LIFELONG LEARNING
LITERATURE REVIEW

October, 2015

Prepared by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Prepared for Alberta’s Promise
BACKGROUND
The Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research (The Centre) was established to support and disseminate research knowledge and evidence on policy issues related to improving the well-being and health of children and youth. The Centre is seen as an innovative leader in the development and dissemination of policy relevant evidence.

The Centre is collaborating with Alberta’s Promise, which was established to bring together business and community leaders to be champions for Alberta’s children and youth.

Alberta’s Promise focuses on five promises:

1. **A Healthy Start**: Focusing on the growth and wellbeing of children in their early years and supporting parents.

2. **Caring Adults**: Providing support and guidance to children and youth through mentoring, coaching and volunteering.

3. **Lifelong Learning**: Supporting the development of a passion for knowledge and skill development throughout life.

4. **Child and Youth Friendly Communities**: Providing safe, welcoming and supportive communities where families have access to a broad range of services essential for the healthy development of children and youth.

5. **Opportunities to Contribute**: Providing venues for children and youth to engage in and contribute to their communities.

Alberta’s Promise wants to ensure that its work is based on the best available evidence. This includes summarizing the evidence behind each of the five promises. The current review synthesizes the literature on *Lifelong Learning*. Please see Alberta’s Promise for reviews and summaries of evidence for each of the remaining promises.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Questions about this literature review can be directed to CVandenberghe@research4children.com.

KEYWORDS
attendance, child, early childhood education, high school completion, high school dropout, lifelong learning, post-secondary enrollment, transition to the workforce, youth
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
Alberta’s Promise Lifelong Learning promise states “I promise to inspire a passion for learning and skill development throughout life; in the classroom, in the workplace, in the community”. The promise involves supporting children and youth’s development of a passion for knowledge and their skill development throughout life.

Following is a synthesis of literature on topics related to lifelong learning for children and youth. These concepts include:

- early childhood education;
- the Alberta education system;
- lifelong learning;
- transition to the work force;
- and college and post-secondary.

Albertan and Canadian examples of these concepts are highlighted throughout the review.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION
Alberta Education’s Inspiring Education initiative calls for the educated Albertan to have developed and demonstrated the attitudes, skills, knowledge and values required for life-long learning. Similarly Alberta’s Promise Lifelong Learning promise calls for Albertans “to inspire a passion for learning and skill development throughout life; in the classroom, in the workplace, in the community”. This involves supporting children and youth’s development of a passion for knowledge and their skill development throughout life. Following is a synthesis of literature on topics related to lifelong learning for children and youth.

2.0 METHODS

Database Searches
Academic literature on Lifelong Learning was identified through a database search of the following databases:

- Academic OneFile
- Academic Search Complete
- Canadian Health Research Collection
- PsycINFO
- Social Services
- SocINDEX
- Social Work
- Web of Science

Databases were searched using the following keywords and limits were used to only identify lifelong learning literature for children and youth from the past 10 years. An effort was also made to focus on literature from Canada and specifically Alberta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifelong Learning Search Terms</th>
<th>Limits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>child* youth* Alberta Canada 2005-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school graduation rates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunity for learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-secondary enrollment</td>
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<tr>
<td>school absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>school environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>school stability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>skill development</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Webpage Searches
The following organization’s websites were also searched for articles related to lifelong learning for children and youth:

- Alberta Education;
- Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education;
- Early Child Development Mapping Project Alberta;
- Galileo Educational Network Association;
- and the Work and Lifelong Learning Research Network.

3.0 RESULTS
Literature was identified on concepts relating to lifelong learning. These include:

- early childhood education;
- the Alberta education system;
- lifelong learning;
- transition to the work force;
- and college and post-secondary.

Albertan and Canadian examples of lifelong learning are highlighted throughout the review.
4.0 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Caregivers are children’s first and most important teachers. A number of resources are available to caregivers who want to enhance their skills and knowledge of early childhood development (ECD). These include:

- the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative which translates scientific research about ECD into policy and practice;
- the Healthy Parents Healthy Children website from Alberta Health Services which provides information on pregnancy and parenting;
- and Parent Link Centres, which are centres that provide free parenting and play programming to 185 communities throughout Alberta (Ministry of Human Services, 2015).

Despite these services, results from a survey of Calgarians indicated a desire for improvements in the support systems and programs for caregivers that provide parenting advice and information (Calgary Foundation, 2015). Respondents also requested increases in the number of high quality, affordable early learning and care services for children and greater support for children with developmental difficulties (Calgary Foundation, 2015).

