

Transformation Project for Young People in Care

Year Two Outcomes and Learning Report

April 2025 - March 2026

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Executive Summary & Introduction

The Transformation Project for Young People in Care is a multi-year initiative to reimagine group care as a family-centered, culturally grounded, recovery-oriented and prevention-focused model of support. In 2025–26, Trellis continued to advance this transformation by strengthening the relationships, practices and pathways that help young people build connection, recovery capital, stability and belonging beyond placement.

Trellis operates 33 group care beds across seven homes, serving young people with complex histories of trauma, disrupted relationships, system involvement, mental health needs, substance use, cultural disconnection and unstable transitions.

At the heart of the Transformation Project is a simple belief: young people do not heal, grow or thrive in isolation. Stability and belonging develop through trusted connections, cultural identity, practical stability and consistent care over time. This means looking beyond the group home itself to strengthen the people, places and supports that can remain part of a young person's life long after formal services end. Rather than positioning the group home as the center of intervention, the model focuses on what surrounds and sustains the young person: family and natural supports, cultural connection, recovery capital, practical resources and coordinated planning with Children and Family Services.

In Year Two, Trellis continued to build on five core program enhancements: Youth and Family Case Managers, Expanded Clinical Supports, Circle Keepers, Barrier Removal Funds and cross-system collaboration with Children and Family Services.

Together, these enhancements supported six connected outcomes (Figure 1): increased connection to family and natural supports, more planned and stable transitions, stronger recovery capital for healing and well-being, deeper community and cultural belonging, reduced practical barriers to connection and improved collaboration with Children and Family Services.

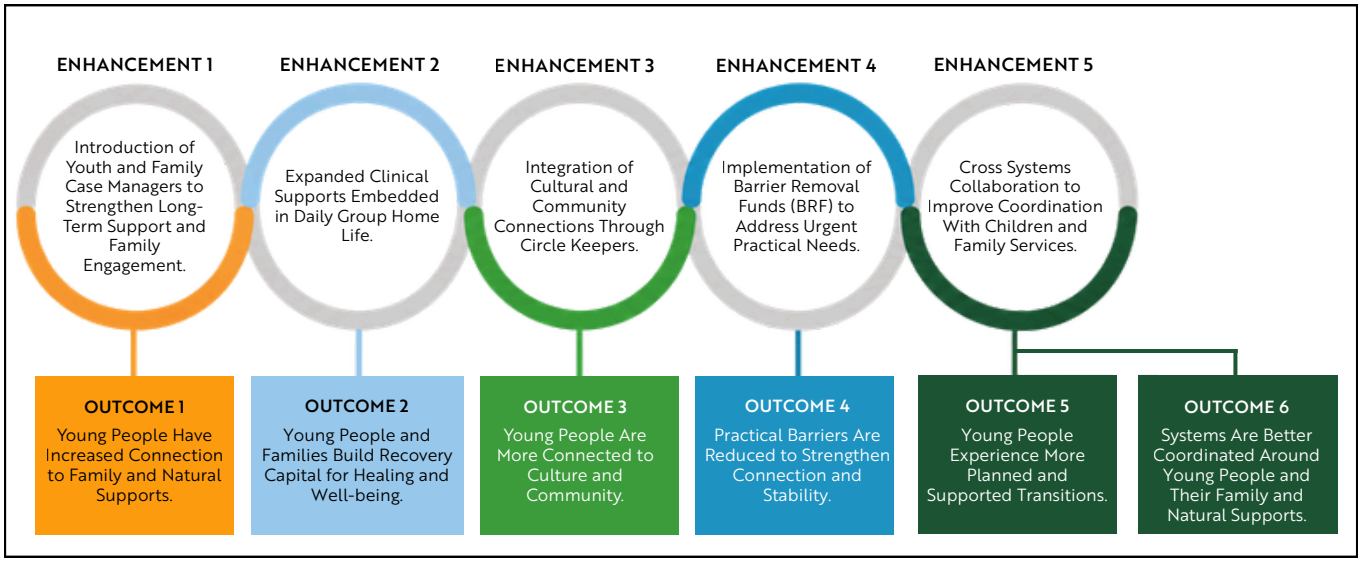


Figure 1

Progress in Year Two was evident across the model. Young people had more visible and active family and natural supports networks. Clinical and cultural supports became more embedded in daily group home life.

Barrier Removal Funds helped address practical needs that could otherwise disrupt connection, recovery and stability. Collaboration and planning processes with Children and Family Services also improved, creating stronger foundations for family work and transition planning from the beginning of a young person's placement.

The work also reinforced a critical lesson: reconnection and reunification take time. Many young people and families are navigating overlapping challenges related to trauma, instability, well-being, substance use, housing, poverty and system involvement, all of which shape what is possible in the short term.

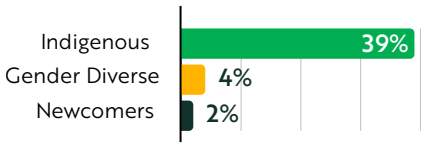
For some young people, progress meant a stronger relationship, a safer visit, a renewed cultural connection or a more planned transition, even when reunification was not yet possible within the reporting period.

Year Two confirmed that the Transformation Project is moving in the right direction. Trellis is strengthening the people, practices and systems around young people in care, while continuing to learn how to measure better what matters most: not only where young people go when they leave care, but also whether they leave with stronger, safer and more connected supports and relationships.

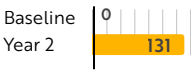
This report is organized around the outcomes these enhancements are collectively helping to advance. Where available, 2023–24 data is used as a baseline, reflecting the period before the enhancements were implemented.

Year Two Outcomes Summary

54
YOUTH SERVED



Number of youth therapy sessions



Instances of engagement in therapeutic activities



FAMILY AND NATURAL SUPPORTS

Family and Natural Supports engaged



Family and Natural Supports who received case management



76% of Family & Natural Supports felt supported to spend time with their youth

RECOVERY SUPPORTS

Youth engaged in therapeutic activities



Youth accessed formal therapy

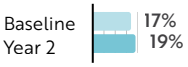


PLANNED AND POSITIVE TRANSITIONS OUT OF GROUP CARE

Youth with a permanency plan



Youth discharged to family or kinship



Permanency plans focused on kinship or family reunification



Outcome 1

Young People Have Increased Connection to Family and Natural Supports

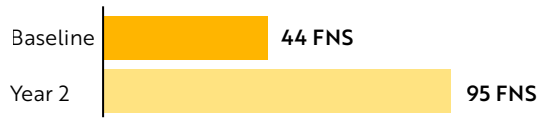
Outcome Summary

Trellis continued to strengthen the family and natural supports around young people in group care. These connections can provide lasting, meaningful relationships that support stability, belonging and well-being beyond the group home.

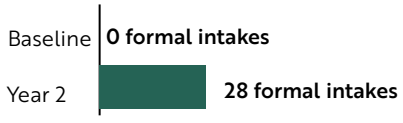
Before the Transformation Project, staff often supported family connections when needs or opportunities arose. Year Two helped move this work toward a more consistent and intentional approach to identifying, strengthening and tracking family and natural supports for every youth.

Key Indicators

Number of Family and Natural Supports (FNS) Engaged



Formal intakes completed with Family and Natural Supports



Connection to Family and Natural Supports

100%

of Child Intervention Practitioners reported Trellis helped their youth build and sustain relationships with kin and biological family.

76%

of Family and Natural Supports felt supported to spend time with their youth.

The data shows a significant increase in the number of family and natural supports connected to young people, from 44 at baseline to 95 in Year Two.

This does not mean every relationship became a placement option or that every connection led to reunification. Rather, it shows that young people had more visible, active and supported relationships around them during their time in care.

The increase in formal Family and Natural Support intakes also shows a shift in the depth of work being provided. By Year Two, Trellis had completed 28 formal intakes with Family and Natural Supports, compared to none at baseline.

