

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE



Provincial Advocate
for Children & Youth

Provincial Advocate *for Children & Youth*

2014 Report to the Legislature

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The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

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Highlights

This report reflects a move to fiscal year reporting and includes the period from April 1 2013 to March 31 2014.

BILL 8 (FORMERLY BILL 179)

We are awaiting passage into law of Bill 8 (formerly Bill 179), the *Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act*, to make public services in Ontario more open and accountable. However, while Bill 8 will enhance the ability of the Advocate's Office to hold child welfare to account, it has a number of deficits which we believe will continue to leave many vulnerable young people without adequate protection. Bill 8 must amend the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* and include a proviso that permits the Advocate's Office to obtain any information it deems necessary to advocate for children and youth and to ensure their continued safety. We are seeking the authority to investigate the concerns of vulnerable children in all areas of our mandate—not just young people who are receiving services from a children's aid society. We also want to see whistle blower protection in our Act for anyone who contacts our Office to raise a concern or make a complaint pertaining to the safety of a young person in care.

ADVOCACY 2.0 This year we undertook another important initiative to connect to young people where they are: online. Called Advocacy 2.0, we are continuing to update our website to incorporate the latest and best in social media technology. Our goal is to have everything our Office does available online. The new website will connect young people to Office services and projects through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo and Instagram. The site will provide a dynamic meeting space for young people where they can feel safe interacting with one another and seek information.

The site will also be used to stream live events and host chat rooms for our projects and sponsored discussions. The new website will launch later in 2014.

2014

I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

This year, we launched a project called "I Have Something to Say", which represents a major step forward in our work to elevate the voices of children and youth with disabilities. The initiative, like Our Voice Our Turn and Feathers of Hope, will gather the voices of children with disabilities in Ontario, bring the young people together and with them deliver their message directly to decision makers. As a first step, we are working closely with our youth advisory committee to create a web space through which children and youth will be able to share their stories. The site is also designed to allow those who serve and care for children and youth with disabilities to access resources through weblinks.

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Message from the Provincial Advocate



IRWIN ELMAN,
PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE

As I sat down to write this message I recalled the story of a young woman in the care of a children's aid society. She had joined a group of youth helping the Advocate's Office understand how best to use our standing at an inquest into the death of a three-year-old boy who died while in care at a foster home. As the young woman wondered how this tragedy could have happened, and how we could make sure it never happened again, she reflected on her own lived experience.

She spoke of the times she had to throw her belongings into a garbage bag to move to a new foster home. "I thought it was demeaning and it made moving feel even worse," she recalled. Then she explained how she and some other youth in her agency asked their case workers for help. It worked. "We were so excited when we were able to raise money to buy luggage so no youth in our agency would ever have to move with garbage bags again."

But the young woman wasn't finished telling her story and what she revealed next has stuck with me. She said, "I realized we had not solved the problem. Yes, luggage was important but if I was moving from one *home* to another *home*, a place where I felt valued and cared for—and not from one *placement* to another *placement*—I don't think I would have cared about the garbage bags."

What this wise young woman recognized was that the luggage was an easy-to-implement, institutional solution that did not solve a deep human problem. "You guys are always creating institutional solutions to human problems when what we need are human solutions," she said. "I know why decision makers don't do it. It's hard and it means things have to change—really change."

Every day my Office hears stories from young people that reflect a gap—sometimes chasm—that exists between government policies, action plans, strategies, frameworks, transformations and declarations of rights on one hand, and the lived experience of children and youth on the other hand. What is

that gap? I believe it is the space that exists between institutional solutions and human problems, a space that leaves young people's real needs unmet. It is a gap that is revealed so completely and eloquently by the voices of the children and youth who call us every day.

In the publication we released in 2012, *My Real Lifebook*, young people stated, "We want to be part of our own lives." The same sentiment can be heard in the voices of First Nations youth in a second publication, *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*, which was released in 2013. A third publication, *It Depends Who's Working*, also released in 2013, reiterates the message in the context of the struggles of young people in Ontario's youth justice system. In all these realms our work has revealed a lack of human solutions to human problems—that is, a lack of will to create policies, service models and professional practices rooted in the whole, real, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual lived experiences of children and youth.

It is the view of our Office that finding human solutions for human problems does not have to cost more money. It means operating services differently or taking a truly whole-of-government approach to solving young people's problems. It means working collaboratively to build systems and services from the front line up. It means listening to and working with children and youth themselves when creating the services and supports they need. Children and youth may say things that are difficult for adults, service providers or policy makers to hear but their voices help hold the Province of Ontario accountable.

If you are a young person reading this, consider adding your voice and energy to the work we do. If you have something you need for yourself, or want to change things for those who come after you, please reach out to our Office. We are here for you.



EVERY TIME
I MEET YOUNG PEOPLE, NO
MATTER HOW DIFFICULT
THEIR LIVES HAVE BEEN IN
THE SYSTEM, BEFORE
THE SYSTEM, OUTSIDE
THE SYSTEM, THEY WANT
TO CONTRIBUTE.

IRWIN ELMAN,
PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE





Advocacy

Elevating the voices of children and youth

The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (Advocate's Office) is an independent Office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We are guided in our work by principles expressed in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. A primary focus of our work is to be an exemplar for meaningful participation of children and youth through all aspects of our advocacy services.