Many students begin their education journey in Kindergarten, which is optional in Alberta. Children must be at least four years of age on or before March 1 to start Kindergarten the following September (this start age will change under the new Education Act). Most Kindergarten programs are half day and are offered in either the morning or afternoon depending on the school.

A recent large scale research project that looked at the development of children in Kindergarten in Alberta was the Early Child Development Mapping Project Alberta (ECMap). ECMap was a five-year project by Alberta Education to gather information about the development of children and to learn about the environmental factors that can influence their development (ECMap, 2014). One of the pieces of information that ECMap used in its work is the Early Development Instrument (EDI), which is a tool that measures the development of groups of five-year-old children in five developmental areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Physical Health &amp; Wellbeing</th>
<th>(2) Social Competence</th>
<th>(3) Emotional Maturity</th>
<th>(4) Language &amp; Thinking Skills</th>
<th>(5) Communication Skills &amp; General Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fine and gross motor skills;</td>
<td>plays and gets along</td>
<td>can deal with their</td>
<td>shows an interest in reading,</td>
<td>can communicate their needs / wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent in looking after</td>
<td>with other children;</td>
<td>feelings at an age</td>
<td>writing, and language;</td>
<td>appropriately;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their own needs;</td>
<td>can follow rules and</td>
<td>appropriate level;</td>
<td>reading, writing and counting</td>
<td>can tell stories;</td>
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<tr>
<td>physically ready for school;</td>
<td>instructions; can</td>
<td>can separate from</td>
<td>skills are age appropriate;</td>
<td>can clearly say words;</td>
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<tr>
<td>and keep energy levels</td>
<td>follow routines;</td>
<td>caregiver; is not too</td>
<td>can recognize shapes, sizes</td>
<td>has an age appropriate knowledge of life and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throughout the school day.</td>
<td>takes responsibility</td>
<td>fearful or impulsive;</td>
<td>and colours; and can remember</td>
<td>the world;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>for his or her</td>
<td>and can focus.</td>
<td>things easily.</td>
<td>and can join in imaginative play.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>actions; and shows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>respect for others.</td>
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(from ECMap, 2014)
EDI data was collected throughout Alberta between 2009 and 2013. The results showed that 46% of Albertan children were developing appropriately in all of the five areas of development discussed above (ECMap, 2014). Unfortunately, 29% (compared to the Canadian norm of 25%) were experiencing great difficulty in one or more of the five areas of development (ECMap, 2014). Additionally, 15% (compared to the Canadian norm of 12%) of children were experiencing great difficulty in two or more areas of development (ECMap, 2014). Children had the most difficulty in the area of communication skills and general knowledge, with 31% of children showing difficulty or great difficulty (ECMap, 2014).

Interestingly, no differences were found in the EDI results from children from rural versus urban communities, or children from northern, versus central or southern regions of the province (ECMap, 2014).

The project also found that one in five children had a diagnosed disability or delay (mild to severe disabilities or language delays) by kindergarten, although the percentage varied (0 to 44%) considerably between communities (ECMap, 2015). They also found that more boys than girls and more children with English as a second language were diagnosed with disabilities (ECMap, 2015).

In addition to its work with the EDI, the ECMap project built community coalitions across Alberta to respond to local needs. Contact information for each coalition by community is available at http://www.ecmap.ca/community-development/coalitions/contact-your-coalition.html. Coalitions also helped to map resources available in their community. Resources included programs, facilities, services and other supports that could contribute to early development. The results of the EDI and community resources for each participating community in Alberta were mapped and are available at http://ecmaps.ca/webmaps/LiveAtlas/EDIResources.html. The following recommendations came out of the ECMap project (ECMap, 2014):

- that EDI data continue to be collected to help monitor early childhood development (ECD) in the province;
- that the established community coalitions continue to be supported to use the EDI data for their local planning;
- that healthy, supportive and nurturing environments be available to all children in the province;
- that a strategy should be developed to raise the knowledge of ECD throughout Alberta;
- that the qualifications and educational requirements for those in early education be examined and a strategy be developed to enhance early educators’ knowledge of ECD;
- and that a cross departmental Human Early Learning and Development secretariat be established.

5.0 ALBERTA EDUCATION SYSTEM: GRADE 1 to 12
Approximately 68,000 children and youth were registered in schools in the 2014/2015 school year (Alberta Education, 2015a). Following is a discussion of some of the key indicators used to track the progress of these students in the Alberta education system including:

- the Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) and Diploma Examinations used in Grades 6, 9 and 12;
- surveys of Alberta education system stakeholders;
- attendance and school dropout rate;
- and the high school completion rate.

