidoti, 2005). For youth, transitions are a shared experience as they move through various aspects of school, family and social life.

In defining youth transitions for the purpose of this review, we can conclude that youth transitions: (a) constitute a process, rather than an event, that occurs over time; (b) intersect and change between various contexts and relationships; (c) are grounded in sociological theory; and (d) can be mediated by effective programming, activities and support.

Risk factors and protective factors are often discussed in the literature pertaining to youth transitions. Throughout each stage of the cycle, there exists an interrelated set of factors which impact behaviours, choices, and outcomes for individuals (Blum, 2005). Risk factors are defined as those which increase the likelihood that a young person will experience negative outcomes, whereas protective factors counterbalance the risk factors, increasing the likelihood that an individual will make a positive transition (Blum, 2005).

Upon review of the literature, the following risk factors have been identified as they relate to youth transitions and will be discussed in more detail below:

- Socioeconomic status
- Minority group status
- Youth involved in the justice system
- Gender
- Physical and developmental disabilities
- Mental health
Like risk factors, protective factors also fluctuate over time based on different and changing social contexts. Again, these themes were derived mainly from the research and literature on youth development more generally; however, some research has identified specific factors that assist youth during transition periods. Awareness of these factors can help to support positive development and enhance healthy transitions towards adulthood through programs, activities and policy (Green, 1999).

For the purpose of the currently literature review, the following themes addressing protective factors will be discussed in greater detail:

- Family support
- Mentorship and social bonds
- Resiliency
- Engagement in effective programs

**SECTION 3.0 THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL**

Research has consistently found the transition to high school is a critical stage for students and those who struggle to make this transition successfully, often face greater challenges. For example, researchers often identify ninth grade as the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation, failing, and dropping out of school (Gibson, 2006). The transition from elementary to secondary school can entail changes in academic achievement, organizational and social concerns among youth and families, and risk factors that have the potential to make this transition more challenging.

The academic attainment of students is of primary importance when they make the transition from primary to secondary school (Midgley & Maehr, 2004). A consistent theme in the literature on the transition to high school suggests many students experience a decrease in academic achievement upon entering grade nine (Ganeson, 2006; Gordon, Peterson & Klingbeil, 2011; Tilleczek, 2007). There are various explanations discussed in the research as to why this slip in academic achievement occurs for students.

Another theme found in the literature on youth transitioning to high school discussed challenges with geography and organization. Secondary schools are often bigger, more heterogeneous, more compartmentalized, less tolerant and more rule bound then elementary schools (Tilleczek, 2007).

The transition from primary to secondary school is often reported as a stressful time for students particularly around social issues (Mackenzie, McMaugh & O’Sullivan, 2012). Students face social challenges—both real and perceived—as they move to high school, including harassment or teasing by older students, re-establishing popularity, and difficulty in making new friends (Texas Comprehensive Center, n.d.).

Research has identified additional challenges among specific groups of youth transitioning to high school. For example, individuals living in low socioeconomic status, minority youth, students with mental health issues and notable differences between genders. The literature examining the transition of youth to high school is closely linked to developmental outcomes of youth more generally, which are dependent on certain health and social contexts.
There are also protective factors discussed in the literature in terms of the transition to high school. Based on the current review of literature, the following themes were identified as important considerations in developing protective factors and programs for youth transitioning to high school: peer and social support, parental and family support, involving teachers, providing accurate information and knowledge, and collaboration.

**SECTION 4.0 TRANSITION TO POST-SECONDARY OR WORK**

The transition from high school into post-secondary or work is a key turning point in the lives of many young people (Kline & Williams, 2007). The transition out of high school into post-secondary education or work is often characterized more generally with the transition to adulthood. Transitioning from adolescence into adulthood is a critical period in youth development (United Way of Calgary, 2011).

The economic and social climate also has an impact on youth during this transition stage. We live in “new times” characterized by economic globalization, the disappearance of many traditional manufacturing occupations, the enormous growth of the service sector and the casualization of labour (Perry, Dockett, Whiton, Vickers, Johnston and Sidoti, 2005, p. 4). For example, despite staying in school longer than any other generation, Canadian youth continue to have higher unemployment rates in comparison to the adult population and take longer to make school-to-work transitions than ever before (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). Likewise, high school drop-outs, youth moving from in care to out of care, and other high risk groups all face additional challenges (Makarchuk, 2003). As a result, this period of transition has become more of a cyclical, repetitive process influenced by many individual, social and structural factors (Makarchuk, 2003).

The transition from school to work can be complicated by an increasing youth unemployment rate. In Canada, recent data shows the current unemployment rate for youth, 15 to 24 is 14.3%, compared with a rate of 6.0% for core-age adults aged 25 to 54 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Individual and family factors can also play role in the transition from school to work.

Other barriers that impeded the successful transition to the labour market include youth who are located in rural and remote locations, as well as Aboriginal youth and youth with disabilities (Bell and Benes, 2012; Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways, 2011). A frequent recommendation found in the literature is that educators develop programs that include workplace experience to enhance students’ academic accomplishments and to steer at-risk youth away from paths of social exclusion (Versnel, DeLuca, Hutchinson, Hill and Chin, 2011).

Although there is a significant amount of research into school-to-work pathways of youth in Canada, there is less research conducted on what makes for successful programs (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008).

The transition from high school to post-secondary is influenced by a variety of factors. Research has found, for example, the economic status of parents, the educational attainment of parents, and the level of parental awareness of post-secondary options are influential factors in shaping the pathway for youth into post-secondary education (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). As stated previously, youth also rely more heavily on family supports and for longer periods. Having a young adult live at home for longer periods, pursuing extended education programs and requiring support with bills and other expenses may simply be too much for many families who are already living on the edges of poverty (The United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).
As such, the socioeconomic status and support from families has real implications for transitioning youth and the opportunities they have to access post-secondary education.

Research also suggests that young women and immigrants face greater systemic, cultural and social barriers when transitioning to post-secondary education, for example, lack of information and ineligibility for scholarships and awards; which can prevent the realization of aspirations (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). Other research has also found significant gender differences in the pursuit of post-secondary education for Aboriginal youth.

In terms of transition programs for youth leaving high school, most are typically school or community based while others are collaborative, involving multiple agencies and range in terms of approaches. The Council of Ministers of Education (2012) explains some programs focus on academic support through tutoring, study skills, and homework centres, combined with career guidance and university orientation programs; others use sports, recreation, and wilderness experiences as a vehicle to engage youth; and some prioritize social and emotional development through mentorships, role models, leadership training, and community service to build self-confidence and leadership qualities while helping youth explore possibilities and make thoughtful choices for learning and work pathways.

Youth who are considered vulnerable often lack the basics necessary for successful transitions during this stage including stable housing, access to education and family support and, as a result, struggle with key transitions as they move towards independent adulthood. Of particular concern, are youth who are ageing out of government care, often at age 18, as they are at a greater risk for a number of barriers compared to their peers (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

In addition, there is a growing body of research examining the transition from high school to adulthood for youth living with disabilities. This research has found youth with disabilities are significantly less likely to complete school, to be employed and to participate in the labour force. These youth are often faced with fragmented services, limited program accessibility, and training that too often focuses on low-paying jobs (Bangser, 2008).

SECTION 5.0 EVIDENCE INFORMED MODEL TO SUPPORT YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Based on the review of literature various themes emerged. This section provides two evidence-informed models for youth moving through transitions. In addition, a third model is discussed which was retrieved from the Demonstration Project Work Plan (2009) developed through the Ending Poverty Working Group. These models will be further explored in the following section.
These models discuss risk and protective factors related to successful youth transitions.
The following model was originally developed by the Ending Poverty Working Group (CYN, 2009) to improve the well-being of children and youth by tackling the problems of poverty, literacy and healthy eating and physical activity.

Instead of creating a new model, we have chosen to highlight this model as the research evidence of the current literature review supports this model as a best practice during youth during transitions.

As this model suggests, successful youth transitions are influenced by a variety of social factors and surrounded by various circles of influence.

*Model for the Demonstration Project (2009)*

Based on the review of literature, we can conclude the previous model, developed by the Ending Poverty Working Group, is grounded in evidence-based practice.

In addition to the factors presented in the model depicted above, our review of literature suggests the incorporation of protective factors and the identification of risk factors are important considerations in creating a holistic model.

In creating transition programs for youth, the model for the Demonstration Project provides an evidence-based model of best practice. In addition, however, consideration should be given to the protective and risk factors discussed in this review. When developing programs, activities and policies to address youth transitions, it is important to take these factors into consideration to develop an integrative and holistic support system for youth development throughout important life transitions.
SECTION 6.0 CONCLUSION

It is evident there is more research needed on transition programs and activities. Research clearly indicates protective and risk factors associated with youth development; however, there is a lack of rigorous evaluation studies on specific programs and activities developed for youth transition programs.

This literature review can provide a starting point in terms of successful elements of youth programs and can also be considered and referenced when developing programs for youth in transition.

Moving forward, consideration should be given to developing one cohesive model to inform the development of the working groups within the CYN. Based on the results derived from the research on youth literacy and youth transitions, there appears to be important similarities in terms of providing support, namely, the effectiveness of implementing an integrative and holistic model.

Supporting healthy and successful youth development requires a collective and concerted effort by various groups. Efforts should continue to be placed on creating programs and activities to enhance protective factors grounded in an integrative model of support.
SECTION 1.0 Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS

The youth transitions literature review focused on youth transitions from grade eight to high school and high school to adulthood. Protective factors and risk factors were explored as they relate to youth development and youth transitions in particular. The following research questions guided this literature review:

- What are the risk factors and protective factors associated with youth development?
- What are the themes found in the literature on the transition from elementary to high school?
- What are the themes found in the literature on the transition from high school to post-secondary and work?
- What are the program elements and activities that can assist youth during these transitions?
- What are the overarching themes that can be implemented to create a best practice model?

Research was collected from various academic journals by searching social science databases including the Social Science Citation Index and Scholars Portal Journals. In addition, a review of the grey literature was conducted. This included information obtained through the Google search engine as well as specific websites (i.e., Statistics Canada). A variety of terms were used to obtain and refine the search through these means. A complete list of search terms can be found on page 51 of the appendix.