These intakes represent family members and natural supports who were engaged in more intensive support, including case management, goal setting, system navigation and practical assistance.

Together, these indicators show that Family and Natural Supports work became more structured, visible and embedded in group care practice.

They also demonstrate greater identification, engagement and support of family and natural supports throughout a young person's time in care.

What Happened in Year Two

Over Year Two, the Youth and Family Case Manager (YFCM) role became one of the most important areas of learning and refinement in the Transformation Project.

Trellis continued to invest in this role, while also making changes to team structure, role clarity and practice expectations so YFCMs could stay focused on the long-term relational work that is central to a family-centered model of care. In Year One, YFCMs were embedded directly in the group homes

This created strong relationships with frontline teams and helped them stay closely connected to the daily experiences of young people.

"The program helped me stay in contact with my youth and supported us to spend time together."

PARENT OF GROUP HOME YOUTH

However, the crisis-oriented nature and day-to-day urgency of the homes often overwhelmed the broader case management work. As a result, Case Managers were frequently pulled away from family-finding and natural-supports work.

In Year Two, the role shifted into a stand-alone team that continues to collaborate closely with the homes but is no longer fully absorbed into daily operations.

This change strengthened the team's ability to zoom out, stay focused on the bigger picture and keep family connection at the center of the role.

Being somewhat removed from the immediate urgency of day-to-day group care operations allowed Youth and Family Case Managers to be more present and grounded in their work. The stand-alone team structure created new opportunities for collaboration, shared learning and peer support.

Case managers worked together more intentionally, shared best practices, reflected on challenges, and supported one another to stay aligned with the role's purpose.

As a result, the work became more consistently community-based, relationship-focused and centered on strengthening Family and Natural Support connections.

This helped move the work beyond responding to immediate needs in the home toward building the lasting relationships and natural supports young people need beyond care.

What We Learned

Family and Natural Supports work requires more than strong case management skills. It requires values alignment, emotional regulation, resilience and a deep belief in the possibility of family healing and reconnection.

The team began the year with three Case Managers and is now fully staffed, with five full-time positions filled. This year also included significant turnover and rebuilding of the team, which became an important learning point in itself.

In reflecting on the YFCM team, values alignment has emerged as a critical facilitator of the work. YFCMs need alignment with the principles of family and natural supports work, including a deep understanding of family complexity,

intergenerational trauma, systemic barriers, and lived experiences that can contribute to a family's involvement with the Child Welfare system.

Youth and Family Case Managers must be able to stay grounded in complex and emotionally charged situations, remain non-judgmental toward parents and family members and understand that the same trauma-informed lens applied to young people also needs to be extended to the adults in their lives.

Many parents, caregivers and relatives have their own histories of intergenerational trauma, loss, poverty, disconnection and system involvement.

Year Two reinforced that building Family and Natural Supports is slow, relational work. It often happens in the grey: building trust, navigating risk, supporting adults who may distrust systems and working carefully between young people, parents, caseworkers and other partners.

A key learning in Year Two was the importance of extending the same trauma-informed lens applied to young people to their parents, caregivers and family members.

Staff reflections show a shift from focusing only on the harm experienced by the young person to asking deeper questions about what has happened within the family system, and what supports may be needed to create safer pathways for reconnection.

Staff described this shift in practice as moving from "this family has harmed this child" toward asking, "what has happened to this family to get them to where they are now?" As one reflection captured, "everyone understands why the kids behaved this way, but they couldn't apply that to the family, even though it was the same legacy of trauma."

YFCMs are also working within a context of systemic distrust from parents and family members, many of whom have had painful or harmful experiences with child-serving systems. As a result, YFCMs are often required to work "in the grey," building safety and trust in relationships while navigating trauma responses, risky behaviours, and persistent structural barriers.

At times, this also requires careful navigation between Child Intervention Practitioners, other systems, young people, parents, and family members to ensure the work remains relational, transparent, and focused on connection.

Each team member also brings their own perceptions, assumptions, and lived experiences of what "family" means. However, the YFCM role requires staff to stay grounded in Trellis' shared Family and Natural Supports framework, which prioritizes connection and belonging.

Year Two reinforced that building Family and Natural Supports is slow, relational work. It often happens in the grey: building trust, navigating risk, supporting adults who may distrust systems and working carefully between young people, parents, caseworkers and other partners.

This learning will continue to inform hiring, supervision, training and team development.

"Living at the group home taught me how much I actually matter."

YOUTH IN GROUP CARE

Case Example: Strengthening Sibling Relationships Beyond the Home

Three sisters, Maya (14), Sophie (16) and Riley (15), came to Trellis with an extensive history in care and emergency shelter use, along with complex risks related to substance use and exploitation. Both of their parents had died from drug poisonings.

Because Trellis operates multiple group homes, the team was able to create a living arrangement that allowed Maya, Sophie and Riley to stay connected in the same home. This was especially important as



Maya, the oldest sister, approached adulthood. The sisters also have three older siblings in their support network. With support from the team, each of the girls has been independently visiting an older sister in British Columbia. These visits have helped them practice planning, travelling and maintaining family relationships. Maya, Sophie and Riley also share a love of a specific restaurant. The team used flexible Barrier Removal Funds to support a birthday dinner there, with no staff accompanying them.

This allowed the sisters to celebrate together as siblings, independently and without formal supports present. This example shows how Family and Natural Supports work goes beyond formal reunification.

It is also about helping young people experience ordinary family moments, sibling connection, independence and belonging.

***All names in the Case Examples have been changed to protect confidentiality**

One Door: Coordinated Intake and Connected Support

Young people and families often need more than one kind of support. Through Trellis' One Door model, group care teams can connect young people and their Family and Natural Supports to other Trellis services, including housing, employment, counselling, basic needs and in-home support, as well as external services when needs fall outside what Trellis provides.

One Door has also simplified referrals and intakes for group care. A centralized intake role coordinates directly with Children and Family Services to gather the information needed, clarify referral details and plan the intake.

This helps young people enter care with stronger information, clearer planning and more coordinated support from the beginning.

Family and Natural Supports work goes beyond formal reunification. It is also about helping young people experience ordinary family moments, sibling connection, independence and belonging.

Outcome 2

Young People and Families Build Recovery Capital for Healing and Well-being

Outcome Summary

Trellis strengthened recovery-oriented supports by focusing not only on formal therapy or treatment, but on the broader conditions that make healing and well-being possible.

For young people in group care, recovery capital includes safety, trust, emotional regulation, practical stability, supportive relationships, cultural connection and access to clinical support when they are ready.

The data shows that more young people are engaging in therapeutic supports over time. In Year Two, 60% of young people engaged in therapeutic supports, compared to 28% at baseline and 44% in Year One.

"I really like it when staff support me and don't judge me when I am crashing out about my emotions. They listen to my feelings and help me to process."

YOUTH IN GROUP CARE

This includes formal therapy, group therapeutic activities and informal therapeutic interactions, reflecting the way clinical support is becoming more embedded in the everyday environment of the homes.

For many young people in group care, readiness for therapy, treatment or behaviour change depends on first experiencing safety, predictability and trust. The data in Year Two supports this learning. While not every young person is ready to participate in formal one-to-one therapy, those who do engage tend to engage deeply.

In Year Two, 13 young people participated in formal therapy and received 131 sessions in total, which is approximately 10 sessions per young person. This suggests that once young people have enough safety, trust and readiness to begin therapy, they are able to use that support in a meaningful and sustained way.

Formal therapy is only one part of the recovery work happening in the homes. Clinicians also facilitated 193 group sessions, with 372 instances of youth engagement.