5.1 PATs and Diploma Examinations
PATs are administered to all students in Grade 6 and 9 on the topics of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. These tests are intended to help determine if students are learning what they
are expected to learn. Seventy-three percent of students in Alberta met the acceptable standard on the provincial achievement test in 2014 (Alberta Education, 2015b). Diploma exams are also administered to determine the extent of students’ knowledge and 30% of the exam mark contributes to the students’ overall grade in that subject. The exams are administered in Grade 12 to students taking the following subjects: biology, chemistry, language arts, French, mathematics, physics, science, and social studies. Eighty-five percent of students writing diploma exams reached the acceptable standard in 2014 (Alberta Education, 2015b).

5.2 Surveys of Alberta Education System Stakeholders
In addition to testing students’ performance on objective tests, it is important to also gather information on satisfaction with Alberta’s learning system. Alberta Education conducts a yearly survey of the following stakeholders (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014):

- senior high school students;
- Aboriginal senior high school students;
- parents of students;
- parents of Aboriginal students;
- parents of students with severe special needs;
- teachers;
- school principals (alternating years);
- school board trustees;
- superintendents (alternating years);
- and the general public.

In 2014, most of the above stakeholders agreed that there was high quality education provided at Alberta schools. Stakeholders directly involved in the system such as students (99%), principals (98%), school board trustees (97%), teachers (96%) and superintendents (96%) were especially satisfied (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014). However, satisfaction was somewhat lower for parents of children in Kindergarten to Grade 12 (90%), parents of children with severe special needs (83%) and the general public (71%; Corporate Planning Branch, 2014).

5.3 Attendance and Dropout Rate
As Alberta Education (2014, p.2) notes for students “every day in school counts”. Clandinin et al. (2010) draws attention to their finding from speaking with youth who left school that dropping out is not a singular event, rather it is a process over time. Inconsistent attendance is recognized as an early indicator that a student is at risk for beginning the process of dropping out of school.

### Attendance Board, Alberta Education

An Albertan Attendance Board was established in 1988 to help students under 16 who are developing inconsistent attendance. Attendance Board members are appointed by the Minister of Education, and can include, for example, parents, school board employees, the general public, and business people. If there is inconsistent attendance that cannot be addressed locally, school boards can refer the case to the Attendance Board. The Attendance Board receives approximately 750 referrals and works with about 2,000 students a year (Alberta Education, n.d.). In hearings, board and panel members (e.g. student, caregivers, social worker) look at options to help the student attend school regularly.

In a similar approach in Fort McMurray, an Elders Attendance circle was convened to help to intervene with Indigenous students who were having attendance issues (First Nations, Métis and Inuit and Field Services Branch, 2013).

Dropping out of high school has long term consequences for youth such as unemployment, reduced income and overall opportunities (Alberta Education, 2014). In addition to these personal implications, when a youth drops out of school it also impacts society through “expenditures on health, social services and programs, education, employment, criminality and lower economic productivity” (Hankivsky, 2008,
Hankivsky (2008) estimated that if the Canadian high school graduation rate could be increased by just 1%, the cost savings would be over $7.7 billion dollars.

The dropout rate in Alberta is measured by the percentage of students between the ages of 14 to 18 that had been registered in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system and who were not participating in the system or did not complete high school in the following year. The dropout rate in Alberta has decreased from 4% in 2010 to 3% in 2014 (Alberta Education, 2015b).

### 5.4 High School Completion

High school completion can include receiving a high school diploma or completing a high school equivalency diploma (GED). Alberta Education measures high school completion as the percentage of students in Grade 10 who have completed high school by the end of their third year (Alberta Education, 2015b). In the past five years the high school completion rate has gone up from 73% to 76% (Alberta Education, 2015b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Edmonton Catholic Schools: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) High School Graduation Coach Program (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2011)</th>
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<tr>
<td>The high school completion rate for FNMI students is 40%, which is well below the provincial average (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2011). In an effort to address this statistic, the FNMI High School Graduation Coach Program was developed at Edmonton Catholic Schools. The program operates at St. Joseph, Archbishop Oscar Romero, St. Francis Xavier and Archbishop O’Leary High Schools. A graduation coach, tutor and Aboriginal liaison form the program staff at each site. Key focuses of the program are:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Building relationships, providing peer mentoring and role modeling to students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Facilitating transitions between Grade 9 and 10, a common transition point for students dropping out of school, and high school to post-secondary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hosting cultural activities for students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exposing students to career possibilities as well as assisting with career planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assisting with tutoring and course planning for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitating communication between parents, students and the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a result, FNMI high school completion rates at St. Joseph High School for example were 44% (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2011). The Edmonton Catholic Schools (2011) report includes steps on how to introduce graduation coach programs for other schools that may be interested in this approach.</td>
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### 6.0 LIFELONG LEARNING