The research process resulted in the identification of over 100 articles, reports and studies from Canada, the United States and Europe. Each resource was reviewed and categorized into various themes to form the framework for the current literature review. The current report has been divided into the following four sections to enhance readability and to present the various themes derived from the literature:

Section 2.0 discusses the definition of youth transitions. This includes an overview of the risk and protective factors commonly discussed in the literature focusing on youth development.

Section 3.0 presents the literature found relating to the transition from grade eight to high school. Themes discussed include protective and risk factors as well as programs.

Section 4.0 explores literature as it relates to the transition from high school to adulthood. In doing so, the transition to work and post-secondary education is discussed.

Section 5.0 presents three models based on the review of literature. These models represent best practice and discuss risk factors, protective factors and system factors as they relate to youth transitions.
Youth move through critical life stages as they progress between the ages of 10 and their early 20’s (Green, 1999). These stages are often referred to as transitions. The term transition is defined as the process of moving from the known to the unknown or the passage from one position, state or stage to another (Green, 1999; Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston & Sidoti, 2005). For youth, transitions are a shared experience as they move through various aspects of school, family and social life. For example, youth experience transitions when they begin school, when they leave school, when they leave their primary school to go to high school, and when they leave high school to go to post-secondary institutions or the work place (Ganeson, 2006).

The focus of the current literature review explores two of these transitions in particular—namely the transition from elementary school to high school, and the transition from high school to post-secondary institutions or work. These stages in particular have been identified in the literature on adolescent development as most significant for youth transitions. Bonnell and Zizys (2005) provide a useful definition of these stages:

- **Transition from elementary to secondary**: Occurs at age 12 or 13 years, an important development moment, when youth have emerged from elementary school and are entering secondary education.
- **Transition from high school to post-secondary or work**: Occurs at the end of the teen years, when youth may be entering college, university or the workforce.

From a theoretical perspective in defining youth transitions, typically two sociological frameworks are cited, namely, life course theory and ecological theory. Life course theory has become a popular paradigm for understanding the transition of youth in and out of various contexts throughout the lifespan (Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1990). The life course approach seeks to understand how transitions impact the lives of individuals within structural, social and cultural contexts (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003). Likewise, ecological theory focuses on the context of individuals—such as the home, school and workplace—and the socially and culturally based connections between these over time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). Key to this model of transition are the relationships between the different contexts (or ecologies) in which youth spend their time and the impact of those relationships and contexts on the development of youth (Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston & Sidoti, 2005).

Intertwined in each youth transition are various elements and contexts that impact and shape transitions for youth both collectively and individually. As Stuart (2010) explains, the transition itself is constituted by a spectrum of transitions taking place in various contexts, all of which have their own rules, whilst creating their own sense of normality. Examples of these contexts include, changes to family structure, school, friendships, leaving school, leaving home/care, and entering employment (Action for Children, 2009). It is in these areas—and others that will be discussed—that effective programming is most vital (Green, 1999).

The smoothness of any transition process depends on a variety of factors including young people’s development, level of readiness, and the complexity of their needs; the capacities and resources of the youth and family; and the existence of environmental supports and the availability of choices (King, Baldwin, Currie & Evans, 2005).
In defining youth transitions for the purpose of this review, we can conclude that youth transitions:
(a) constitute a process, rather than an event, that occurs over time; (b) intersect and change between
various contexts and relationships; (c) are grounded in sociological theory; and (d) can be mediated
by effective programming, activities and support.

Moving forward in designing effective transition programs, it is important to have a better understanding
of the contextual factors which shape the development of how youth experience transitions. As such,
in the following section, both risk factors and protective factors will be explored as they relate to impact
on youth transitions. These factors were identified in the literature as prevalent to the transition from
elementary to high school and the transition from high school to post-secondary or work.

2.1 RISK FACTORS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Risk factors and protective factors are often discussed in the literature pertaining to youth transitions.
Throughout each stage of the cycle, there exists an interrelated set of factors which impact behaviours,
choices, and outcomes for individuals (Blum, 2005). Risk factors are defined as those which increase
the likelihood that a young person will experience negative outcomes, whereas protective factors
counterbalance the risk factors, increasing the likelihood that an individual will make a positive
transition (Blum, 2005).

In the following section, these factors will be briefly discussed as they relate to their impact on youth
transitions overall. Although these factors may differ depending on the transition, it is important to
introduce these factors now as they have relevance at all stages of youth transitions and provide a
useful framework to guide both policy and program structures (Blum, 2005). It is also important to note
the literature and research available on risk and protective factors as they relate to youth transitions
is fairly weak. Although the body of literature available on these issues appears to be developing,
much of the available evidence to support outcomes is based on literature which discusses differences
in academic outcomes, psychological and social-emotional outcomes, behavioural outcomes, and
teacher perceptions. Likewise, the majority of this research is derived from the literature on youth
development more generally as opposed to youth development through specific transitions.

2.2 RISK FACTORS

When discussing youth transitions, and developing programs to support youth through these
transitions, there are important risk factors that need to be addressed. Risk factors have been identified
as occurring on, and being influenced by, multiple factors of varying levels, and fluctuating over time,
based on circumstances and contexts, rather than being a static or fixed quality (Tilleczek, 2007).

Tilleczek (2007), for example, defines and outlines risk factors from an ecological perspective during
youth transitions on three levels including macro (culture and school structure), meso (family, friends
and classrooms) and micro (youth):
Macro Level (Culture and School Structure)

- Social class and poverty
- Gender differences in adjustment
- Ethnicity and visible minority status
- Age and "age-ism"
- The primacy of the need for status and belonging can get lost
- Cross-school and cross-panel cultures are different
- Tend to focus on academic issues only, rather than relation of academic/social/procedural issues

Meso Level (Families, Friends, and Classrooms)

- Losing, keeping and exposure to new friends is critical
- Some learner pathways are better than others
- Friends and dating
- Social isolation can occur in new, large, bureaucratic settings
- Familial relations
- Teacher-student relations
- Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

Micro Level (Youth)

- Identity issues are critical and often overlooked
- Alienation and isolation
- At-risk students require additional assistance through adjustment
- Mental health issues can be overlooked (i.e., stress, anxiety, depression)
- Dips in academic achievement can lead to disengagement

(Adapted from Tilleczek and Ferguson, 2007, p. 33-34)

Upon review of the literature, the following risk factors have been identified as they relate to youth transitions and will be discussed in more detail below.

- Socioeconomic status
- Minority group status
- Youth involved in the justice system
- Gender
- Physical and developmental disabilities
- Mental health

Socioeconomic Status

Poverty has long been understood as the most critical risk condition for youth across many outcomes and the pervasiveness of the socioeconomic gradient effect has been documented in detail (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Tilleczek, 2007). Research has continuously confirmed the challenge and long-term implications of growing up in poverty as a significant risk factor in predicting outcomes for child and youth development over the life course.
Over the past decade, the income gap has widened between Canadian families and research has shown educational outcomes are one of the key areas influenced by family outcomes (Ferguson, Bovaird & Mueller, 2007; Guldi, Page & Stevens, 2006). Likewise, research has demonstrated living in low SES is associated with decreased education aspirations and attainment, other school problems, low self-esteem, substance abuse problems, suicide, and juvenile offences (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001). Likewise, youth from low-income families are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes and they often demonstrate poorer cognitive and behaviour outcomes (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

Breaking the cycle of generational poverty requires multiple supports. Children who grow up in poverty are at a higher risk of living in poverty when they are adults, are less likely to graduate from high school, and less likely to go on to post-secondary education (Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, n.d.).

**Minority Group Status**

Much of what is found in the research about youth of different SES groups has a close relationship to what is said of cultural and ethnic differences as well (McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2003). Research indicates minority group status (race/ethnicity, country of origin and/or sexual orientation) is associated with greater challenges during transition stages than youth not representative of minority groups.

For example, research demonstrates educational attainment is unequally distributed among minority and immigrant groups in Canada and is associated with high rates of disengagement in school (McMillian & Marks, 2003; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn & Rounds, 2002; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007). These youth are also more likely to confront barriers related to racism, discrimination and marginalization, compounding the likelihood they will live in low-income households and struggle to access education and employment opportunities (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

In addition, Aboriginal youth tend to experience higher rates of poverty, poor health, homelessness, family breakdown, child welfare involvement and greater involvement in high-risk behaviours, relative to other youth in Canada (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

**Youth Involved in the Justice System**

Research has consistently demonstrated involvement in the criminal justice system compounds vulnerability through exposure to further barriers and stigmatization. Youth involved in the juvenile justice system tend to struggle both early and later in life (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

**Gender**

There is some evidence to suggest differences exist between genders as youth develop and transition through different stages. The majority of this research examines differences in educational attainment.

For example, research indicates young men and women report different reasons for engaging in and leaving school. Risk factors for young men include the need to work, mental health and addiction issues, and/or incarceration, whereas young women tend to leave to take care of children, families or
to work (Ferguson et al., 2005). Likewise, although young women are currently completing high school at a higher rate than young men in Canada, studies have indicated women who do leave school early are at a greater disadvantage than men who leave as they face an increased risk of unemployment, poverty and lack of social support (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

Likewise, some researchers have explained the number of young males who are dropping out of school, relinquishing graduation, and dispensing with college or university education is a source of continuing concern (Boys Literacy Teacher Inquiry, 2005).

There is also some research to suggest adjustment to transition stages differ depending on gender. For example, studies have indicated girls report more depression, more feelings of vulnerability, a greater decline in commitment to school and a decline in self-esteem during transitions as compared to boys (Ferguson & Barry, 1998; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1987; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

Physical and Developmental Disabilities

There is a growing body of research examining the unique challenges youth living with various disabilities face when transitioning. Research posits that youth with physical and developmental challenges experience greater difficulty and higher levels of social risk than do students without these challenges, during transition periods (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; Tur-Kaspa, 2002).

The transition process can have multiple and complex impacts on youth with disabilities and their families (King, Baldwin, Currie & Evans, 2005). For example, research has consistently shown that compared to youth without disabilities, youth with disabilities are less likely to be employed or participate in post-secondary education, are at a greater risk for social difficulties, take part in fewer organized social activities, and have fewer contacts with peers outside of school (King, Baldwin, Currie & Evans, 2005). As such, the research in this area has suggested for many youth living with physical or developmental disabilities, transition planning is essential (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994).