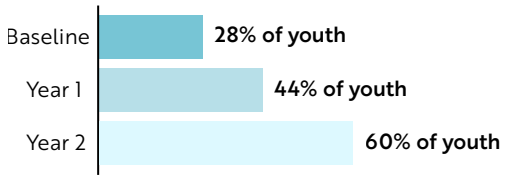
A young person's recovery is affected by the stability, capacity and well-being of the adults around them. Many parents, caregivers and natural supports are navigating their own histories of trauma, poverty, housing instability, system distrust, grief, mental health needs or substance use.

In Year Two, Trellis supported six Family and Natural Supports with 38 sessions compared to four family and natural supports receiving nine sessions in Year One. Together, these indicators show that recovery capital is being built before, during and beyond formal therapy.

The model is expanding clinical support beyond individual treatment and embedding healing, regulation, coaching and therapeutic relationships into the broader care environment.

Key Indicators

Young People Engaged with Therapeutic Support



Year Two Therapeutic Supports at a Glance

100%
of youth had clinical consents in place by the end of Year Two.

13
Youth participated in formal therapy sessions.

131
Therapy sessions provided.

6
Family and Natural Supports received one-to-one formal therapy.

38
Sessions provided.

193
Group sessions in the homes.

372
Instances of youth engagement.

What Happened in Year Two

Trellis implemented a more consistent approach to clinical presence in each group home. Clinicians now attend each home weekly, with the same person present at the same time and place each week. This consistency created greater predictability for youth and helped them experience therapists as familiar people within the home environment.

Over time, this contributed to a more casual and relational approach to clinical support. Young people became more used to clinicians being present in their space, which helped reduce stigma and opened doors to connection.

Healing in Ordinary Moments.

Healing often showed up in ordinary moments: shared dinners, family visits, swimming trips, muffins baked with staff, birthday celebrations and making memories together. Youth consistently described these experiences as the things they looked forward to most.

In one example, a young person was on the phone with his father while also speaking with a therapist at the program and casually said, "Daaaaaad... I'm talking to my THERAPIST."

This kind of moment reflects the shift from therapy as something separate or stigmatized to therapy as part of the relational environment of the home.

Clinical presence also strengthened collaboration between frontline staff and clinicians.

Increased face-to-face time created more opportunities for in-the-moment regulation support, consultation around emerging issues and debriefing after incidents.

Frontline staff received coaching and practical guidance from clinicians in real time, helping translate clinical concepts into day-to-day practice.

Trellis clinical consults were systematized in Year Two and now occur twice per month online, allowing staff on shift to participate. Consults typically begin with psychoeducational content from clinicians, informed by the diagnoses and presenting needs of youth currently in the program.

Resources include practical "FAQ sheets" on specific diagnoses, with strategies staff can use to support young people. Staff then participate in a group discussion about behaviour management, therapy engagement, daily strategies and emerging needs.

Once young people have enough safety, trust and readiness to begin therapy, they are able to engage in a meaningful and sustained way.

Trellis also addressed a significant barrier to accessing clinical supports. Midway through the year, clinical consents from Child Intervention Practitioners at intake were identified as a gap. By the end of Year Two, 100% of youth had clinical consents in place.

This means that when a young person is ready to engage in one-to-one therapy, that support can begin without additional restrictions, permissions, wait times or administrative barriers.

The Clinical team served more parents, family members and natural supports than in previous years. Youth and Family Case Managers referred family and natural supports to clinicians for support with venting, processing frustrations, strengthening communication and receiving coaching around appropriate interactions with youth and workers. In one example, a parent regularly vented significant frustration to staff, which at times overwhelmed staff capacity.

A clinician was brought in to support the parents' need to vent, hold space therapeutically and provide parenting coaching about how to engage more appropriately with both the young person and the caregiving staff.

This allowed Youth and Family Case Managers to remain focused on family finding and relationship-building, while clinicians addressed therapeutic needs.

Trellis also developed a partnership with a private psychology practice in Calgary that provides complete psychoeducational assessments, including Autism Spectrum Disorder assessments, at reduced cost for Trellis clients.

This created a more flexible and timely assessment pathway for young people, parents, family members and natural supports.

What We Learned

Year Two reinforced that clinical work in group care needs to be relational, accessible and integrated into the daily accessible and integrated into the daily activities of the homes. Clinicians need to be visible and familiar to youth, while also supporting staff and family members with practical strategies that strengthen the broader care environment.

The work also showed that clinicians in group homes need to be multi-skilled and cross-disciplinary. Clinical work extends beyond formal therapy and includes parent coaching, teaching, skill-building, psychoeducation, staff consultation and

practical educational supports. Another important learning is that young people's recovery capital is affected by the adults and systems around them.

When parents, caregivers or natural supports are overwhelmed, unsupported or in crisis, this can affect the young person's own stability and recovery. Supporting family members therapeutically helps strengthen the broader recovery environment around the young person.

Transforming services for young people in group care is not only about adding new services to existing homes. It is about changing the purpose and practice of care itself.

Case Example: Addictions Recovery as a Pathway to Reunification

When Heidi entered a Trellis group home, she was not permitted to visit her mother, even with supervision. This created a significant barrier to maintaining their relationship and working toward reunification.

Over several months, Trellis staff remained actively engaged with Children and Family Services while also supporting Heidi's mother to strengthen the conditions needed for safe family connection.

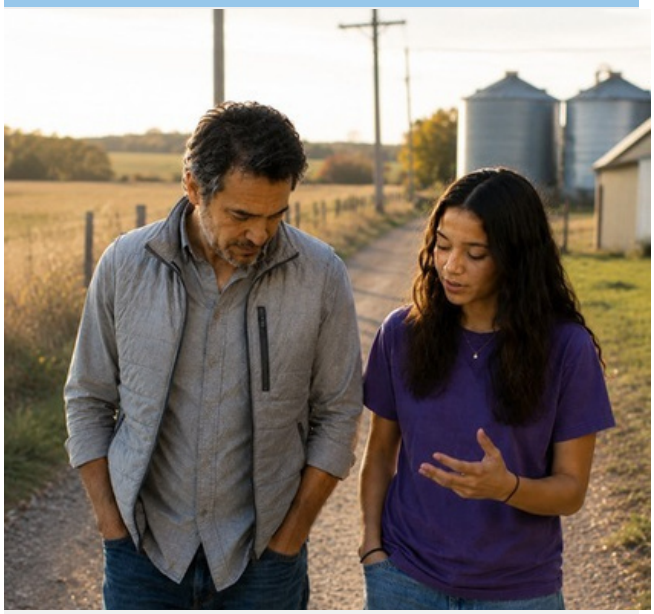


Staff helped her access stable housing, connect with addiction recovery supports and build greater stability in her daily life.

As Heidi's mother strengthened her recovery from addiction and demonstrated increased stability, supervised contact was reconsidered, and unsupervised visits were eventually approved. This work supported Heidi to return to her mother's care in May 2026, where she continues to live successfully.

By addressing housing, addiction recovery and family stability together, Trellis helped Heidi and her mother rebuild their relationship and create a safer, more sustainable path to reunification.

Case Example: Family and Natural Supports as Recovery Capital



Leah came into care with an uncle listed in her family contacts, but there was no active relationship at the time of transition. Through Family and Natural Supports work, the team helped create opportunities for connection and gradually rebuild that relationship.



After Leah completed a short-term detox and recovery program, she identified that returning immediately to an urban environment with familiar triggers would not support her recovery.

Because her relationship with her uncle had been strengthened, Leah was able to spend two weeks living with him in a rural area of the province and continue her recovery journey in a safer, more supportive place.

This example shows how Family and Natural Supports can become an important part of recovery capital. Rebuilding a family relationship created an option for Leah beyond formal treatment or placement, and gave her access to connection, stability and support during a critical point in her recovery.

Case Example: Therapeutic Support Through Relationship Building

Ethan had strengths in guitar and vocals. One of the clinicians supporting the home also had skills in guitar and music production, which created a natural point of connection between them.