As part of an Alberta Education survey administered to Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system stakeholders, respondents were asked two questions directly relevant to lifelong learning. They were asked their agreement with the following statements (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014):

- Students are taught knowledge, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning.
- High school students/graduates demonstrate knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning.

While 90% of teachers agreed that children and youth were taught the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for lifelong learning, only 70% of parents agreed (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014). When asked whether high school students and recent graduates demonstrate this knowledge, skills and attitudes responses ranged from a high of 93% agreement from students themselves, followed by teachers (62%), parents (59%) and the public (53%; Corporate Planning Branch, 2014). A subsequent survey of Alberta
employers found that 61% felt that high school graduates had the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for lifelong learning (CCI Research Inc., 2014).

**Composite Learning Index, Canadian Council on Learning**

The Canadian Council on Learning produced a yearly Composite of Learning Index until its funding ceased in 2010. The index was a measure of progress locally and nationally towards lifelong learning. The higher the index score for a community, the more that community had the conditions to foster lifelong learning. The index measured learning in four pillars:

- **Learning to Know**: Learning knowledge and literacy, numeracy and critical thinking skills.
  - Key Indicators: youth literacy, high school dropout rates, participation in post-secondary education, and university attainment.

- **Learning to Do**: Learning the skills needed for success in the workplace, such as project management and computer training.
  - Key Indicators: opportunities for workplace training and participation in job-related training.

- **Learning to Live Together**: Learning the skills and values needed to interact on a personal level with others.
  - Key Indicators: participation in social clubs and organizations, learning from other cultures and volunteering.

- **Learning to Be**: Learning for one’s own personal development.
  - Key Indicators: exposure to the media, sports learning, culture learning, access to the internet.

The Canadian average Composite Learning Index score was 75 in 2010. This average was surpassed in Calgary with a score of 88, Edmonton with 83, Red Deer with 79, Lethbridge with 78 and Grande Prairie with 77. However, it was lower for rural areas such as Wood Buffalo with a score of 71.

### 7.0 TRANSITION TO THE WORK FORCE

In addition to getting feedback about lifelong learning, Alberta Education’s stakeholder survey asked whether youth were prepared for the transition to work. Here are their responses regarding their perceptions of youth having been taught the attitudes and behaviours needed to be successful at work:

![Figure 1: Percentage of stakeholders agreeing that youth have been taught the attitudes and behaviours to be successful at work (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014)](image)
Agreement that recent graduates have the attitudes and behaviours to be successful at work ranged from a low of 44% from the general public to a high of 100% by superintendents (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014). Survey participants were also asked whether youth demonstrate the attitudes and skills they need to be successful in the work force. Responses ranged from a high of 93% by Aboriginal students, followed by 56% of parents in general and parents of Aboriginal students, and 42% of the public agreeing these are demonstrated by youth (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014).

Teacher and parent agreement that youth have been taught and are demonstrating the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be successful at work is being tracked as a key indicator by Alberta Education as part of their accountability pillar. The accountability pillar is a means for school authorities to measure their success and track their progress towards meeting their learning goals (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

In 2014 Alberta Education commissioned a survey of Alberta employers themselves to determine if they were satisfied with the education system and the skills of youth workers. Fifty-nine percent of those responding agreed that high school graduates were joining the work force with the skills and knowledge they needed (CCI Research Inc., 2014). They also agreed (67%) that the education system is responsive in meeting the needs of employers by providing enough high school graduates for their workforce (CCI Research Inc., 2014).

When asked about satisfaction with specific skills needed to be successful at work their responses were as follows (CCI Research Inc., 2014):

![Graph showing percentages of employers agreeing with various skills](image)

Figure 2: Percentage of employers agreeing that youth have the abilities needed to be successful at work (CCI Research Inc., 2014).