UNDER OUR LEGISLATION THE ADVOCATE'S OFFICE MUST:

- Provide an independent voice for children and youth by partnering with them to bring issues forward.
- Encourage communication and understanding between children and families and those who provide them with services.
- Educate children, youth and their caregivers about the rights of children.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DEFINE OUR MANDATE

The children and youth who fall within the mandate of the Advocate's Office include those who are seeking or receiving services from the children's services sector in areas such as child welfare, youth justice, children's mental health, developmental services and children's treatment services. The jurisdiction of the Office also includes students of the provincial and demonstration schools, youth in court holding cells or being transported to and from court holding cells, First Nations children and youth, and children and youth with special needs.

THREE DOMAINS OF ADVOCACY

Our Office undertakes work in three areas of advocacy. The foundation of our work is in individual rights advocacy, answering

thousands of calls each year from children and youth, their families, caregivers and others. Children and youth in Ontario's systems of care often feel that they are invisible to the Province and that their voices go unheard. It's our job to make sure that young people have a voice and that youth within the care of Ontario's residential services system know they have the right to speak to an advocate from our Office.

When we notice patterns or trends in the calls we receive from young people, we may decide to engage in deeper and closer scrutiny of an issue through systemic advocacy. When we speak of "systems" we are referring to government policy, legislation and guidelines for service providers that determine the way an organization carries out its duties and obligations to children and youth. By "systems" we also mean agencies' own organizational policies and service practices. When conducting systemic advocacy, the Office draws from the expertise of young people who have direct knowledge or experience with the issue and works with them to make recommendations for change at the level of policy, funding or program delivery.

When an issue concerns specific local groups or whole populations of young people, we will undertake community development advocacy. In these situations, the Office engages young people and their natural supports and allies, and helps them become their own advocates by partnering with them to help create the change they wish to see. Community development plays an additional role by providing outreach and education.

We answer calls from thousands of individuals every year—young people, their families, caregivers and others with an interest in protecting children’s rights and amplifying their voices.



When patterns or trends emerge in the calls to our Office, we may decide to take a closer look at a systemic level and involve groups of young people in our mandate who have lived experience with the issue.

When an issue concerns specific local groups or whole populations of young people, we will undertake community development advocacy. In these situations, the Office engages young people, their natural supports and allies, and helps them become their own advocates.

When a young person calls

Calls received by the Advocate's Office cover a range of issues. For example, young people's calls could be about being mistreated in a facility, being denied visits with their family, about services not being received, wanting to live somewhere else or wanting to learn more about their religion or culture.

Each phone call, email or Facebook message we receive from a young person, no matter what the concern, is important. We know how difficult it is for a child to speak up when they feel no one is listening. We know how isolated they feel. When they contact us we know it may be the first time a child or youth feels listened to and heard, and we understand the power that this act of being heard can have on a young person. Once the youth has contacted us, he or she may work to create an advocacy plan with the assistance of an Individual Rights Advocate. The plan sets out what the goals are, what the steps are and who will do what. Importantly, the young person ultimately directs the course that the advocacy plan will take. The advocate will follow that plan with the child until the young person is satisfied.

When someone other than a young person contacts the Advocate's Office on behalf of a child or youth, an Individual Rights Advocate will, wherever possible, attempt to communicate with the young person directly. Office staff must obtain the young person's consent to move forward and, where possible, develop the advocacy plan with that young person. The Advocate's Office receives many calls and emails on behalf of the young people in its mandate and recognizes the vital role that supporters play in getting children and youth the services they need. These "natural advocates," as we call them, often come from the community in which the child lives and can include service providers, social workers, counsellors, child and youth workers, caregivers, teachers, clergy, friends, family members, coaches and neighbours. Natural advocates are a crucial source of support and referral for children and youth in care.

STRIVING TO BE AN EXEMPLAR FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Our legislation instructs us to be an "exemplar for meaningful child and youth participation". We believe that the most powerful voice for young people is their own, and we bring that voice into every element of the work that we do. We have young people who work for the Office who are known as the Youth Amplifiers, a name they chose themselves. Amplifiers work with the Office on a paid, part-time basis. Many Amplifiers are students; all are young people with close ties to the many areas of our mandate.

Working with the guidance of Office staff, Youth Amplifiers conduct outreach, provide rights education and training to other young people, identify problematic youth issues and provide recommendations, help the Office prepare youth-oriented reports, education materials and media products that address issues brought to the Office by youth across all mandated areas of our work, and contribute in many other important ways. Amplifiers provide insight and lived experience that informs all aspects of the Office's work. There are 14 Youth Amplifiers currently working with us. Some of their personal stories about their work with the Office are contained in the pages of this annual report.