Over time, parts of their sessions began to include playing music together. Through that shared interest, Ethan and the clinician were able to build trust and begin exploring broader themes related to healing, identity, emotions and recovery. This example reflects the way recovery-oriented clinical support often begins through relationship, shared interests and trust.

For some young people, healing does not begin with a formal conversation in an office. It begins through connection, creativity and a trusted adult who can meet them where they are.



Outcome 3

Young People Are More Connected to Culture and Community

Outcome Summary

Trellis continued to strengthen cultural and community connection so young people can experience belonging, identity and healing through relationships with culture, land, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community and family.

These connections are also part of recovery capital. They help young people build a stronger sense of who they are, where they come from and whom they can turn to during times of stress, transition or healing.

The data shows increased cultural presence and engagement across group care in Year Two. Circle Keepers visited group homes 65 times, twice as many visits as the previous year.

"My youth is residing in an Indigenous home with other peers who are Indigenous. Trellis has accommodated sibling visits."

CHILD INTERVENTION PRACTITIONER

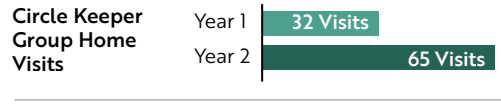
This increase is significant because cultural connection is not built through one-time activities alone. It requires consistency, trust and relationships that develop over time.

Young people were also connected to a range of cultural and community opportunities, including Ii'yika'kimaat, Trellis' after-school Indigenous youth program, equine therapy at Eagle Feather Ranch, and visits to their home Nations. These numbers are small, but meaningful. They reflect individualized work that often takes persistence, coordination and relationship-building with young people, families, nations, and community partners. They also remind us that cultural connection depends on readiness, trust and the right relational pathway. The data also suggests that this work was visible to partners outside Trellis. In Year Two, 100% of Child Intervention Practitioners agreed that Trellis helped young people connect to their culture and communities of choice.

This reflects growing recognition that cultural connection is part of each young person's care, planning and well-being. These indicators should be understood as signs of both reach and depth.

The number of visits, activities and Nation connections matters, but so does what those connections make possible: stronger identity, belonging, trust, emotional regulation, family reconnection and experiences where young people are seen for who they are beyond the label of being in care.

Key Indicators



3
Youth participated in Iiiyika'kimaat, Trellis' after-school Indigenous youth program.

2
Youth participated in Equine Therapy at Eagle Feather Ranch.

2
Youth were supported to visit their home Nations.

100%

of Child Intervention Practitioners agreed that Trellis helped their youth connect to their culture and communities of their choice.

Strengthening Connections to Nation, Culture and Family

Trellis supported young people to strengthen relationships with their home Nations, extended family, culture and community.

Support was individualized and included transportation to Nation, family visits, naming ceremonies, powwows, financial assistance and hosting Nation representatives within a group home.

These connections helped young people build cultural identity, belonging, family relationships and sources of support that can continue beyond their time in care.

The table below highlights the work of the transformation project with Nations to promote connection to culture and family.

Nation	Connection and support provided
O'Chiese First Nation	Staff transported a young person and their brother to the Nation on two occasions to visit family and community.
Tsuut'ina Nation	Staff provided transportation to and from the Nation so the young person could maintain community connections.
Kehewin Cree Nation	Staff transported a young person, their mother and three siblings to the Nation for a naming ceremony.
Zagime Anishinabek First Nation	A young person and staff travelled to visit the young person's grandfather, aunt and siblings.
Samson Cree Nation	Staff supported a connection with an aunt, and the young person spent significant time on the Nation throughout their stay.

What Happened in Year 2

The Circle Keeper role helped ensure cultural support was not treated as a one-time activity, but as an ongoing relational practice that strengthens belonging, identity and healing for young people and their families.

In Year Two, the increased presence of Circle Keepers created more opportunities for young people to build trust, participate in cultural activities and experience culture through consistent relationships.

Trellis also continued to work intentionally to connect young people to their home Nations. This work often required persistence, relationship-building and coordination with family members, nations, and community contacts.

Nation	Connection and support provided
O'Chiese First Nation	Barrier Removal Funds supported a father to take the young person and their younger brother to the Nation.
Sunchild First Nation	A young person attended a powwow on the Nation.
Pasqua First Nation	A young person participated in a naming ceremony and spent time on the Nation.
Onion Lake Cree Nation	Nation representatives visited a young person at Banff Trail and were hosted within the group home.

In Year Two, two youth were supported to visit their home Nations, creating opportunities for family reconnection, cultural belonging and a stronger sense of identity.

Group homes also strengthened relationships with Iiiyika'kimaat, Trellis' after-school Indigenous youth program. Three youth participated this year, building on relationships with staff members they knew and looked forward to seeing at the program.

Through this connection, youth participated in cultural activities, including time with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, crafts, hands-on learning and kinship dinners.

Equine Therapy at Eagle Feather Ranch has become a meaningful recurring activity for youth in group care, supporting emotional regulation, connection and care.

This year, two youth participated in equine therapy. The ranch provides a home for horses that have not thrived in performance or professional equine settings and supports them through rehabilitation, patience and relationship-building.

For some young people, there is a powerful parallel in spending time with animals that have also been misunderstood, excluded or seen as not fitting within other environments.

In this setting, youth can practice regulation, build trust, experience responsibility and connect through calm, non-verbal relationships in a culturally grounded environment.

What We Learned

Cultural connection is relational and cannot be reduced to attendance counts. The number of visits matters, but the depth of identity, belonging and healing created through those relationships matters too.

A key learning from the first year of the project was the need to support teams to record cultural data in more appropriate ways. In response, Trellis launched a Cultural Liaison role in each group home. Cultural Liaisons are frontline staff members responsible for helping facilitate connections between the program and Circle Keepers.

They maintain regular contact with Circle Keepers and support logistics for visits, activities and engagement within the group home. Importantly, Cultural Liaisons are also responsible for documenting cultural engagement, consistent with their existing case-noting responsibilities as frontline staff.

The number of visits, activities and Nation connections matters, but so does what those connections make possible: stronger identity, belonging, trust, emotional regulation, family reconnection and experiences where young people are seen for who they are beyond the label of being in care.

This allows Circle Keepers to remain focused on relational, cultural and ceremonial support, with minimal Western documentation requirements.

Shifting documentation responsibility to program staff helps the whole team focus on what they do best: Circle Keepers lead cultural connection and relationship-building, while frontline staff ensure the work is captured in ways that support learning, reporting and continuity of care.

Year Two also reinforced that cultural reconnection is not always linear.

Reconnection with family, Nation and culture can be interrupted by custody, treatment, crisis, readiness or other circumstances.

The work requires persistence, flexibility and continued relationship-building even when plans are disrupted.

Reconnection with family, Nation and culture can be interrupted by custody, treatment, crisis, readiness or other circumstances. The work requires persistence, flexibility and continued relationship-building even when plans are disrupted.

Case Example: Being Seen as More Than a "Group Home Kid"

For young people in care, cultural connection can also challenge the negative labels they may carry.

Rowan, an Indigenous youth in group care, spent time with a Circle Keeper at a ceremony location, helping clean and maintain the area. While there were other people on-site, Rowan asked whether they knew he was a "group home kid."

Staff reassured him that no one knew anything about him beyond what they could see: a helpful, hard-working and respectful young person making an important contribution.

In that moment, Rowan was able to experience himself beyond the stigma of being in care. Through cultural connection, contribution and belonging, he was able to stand taller in his identity.



Cultural Connection Through Circle Keepers

Circle Keepers bring Indigenous knowledge, ceremony and cultural practices into group care. They support young people, families and staff through teachings, smudging, tobacco teachings, Home Fire ceremonies, Celebrations of Life, powwows and pipe ceremonies. They also provide guidance during grief, loss, transition and healing.

Case Example: Reconnecting With Family and Nation

Avery expressed a strong desire to reconnect with her grandfather and siblings on Zagime Anishinabek Nation.