Mental Health

Mental illness is often described as the most significant health issue for youth, affecting between 15 to 25 percent of individuals as they transition throughout their life course (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011). Unfortunately, many mental health issues amongst youth often go undiagnosed and untreated. Research examining youth with mental health issues and transitions typically address transitions between agencies and sectors to promote better health integration (Children’s Mental Health Ontario, 2013).

There has been some research evidence, however, to demonstrate mental health plays a significant role during transition stages for many youth. For example, research suggests youth who experience challenges during transitions often experience mental health issues (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; Rudolph et al., 2001; Wallis & Barrett, 1998) and that transitions can also exacerbate mental health issues such as depressive and anxious symptoms (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; Rudolph et al., 2001; Wallis & Barrett, 1998).
In summary, it is important to note that as the number of these risk factors increases, so does the risks. Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) highlight, in their review of selected literature, that youth with two or more risk factors had a greater likelihood of unfavourable outcomes when transitioning throughout the life span. Likewise, if a youth faces multiple negative factors at home, at school and in the community, the effects of these factors are typically multiplied, rather than simply added together, as these conditions interact and reinforce each other (Tilleczek, 2007; Werner & Smith, 1992).

The previous section identified some of the risk factors discussed in the research on youth development and youth transitions specifically. Although the previously discussed risk factors are associated with increased difficulty during transition phases, there are also protective factors that can alleviate these risks. These protective factors are important to consider when developing programs to assist youth during transitions. In the next section, common protective factors discussed in the literature will be highlighted.

2.3 PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Like risk factors, protective factors also fluctuate over time based on different and changing social contexts. Again, these themes were derived mainly from the research and literature on youth development more generally; however, some research has identified specific factors that assist youth during transition periods. Awareness of these factors can help to support positive development and enhance healthy transitions towards adulthood through programs, activities and policy (Green, 1999).

Research has identified a number of individual and contextual factors that promote healthy development in youth. For example, in a report completed for the Calgary Children’s Initiative on key issues facing youth in transition, Makarchuck (2003) identified the following protective factors based on a review of relevant literature and research:

**Protective Factors:**
- Parental presence
- Low family stress (such as an absence of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse etc.)
- Recreation
- Exercise and extra-curricular activities
- A cohesive/stable family, external support, protective personal resources
- Positive attitude towards school, teacher support and a lack of parental pressure
- High expectations from parents (for achievement and for completing high school) is associated with lower levels of health risk behaviours
- Parental attitudes toward education
- Having positive peer relationships and influences
- Developing intrinsic strengths (i.e., empowerment, self-control, self-concept, cultural sensitivity, social sensitivity)
- Other positive factors that may provide protection include: volunteering, creativity, spirituality, delayed gratification, persistence, good health/diet, academic excellence, personal development (read for pleasure), social development (i.e., cultural awareness)

(Adapted from Makarchuk, 2003, p.12)
Young people need positive relationships and caring social environments to grow and thrive. As such, many of the protective factors identified in the literature address the importance of positive relationships such as, feeling cared about by family, feeling connected to school, having caring adults to turn to with problems, and having supportive friends with positive social values (The McCreary Centre Society, 2006). Other protective factors create opportunities for engaging in creative skills and artistic expression, teamwork, health enhancing social activities, and/or making a difference in the community through volunteer work (McCreary Centre Society, 2006).

For the purpose of the current literature review, the following themes addressing protective factors will be discussed in greater detail:

- Family support
- Mentorship and social bonds
- Resiliency
- Engagement in effective programs

**Family Support**

Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of family support for children and youth as they develop and grow. Families are the keystones in the foundation of social supports and caring relationships and consistent emotional bonds between families and adolescents are significant protective factors for youth (The Youth Development Institute, 2002). Family support contributes to a variety of key aspects pertaining to healthy youth development, including: providing nurturing relationships, a sense of security, financial resources, and support for the development of a strong sense of identity (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

Research demonstrates that family involvement during transition periods enhances success outcomes among youth. For example, Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) explain parental involvement and engagement has been linked to better student achievement more generally and success during periods of transitions. Likewise, other research has found that youth who feel cared about by family, can talk to family about their problems, or have a parent present at key times report more positive outcomes (McCreary Centre Society, 2006). Furthermore, some research suggests that parental and family attitudes toward school and the emphasis they place on education are significant indicators of academic success (Cobb, Meltzer & Williams, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

**Mentorship and Social Bonds**

Mentorship and the development of social bonds were discussed frequently in the literature on protective factors in youth development. Research has consistently shown one of the key protective factors for children and youth is the availability of consistent adults who provide them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative (Tilleczek, 2007).

This literature also recommends the importance of providing support in a variety of formats including mentoring programs, peer support groups, and counselling which can be incorporated into youth transition programs (Green, 1999). Mentoring and mentorship programs are often cited as beneficial in combatting aggression and feelings of rejection, and improving social relationships among adolescents who lack positive role models (Green, 1999).
Creating attachment and engagement to various social spheres was also found to enhance successful transitions for youth. For example, Makarchuk (2003) found that having “a sense of connectedness” to one’s family, school and community is one of the most important components in protecting youth from risk factors (p. 1). Social spheres discussed in the literature related to the development of mentorship and social bonds, including:

**Parent and Family Connectedness**: Refers to having a high degree of closeness, caring and satisfaction in family relationships. Feeling understood, loved, wanted and paid attention to by family members are also components of connectedness.

**School connectedness**: Refers to youth’s perception that they are being treated fairly by teachers, that they are getting along with teachers and students and that they are feeling close to people at school.

**Community Connectedness**: Refers to youth’s connectedness to the community and supportive adults/mentors.

(Makarchuk, 2003, p. 11)

Other research has found similar results in terms of creating a sense of connectedness. For example Green (1999) reports that youth who have a sense of connectedness to school and family are less likely to engage in risky behaviours during the important transition to adolescence such as drinking and driving, violence, early and unprotected sex and drug use.

Research also suggests there is a relationship between peer relationships and student academic achievement (Demetriou et al., 2000). Likewise, isolation, loneliness, and peer rejection have been found to be important social risks during youth transitions (Tur-Kaspa, 2002).

**Resiliency**

There is a growing body of literature which examines resiliency as a unique protective factor in youth development. Resiliency refers to achieving positive outcomes despite challenging or threatening circumstances, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding negative paths linked with risks (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). In other words, resiliency is characterized by successful adaptation in the presence of risk or adversity (Jenson and Fraser, 2010).

In terms of program development, a resilience based approach to youth development is based upon the principle that all people have the ability to overcome adversity and to succeed in spite of their life circumstances (California Health Kids, 2013). This approach puts the emphasis on potential rather than on problem solving (Green, 1999).

Likewise, the research on resiliency theory suggests youth who do overcome adversity have access to various kinds of protective support. For example, according to Benzies and Mychasiul (2009), resilience
is optimized when protective factors are strengthened at all interactive levels of the socio-ecological model, including individual, family and community. Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) identify the following socio-ecological factors as they relate to individual, family and community protective factors:

- **Individual:** Resilient children have temperamental characteristics that provoke positive responses from family members and strangers; have pronounced autonomy and a strong social orientation. Other characteristics include: intelligence, connections and attachments, coping skills, temperament, health, gender, and internal motivation. Self-regulation and a positive self-concept are also important individual factors.

- **Family:** Authoritative parenting style, family structure, intimate-partner relations, family cohesion, supportive parent-child interactions, and stable and adequate income have been associated with optimal competence in children and adolescents.

- **Community:** Role models outside of the family can be potential buffers for children at-risk. These include school counselors, after-school program supervisors, coaches, community center workers, clergy, mental health workers, and good neighbours. Other community supports discussed include environments and social structures such as early prevention and intervention programs, safety in neighbourhoods, relevant support services, recreational facilities and programs, accessibility to adequate health services, economic opportunities for families, and religious and spiritual organizations.

The research on resilience theory offers researchers and practitioners a conceptual model to understand how children and youth overcome adversity and how this knowledge can be used to improve strengths and build positive characteristics in their lives (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012).

**Engagement in Effective Programs**

Offering effective programming that addresses risk factors and encourages protective factors for youth to enhance their skills and provide support is important during transitions.

A transition program is ideally a set of activities, strategies and/or resources proposed by an institution to ease the passage of students during transition (Ganeson, 2006). The overall aim of these programs and activities is to ensure the passage is made easier for students and to help them overcome the emotional, social, intellectual and physical challenges by reducing apprehension and increasing students’ sense of belonging (Ganeson, 2006). Examples of some of these programs have already been discussed in the research above, for example mentorship, peer support, health and social services, economic opportunities, academic support and counselling.

When planning programs to support transition it is important to recognize the different elements and issues involved and to target them appropriately, while at the same time, recognizing that such issues overlap and are often intertwined (Perry, Dockett, Whitten, Vickers, Johnston and Sidoti, 2005). In other words, while transitions share common elements, it is important to understand that each individual or community may experience them in different and unique ways.
Taken together, some research has proposed general themes and guidelines to consider when developing transition programs for youth. For example, Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston and Sidoti (2005) proposed guidelines for effective transition programs which hold that such programs:

- Establish positive relationships between the children, parents and educators
- Facilitate each child’s development as a capable learner
- Draw upon dedicated funding and resources
- Involve a range of stakeholders
- Are well planned and effectively evaluated
- Are flexible and responsive
- Are based on mutual trust and respect
- Rely on reciprocal communication among participants
- Take into account the contextual aspects of community, and of individual families and children within that community


Furthermore, when considering these guidelines and their applicability across a range of educational transitions, the authors identify several themes, including:

- The importance of relationships;
- Focusing on strengths and competencies rather than deficits;
- Promoting inclusivity rather than exclusivity;
- Responsiveness to local communities;
- The need for dedicated support and resources; and
- High quality programs

Specific program features will be discussed in more detail throughout this review as they relate to the transition from elementary to high school and high school to post-secondary or work.

The previous section discussed the definition and importance of youth transitions. As the research suggests, there are both risk and protective factors that affect and mitigate how youth develop and adjust. These factors are embedded in the individual, social and structural systems in our culture. Although the factors discussed in this section relate to youth development generally, they have important implications for youth as they transition from elementary to high school and from high school to post-secondary and work. In the following section, research pertaining specifically to these transitions will be discussed in more detail.
SECTION 3.0

The Transition to High School

During the transition to ninth grade a change process occurs that includes dealing with a new school year, a new set of teachers, a new building and new routines both in and out of the classroom (Gibson, 2006). For the majority of young Canadians, the movement from elementary to high school is the first major transition of adolescence (Green, 1999).