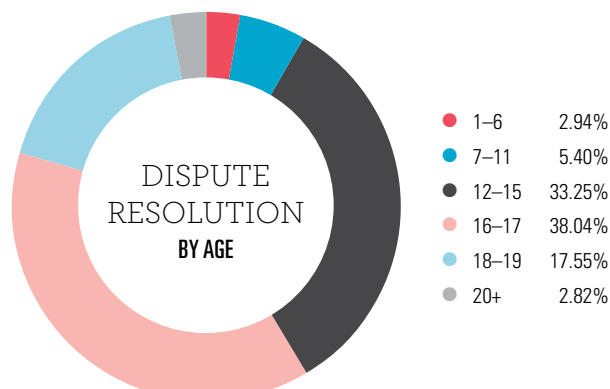
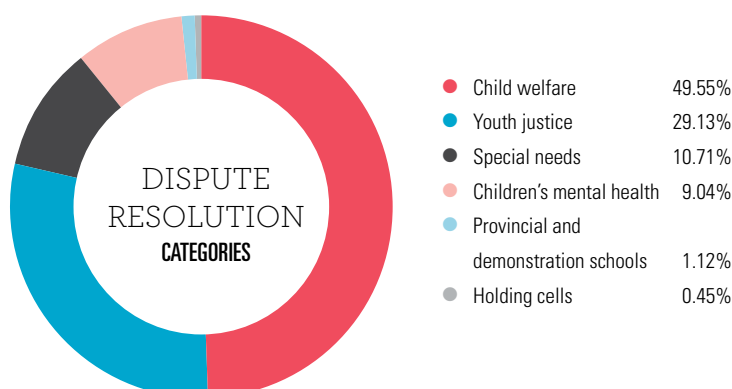
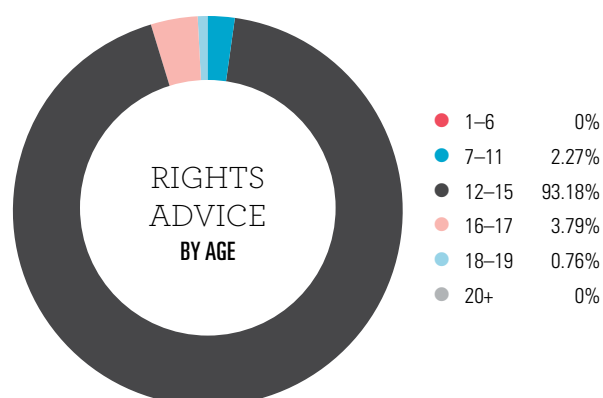
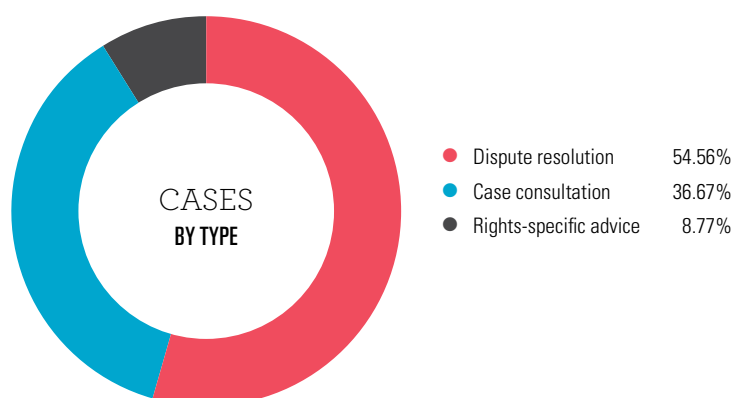
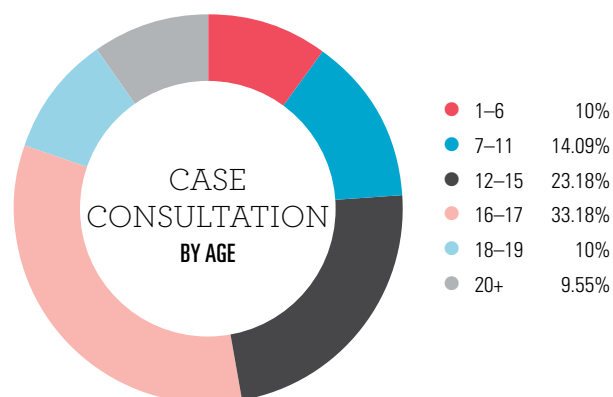
Other young people work with us as well. For example, young people volunteer their time to sit on advisory committees, provide support at Office-sponsored events, or make submissions, sharing their stories and ideas for change when the Office undertakes systemic advocacy. Also, the young people who call us every day to share their stories, experiences and concerns have a direct impact on how the Office conceives projects and initiatives designed to meet their needs.

Service statistics

APRIL 1, 2013 TO MARCH 31, 2014

In 2013–2014, the Advocate's Office received 2,882 calls for assistance. Children and youth have a legal right to speak to us without interference or delay. When young people in any of our mandate areas are admitted to care, the service provider must provide them with our Office's contact information and continue to provide the information quarterly thereafter.

Advocates' cases fall under three categories: dispute resolution, case consultation or rights-specific advice. Dispute resolution means helping a young person create a plan to deal with a conflict in a placement. Disputes could be about unfair treatment, improper staff conduct or a perceived lack of safety. Consultation involves providing the young person with information about a specific issue they are experiencing. Rights-specific advice is primarily for situations where a young person is detained in emergency secure treatment.



Ten calls to the Advocate's Office

Although there is no typical day in the Advocate's Office, the following examples provide a snapshot of actual calls received on one day in the life of the Office.

1

A foster mother called, telling us her six-year-old foster son's health is being compromised while on access visits with his father. She wants to know how to raise the issue so the children's aid society (CAS) involved will hear her and not react to the fact she is expressing concern.

3

A parent calls about her seven-year-old son's treatment by a CAS. He has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and was interviewed at school, which the CAS had said they would not do. The young boy explains he was upset by what the CAS worker had done as it labeled him with the school and with his friends.

2

A 15 year old claiming she has been abused in her parent's home calls asking how she can be designated a Crown Ward. She says the CAS involved wants to return her home against her wishes.

4

The mother of a child who is severely disabled and non-verbal called to complain she had applied for and received funding for service last year, but didn't qualify this year. Reapplying would result in months of waiting and service delivery gaps in meeting the needs of the child.