At first, contact information for her grandfather was unavailable. Staff made ongoing efforts to connect with the Band

Office, locate family members and support Avery's goal of reconnecting with her family and home Nation. After persistent outreach, contact was established through an aunt, who connected staff directly with Avery's grandfather. He was excited to hear from them and welcomed the opportunity to reconnect with his granddaughter.

One day before the scheduled trip, Avery was incarcerated, and the visit had to be cancelled. Following this disruption, staff worked alongside Avery and her family to create a new plan so the reconnection could still happen when the opportunity became available.

In May 2026, staff travelled with Avery to Zagime Anishinabek Nation. The reunion with her grandfather and siblings was deeply emotional, filled with love, care and many tears.

Avery had shared fears that her grandfather might be upset with her because of some of the decisions she had made recently, especially around her time



Circle Keepers play an important role as relational and cultural bridges. Their involvement can help create trust where formal systems may not be enough, opening pathways to family, kinship and belonging.

in custody. Instead, she was met with acceptance, compassion and support. During the visit, the family spent meaningful time together. They shared meals, participated in activities and had the chance to simply enjoy being together. They also pulled out old photo albums, and Avery saw pictures of herself as a young child.

The visit created space for belonging, cultural connection and family healing. It also strengthened important relationships that can continue to support Avery's identity, recovery and connection beyond her time in care.

Case Example: Circle Keepers as Bridges to Kinship

Mia, an Indigenous youth who entered Trellis group care, had an older sibling who was identified as a potential kinship placement.

Although her sibling was initially interested in exploring this possibility, the team's early outreach was met with hesitation and reluctance to engage. Recognizing that trust needed to be built differently, the team invited a female Circle Keeper to support the connection.

Through shared culture, relationship and a more natural point of connection, the Circle Keeper began building trust with



Mia's sibling. These early conversations created a stronger foundation for collaboration.

As trust grew, additional team members became involved, building on the credibility and relational groundwork established by the Circle Keeper and the team's ongoing work with Mia.

After several months, Mia transitioned from group care into a kinship placement with her sibling. This example reflects the important role Circle Keepers can play as relational and cultural bridges. Their involvement can help create trust where formal systems alone may not be enough, opening pathways to family, kinship and belonging.

"The group home taught me that patience is key, nothing is forever, stuff gets hard, but in the end it will be fine."

YOUTH IN GROUP CARE



Circle Keepers are Indigenous cultural leaders who help young people and families strengthen their connection to culture, identity, community and belonging. Through cultural teachings, ceremony, storytelling, land-based learning, one-to-one support, and family engagement, they provide culturally grounded guidance, mentorship, and support during times of grief, loss, and transition.



Outcome 4

Practical Barriers Are Reduced to Strengthen Connection and Stability

Outcome Summary

Practical barriers can quickly become relational barriers. In Year Two, Barrier Removal Funds remained an important tool for responding to barriers that could otherwise limit connection, participation, stability or progress.

Trellis continued to monitor and spend Barrier Removal Funds as needed, while encouraging the team to think creatively about what doors these funds could open for young people and families.

Rather than treating the fund only as an emergency resource, the team considered how flexible financial support could be used relationally and strategically to reduce pressure on families, create opportunities for connection and support young people and their natural supports in ways that were responsive to their real-life circumstances.

"The group home helped me get a safe apartment to live in so my child could come and visit."

PARENT OF GROUP HOME YOUTH

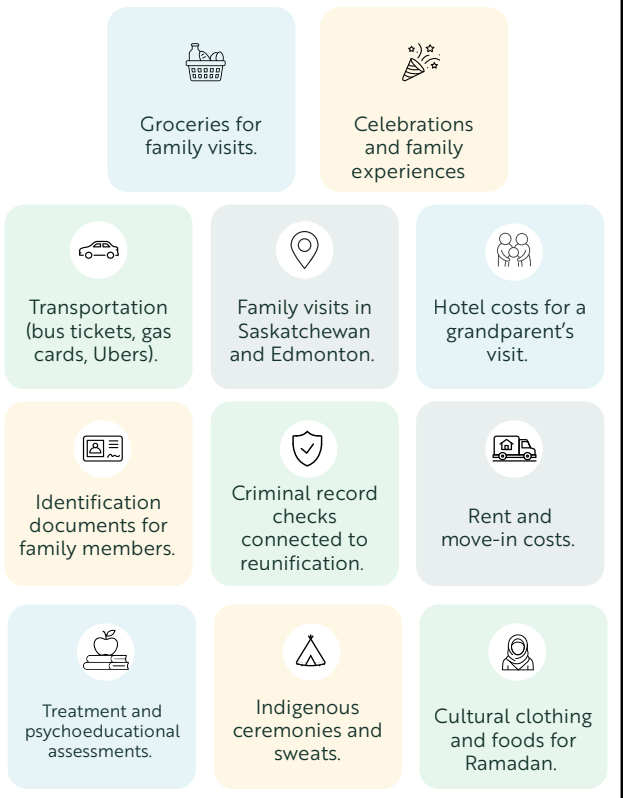
The examples that follow show the range of ways Barrier Removal Funds supported the Transformation Project. Some funds addressed immediate practical needs, such as groceries, transportation, identification, rent, move-in costs or treatment access.

Other funds supported connection and belonging, such as sibling visits, family celebrations, cultural clothing, traditional foods, gifts and opportunities for young people to spend meaningful time with people they care about.

These examples show that Barrier Removal Funds were not only financial assistance. They were a flexible prevention and recovery-oriented tool that helped reduce financial pressure, keep relationships moving and create the conditions for trust, participation, family healing, cultural connection and stability.

Key Examples of Supports Provided

Barrier Removal Funds supported:



What Happened in Year Two

Barrier Removal Funds were used intentionally to remove practical barriers while strengthening relationships and creating opportunities for connection. Sometimes that meant something as simple as buying coffee, snacks or a meal to create a comfortable space for difficult conversations.

Other times, it meant making it possible for siblings to spend a day together at the zoo, Calaway Park or the movies, or helping a young person buy a birthday gift for a sibling or former foster parent.

These small gestures helped young people maintain important relationships and express care. The funds also reduced financial pressures that could prevent families from staying connected.

Groceries helped families prepare for successful home visits, while transportation supports, including bus tickets, gas cards, rideshares and intercity travel, made it possible for young people and family members to attend visits, therapy appointments, cultural activities and other important commitments.

In one instance, accommodation was arranged so a grandparent could travel to spend meaningful time with a young person when the cost of lodging would otherwise have made the visit impossible.

Barrier Removal Funds also helped remove administrative and financial barriers that stood in the way of family stability and reunification.

Support was provided for identification documents, criminal record checks required for reunification planning, rent and move-in costs, and specialized services such as treatment and psychoeducational assessments, when these expenses would otherwise have delayed progress.

The funds also created opportunities for cultural connection and belonging.

Young people were supported to participate in ceremonies and cultural practices through items such as a ribbon skirt, attendance at sweats, traditional foods and clothing for Ramadan, and opportunities to connect with their cultural communities in ways that reflected their identity and heritage.

Together, these examples demonstrate that Barrier Removal Funds were much more than emergency financial assistance. They were a flexible prevention tool that helped remove obstacles, strengthen relationships and create meaningful opportunities for family connection, cultural identity, participation and long-term stability.

Practical Barriers Can Become Relational Barriers

A missed bus, a missing ID or no place for the family to stay can delay a visit, a reconnection or a reunification plan. Barrier Removal Funds help keep relationships moving forward.



What We Learned

Year Two showed that practical barriers can make or break opportunities for connection, healing and recovery. Recovery capital is not only relational, but also practical.

A young person's progress can depend on whether they can attend a family visit, access treatment, participate in ceremony, maintain sibling relationships or return to a home where basic needs are stable.