Although the transition to high school is an exciting time for young people and their families it is also a crucial transition point that requires special attention and support. Researchers have begun to examine this transition point as an important juncture for future success and risk. For example, Williamston (2013) argues the transition to high school has become an important area of focus for the following reasons:

- The single most predictive indicator of high school dropout rate is a student’s academic standing during the ninth grade.
- Declining achievement during the transition to high school impacts divisions to dropout of school.
- Behaviour problems resulting in suspension or expulsion increase significantly early in the ninth grade.
- Students who have transitioned to ninth grade report that academic ability, time management, ability to stay on task and social skills are important in high school.
- Social issues such as peer relationships, bullying and getting lost overshadow concerns about academics.

(Williamston, 2013, p. 1)

Research has consistently found the transition to high school is a critical stage for students and those who struggle to make this transition successfully, often face greater challenges. For example, researchers often identify ninth grade as the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation, failing, and dropping out of school (Gibson, 2006). The transition from elementary to secondary school can entail changes in academic achievement, organizational and social concerns among youth and families, and risk factors that have the potential to make this transition more challenging (Tilleczek, 2010).

There are many difficulties for students, families and teachers in the transition from primary to secondary school. As a result it is vital to identify the challenges specific to this transition period for youth as well as programs and resources to assist youth during this time.
3.1 TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

In the following section, research addressing the transition from elementary to high school will be discussed. In particular, the impact of this transition on academic achievement, organizational and social concerns among youth and families, and risk factors that have the potential to make this transition more challenging.

**Impact on Academic Achievement**

The academic attainment of students is of primary importance when they make the transition from primary to secondary school (Midgley & Maehr, 2004). A consistent theme in the literature on the transition to high school suggests many students experience a decrease in academic achievement upon entering grade nine (Ganeson, 2006; Gordon, Peterson & Klingbeil, 2011; Tilleczek, 2007). There are various explanations discussed in the research as to why this slip in academic achievement occurs for students.

Some research has found a correlation between a decline in academic achievement and the onset of adolescence (Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson & Drawby, 2001). The transition process to high school coincides with the onset of puberty which brings physical, social, psychological and emotional changes (Makarchuk, 2003).

Other research suggests the reason for a decrease in academic achievement during the transition to high school is attributed to the focus of the different environments. For example, in a study by Nieraeth (2011) on finding success during the transition to high school, it was noted that during the elementary years, much of the learning is student-centered and students find purpose in the learning process; however, when these students reach the secondary level, Nieraeth (2011) argues, they find environments that are more teacher-centered which require higher levels of motivation and responsibility to be successful.

Other research has demonstrated similar results in explaining a decrease in academic achievement. For example, Ganeson (2006) notes students entering high school face a number of curricular and academic challenges that have an impact on transition as students now learn more subjects than previously and the amount of homework is often intensified and given more frequently. Likewise, other literature has noted as students are faced with a larger, more impersonal, more competitive, more academically orientated environments, a greater diversity of teachers and peers, and more choice to make about curricular and co-curricular activities, students grades may drop (Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston & Sidoti, 2005; Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson & Drawby, 2001).

For students who are able to manage the academic demands of the transition to high school, there is some research that demonstrates they also have a higher probability of graduating four years later than those who fail to earn as many credits as they should during the ninth grade (Neild, 2009).

Interestingly, a study completed by Whitley, Lupart and Beran (2007) that examined research on the transition of Canadian students to high school, found that school transition did not impact academic achievement. Likewise, Lipps (2005), using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), examined the adjustment of Canadian students who moved into high school and did not find a relationship between students’ grades and transition (Lipps, 2005; Whitley, Lupart & Beran, 2007). The authors suggest the studies reviewed indicate that students in Canadian schools
may experience the transition to high schools somewhat differently from students in the United States and Europe; however, a systematic examination of the impact of school transition on academic achievement of Canadian students’ needs to be studied further before this conclusion can be formalized.

**Organizational Challenges**

Another theme found in the literature on youth transitioning to high school discussed challenges with geography and organization. Secondary schools are often bigger, more heterogeneous, more compartmentalized, less tolerant and more rule bound than elementary schools (Tilleczek, 2007).

Studies that evaluated students’ experience during the transition to high school found that students often expressed concern about the new geographic location and organizational structure of the high school (Ganeson, 2006). Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston and Sidoti (2005) suggest that organizational issues cover two broad categories including structural and administrative issues and offer a definition of both:

- **Structural**: The structure relates to the overall organization of the school, year groups, placement of classes, and organization of additional curricula activities, day-to-day procedures of the school, the learning environment, the length of lessons and the issues that impact upon each student and their family as well as the teachers.
- **Administrative**: Administrative issues relate to how classes are organized, including the leadership with the school and roles and responsibilities of the teacher, timetable issues, and travel to school.

Other literature has found similar concerns regarding the transition to high school. For example, McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow (2003) explain that students are often concerned about the size and layout of the secondary school, their timetable, complicated schedules, getting lost and having multiple teachers (McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2003; Tilleczek, 2007).

**Social Challenges**

The transition from primary to secondary school is often reported as a stressful time for students particularly around social issues (Mackenzie, McMaugh & O’Sullivan, 2012). Adolescence is a period when social acceptance is typically perceived by students to be of great importance and this is often intensified during the primary to secondary transition when the formation of new social groups is at its peak (Mackenzie, McMaugh & O’Sullivan, 2012). Students face social challenges—both real and perceived—as they move to high school, including harassment or teasing by older students, re-establishing popularity, and difficulty in making new friends (Texas Comprehensive Center, n.d.).

The transition to secondary school can disrupt friendships as students move to different schools, as well as expand opportunities for friendships as students encounter many more peers and different opportunities for interaction. Research has found that students report they feel both excited by the social challenges they face as well as scared and anxious that they may not make friends (Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston & Sidoti, 2005). Likewise, a study completed by Chapman and Sawyer (2001) found that students who reported problems making friends and with the socialization process during transitions, are more likely to experience issues succeeding in school overall.
A study completed by Chedzoy and Burden (2005) found that students identified fitting in and making friends as being of utmost importance during the transition period. Other research found social concerns include getting lost, bullying, making new friends and being separated from friends (Kvalsund, 2000; Tilleczek, 2010).

Other researchers, however, have found that many young people often report being hopeful about their new status, school, friends and education. For example, Tilleczek (2010) found that students often look forward to this fresh start and are adept at making new friends for positive academic purposes. Likewise, research has also found students report coping better than expected, enjoying new freedoms and involvement in extra-curricular activities (Tilleczek, 2010).

### 3.2 Risk Factors

Research has identified additional challenges among specific groups of youth transitioning to high school. Some of these factors overlap with those discussed in section one, however it is important to highlight the research as it relates specifically to the transition from elementary to high school.

For example, individuals living in low socioeconomic status, minority youth, students with mental health issues and notable differences between genders. The literature examining the transition of youth to high school is closely linked to developmental outcomes of youth more generally, which are dependent on certain health and social contexts. For example, Makarchuk (2003) highlights seven factors identified that place children and youth at risk during this transition, including:

- Low income
- Having a single parent
- Low level of parental education
- Parental substance abuse
- Teenage pregnancy
- Parental mental health
- Negative parenting practices

(Makarchuk, 2003, p. 10).

In terms of the specific factors associated with greater difficulty during the transition to high school, there was some notable research. In the following section, these factors will be discussed further. In terms of minority status, there is some research out of the United States which indicates youth of minority status may experience greater challenges when transitioning to high school. Transferring from primary to secondary school can pose specific problems and concerns for students who do not belong to the “majority” culture (McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow, 2003). Research has consistently demonstrated that culture impacts upon health and social development in various ways. For example, a lack of continuity with ones culture of origin can lead to youth feeling isolated and to have difficulties in identity development (Green, 1999).

There is a lack of research to account for the impact of culture on the transition from elementary to high school; however, there are a few notable studies. For example, Makarchuk (2003) notes that minority youth often face additional challenges such as a lack of understanding from teachers/students, a lack of continuity with their culture, increased isolation, and difficulties with school-work
and increased bullying from other students. Likewise, in a study by Benner and Graham (2009) the transition to high school was evaluated using an ethnically diverse sample to examine the high school transition experiences of adolescents from different racial/ethnic groups. Results indicate the immediate transition appears to be particularly challenging for African American and Latino students (Benner & Graham, 2009).

This transition period has also been associated with mental health concerns (Gutman & Eccles, 2007; Zeedyk et al., 2003), including the onset of eating disorders (Birchley, 2007) and declines in self-esteem (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Mackenzie, McMaugh & O’Sullivan, 2012).

In terms of gender differences among youth transitioning to high school, some research suggests that girls experience different types of stress and concern. For example, Ganeson (2006) explains girls experience peer relationships as the most stressful during transitions and are worried about being bullied, whereas boys reported peer relationships, conflict with authority and academic pressures as equal stressors. However, the literature on the association between gender and transitions to high school is small and much more is needed before impacts can be comprehensively assessed (McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow, 2003).

Finally, low socioeconomic status (SES) has been identified as a risk factor in terms of difficult transitions and is linked to healthy development. Socioeconomic deficits may contribute to a variety of difficulties for adolescents including adolescent smoking, drug and alcohol use, suicide, dropping out of high school, and juvenile offences (Green, 1999).

### 3.3 PROTECTIVE FACTORS DURING THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

In the following section, protective factors will be discussed as they relate specifically to youth transitioning from elementary to high school. In addition, program elements and features will also be presented.

Based on the current review of literature, the following themes were identified as important considerations in developing protective factors and programs for youth transitioning to high school: peer and social support, parental and family support, involving teachers, providing accurate information and knowledge, and collaboration.

#### Peer and social support

Friendships and social networking are important for students as they move to a new school (Williamston, 2010). The transition to secondary school can often disrupt friendship networks and cause stress and concern for students entering a new social environment. As such, researchers have identified the importance of providing opportunities for students to participate in peer and social activities to develop positive relationships with older students, incoming students, teachers and staff, and the larger community (Green, 1999; Midgley & Maehr, 2004).