5

A 23 year old former Crown Ward calls reporting that his rights have been violated. He states that an individual has signed a consent form on his behalf and wants help finding out how it happened without his knowing.

8

A mother calls regarding her daughter's death. She feels that the child slipped through the cracks and was not given proper care by the agencies providing her with care.

6

A 16 year old young person calls from a youth justice facility complaining that he has been put "off program," meaning he is confined to his room and is unable to attend school. Apparently, the facility's policy dictates that the youth is not permitted to return to school until he has been put back "on program." The young person asks for our help because he believes he is being denied his right to an education.

9

A youth in secure treatment for a long time is ready to be discharged but no placement can be found. The youth calls our Office to seek our assistance with finding a placement.

7

A 16 year old at a secure (i.e., locked) treatment facility calls to report that the agency is refusing to provide her with medical assistance.

10

A young person who has just turned 16 wants to know how to terminate her Crown Wardship. She has a right to ask for a review of her status, but her CAS is not willing to help her obtain a review.

A CALL FOR

Greater openness and accountability

BILL 8

Shortly before Ontario's 2014 general election, the government of Ontario introduced Bill 179 (now known as Bill 8), the *Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act*, to make public services in Ontario more open and accountable. One area of change proposed in the legislation is to improve the oversight of services to children and youth in care by amending the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*.

However, while Bill 8 will enhance the ability of the Advocate's Office to hold child welfare to account, the Bill has a number of deficits, which will leave many vulnerable young people without adequate protection. Currently, the Advocate's Office is prohibited from conducting investigations (although we may "gather and collect information") and does not have the legal authority to compel information from a service provider beyond that which may be available to any member of the public through an access request under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The amendments proposed in Bill 8 will permit the Office to conduct investigations but in only one area of our mandate: children receiving services from a children's aid society or residential licensee following a children's aid society placement. Young people in youth justice facilities, homes for children and youth with special needs, and those placed in unlicensed facilities are just some of the groups of young people who are excluded from this added protection. The Advocate's Office will continue to lack the authority to require services, governments, institutions and agencies to produce any and all information required to investigate complaints from young people in these other areas of our mandate.

WHAT WE WANT

First, Bill 8 must amend the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* and include a proviso that permits the Advocate's Office to obtain any information it deems necessary to advocate for children and youth and to ensure their continued safety. Second, the Advocate should have the power to investigate the concerns of vulnerable children in any area of its mandate, not just those who are receiving services from a children's aid society. Third, there should be whistle blower protection for anyone who raises a concern or makes a complaint to the Advocate's Office about the safety of a young person.

At present, we are the only Advocate's Office in Canada with restricted access to information concerning incidents involving serious harm or death to children in our mandate. This must change. To illustrate the gravity of the situation, we have provided examples, below, that show the vulnerability of young people in the children's services system and why they should be entitled to have access to an advocate with full investigative powers to resolve their concerns and safeguard their well-being.

WE ARE THE ONES LISTENING

In 2013, the Advocate's Office learned of a very young child living in a group home who was subjected to an extraordinarily high number of physical restraints over a little more than twelve months. Although the use of physical restraints on a child requires documentation in a serious occurrence report, neither the Ministry of Children and Youth (MCYS) nor the children's aid society that had placed him appeared to show concern about the high number of reported restraints. It seemed that nobody was listening. Without having the authority from our Act to access serious occurrence reports, the Office's ability to safeguard the well-being of vulnerable children and youth in care is compromised.

OFTEN, WE GET OUR FACTS FROM THE MEDIA

On December 17, 2013, the *Globe and Mail* reported that a man had been sentenced to a 20-year prison term for the assault of a 12 year-old autistic boy. The assault took place at a children's mental health facility operated by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

The Advocate's Office learned of the situation through media reports when a staff member at the facility was arrested. The Ministry took the position it was unable to provide specific information to the Advocate's Office about the event or investigation. As a result, we must seek court transcripts to obtain details about the incident and will pursue Freedom of Information requests to learn what actions the Ministry has taken to prevent similar incidents. We shouldn't have to jump through hoops to do our work. If a problem arises regarding a vulnerable young person in our mandate we should have a right to obtain the information necessary to get answers and protect them.

A DISTURBING LACK OF INFORMATION

Recently, a Toronto newspaper reported that a child who had been found dead in a car along with two other family members was a recently adopted foster child. The Office of the Chief Coroner and the placing children's aid society both declined to provide the Advocate's Office with a briefing about the death or the status of the investigation. As a result, we have as much information about the death of a child in our mandate as an ordinary member of the public—and far less information than the media reporters assigned to cover this tragic death.



SHUT OUT OF THE PROCESS

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services continues to refuse to provide the Advocate's Office with investigation reports that would provide assurances that the Ministry has undertaken a thorough investigation in response to an allegation from a young person that he or she was assaulted by staff in a youth justice facility.

WHEN CARE PROVIDERS DON'T LISTEN

A 13-year-old girl called the Advocate's Office because her children's aid society intended to terminate a temporary care agreement and return her to her family's legal custody (she was to live temporarily with a relative). She raised concerns about the living conditions in her relative's home. She proposed that she not be moved until her concerns about the living conditions were addressed.

The children's aid society refused to provide the Advocate's Office with either a copy of its home study investigation or a letter attesting to the fact that the home was safe. It discharged the young woman from care within a few days of the Office's call.