As demonstrated in the graph, there was less satisfaction with youth’s skills in managing credit and their personal finances (39%) and high levels of satisfaction with youth’s ability to work safely (91%) and well with others (92%).
However, some employers felt that high school graduates need improvement in the following abilities (CCI Research Inc., 2014):

- 21% felt that youth needed a better working attitude, professionalism or motivation;
- 19% felt that youth’s writing, reading, and literacy skills needed improvement;
- 18% agreed that youth’s mathematics skills should be enhanced;
- 16% called for better verbal communication skills;
- 15% requested improved common sense or basic life skills;
- and 15% felt that youth needed a better work ethic or to take pride in their own work.

8.0 COLLEGE/POST-SECONDARY

While youth can transition directly to work after completing high school, many are recognizing that additional education is necessary in today’s work environment. Supporting this, a recent report projects that by 2020, two thirds of jobs will require more than a high school diploma (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013).

![Projected education requirements for 2020](image)

Figure 3: Projected education requirements for 2020 (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013)

In Alberta Education’s Corporate Planning Branch (2014) survey of education system stakeholders, respondents were asked whether they felt that high school graduates were prepared to enter post-secondary education. Sixty-two percent of the public agreed that Alberta high school graduates were well prepared to enter into post-secondary (Corporate Planning Branch, 2014).

Youth or mature students have a variety of options to enhance their education. These include attending an apprenticeship, college or post-secondary institution. Post-secondary institutions also offer a variety of learning experiences to accommodate students such as distance learning, travel study, practicum, internships and apprenticeships in addition to learning in a traditional classroom (Calgary Foundation, 2015).
Campus Alberta

Campus Alberta began in 2002 as an effort to formalize and encourage collaboration between the 26 post-secondary institutions that are publically funded in Alberta. The institutions aim to address the following goals:

- Provide accessible, affordable and quality learning opportunities.
- Enhance transitions into and within the post-secondary system. This is achieved through transfer agreements between institutions called TransferAlberta.
- Ensure learners have the tools needed to succeed in learning. This is partly achieved through eCampusAlberta that provides online learning by the 26 involved institutions.
- Ensure lifelong participation in the post-secondary system for those that have the desire to do so. Part of this goal is achieved through ApplyAlberta which consists of coordinated applications to post-secondary institutions.

Alberta Education tracks post-secondary transition rates; this is the percentage of students in Grade 10 who entered a post-secondary-level program at an Alberta institution or registered in an apprenticeship program within six years. This number has remained fairly steady over the past five years with 60% of students transitioning to post-secondary in 2014 (Alberta Education, 2015b).

Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education notes that the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in publicly-funded post-secondary institutions has increased from 6,236 in 2005 to 10,610 in 2013 (“Alberta Indigenous Post-Secondary Numbers Almost Double in 10 Years”, 2015). A key goal of Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education is to have Aboriginal student post-secondary enrollment rates match those of the general student population. In order to reach this goal, attempts are being made to reduce some of the barriers to Aboriginal student enrollment in post-secondary. For example, transitioning from small town to larger cities where many post-secondary institutions are located can be difficult for Aboriginal students. As such, many post-secondary institutions have established student centres to help assist with these transitions. For example, the Aboriginal Student Services Centre at the University of Alberta provides a smudging and meditation room, a reference room with books highlighting Aboriginal themes and stories as well as offering several Aboriginal events throughout the year.

Another group of key focus to increase post-secondary enrollment rates are youth in or transitioning out of government care. The Child and Youth Data Laboratory (2012) found that in 2008/2009, 38% of youth, age 17 to 22 years who were receiving intervention services, were enrolled in a certificate or diploma program. A smaller percentage of these youth, 9%, were enrolled in a bachelor, applied or graduate degree program (Child and Youth Data Laboratory, 2012).

Advancing Futures Bursary

The Advancing Futures Bursary is a bursary offered by the Ministry of Human Services to youth aged 18 to 24 years who have been in government care. The bursary can be used by part-time or full time students working towards high school equivalency, a license, certificate, trade, diploma or post-secondary degree. The funds help with living expenses and the program provides assistance in gaining employment. Applications are accepted three times a year depending on when the student would like to start their studies.

A key barrier to access to post-secondary education is cost. Consistent with this, respondents to Calgary’s recent Vital Signs survey identified improvement of the affordability of post-secondary education as a key priority area (Calgary Foundation, 2015). As post-secondary tuition rates rise in Canada, more students are taking out student loans to finance their education. In a recent study on the
financial impact of student loans, Statistics Canada found that in 2005 the average amount owed upon graduation from post-secondary was $18,800 and a “growing proportion of borrowers are graduating with debt loads of $25,000 or more” (Luong, 2010).
9.0 REFERENCES