A study by Ganeson (2006) of the lived experience of students who transition to high school in Queensland found the role of friendship as critical during this stage. For example, it was found that friendship groups changed for some students and it was easy for these students to make new friends in a large school even though some of them had lost their old and trusted friends.
Likewise, the transition into high school often became a period of the end for existing friendships for some students and the beginning of new ones for many others (Ganeson, 2006, p. 209).

Induction programs are used by some schools—also referred to as “shadowing programs”—which allow students to partake in the daily activities of high school students. Schools differ on the amount of time they offer this activity for (i.e., one day to three days) but the goal is to assist incoming students and reduce their concerns by providing senior students as mentors (Ganeson, 2006). Research has shown these programs can reduce the anxiety of transitioning to a new school and also reduce the fear of being bullied (Ganeson, 2006; Kneisler, 2001). For example, Midgley and Maehr (2004) note that providing mentorship programs and “buddying” with older pupils can reduce stress and improve performance for students during transitions (Midgley & Maehr, 2004, p. 15).

Williamston (2010) identifies a variety of other strategies for providing social support as well including:

**Strategies for Providing Social Support**

- Help students gain confidence in themselves as learners to increase self-esteem and confidence about success in high school
- Include lessons on how to learn, how to study and how to take tests
- Focus on personal problem solving and decision making in high school
- Invite middle school students to shadow ninth graders
- Establish small houses or academies for ninth graders
- Include an opportunity to interact with high school students in all summer bridge activities
- Provide specialized ninth-grade course that focuses on multi-year plans for success in high school
- Provide every ninth grader with an adult mentor or advisor

(Williamston, 2010, p. 4)

**Parental and Family Support**

Family support has been linked to achievement after transition. The importance of including parents in the transition process and communicating expectations of how parents can support their students is stressed by many researchers (Texas Comprehensive Centre, n.d.). For example, Nieraeth (2011) explains that students who have parental involvement in their education will more likely exhibit increased academic achievement, lower amounts of behavioural problems, and will be less likely to drop out of school. Likewise, Williamston (2010) found when parents are involved in students’ transition, they tend to stay involved in their child’s high school experience, students achieve more, and will better adjust. As such, reaching out to parents can be an effective method to help with the transition of students between elementary and high school (Nieraeth, 2011).

Several studies have shown various factors families can provide to promote school success during the transition to high school, such as:
Factors that Promote School Success After Transition to Secondary School:

- Presence of books in the home
- A place in the home to study
- Parents maintaining rules limiting television viewing
- Frequency of checking on homework
- Parent discussion of schoolwork with their children
- Parent participation in parent-teacher organization
- Parents monitoring their child’s social life and creating a positive peer network for them
- Parents monitoring their child’s academic progress
- Parent knowledge of school structure and bureaucracy
- Self-confidence in making demands of the school and to intercede on their child’s behalf when necessary
- Ability to provide time, energy and money for resources
- Ability to wield their resources in supervising, monitoring and supporting their children at home and at school

(McGee, War, Gibbons & Harlow, 2003, p. 47)

In addition, research has found parental involvement can decrease unless teachers and principals work to encourage their continued involvement (Williamston, 2010). Parental involvement often drops by the ninth grade as students seek greater independence, however by communicating expectations and providing tools and resources to understand the needs and challenges of youth, educators can play a significant role in encouraging parents and families to share responsibility for students’ success in high school (Neild, 2009; Texas Comprehensive Center, n.d.). Williamston (2010) highlights the following strategies for providing information to students and parents to enhance and maintain engagement:

Strategies for Providing Information to Students and Parents

- Invite parents to participate in a conference with their child and the high school counsellor about course options and schedules
- Tell students and parents the truth about what counts in high school and why they will need to know and be able to do
- Provide lessons on how and who to approach when questions and concerns arise in the new school
- Ask parents to visit the high school with their children in the spring and again in the fall
- Invite parents to spend an entire day at the high school to help them understand what their child’s life will be like
- Involve parents in planning transition activities that will support students and parents during the transition
- Connect middle school parents with parents of current high school students

(Williamston, 2010, p. 4)
Likewise, the Texas Comprehensive Center (n.d.) developed a list of activities and practices based on a review of literature that can be implemented in a transition program with a focus on involving parents and families in the transition process. These include:

- Make communication and involvement with parents a priority. Encourage parents to engage in small group or family conversations and also communicate in other ways with families who may not be able to come to the school physically.
- Send notices and newsletters and also promote two-way communication such as phone calls and e-mails. Ensure that supports are in place for families that do not speak English including translation services and having information available in other languages when possible. Consider a system for alerting parents when students are absent or other concerns arise.
- Ensure that parents feel comfortable coming to school and confident that their involvement makes a difference in their child’s academic success. Include parents in social activities, such as a morning coffee or a luncheon, as well as for academic and high school preparatory activities. Ensure that the front office is welcoming and that school personnel know the importance of creating and maintaining a “family friendly” environment.
- Involve parents in conversations with their child and ninth-grade teachers and/or counselors and discuss expectations for high school. Set personal and academic goals for high school while in the eighth grade. If available, review eighth-grade student data and portfolios to help set high school goals.
- Consider holding workshops or parent education programs on different topics of interest, such as guiding students in choosing electives, helping with homework, living with adolescents, monitoring risky behaviors, and other areas of interest or need.
- Invite parents of ninth-grade students (groups of 15–20) to a coffee or a tea hosted by high school administrators (held weekly throughout the ninth-grade year) to discuss high school policies and procedures as well as to offer ideas for supporting students academically.
- Ask parents of high school students to call other families and invite them to the high school for meetings, events or celebrations.
- Provide academic supports and tools for communicating students’ academic progress to parents, e.g., end of term conferences or more frequent progress reports.

(The Texas Comprehensive Center, n.d., p. 6)

Involving Teachers

The student-teacher relationship is an important dynamic for students during their transition to high school. Teachers play an important role in helping students during the transition and empowering them to be committed to lifelong learning (Ganeson, 2006).

For example, in an Australian study it was found the nature of the teacher and the type of teaching were the main issues noted by students about the transition to secondary school (Cocklin, 1999). Likewise, research studies have found that students who report easier transition into high school were often assisted by kind, helpful teachers (Ganeson, 2006).

Tilleczek (2010) argues, however, the beliefs held by secondary teachers about friendships, academic interests and youth as motivated learners can be improved. For example, he explains that teacher
expectations and beliefs are an integral part of the student-teacher relationship and during the transition stage, teachers often report negative stereotypes and images of young people, which can make it easier for students to skip classes, grades to drop and homework to be neglected (Tilleczek, 2010).

Teachers also play a crucial role in identifying students who may be struggling academically or socially during the transition process. In doing so, the following activities and features were discussed in the literature:

- Address the instructional needs of students who enter high school unprepared for rigorous, college preparatory work by offering peer support programs
- Institute adolescent literacy initiatives that focus support on struggling readers or second language learners
- Organize freshman awareness and/or support groups or a ninth grade center where students can discuss common academic problems
- Assign weaker students to an experienced teacher or a student who can act as a mentor
- Establish an early warning database to capture data regarding students’ academic performance and attendance
- Provide additional support or tutoring and/or reduce the course load for struggling students

(Texas Comprehensive Centre, n.d., p. 8)

Providing Accurate Information and Knowledge

Students and parents alike have concerns about the transition to high school. Questions such as the amount of homework that will be given or where classrooms are located seem to be on the forefront of their minds during the transition to high school (Nieraeth, 2011). As a result, the fear of the unknown can lead students to start the year trying to figure out how to address these concerns rather than learn the necessary skills to become successful (Nieraeth, 2011). An effective way to mediate this stress is to provide ample information beginning early in the middle grades and continuing throughout the transition (Williamston, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Ganeson (2006) describes orientation days as an effective way to ease the process of transition and student anxiety about the new environment and allow students to get to know the new school. Studies by Chapman and Sawyer (2001) suggest activities provided during these programs should be unstructured, allowing students to have access to the school to ask questions relevant to their needs.

Schools have traditionally done a good job in providing information about the logistics of transitioning to high school for both students and parents, for example, meeting with counselors, learning about course requirements, visiting the school, and providing on-site orientation on the first day of school (Williamston, 2010). Another effective way to ensure information is shared effectively includes the implementation of hotlines and/or websites for parents and students, curriculum articulation across school, teacher visits across panels, letters to parents and families, parent council involvement, letters between schools exchanged, and school handbooks written and shared with families and students (Williamston, 2010).
In a review of the literature on effective programs and practices to assist students in transitions, the following resources were identified in making the transition easier:

- Distribute a school handbook to each family with phone numbers; teachers identified by grade level, team, and subject area; calendar and bell schedules; lunch procedures; discipline plan; and safety information.
- Give students a map of the high school to study when they tour the school in the eighth grade.
- Develop packets of sample high school tests, homework assignments, student work, or topics of study for eighth-grade students to take home, examine, and discuss with their parents.
- Distribute high school newsletters to eighth-grade students and their parents.

*(Texas Comprehensive Centre, n.d., p. 8)*

Other activities found in the literature include supporting students to orient themselves to their new surroundings, meeting teachers and support staff, having interactions with peers, and promoting dialogue between elementary and secondary teachers on content, assessment, and pedagogy (Nieraeth, 2011).

**Collaboration**

In order for schools to develop strategies to prepare students for high school and build student resilience, staff, families, youth, and the community need to be prepared to support this work (Texas Comprehensive Centre, n.d.).

Promoting collaboration between public schools and high schools during transition has been found to enhance positive experiences for youth. Researchers often explain that the most successful transition programs are the result of extensive collaboration between middle grades and the high school while at the same time, including students, parents and the larger community (Maute & Brough, 2002; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

In terms of enhancing collaboration between the elementary schools and high schools, The Texas Comprehensive Centre (n.d.) suggests the following activities for consideration to enhance and support the transition process:

- Encourage opportunities for professional conversation among school personnel from the middle and high schools in planning transition initiatives.
- Ensure the alignment of academic standards and benchmarks with curriculum and assessments to provide consistency between schools and programs.
- Arrange for ninth grade counselors and counseling teams to visit the elementary school to address eighth grade students and families at a student assembly or as a part of a panel discussion to explain registration procedures, the high school curriculum, scheduling and extra-curricular activities (can also take place in small groups).
- Host a “meet the teachers” reception so that eighth graders and their parents can meet the ninth grade teachers and counselors.
- Consider a coping skills curriculum at both the middle and high school levels that includes developing and strengthening study skills, time management skills, and skills for reaching out and seeking information.