AN URGENT CALL FOR CHANGE

These stories raise concern for the safety and well-being of Ontario's children and youth. Clearly there is need for young people and all Ontarians to join together and add their voices to an appeal for greater transparency and accountability in services designed to provide care for children and youth. This can be easily accomplished by giving the Advocate's Office the same powers as other Provincial Child Advocates in Canada and the other Officers of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

THE GAP:

My life, your policy

A young person told the Advocate's Office the following story. She was talking about her own experience and why our Office is important to young people. Her story helps explain why every call is important, why we listen first, and why we help create a detailed plan for each child we serve to be heard by the system.

"Try for a moment to imagine what it's like to enter one of Ontario's service systems—a child in foster care, perhaps. I was this child and grew up in fear and uncertainty, in a situation I felt powerless to change. Violent outbursts, emotional blackmail, physical assault and chronic neglect were a part of my everyday life.

One day, when I was eight years old, someone unknown stepped into my life. I got a surprise visit at school from a child welfare worker who asked questions I was afraid to answer. The worker checked my body for bruises. My living situation was judged to be dangerous and I was forced to leave my home and everything familiar behind. I was placed in care and became part of a system with rules and regulations outside anyone's control, let alone my own.

I spent two nights in one foster home, and then moved again to a more permanent placement. Family court proceedings then took place. I was this small eight year old who had a lawyer but, rather than feeling reassured by this I thought, 'People who are bad need lawyers. Does this mean I'm bad?'

A decision was made about my long-term care. The worker who removed me from my home was replaced with yet another worker I didn't know. The worker dropped me off with my few possessions at yet another new home filled with strangers. During the years spent living in foster care, I moved four more times, experiencing an even greater feeling of loss of control each time I was uprooted. And this is when things were supposed to be getting easier for me.

All of this was outside of my control. Then, when I turned 18, I was told, 'You have to live on your own,' ready or not.

It's no wonder I felt powerless and left out of my own life. It's why I think the Advocate's Office is so important. Every time you listen, every time you help us to be heard, you give us back a sense of control. You help us own our lives."



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FORMERLY LIVING
IN CARE



Projects & Initiatives



FIRST NATIONS

On February 24, 2014, *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan* was officially released in Ottawa, Toronto and Thunder Bay. A highlight of this release is that it was received by the federal and Ontario governments, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), and the First Nations leadership of Treaty #3, the Robinson-Superior Treaty, the Union of Ontario Indians, the Chiefs of Ontario and the Assembly of First Nations. All accepted the young people's recommendations contained in the report and offered their support to help put the plan into action.

FEATHERS OF HOPE

The work of mobilizing young people through community development advocacy has continued to grow in all areas of the Office this year. Nowhere has this been more evident than in our work with and for First Nations youth around Feathers of Hope (FOH).

Over the last year we moved from organizing and running the Feathers of Hope Youth Forum in Thunder Bay to writing and shaping what is now known as *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*. The action plan was written by the four Youth Amplifiers the Office hired to lead the Feathers of Hope initiative with the support and guidance of the Office. The action plan addresses a broad range of issues reflecting the realities of life for First Nations youth in Northern Ontario's remote and fly-in communities. It touches on the legacy of residential schools, issues in education, physical and mental health, child welfare, sustainable funding, sport, recreation and leisure,

coaching, mentorship and broad-reaching themes associated with government, Band Council accountability and cross jurisdictional relations. Each area of the report was addressed within the context of young people wanting to take an increasing leadership role with provincial, federal and First Nations leaders to create healthier communities for all.

On February 24, 2014, the action plan was released simultaneously at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, at the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa and in Thunder Bay where the Feathers of Hope Youth Forum had taken place almost a year previously. High attendance at all three sites of the release demonstrated the tremendous interest in and support for the report. The Youth Amplifiers spoke powerfully to the issues raised by the hundreds of First Nations young people that had been part of the Feathers of Hope process and others who attended the youth forum in 2013. Key recommendations in the report include:

- 1/ A call for provincial, federal and First Nations leadership to come together with First Nations young people and begin working towards creating real and sustainable change to address the concerns raised by young people at the forum.
- 2/ That provincial, federal and First Nations leadership commit publicly to a five-year work plan to create change within 60 days of the release of the report.
- 3/ That within 90 days of the release of the report, a funded strategy be put in place to ensure that youth play an integral role in the work that will take place over the next five years. In each of the five years of the work plan, two different recommendations contained in the report will be addressed through a future Feathers of Hope forum and concrete action plans resulting from discussion of the issues at each forum will be piloted in selected First Nations communities.
- 4/ That support and funding for the development of the five-year work plan be



shared by government and First Nations leadership. The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth will continue to partner with young people to support them directly in their work on the plan.

The impact of the report on young people in communities across Ontario and Canada has been remarkable. The authors of the report have gifted the Feathers of Hope model and process to all First Nations youth and communities across the country. The Amplifiers and staff on the Office's Community Development Team have shared the Feathers of Hope story with attendees at the Assembly of First Nations National Youth Summit in Saskatoon, First Nations Youth in the Yukon at the Choices conference, and with Justice Murray Sinclair and co-commissioners Dr. Marie Wilson and Chief Wilton Littlechild of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

The TRC leadership invited the Youth Amplifiers to conduct a workshop and



CULTURE AND
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US TOWARD OUR
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FOH YOUTH



offer a statement of reconciliation at the final National TRC Event in Edmonton so the report could be placed in the Bentwood Box and become part of the permanent archive at the TRC National Research Centre. The box has accompanied TRC staff as they have travelled across the country; in it have been placed gifts and special mementos to commemorate peoples' journeys of reconciliation and stories about the legacy of the Indian residential schools. From March 27 to 30, 2014, the Bentwood Box took the stage in Edmonton, Alberta, where some 20,000 people gathered for the TRC's last national event.