Barrier Removal Funds helped address these conditions, giving young people and families greater opportunities to strengthen connections, support recovery, and move toward greater stability.

Many young people and families are trying to rebuild relationships while also managing poverty, housing instability, transportation barriers, system requirements, cultural disconnection and unmet treatment needs.

Flexible funding allowed staff to respond to these realities in ways that were timely, relational and practical. It also supported young people's agency and identity by helping them participate in cultural practices, celebrate birthdays, buy gifts, spend time with siblings and experience everyday moments of family life.

The learning is that Barrier Removal Funds should not be understood only as financial assistance.

They are a relational and prevention-focused tool that helps create the conditions for connection, trust, participation and family healing.

"The group home supports transportation for sibling visits to take place at the group home every Friday."

CHILD INTERVENTION PRACTITIONER





Barrier Removal Funds should not be understood only as financial assistance. They are a relational and prevention-focused tool that helps create the conditions for connection, trust, participation and family healing.

Outcome 5

Young People Experience More Planned and Supported Transitions

Outcome Summary

Trellis strengthened planning around transitions so young people are less likely to experience abrupt changes in placement and more likely to move forward with preparation, stability and support.

Planned transitions are especially important for young people in care because abrupt moves can reinforce instability, distress and trauma.

In Year Two, stronger role clarity, collaborative service planning, Family and Natural Supports work, Barrier Removal Funds and One Door referrals all contributed to more coordinated transition planning.

The transition data tells two stories. On one hand, planned transitions improved significantly, increasing from 57% at baseline to 81% in Year Two.

This reflects stronger anticipation of transitions, earlier responses to emerging behaviours and needs and more intentional planning with young people and their support networks.

On the other hand, discharges to home, parent or kinship remained relatively stable. This does not mean the Family and Natural Supports work was ineffective. Rather, it shows that family reconnection and reunification often require more time, stability and system coordination than can be reflected through discharge destination alone.

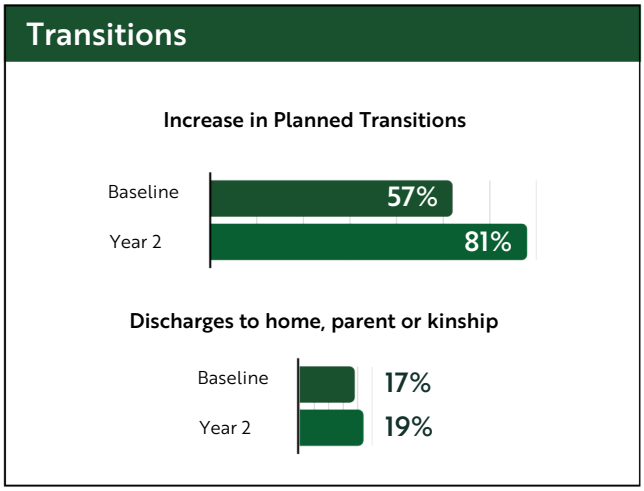
Many parents, kinship caregivers and natural supports are navigating housing instability, poverty, trauma, mental health needs, substance use, system distrust and other practical barriers that affect family stability and recovery.

In some cases, relationships strengthened significantly, but families were not yet ready or able to become placement options within the reporting period.

While this outcome remained relatively stable, Year Two showed important progress in the conditions that make future reunification more possible. This creates a stronger foundation for Year Three.

As relationships continue to rebuild, Family and Natural Supports become more engaged and practical barriers are addressed, Trellis expects more young people to have clearer, safer and more connected pathways toward reunification, kinship, stable housing or other planned transitions.

Transitions



Trellis made 6 internal referrals to Housing Liaisons for Family and Natural Supports

who needed housing support to strengthen stability or support reunification. Housing Liaison referrals supported families who needed larger housing to make reunification possible, as well as family and natural supports experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

What Happened in Year Two

Year Two changes helped strengthen transition planning by creating more space for intentional, longer-term work with young people and their Family and Natural Supports.

With greater clarity, consistency and collaboration across the team, staff were better positioned to anticipate transitions, respond to emerging needs and plan with young people and the people who matter to them before decisions became crisis-driven.

"One youth has greatly stabilized. He has found employment and is thinking of his future."

CHILD INTERVENTION PRACTITIONER

At the organizational level, Trellis continued to operationalize One Door, creating smoother connections between programs for young people, family members and natural supports.

This matters because transforming group care requires responding to the broader needs surrounding a young person, not only those connected to their placement. In Year Two, this work included 6 referrals to Housing Liaisons for family and natural supports who needed housing support.

These referrals included situations where families needed to relocate into larger housing to support reunification, as well as situations where family or natural supports needed help exiting homelessness and creating greater housing stability.

What We Learned

Reunification is not simply a placement decision. It depends on the conditions surrounding the young person and their family.

Families may need stable housing, transportation, income, therapeutic support, system navigation or time to rebuild trust before reunification can become safe and sustainable.

Year Two also reinforced that young people in group care often move across multiple systems, including child welfare, justice, health and addictions.
Some transitions were affected by custody, detox, treatment, extended absences, AWOLs, safety concerns or crisis-driven decisions.

These realities shaped discharge outcomes in ways that were not fully within the control of the program. The key learning is that transition planning needs to start early, include Family and Natural Supports whenever possible and address the practical, relational and recovery conditions that make stability more likely.

Case Example: Strengthening Transition Planning Around the Whole Family

This year, the team mobilized to support one family through a period of significant housing instability and transition.

Sarah (mother) and her two children, Ethan (17) and Liam (15), had a longstanding involvement with support services, and both youth had previous experience residing in Trellis Group Homes.

As Ethan approached his 18th birthday, he was preparing to age out of programming with another agency and faced uncertainty regarding housing and next steps.

At the same time, Sarah was experiencing precarious housing circumstances, creating an increased risk that both she and Ethan would experience homelessness.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation and the importance of maintaining family connection, Trellis Youth & Family Case Managers worked collaboratively with Sarah and Ethan to identify a sustainable housing solution.

Through coordinated planning and advocacy, the family was supported in transitioning into a Trellis-owned apartment unit that aligned with their immediate needs and provided greater stability during this critical period.

While Liam remained in Group Care, maintaining meaningful family relationships remained a priority. With support from staff, Liam participated in



regular visits with his mother and brother, helping to strengthen family connections during the transition.

These visits included everyday moments of belonging and celebration, such as bringing a housewarming gift to welcome them into their new home and spending birthdays together with extended family members.

This case highlights the impact of coordinated, family-centred intervention in preventing homelessness, supporting successful transitions to adulthood, and preserving family relationships during periods of change and uncertainty.



Outcome 6

Systems Are Better Coordinated Around Young People and Their Family and Natural Supports

Outcome Summary

Trellis strengthened collaboration with Children and Family Services so planning begins earlier, Family and Natural Support information is more visible and young people are less likely to move through systems without a clear, coordinated plan.

The data shows important improvements in the quality and completeness of information available at intake.

By the end of Year Two, 100% of youth had documented permanency plans in place, compared to 76% before the project.

This matters because clearer permanency information helps staff understand each young person's long-term direction earlier and plan more intentionally from the beginning of placement.

Better information at intake also helps the team understand what recovery capital already exists around a young person and where it needs to be strengthened.

This includes family relationships, cultural connections, community supports, clinical needs, housing stability and other resources that can support healing and long-term well-being.

The data also shows an increase in permanency plans focused on kinship or family reunification, from 38% at baseline to 47% in Year Two.