*(Texas Comprehensive Centre, n.d., p. 6).*
Some researchers explain that one of the most effective ways to create this collaboration is to devise a “transition team” consisting of teachers, administrators, parents and students from both schools and community representatives (Ganeson, 2006; Williamston, 2010). The role of such a team is to identify transition needs, develop plans for attending to them, and monitoring their implementation (Williamston, 2010). Williamston (2010) provides an overview of typical transition team activities in the following:

**Examples of Transition Team Activities**

**Information**
- Parent information activities
- Honest information about what is expected academically at high school
- Co-curricular fair
- Bridging communication gaps
- Identifying multiple ways to share information

**Social Support**
- Eighth grade culminating activity
- Mentoring programs
- Organizing school visits
- Eighth graders shadowing a ninth grade student
- Professional development on young adolescents

**Academic Support**
- Support high academic expectations for all students
- Examine and recommend ideas to redesign the ninth grade experience (course offerings, schedule, extra-help)
- Arrange teacher exchange or shadowing between middle school and high school
- Review achievement data and use these data to guide decisions about changes to the transition plans

*(Williamston, 2010, p. 5)*
Likewise, in examining activities that facilitate the transition to high school from a collectivist perspective, Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) in their review of relevant literature for the Ontario Ministry of Education, have identified the following factors:

Culture and School Structure
- Attend to social class, gender, and ethnicity, anti-racism, anti-classism, and bullying awareness
- Attend to school-development fit, belonging, friends, teacher training on youth culture and development
- Attend to continuities and discontinuities in elementary and secondary school cultures (i.e., structures, practices, pedagogy, assessment, curriculum, teaching)
- Create well-coordinated transitions, decrease adjustment time, keep what works, document, describe, communicate, evaluate. Provide adequate information for students and families. Focus on long-term adjustment not just immediate movement
- Get administrative work out of the way so that students can focus on school and social events in first weeks
- Engage across panels (parents, students and teachers) with multiple strategies (letters, hotline, websites, visits, clear timetables, open house, handbooks, maps, meet teachers, ongoing meetings of personnel, internet chats, teacher/student cross-visits)
- Make timelines and transition plans for each student and parent (attend to at-risk issues early in elementary school)
- Redirect efforts and funds, assess human and financial supports, identify caring adults

Classes, Friends, Families
- Focus on teaching style/care, similarities across schools, student input in seating plans, work partners, class activities, sense of belonging, teachers as human developers
- Focus on pedagogical issues/similarities across panels, less competitive pedagogy in grade nine, use friends, make friends, task-focused strategies
- Focus on friendships, peer groups and influence, continuity in peer groups, connect students to friends/peers/classmates
- Focus on shifts in parental/peer relationship which occur at the time of transition; parents require more information at precisely the time youth distance from parents
- Focus on roles of counselling, caring, community outreach, and parental input
- Focus on core/bridging curriculum across schools, language across the curriculum, post-induction programs for study and organizational skills, elementary booster classes
- Focus on issues of assessment and its practice and meaning across panels, focus on dips in achievement per subject

Youth and Teachers
- Elementary students are positive and excited about the transition; youth should know that some anxiety is expected and appropriate
- Help youth commit to learner identities and belonging, acknowledge strengths, prior achievements, create fresh starts, avoid old labels, friends are important, set clear goals
- Support at-risk students, look beyond regular assessment data when tracking risk, look to how risk factors play out in class
- Engage youth and friends in the transition process at all levels and stages
- Engage parents and students to see the importance of academic and social development
- Teachers are human developers, teachers are also in transition, teachers need support

(Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p. 40-41)
Finally, the inclusion and utilization of community organizations have been demonstrated as important support systems for youth as they transition. Community organizations are often a first resort for families and youth when they experience difficult times and can provide reprieve from a variety of risk factors. Likewise, community organizations offer a variety of programs to positively engage youth in recreational activities, education and training, employment supports, health, and culture to name a few. Unfortunately, there is a lack of evaluation data available on specific community programs and how they can assist youth as they transition.

The previous section discussed the themes found in the literature addressing the transition from elementary to high school. Although this body of literature is small and developing, it addresses important considerations for program and activity development.

In the following section, the transition from high school to post-secondary and work will be discussed by presenting themes found in the literature as well as recommendations for best practice.
SECTION 4.0

Transition to Post-Secondary or Work

The transition from high school into post-secondary or work is a key turning point in the lives of many young people (Kline & Williams, 2007). This transition can take various pathways and the options can often be extremely overwhelming for youth (Makarchuk, 2003). Older youth face a unique set of challenges and concerns as they move into adulthood which are separate from youth entering high school (Hadley, Mbwana & Hair, 2010). As such, it is important to identify these challenges as well as strategies and programs that can enhance their development and success.

The transition out of high school into post-secondary education or work is often characterized more generally with the transition to adulthood. Transitioning from adolescence into adulthood is a critical period in youth development (United Way of Calgary, 2011). For the majority of youth, the transition to adulthood represents a process that takes place over a period of time with the support of family and friends (Reid and Dudding, 2006). Likewise, research shows the transition into adulthood is increasingly prolonged, non-linear and more complex than it was decades ago (Fursteberg, Kennedy, McCloyd, Rumbaut and Settersten, 2003; Reid and Dudding, 2006; United Way of Calgary, 2011).

The economic and social climate also has an impact on youth during this transition stage. We live in “new times” characterized by economic globalization, the disappearance of many traditional manufacturing occupations, the enormous growth of the service sector and the casualization of labour (Perry, Dockett, Whitton, Vickers, Johnston and Sidoti, 2005, p. 4). For example, despite staying in school longer than any other generation, Canadian youth continue to have higher unemployment rates in comparison to the adult population and take longer to make school-to-work transitions than ever before (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). Likewise, high school drop-outs, youth moving from in care to out of care, and other high risk groups all face additional challenges (Makarchuk, 2003). As a result, this period of transition has become more of a cyclical, repetitive process influenced by many individual, social and structural factors (Makarchuk, 2003).

In the following section, the major themes found in the literature will be discussed including, the transition from school to work, the transition from school to university, and transitional concerns for at-risk youth during these stages. In doing so, themes for programs and activities are presented.

4.1 TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Upon completion of high school, many youth enter the work force immediately. The transition from school to work is something most Canadians experience at some point in their lives (Bowlby, 2000). Most often, this transition happens gradually as students engage in part time work during high school. For some, upon completion of school, the transition to the world of work can be smooth, occurring quickly and with relative ease. For others, however, finding their first job after school can take a long time (Bowlby, 2000).
The transition from school to work is further complicated by an increasing youth unemployment rate. In Canada, recent data shows the current unemployment rate for youth 15 to 24 is 14.3%, compared with a rate of 6.0% for core-age adults aged 25 to 54 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Likewise, while Canadian youth are among the most educated people in the world, they are not finding work to commensurate with their skills (Bell and Benes, 2012).

Individual and family factors can also play a role in the transition from school to work. For example, Versnel, DeLuca, Hutchinson, Hill and Chin (2011) in their review of factors that affect school to work transitions for at-risk youth in Canada identified the following factors which appear to have a cumulative effect on successful transitions:

- **Age**: Teenagers (15-19 years) typically have the least education and experience and are challenged to obtain the experience valued by employers. These youth often seek part-time, low skills work because it is more attainable.
- **Gender**: Young women have more difficulties finding work than young men. When they do find work, it is often at a lower rate of pay and in unprotected, low skill jobs.
- **Family Socioeconomic Status**: Adolescents from low income households are the least likely to be employed. Likewise, adolescents whose parents did not complete secondary school are over-represented in the data on early school leavers.

Other barriers that impeded the successful transition to the labour market include youth who are located in rural and remote locations, as well as Aboriginal youth and youth with disabilities (Bell and Benes, 2012; Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways, 2011). A frequent recommendation found in the literature is that educators develop programs that include workplace experience to enhance students’ academic accomplishments and to steer at-risk youth away from paths of social exclusion (Versnel, DeLuca, Hutchinson, Hill and Chin, 2011).

Although there is a significant amount of research into school-to-work pathways of youth in Canada, there is less research conducted on what makes for successful programs (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). Research suggests that collaboration with employers and economic development agencies to create youth apprenticeships, internships and job shadowing are helpful in preparing students for successful transitions to post-secondary education and employment (Bangser, 2008). Likewise, many researchers argue there are too few of these approaches in place and there is a need for employers to actively participate in career development programming to connect education and the labour market (Bell and Benes, 2012).

Bell and O’Reilly (2008), on the other hand, explain there has been an evolution in school-to-work programming in Canada. Initially, they explain these initiatives focused on at-risk youth and youth who would graduate from high school and go directly into the labour force; however, due to the increased length of time it takes to make this transition, programs have expanded in the last ten years to include youth more broadly. The authors explain Canadian youth need to have access to school-to-work transition programs to reduce high unemployment rates and the time it takes to transition into full-time, meaningful work (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008).
After completing an inventory of effective promising Canadian school-to-work transition practices, programs and policies, Bell and O’Reilly (2008) identified 12 key elements for successful school-to-work initiatives, including:

1. Highly visible and well-organized transition pathways
2. A strategic framework and vision
3. Consultations and involvement of key stakeholders
4. Techniques to address attitudes of parents, teachers, employers and students towards different pathways other than university
5. Involvement of employers as key partners
6. Governments at all levels who provide commitment and leadership
7. Financial viability and sustainability
8. Career development (counselling, information and education) integrated into the curriculum and made visible to support better students access
9. Occupation learning connected with academic learning
10. Professional development and occupation awareness for educators
11. Partnerships and articulation between high school and post-secondary education
12. Solid bridging and mobility between vocational training, apprenticeships and post-secondary education

(Bell and O’Reilly, 2008, p. 4)

Green (1999) further makes the argument of the importance of school-to-work programs and provides the following suggestions for increasing the likelihood of a successful transition for youth into employment:

- A focus on work experiences (co-ops, apprenticeships, internships, and pre-employment training)
- Opportunities for community participation (voluntary service and youth initiatives)
- Provision of vocational education that would teach youth a wide range of generic skills, useful for many different lines of work
- Equal access to continuing education, employment, and training
- Career information and counselling that is accessible and available to all youth
- Job creation strategies
- Community partnerships
- Employment and pay equity
- Entrepreneurial programs for youth
- Encouragement to hire young people
- Continued special education and skills training for those with special needs

Concerning the role of part time employment during school, research has found conflicting results in terms of the benefits for transitioning youth. On one side, exposure to work experiences in high school has been linked to greater success in the workforce and postsecondary education (Kline and Williams, 2007).