The honour of having the Feathers of Hope report placed in the box was not fully appreciated until the morning that the Youth Amplifiers and Director of Strategic Development offered their statement of reconciliation. The power of being able to move confidently into the future was reflected in their words as they spoke about the importance of hope and healing within the work of truth and reconcili-

ation. The Office was informed that the live stream for the TRC event was viewed in 32 countries in addition to many of the 20,000 people who were in attendance at the four-day event in Edmonton. The number of speaking engagements the Amplifiers and Community Development Team have been involved in leading up to the release of the report and since its release has been astounding.

View English and French versions of the Feathers of Hope action plan via the following links:



ENGLISH http://bit.ly/FOH_en

FRENCH http://bit.ly/LPDE_fr

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF FIRST NATIONS YOUTH ON JURIES

Another issue we have focused on this year is the underrepresentation of First Nations people on jury rolls. First Nations youth are overrepresented in custody in many parts of Ontario, particularly in the north, while at the same time being underrepresented on jury roll lists. In 2011–2012, former Supreme Court Justice the Honourable Frank Iacobucci conducted an independent review of the issue of jury rolls in northern Ontario. His resulting report recommends sweeping changes to the ways in which First Nations people and the justice system interact.

Recommendation #7 of the Independent Review directed the Ministry of the Attorney General to approach the Advocate's Office to work with First Nations youth and learn about their ideas for addressing this problem of underrepresentation. In early 2014, we began discussions with the Ministry to move this work forward.

View English and French versions of former Justice Iacobucci's report via the following links:



ENGLISH http://bit.ly/FN_ontariojuries

FRENCH http://bit.ly/PN_juresontario

HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL HEARING

The Advocate's Office will continue to be a strong supporter of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) hearing that is based on a long-standing human rights complaint against the federal government filed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations. This case is important to the Office because of our mandate to raise the voices of First Nations children and youth and ensure their rights are safeguarded. The CHRT resembles a court; Tribunal members are like judges who listen to information being presented and make decisions that must be carried out. The function of the Tribunal is to receive cases referred from the Canadian Human Rights Commission and apply the *Canadian Human Rights Act* to determine if an individual, organization or government is practising discrimination.

The original complaint was filed in 2007 and, after six years and several unsuccessful attempts by the Government of Canada to have the case dismissed on technical grounds, the case moved forward to a hearing with the Tribunal on February 25, 2013. The hearing will continue into 2014, with a decision expected sometime in 2015. The complaint suggests the federal government is failing in its responsibility to provide the same supports and services to First Nations children and families that non-First Nations persons have in the rest of Canada. The Advocate's Office supports the complaint because our experience with issues involving First Nations youth reveals there is a significant disparity between services received in First Nations communities and those in other parts of the province.



WE ALL WANT TO
FEEL HAPPINESS
AND HOPE FOR THE
FUTURE [AND] A
CHANCE TO MAKE
THINGS RIGHT. MOST
OF US WANT TO
HELP OUR ELDERS...
TO LET THEM SEE
THERE IS HOPE FOR
THE COMMUNITY IN
THE FUTURE.

FOH YOUTH





I FEEL GOOD
ABOUT TAKING
THE STEPS TO HELP
IMPROVE THE LIVES OF

FIRST NATIONS
PEOPLE AS A
YOUTH LEADER. IF I
CAN DO IT, SO CAN YOU.

TALON

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My involvement with the Advocate's Office started when I attended the Feathers of Hope youth forum in Thunder Bay where I reside. I had no intention of getting involved in the Feathers of Hope movement, I just wanted to participate in the forum. But with every workshop and activity I found myself getting inspired. The inspiration came from the Youth Amplifiers who led the project. Seeing them put aside their differences and work together in a cohesive way really spoke to me. I thought "if they can do it, so can I" and decided right there to stand up and speak out. During the sessions I participated to my full potential and encouraged other youth to do the same. As time passed I found myself having a stronger and stronger belief in Feathers of Hope. After the forum I stayed connected with the movement through social media.

One day I saw a posting about joining the Feathers of Hope advisory committee. I took a chance and became one of the advisors. I was able to travel with the Amplifiers to a few destinations, see them in action, and participate in a mini Feathers of Hope youth forum in Kashechewan.

When I saw the Amplifier position posted, I applied without hesitation. I joined the project because I truly believe in the work Feathers of Hope is trying to achieve and will continue to work hard to support the movement. I feel good about taking the steps to help improve the lives of First Nations people, not just as an Amplifier or a fellow First Nations person, but as a youth leader taking the steps to bring about change. If I can do it, so can you.

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Noura Abdelrazec

The day we went on that productive excursion,
One that everyone thought was diversion,
A trip that would change many lifetimes,
That makes up for the many past crimes,
The ones which did nothing but leave many abused,
The Aboriginals were the witnesses, those people misused.
Ignorant people, we taught to educate
Peace, they say, needing to translate
European settlers thought they were stronger,
I didn't think they could wait much longer.
Poof! The first residential school came along.
They didn't realize taking innocent children was wrong.
At the thought of colonialism, the settlers smiled,
"Kill the Indian, save the child"
Now we know that we are equal,
We can figure that out by watching a prequel.
The past was dramatic and now we are apologetic,
Today we feel more than empathetic.
Hair cut off, Aboriginals crying,
The government wasn't really trying.
Even that letter of apology isn't enough to me
Those First Nations beaten for trying to flee.