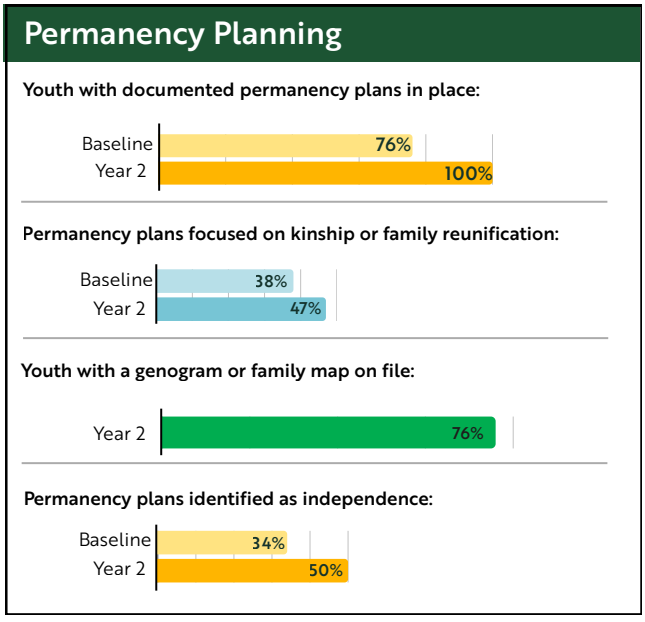
While more young people had clearer permanency plans, the proportion expected to transition toward independence also increased, from 34% at baseline to 50% in Year Two. For these young people, independence is a formal planning direction, not an expectation that they navigate adulthood alone. Strong Family and Natural Supports, cultural connection, practical stability and coordinated planning remain essential to helping them move forward successfully.

The increase in the number of genograms is especially significant. By the end of Year Two, 76% of youth had a genogram or family map on file. This is more than an administrative improvement.

When family information is available early, staff can begin relational work sooner, identify possible supports and create opportunities for reconnection that may otherwise be missed.

Together, these indicators show that systems coordination improved in Year Two, while also highlighting the ongoing need to strengthen information-sharing, role clarity and shared planning across Trellis, Children and Family Services and other partners involved in young people's lives.

Permanency Planning



What Happened in Year Two



In addition to strengthening referral and intake coordination, Trellis continued to create opportunities for shared learning and alignment with provincial partners.

Throughout the year, Trellis leadership met with representatives from Children and Family Services and Mental Health and Addiction to share progress, review emerging data, discuss implementation learnings and identify opportunities to strengthen practice across systems.

These conversations helped ensure the model continued to develop with government insight and supported a shared understanding of the conditions needed for successful implementation, sustainability and potential system learning.

At the practice level, Trellis staff also continued to strengthen day-to-day collaboration with Child Intervention Practitioners. As the model matured, the work became less about navigating separate roles and more about aligning around a shared purpose: putting young people and families at the centre. This helped create more trust, clearer communication and stronger planning between Trellis and Children and Family Services.

Trellis also shared learnings with community partners and others across the group care sector, including presentations to the Calgary John Howard Society Board of Directors, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference, group care providers in Red Deer, the ALIGN Provincial Board and the National Child & Youth Care Conference.

What We Learned

A significant challenge is in the proportion of youth whose permanency plan is identified as independence.

For Trellis, this reinforces the importance of strengthening Family and Natural Supports regardless of the formal permanency plan.

Whether a young person returns to family, transitions to another placement or moves toward independent living, strong relational connections are critical to long-term stability, belonging and the ability to navigate future challenges.





Year Two reinforced that information sharing across systems is foundational. When genograms, permanency plans and family contact information are available at intake, the team can begin relational work earlier and with greater clarity.

When this information is delayed or missing, the opportunities for reconnection may be missed or slowed. Another important learning was that values alignment matters across systems, not only within Trellis.

The work is strongest when Trellis staff and Children and Family Services partners can approach planning as people working together toward shared outcomes for young people and families.

Year Two helped strengthen this collaborative posture, moving away from an "organization versus system" mindset and toward more relational, transparent and solutions-focused work alongside one another. System coordination is an essential part of recovery-oriented practice.

When information is shared early, the team can begin strengthening the relationships, resources and supports that help young people stabilize, heal and prepare for life beyond care.

Case Example: Genograms as a Pathway to Reconnection

Arjun was admitted to a Trellis group home with no family members in Canada.

At intake, a genogram provided by the CIP identified grandparents and older relatives in India who were known to the system but not actively connected to him.

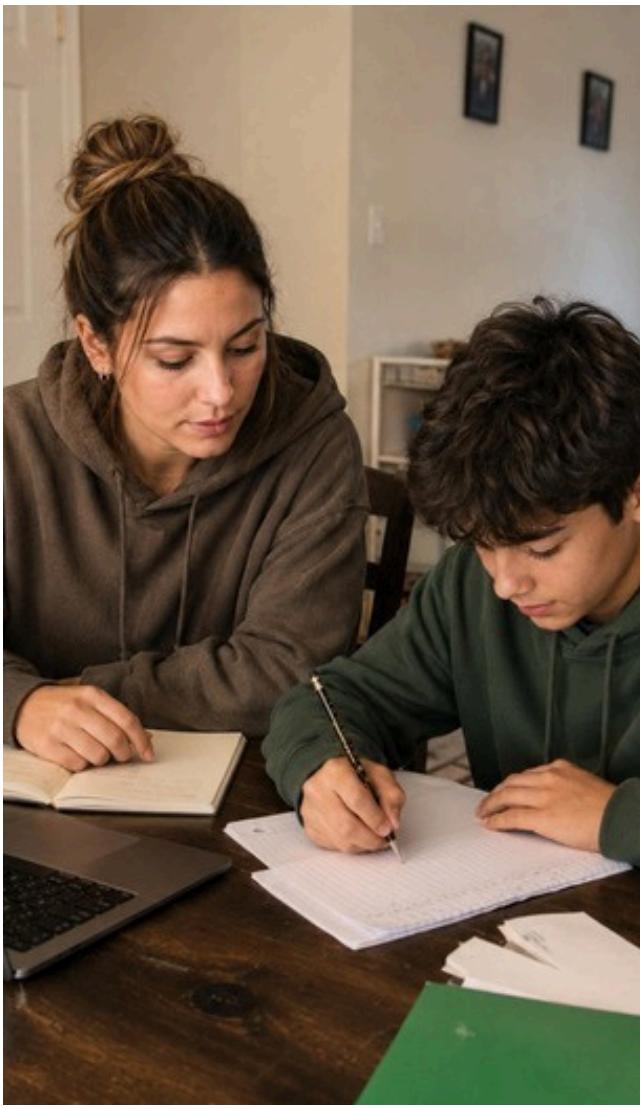
With support from staff, Arjun was able to establish a connection with those relatives over WhatsApp.

This significantly improved Arjun's emotional support network and demonstrated the practical importance of having family information available early.



Case Example: Looking Beyond the Referral Narrative

Jayden and Kai, two brothers, entered a Trellis group home after their placement with an older sister had broken down. At referral and intake, staff were told that their sister "wanted nothing to do with the boys," and her contact information was not shared with Trellis. Once her contact information became available, staff began



building communication with her and learning more about what had happened. They discovered that she still felt deeply connected to her brothers and had struggled significantly after the placement broke down.

She had been trying to find support, but did not know where to turn. While she is not able to serve as a kinship placement, she now provides weekend respite care for Kai, the younger brother.

This has restored an important family connection and created a meaningful way for her to remain part of the boys' lives. This example shows why Family and Natural Supports work requires curiosity, persistence and a willingness to look beyond the first story shared at referral.

Even when reunification or kinship placement is not possible, relationships can still be repaired, strengthened and made part of a young person's support network.