Likewise, other studies have found that working part-time during high school increases the odds of finding full-time work and can also increase the chances of gaining apprenticeships (Perry et al., 2005; Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley, 2003).
Perry et al. (2005) argue, however, that the boundary between school and work has become blurred and a key question for those seeking to help young people make effective transitions from school to work is whether participation in part-time work increases the likelihood of early leaving, or whether it provides benefits by increasing the chances a young person will gain employment after leaving school.

Research suggest it can do both. For example, Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley (2003) found that if students work very few hours, it makes almost no difference to the likelihood of completing high school; however, participation in employment beyond the level of five hours a week was associated with an increased likelihood of dropping out. Hango and de Broucker (2007) report similar results and explain that while working some hours in high school can be beneficial, working a great number of hours (over 20) can be detrimental, leading to a greater risk of dropping out of school.

4.2 TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

Acceptance to post-secondary education is often regarded as a significant marker of success. For example, the employment rate is better for post-secondary education graduates (and best for those with a university degree) as almost 60% of new jobs from 1999 to 2008 demanded post-secondary education. Further, unemployment is high for youth with limited education (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). Likewise, there is a significant difference in income between high school graduates and post-secondary graduates (Makarchuk, 2003). For example, graduates from university programs were reported to earn approximately 75 percent more on average than high school or trade/vocational program graduates in Canada in 2007 (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

However, the transition from high school to post-secondary is influenced by a variety of factors. Research has found, for example, the economic status of parents, the educational attainment of parents, and the level of parental awareness of post-secondary options are influential factors in shaping the pathway for youth into post-secondary education (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008). As stated previously, youth also rely more heavily on family supports and for longer periods. Having a young adult live at home for longer periods, pursuing extended education programs and requiring support with bills and other expenses may simply be too much for many families who are already living on the edges of poverty (The United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011). As such, the socioeconomic status and support from families has real implications for transitioning youth and the opportunities they have to access post-secondary education.

Research also suggests young women and immigrants face greater systemic, cultural and social barriers when transitioning to post-secondary education, for example, lack of information and ineligibility for scholarships and awards; which can prevent the realization of aspirations (Bell and O’Reilly, 2008).

Other research has also found significant gender differences in the pursuit of post-secondary education for Aboriginal youth. For example, the Council of Ministers of Education (2012) reports that Aboriginal women are consistently more successful at post-secondary completion than Aboriginal men and are more likely to have a university degree. However, this report also explains that males living on-reserve are more likely than their female counterparts to have a trade certificate—which is also true of the Canadian population as a whole as male youth are more likely to engage a trade work than are women.
Furthermore, research suggests females are less likely to follow the pathway of dropping out of high school and are more likely to go on to some type of post-secondary program prior to entering the labour force. Likewise, they are also less likely to delay the start of a post-secondary program than are males (Hango & de Broucker, 2007).

In terms of transition programs for youth leaving high school, most are typically school or community based while others are collaborative, involving multiple agencies and range in terms of approaches. The Council of Ministers of Education (2012) explains some programs focus on academic support through tutoring, study skills, and homework centres, combined with career guidance and university orientation programs; others use sports, recreation, and wilderness experiences as a vehicle to engage youth; and some prioritize social and emotional development through mentorships, role models, leadership training, and community service to build self-confidence and leadership qualities while helping youth explore possibilities and make thoughtful choices for learning and work pathways.

Other programs address economic needs and cultural differences in the form of incentive plans, tuition-free courses, paid apprenticeships, annual scholarships, and mobility subsidies (Council of Ministers of Education, 2012).

The Department of Education (n.d.) explains comprehensive programs for students transitioning to post-secondary education typically provide the following services:

- **Academic enrichment activities**: these enhance the curriculum, including tutoring, summer school, after-school programs and extra course work;
- **Information sharing**: this is done to educate students and parents about college options, testing and admission requirements, financial aid procedures, and campus life;
- **Mentoring**: this can be done by a peer or adult that provides educational and social support; and
- **Social enrichment activities**: these include activities that provide students with the opportunity to learn leadership skills, set-goals, visit college and university campuses, and explore the arts.

*(Department of Education, n.d., p. 2).*

There has been some evidence which suggests transition programs can have positive effects on students. For example, in a study by Horn and Chen (n.d), using U.S. data to compare high school students who were involved in transition programs with similar students who did not participate, it was found that participants in transition programs had nearly twice the odds of enrolling in a four-year university degree as non-participants.

Likewise, the Pathways to Education model in Canada is a program that provides targeted academic, social, financial and advocacy supports for the educational attainment of youth (Pathways to Education, 2010). Research results from program evaluations demonstrate this program has improved credit accumulation and reduced absenteeism in participating students (Pathways to Education, 2010). Likewise, 80% of graduates from Regent Park have gone on to post-secondary education and over 90% of these students are the first in their families to go on to university of college (Pathways to Education, 2010).
An evidence base is needed, however, to articulate how to better support student transitions. To make this happen, Bell and O’Reilly (2008) argue more funding and more attention needs to be paid to evaluating programs, policies and practices. In using this evidence base, programs, practices and policies which will be sustainable and viable for long-term application can be created and accessed by all youth. It is evident that more experimental studies of existing programs need to be carried out and evidence about successful program implementation strategies needs to be developed (Hadley, Mbwana, and hair, 2010).

4.3 TRANSITIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Similar to the risk factors for youth transitioning from elementary to high school, risk factors were also identified in the research for youth transitioning out of high school. In the following section, some of the themes derived from this review will be highlighted as they pertain to vulnerable youth.

Youth who are considered vulnerable often lack the basics necessary for successful transitions during this stage including stable housing, access to education and family support and, as a result, struggle with key transitions as they move towards independent adulthood. In a report published by the United Way of Calgary and Alberta (2011), reviewing literature relevant to resiliency for vulnerable youth, it is argued there is no better opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and address vulnerability than as youth transition to adulthood. For youth who grew up in poverty, the period between adolescence and adulthood is a time when positive development and the right supports can enable them to change trajectories and pursue pathways to more resilient and sustainable livelihoods (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

Of particular concern, are youth who are ageing out of government care, often at age 18, as they are at a greater risk for a number of barriers compared to their peers (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011). For example, these youth are more likely to drop out of school, become involved in the criminal justice system, engage in early parenting, struggle with mental health and/or substance issues and face difficulties with employment (United Way of Calgary and Alberta, 2011).

Youth in care are forced to face the transition to adulthood much earlier than other youth. While this shift can be prolonged or lengthened for others, youth in care are cut off from many supports at the age of 18, making the transition much more abrupt (Makarchuk, 2003). Youth in care often experience additional issues when transitioning into adulthood and out of care. For example, The National Foster Care Awareness Project (n.d.) identified the key issues including, early discharge, housing, health and medical care, education, and employment.

In addition, there is a growing body of research examining the transition from high school to adulthood for youth living with disabilities. This research has found youth with disabilities are significantly less likely to complete school, to be employed and to participate in the labour force. These youth are often faced with fragmented services, limited program accessibility, and training that too often focuses on low-paying jobs (Bangser, 2008). Unfortunately, support is limited in Canada and research indicates more opportunities are required for this population such as improved skill training, continued special education and a system of advocacy within their educational settings (Makarchuk, 2003).
In a report published by Hango and de Broucker (2007) on the education-to-labour market pathways of Canadian youth, the authors assert that transition planning for students with disabilities should particularly reflect the following considerations:

- A different post-secondary environment: Students and families should be fully informed of differences and a balance must be struck between supporting students’ current needs and preparing them for the demanding environments that they will enter. The transition planning process should reflect an assessment of the specific post-secondary education or workplace environments that the students will encounter.
- Early and active participation by students in transition planning: The transition process should begin early in high school and embody student-focused planning that enables them to participate actively in the process. Decisions should be based on the students’ goals and interests. During the transition process, students should work with a variety of individuals, including psychologists, general and special educators, administrators, counselors and parents.
- Family and community involvement in an inclusive transition planning process: In addition to student participation, the transition planning process should also include parents and other family members, educators representing multiple disciplines, a transition specialist, and community stakeholders.
- A coordinated and collaborative effort among community agencies: Transition goals are more likely to be achieved when schools and communities build capacity together to serve students’ transition needs. Implementing an integrated system is instrumental in sustaining student-focused planning and student development practices, such as work experiences and student involvement in planning.

*(Hango and de Broucker, 2007, p. 15-16)*

Likewise, there is a body of research that addresses youth at-risk of dropping out of high school more generally in terms of program elements which is applicable and relevant to the development of transition programs for at-risk youth. The American Youth Policy Forum (2011), for example, defines essential characteristics of effective programs for vulnerable youth as including:

- Multiple learning pathways: Students who struggle in school or who are unmotivated require opportunity, information, and support to find an alternative program that will enable them to experience success. Comprehensive counselling and career guidance along with exposure to successful role models and career mentors can enhance student awareness of options that meet their goals and interests.
- Connection to career goals: For disconnected youth, learning is often most meaningful in applied settings that demonstrate the connection to jobs and workforce readiness. Education and training opportunities that are most successful with older youth and non-traditional students offer credit for a range of learning opportunities that teach the knowledge and skills necessary to progress to graduation and beyond.
- High expectations matched by support: Alternative pathways to graduation must still embody rigorous learning objectives and quality instruction.
- Flexible schedules and settings: Flexibility to meet individual needs is an essential feature of alternative programming. It must provide extended learning opportunities through self-paced on-line learning modules, community-based learning/homework centres equipped with tutors, dual campus programs, extended hours, and accredited summer work and volunteer experience.
Individualized supports and assistance: Timely access to services to address specific academic, social, and other barriers increases the likelihood of successful program completion.