And I know that it's been extra tragic,
These bad memories won't disappear just like magic.
You're trying to keep your history alive,
So you struggle to keep along with the strive.
Stereotypes might come from ignorance or hate,
I've learned that these "labels" are just a mistake.
We are the future and we take a stand,
For all the pleading First Nations of this land.
We are the voice that speaks for what's right,
These words speak louder than any fight.
We can make a difference because we are children and youth,
Bearing shared stories, telling the truth.
Stories about tragic residential schools,
And stereotypes, calling Aboriginals fools.
We can spread peace and equality, if you take my hand
We are the only hope of this promoted land.

Noura Abdelrazec is a student who attended the Ontario Education Day event that was hosted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.





I BELIEVE
THIS PROJECT
IS IMPORTANT.

I LOOK FORWARD
TO THE WORK WE
HAVE YET TO DO.

KARLA

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Karla. I am from Keewaywin First Nation, but live in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I am a new Youth Amplifier at the Advocate's Office. I have been travelling with the other Amplifiers to do presentations about Feathers of Hope and meeting with delegates and leadership about the implementation of the action plan. I have also been working with my teammates on the Kids' Rights Pilot Project to create awareness of the Advocate's Office to youth in Thunder Bay schools and eventually province-wide.

Through the project, young people will become ambassadors for the Office and share information between the Office and students. I believe this project is important because a lot of youth who are in need

of help most likely don't know where to call or ask for support or assistance. They don't know about the services of the Office or their rights. Once they learn about their rights they will be able to speak up and their rights will begin to get respected.

My experience with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth has been very good. I enjoy working with the other Youth Amplifiers and enjoy the work we have been doing. I look forward to the work that we have yet to do. The people who work at the Office are full of spirit and have been very positive and encouraging of the work we have been doing. I so look forward to working with them during the time I will be here as a Youth Amplifier.



CHILD WELFARE

Children who come into care of the Province of Ontario's child welfare system do so through no fault of their own. If they become Wards of the Crown, we as a province make a commitment to their well-being—a commitment we need to fulfill.

Unfortunately, we are not fulfilling our responsibility. Children who are Crown Wards fare poorly compared to their peers outside the child welfare system. Only 44 percent of youth in child welfare graduate from high school, compared to more than 81 percent of the general youth population.¹ Of young people living on the street, 40 percent have been involved with the child welfare system.² Children who are

Crown Wards also have greater mental health needs than peer-aged youth.³ Why should such poor outcomes be the reality in a province that has the means to enable all its children to thrive?

The Advocate's Office has been working over several years to develop and foster an approach to supporting children and youth in care that extends well beyond the mandate of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). We envision a fundamental shift where all ministries consider the well-being of Crown Wards as they make policy decisions and allocate resources. Our vision, shaped and shared by the young people we serve, has led to the development of a youth-led movement that is gaining momentum with each passing year.

THE CONTINUING IMPACT OF THE YOUTH LEAVING CARE HEARINGS

In 2012, the Advocate's Office supported a series of hearings in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario called Our Voice Our Turn in which young people revealed their experiences in the child welfare system. Following the hearings, the Office helped the youth involved prepare a groundbreaking report entitled *My Real Life Book*. View English and French versions of *My Real Life Book* via the following links:

 ENGLISH http://bit.ly/myrlb_en
 FRENCH http://bit.ly/mavh_fr

As a result of *My Real Life Book*, MCYS, working collaboratively with our Office, established the Youth Leaving Care Working Group to build an action plan for fundamental change. Our Office supported young people in and from care (who made up the majority of the working group's members) to create the action

1 Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, "An Agenda for Youth Pre-Budget Consultation - 2011", (OACAS, 2010), 3, in Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 25 is the new 21: The Costs and Benefits of Providing Extended Care Maintenance to Ontario Youth in Care Until Age 25 (Toronto: OPACY, 2012), 23.

2 Raising the Roof Foundation, Youth Homelessness in Canada: the Road to Solutions, (2009), in "Homefree Nonprofit Foundation, "Helping Youth Leave Child Welfare Care Succeed: Housing Needs and Solutions, (Toronto: HNF, 2009), in Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 25 is the new 21: The Costs and Benefits of Providing Extended Care Maintenance to Ontario Youth in Care Until Age 25 (Toronto: OPACY, 2012), 20.

3 Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, "The Ontario Perspective: Child Welfare Report", (OACAS, 2011), 8, in Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 25 is the new 21: The Costs and Benefits of Providing Extended Care Maintenance to Ontario Youth in Care Until Age 25 (Toronto: OPACY, 2012), 21.



WE HAVE
CREATED A VISION
FOR CHANGE WE
WOULD LIKE TO SEE.
WE WANT TO
FEEL PROTECTED,
RESPECTED,
SUPPORTED AND SO
MUCH MORE.