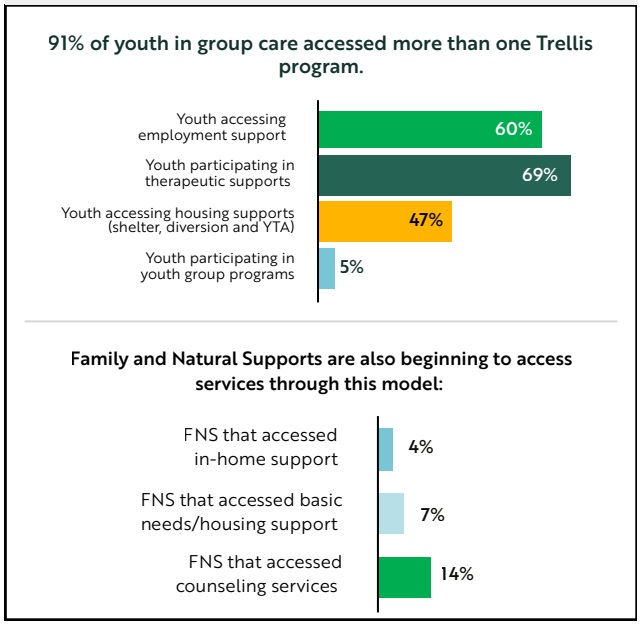
Trellis' One Door

Wraparound Support

Trellis' One Door model provides a more coordinated way for young people and families to access support across the organization and in the community. Rather than relying on one program to meet all needs,

One Door helps connect young people and their Family and Natural Supports to the broader continuum of Trellis services, including housing, employment, counselling, basic needs, in- home support and Recovery Coaches, as well as external services when needs fall outside what Trellis provides.

One Door has also strengthened the referral and intake process for group care. A centralized intake role coordinates directly with Children and Family Services to gather the information needed, clarify referral details and support intake planning. This helps young people enter care with stronger information, clearer planning and more coordinated support from the beginning.





The five project enhancements have strengthened core supports within group care, including Family and Natural Supports work, clinical support, cultural connection and Barrier Removal Funds.

Through One Door, these enhanced group care supports are further connected to existing Trellis programs and community services, including Recovery Coaches who support recovery-oriented planning, navigation and connection.

This creates additional pathways to stability and recovery without duplicating service systems or requiring every need to be met within the group home alone.

One Door strengthens recovery capital by helping young people and families connect to the broader resources they need for stability, healing and well-being.

For some, this may include counselling, housing support, employment services, basic needs, in-home support, Recovery Coaches or referral to external services.

This helps ensure recovery is not treated as something that happens only through clinical intervention, but as something supported through relationships, practical stability, community resources and coordinated care.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Overall Learnings and Ongoing Investments

Overall Year Two Learning



Year Two confirmed that the Transformation Project is moving in the right direction, while also showing that the work is more complex, relational and system-dependent than a single set of outcome measures can fully capture.

The most significant learning is that not all outcomes move at the same pace. Planned transitions improved, suggesting stronger coordination and preparation. At the same time, discharges to home, parent or kinship remained relatively stable. This does not mean the family work was ineffective.

It means that reunification requires more than willingness. It requires trust, time, housing, recovery capital, system coordination and the stabilization of the broader family network.

Year Two also reinforced that young people in group care are experiencing high and increasing complexity. Many are cycling between child welfare, justice, health and addictions systems without the continuity or coordinated support needed to stabilize.

These realities shape outcomes in ways that are not fully within the control of any one program. The project helped clarify what meaningful progress looks like in a family-centered, culturally grounded and recovery-oriented model of group care. Recovery capital is built across the whole model. It shows up in therapy and clinical support, as well as in family reconnection, cultural belonging, stable housing, practical barrier removal, safer transitions, and coordinated planning. For young people in group care, recovery is not a single service or referral.

It is the gradual strengthening of the people, places, skills and supports that help them move toward healing, belonging, and long-term well-being. This is why traditional indicators such as discharge destination, therapy participation, cultural activity counts and fund expenditures remain important, but tell only part of the story.

The project also showed progress in areas closely tied to long-term stability, including stronger family and natural supports, greater readiness for healing and recovery, deeper cultural belonging, improved trust with adults and more planned transitions.

As the model continues to mature, Trellis is refining its measures so the evaluation



can better capture the relational and developmental changes that matter most for young people beyond their time in care. This includes continuing to develop stronger ways to measure the quality and strength of each young person's support network.

The next phase of the Transformation Project will continue to strengthen Family and Natural Supports work, improve cross-system coordination, build recovery capital, deepen cultural connection and adapt the model based on what young people, families, staff and partners are teaching us.

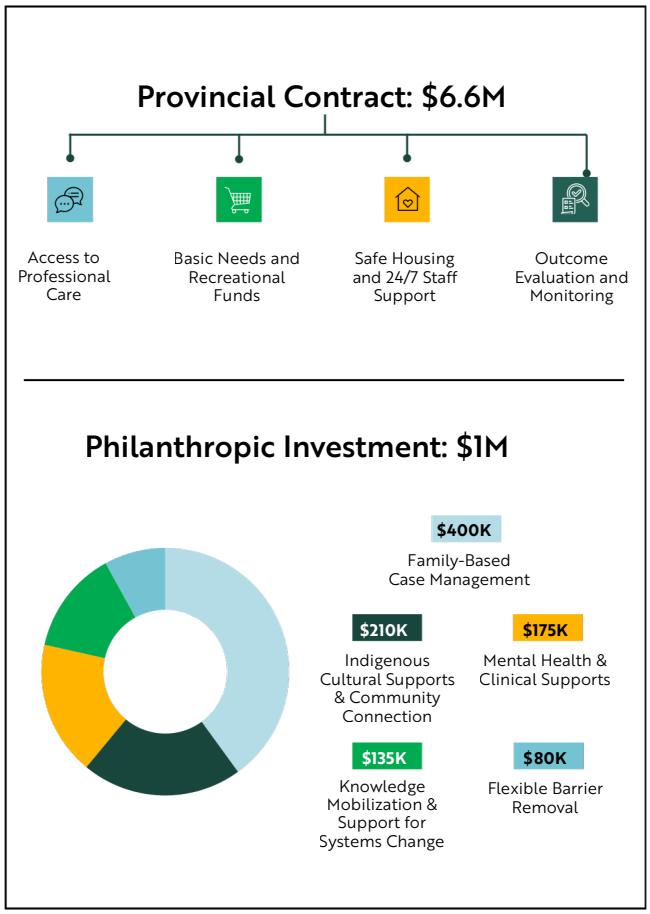
Investment and Sustainability

The Transformation Project has been made possible through significant philanthropic investment over its first three years.

This support has allowed Trellis to test, refine and strengthen a transformed model of group care before seeking longer-term system investment.

The project investment has supported five core program enhancements: Youth and Family Case Managers, Expanded Clinical Supports, Circle Keepers, Barrier Removal Funds and cross-system coordination with Children and Family Services.

Together, these enhancements have created a more family-centered, culturally grounded, recovery-oriented and prevention-focused model of care.



While philanthropic support has been essential to launching and demonstrating the model, the needs addressed by the Transformation Project are ongoing. Young people in group care continue to arrive with complex histories of trauma, system involvement, disrupted relationships, mental health needs, substance use and unstable transitions.

Sustaining this model requires stable year-over-year funding so these supports are not dependent on short-term or time-limited investment. The goal of this project is to move from proof of concept to sustainability. Continued investment would allow the core enhancements to



remain embedded in group care, ensuring young people and families can continue to access the relationships, recovery capital, cultural connection, practical supports, and coordinated planning needed for long-term stability and well-being.

Conclusion

Transforming group care is about changing what care looks like, how it is delivered and what young people can carry with them when they leave.

Young people need recovery capital that can support them beyond placement: enduring relationships, cultural identity, opportunities for healing, practical stability and coordinated support that helps them build a life beyond care.

Year Two demonstrated that when group care is family-centered, culturally grounded, recovery-oriented and prevention-focused, it can become more than a placement where young people stay. It can become a pathway back to connection, belonging, identity, recovery and hope for the future.

Looking ahead, Trellis will continue to build on the foundations created in Year Two by deepening Family and Natural Supports work, strengthening recovery capital, expanding cultural connection and improving coordinated planning so more young people can move toward safer, more stable and more connected futures.