Likewise, the United Way of Calgary and Alberta (2011) based on an extensive review of the literature pertaining to resiliency for vulnerable youth, made the following recommendations to enhance successful transitions to adulthood for vulnerable youth:

- More comprehensive and coordinated responses are required to address the complex issues faced by vulnerable youth and support them throughout their transition to adulthood
- Vulnerable youth must be supported to (re)engage in education, with the entire community mobilized to realize this aim
- Vulnerable youth need improved opportunities to access meaningful training and employment opportunities
- Improved access to basic needs for vulnerable youth will enable movement from crisis to stability
- Vulnerable youth are confronting barriers in accessing comprehensive mental health supports
- Vulnerable youth must have access to a range of diverse formal and informal networks and relationships in their communities


As with the research on transition programs from elementary to high school, there is a lack of evidence for the effectiveness of transition approaches and strategies to post-secondary education or work (King, Baldwin, Currie and Evans, 2005). Few programs for older youth have been rigorously evaluated. As a result, many questions about the impacts of these programs remain unanswered (Hadley, Mbwana, Hair, 2010).

Mentoring has been found to be an effective technique for improving youth outcomes and is especially effective for school and employment outcomes. For example, research has commonly found a major need among youth transitioning to adulthood is having a positive adult mentor in their life (Costello & MacRae-Krisa, 2011; Cuzick et al., 2011).

Likewise Reid, and Dudding (2006) have established eight areas in which youth need support to achieve success in the transition to adulthood, including financial support, education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing, and healthy relationships.

The collaboration of services supporting youth transitioning to adulthood has also been found to be key to successful outcomes. This is especially relevant for vulnerable youth who are often involved with a number of systems and agencies at the same time (Hadley, Mbwana, Hair, 2010).

In conclusion, although this review has highlighted some successful strategies and certain demographic groups that can benefit from programs and activities, the effectiveness of these strategies is still unclear (Hadley, Mbwana, Hair, 2010).
Based on the review of literature various themes emerged. This section provides two evidence-informed models for youth moving through transitions. In addition, a third model is discussed which was retrieved from the Demonstration Project Work Plan (2009) developed through the Ending Poverty Working Group. These models will be further explored in the following section.

When addressing the needs of youth during transition, effective programs, activities, and policies should take these models into consideration.

**5.1 RISK FACTORS AND SUCCESSFUL YOUTH TRANSITIONS**

The following models represent both risk factors and protective facts as discussed in this report as they relate to youth transitions. Risk factors can prevent successful transitions by limiting the potential of youth through various barriers. The risk factors found to be most prevalent in the literature on youth transitions are detailed in the figure below.

*Figure 1.0 Youth Risk Factors to Successful Transitions*
Socioeconomic Status

SES is an important and significant predictor concerning youth transitions. When families are living in low SES they face both short term and long term challenges that affect youth development. Research has suggested low SES is associated with decreased educational attainment, social and behaviour issues, poor health and unstable housing along, to name a few.

Minority Group Status

Youth representative of minority groups, including race/ethnicity, country of origin and sexual orientation, can experience greater challenges during transitional periods. In particular, research suggests particular barriers exist for Aboriginal and newcomer youth in Canada.

Youth Involved in the Justice System

Involvement in the criminal justice system can compound vulnerability to successful transitions. Youth in conflict with the law often struggle with additional social factors such as low SES, homelessness, substance abuse and lack of support which can impede successful transitions.

Youth in Care

The literature suggests making the transition to adulthood can be particularly challenging for youth in care as they are forced to make this transition at an earlier age than most other youth. In addition, supports provided to youth are often removed once they turn 18 and these youth may face additional challenges such as housing, health and medical care, education and employment.

Gender

Although being a specific gender is not an inherent risk factor, research has found youth transitions can be experienced differently depending on gender. For example, males drop out of school more frequently and report lower levels of literacy than females. Likewise, the reasons for engaging and disengaging in school as well as the type of stress experienced upon the transition to high school have been found to differ among genders.

Mental Health

Mental health issues can exacerbate challenges during youth transitions and can also be brought on during these stages, for example, anxiety and depression.

Physical and Developmental Disabilities

Youth with physical and developmental challenges experience greater difficulty as well as higher levels of social risk than do students without these challenges during transitions. For example, research has found these youth are less likely to be employed or engage in post-secondary education, are at a greater risk for social difficulties, take part in fewer social activities, and have fewer contacts with peers.
Social Isolation

Youth who are more socially isolated can experience greater challenges as they transition throughout different stages. These youth often experience greater feelings of loneliness and peer rejection than youth who are not socially isolated.

5.2 PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND SUCCESSFUL YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Protective factors can mediate or counterbalance risk factors and enhance successful transitions and youth development. When developing programs and activities to address risk factors it is important to consider the following protective factors. The most common protective factors addressed in the literature are presented in the figure below.

Figure 2.0 Protective Factors

Peer Support

Peer groups and peer support were identified as important protective factors for youth as they develop and transition throughout different stages. Transitions can disrupt friendship networks and cause stress and concern for students entering new social environments. Providing opportunities for student participation in peer and social activities to develop positive relationships with other students, teachers and the community are important protective factors. This could include, for example, engagement in peer support and recreation, and volunteer and extra-curricular activities and programs to develop and connect positive peer relationships and groups.
Education and Training

Providing resources and support to foster engagement in school including developing and strengthening study skills, time management skills and skills for reaching out and seeking information can enhance successful transitions. Providing opportunities to engage in vocational education to learn a wide range of skills may also be useful for youth making the transition to work. Likewise, ensuring youth, families and schools are provided with relevant information pertaining to needs about transitions is also important, for example, educating students and parents about college and university options, admission requirements, financial aid and procedures, and campus life.

Mentorship and Social Bonds

Mentorship and the development of social bonds are important protective factors discussed in the literature. The availability of consistent and supportive adults and peers can enhance successful youth development through transitions. Likewise, enhancing social bonds to family, school and the community are also important considerations when supporting successful transitions.

Resiliency

Resiliency refers to successful adaptation in the presence of risk or adversity. Resiliency is found to be optimized in youth when supportive factors are enhanced at the individual, family and community level. Programs and supports that can enhance resiliency focus on the potential of youth as opposed to a focus strictly on problem solving.

Financial and Economic Supports

Financial and economic supports relate to the growing unemployment rate for youth. There is a need to create meaningful employment for youth to provide skills and experience and ensure the transition from school to employment is successful. Likewise, financial supports in the form of bursaries, scholarships and financial aid were noted as effective means to assist youth making the transition to post-secondary education.

5.3 System Factors and Successful Youth Transitions

The previous models discussed risk and protective factors related to successful youth transitions. In this section, system factors are discussed. System factors are those influences outside the direct individual and comprise the contextual influences which impact development. Based on the available research, it is evident providing holistic and inclusive supports are most effective when developing programming for youth during transitions. Including parents, school, and community supports are integral to this success. Likewise, ensuring youth are engaged in the process is also an important feature to be considered in developing programming.

In the following section, these factors will be discussed in more detail.
**Parents**

Parental and family supports during transitions provide the foundation of social support, caring relationships and consistent bonds which act as significant protective factors. Research continually demonstrates parental and family involvement during youth development, especially during key transitions, is related to more positive outcomes overall. Ensuring parents are aware, supportive and engaged are important considerations when developing programs and activities.

**School**

School and teacher involvement during youth development play an important role in promoting successful transitions. Schools can assist by providing various programs and resources to enhance support and development (i.e., recreation, after-school programs, literacy programs, information sessions and resources). Likewise, encouraging support from teachers to assist students during transition periods can act as protective factors. Teachers are also instrumental in identifying students who may be struggling and as a result able to direct them to supports. Ensuring there is communication between schools and among schools and community supports is also important, for example proper communication between public schools and high schools to encourage support to ease transitions.

**Community**

Strengthening the broader community to support youth and families during development has many reported benefits. Organizations and individual role models in the community not only mediate risk factors but encourage healthy development. Examples discussed include relevant support services, recreational facilities and programs, access to services, and community partnerships. Coordination and collaboration among community agencies in particular is important to serve the various and unique needs of youth as they develop.

**Youth**

In developing programming to address youth transitions, it is important to ensure the involvement of youth directly. Providing programs that are youth-driven and encourage youth to take an active role in their development are best practice examples.

**5.4 GRADE SEVEN WRAPAROUND MODEL (2009)**

The following model was originally developed by the Ending Poverty Working Group (CYN, 2009) to improve the well-being of children and youth by tackling the problems of poverty, literacy and healthy eating and physical activity.

Instead of creating a new model, we have chosen to highlight this model as the research evidence of the current literature review supports this model as a best practice for youth transitions.

As this model suggests, successful youth transitions are influenced by a variety of social factors surrounded by various circles of influence.
In addition to the factors presented in the model depicted above, our review of literature suggests the incorporation of protective factors and the identification of risk factors are important considerations in creating a holistic model.

**5.5 SUMMARY**

In creating transition programs for youth, the model for the Demonstration Project provides an evidence based model of best practice. In addition, however, consideration should be given to the protective and risk factors discussed in this review. When developing programs, activities and policies to address youth transitions, it is important to take these factors into consideration to develop an integrative and holistic support system for youth development throughout important life transitions.
SECTION 6.0 Conclusion

It is evident there is more research needed on transition programs and activities. Research clearly indicates there are protective and risk factors associated with youth development; however, there is a lack of rigorous evaluation studies on specific programs and activities developed for youth transition programs.

This literature review can provide a starting point in terms of successful elements of youth programs and can also be considered and referenced when developing programs for youth in transitions.

Moving forward, consideration should be given to developing one cohesive model to inform the development of the working groups within the CYN. Based on the results derived from the research on youth literacy and youth transitions, there appears to be important similarities in terms of providing support, namely, the effectiveness of implementing an integrative and holistic model.

Supporting healthy and successful youth development requires a collective and concerted effort by various groups. Efforts should continue to be placed on creating programs and activities to enhance protective factors grounded in an integrative model of support.
Appendix

**Search Terms:**

- Youth Transition
- Youth Transition to high school
- Transition* to high school
- transition* to high school PDF
- poverty reduction strategy Ontario
- Youth transition* + poverty
- risk factors + transition youth
- Alberta Education Transition
- Youth transition planning
- Transition* to adulthood PDF
- Transition* + youth + Canada
- School to work Transition*
- school to work transition PDF + Canada
- Transition out of poverty + youth
- Structural pathways to poverty
- Pathways out of poverty
- Poverty reduction + youth
- Bridges out of poverty
- Effects of poverty on youth
- Poverty + youth + transition* PDF
- Youth transition to adulthood PDF
- Vulnerable youth and the transition to adulthood
- Youth transition program* PDF
Bibliography