YOUTH IN CARE



plan. In January 2013, the working group submitted its action plan, called *Blueprint for Fundamental Change*, to Ontario's Child Welfare System. *My Real Life Book*, the Youth Leaving Care Hearings and the resulting *Blueprint for Fundamental Change* have inspired action from government across several ministries. View English and French versions of the Blueprint via the following links:

ENGLISH http://bit.ly/BFC_en
FRENCH http://bit.ly/PDCV_fr

YOUTH IN CARE DAY

As a result of the compelling stories shared by young people at the Our Voice, Our Turn: Youth Leaving Care Hearings, May 14 has been proclaimed Children and Youth in Care Day. The date was chosen

to correspond to the date of the release of the young people's report *My Real Life Book*. The *Children and Youth in Care Act, 2012*, sponsored by Soo Wong, MPP, was passed unanimously on March 17, 2014 by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize the enormous contributions that current and former Crown and Society Wards make to Ontario. The proclamation also recognizes the strength and resilience shown by young people in the face of adversity. The day provides an opportunity to raise awareness about young people in the care of the Province of Ontario and keep in the front of everyone's mind that more needs to be done by government to support and meet the needs of these children and youth.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES (MCYS)

1 Young people in care will now receive an Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent that broadens access for youth up to age 17 to educational, social, cultural and recreational opportunities.

2 Under the leadership of MCYS and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), 29 Ontario colleges and universities have agreed to partner with MTCU to jointly cover 100 per cent of tuition fees (up to a maximum of \$6,000 per year for up to four years) for Crown Wards and young people receiving Extended Care and Maintenance.

3 MCYS has increased minimum monthly financial support for youth in care aged 18 to 21 from \$663 to \$850 per month.

4 With support from the Advocate's Office and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, MCYS has begun to develop a process for creating a strategy to create better outcomes for Black children and youth in care.

ADDITIONALLY, MCYS HAS ANNOUNCED IT WILL:

5 Broaden the eligibility for all youth 18 to 21—not just those attending school—to receive continued care and support. The support program sets specific goals for success, such as mandating agencies to ensure youth have stable housing and a reliable source of income before they leave care when they are 21.

6 Create "accountability agreements" with all children's aid society boards that will establish life outcome markers for all children and youth leaving care, and require measurement and reporting by boards each year to assess their agency's success against these markers.

7 Fund 50 new staff positions that will support young people as they transition out of care. These workers have been hired by community groups across Ontario and are tasked with providing support and advice on life skills such as money management, job searches, cooking, housing and education.

8 In partnership with the Ministry of Education, develop mandatory school success protocols for youth in care between all school boards in the province and their local children's aid societies.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE)

9/ The Ministry of Education has committed to raising the graduation rate of children in care from 44 percent to the provincial average of 81 percent within the next five years by inviting school boards to apply to run pilot programs that focus on innovative education delivery models and improve educational outcomes for secondary school students in care or receiving services from children's aid societies.

10/ Children's aid societies are now required to establish Registered Educational Savings Plans for eligible children in care by using funds from the Universal Child Care Benefit. Young people can access the funds to support their education-related expenses.

MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES (MGS)

11/ The Ministry of Government Services has waived the fee for youth in and from care to obtain an Ontario identification card.

MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES (MNR)

12/ In 2013, the Ministry of Natural Resources piloted an approach that makes youth in care a priority group in their summer employment programs.

MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (MTCU)

13/ The Ontario Crown Ward Postsecondary Application Fee Reimbursement Program has been introduced to cover the cost of college and university application fees for Crown Wards and former Crown Wards applying for their first college or university program.

14/ MTCU has committed to provide \$500 per month to youth in and from care aged 21 to 25 who are enrolled in Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)-eligible postsecondary education and training programs.

15/ MTCU has expanded the eligibility for youth receiving the Extended Care and Maintenance allowance to receive the Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards. The grant covers 50 percent of tuition, up to \$3,000.

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES (MCYS)

16/ The Aftercare Benefits Initiative (ABI), which launched in summer 2014, will provide prescription drug, dental and extended health benefits to eligible youth. Beginning August 1, 2014, young people who formerly were Crown Wards and other youth who have left or are leaving care may be eligible to enroll. Youth from age 21 and 24 as of August 1, 2014 who were eligible to receive Continued Care and Support for Youth, Extended Care and Maintenance or Renewed Youth Support are eligible for ABI.

CONTINUING TO ACT ON THE *BLUEPRINT FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE*

Building on the success of 2013's *Blueprint for Fundamental Change*, our Office resolved in 2013–2014 to continue to work with young people and others on issues that will bring about the human solutions raised in the report. We will continue to advocate to ensure that every child in care leaves the system with permanent supportive relationships. At present, much of the language used in care settings can marginalize young people and limit their ability to contribute their voices to discussions involving their care. We will support young people to review the language now in use and recommend ways, however difficult, to change this for the better.

OUR VOICE OUR TURN WORKING GROUP FOCUSES ON THE CRISIS OF HOMELESSNESS

An Our Voice Our Turn working group consisting of current and former youth in care—some now adults—meets quarterly to monitor the implementation of recommendations provided in *My Real Life Book* and develop projects to address concerns and issues related to improving care raised in the report. Sub-committees of the group will form to steer specific projects of interest. The group meetings and project work are supported by the Advocate's Office.

At the December 2013 meeting of the Our Voice Our Turn group, members agreed to work on the issue of homelessness among youth who have been in care, in the youth justice system or the children's mental health system. Homelessness is an issue that *My Real Life Book* identified as an area of great concern. Several members volunteered to initiate discussion by meeting regularly over the next two years. While this project is in its early stages, the committee members identified as a possible outcome the production of written or

visual material that could be used to educate policy makers, education systems and the general public about ways to prevent youth from becoming homeless. A number of the young committee members have themselves been homeless.

CONTINUING ACTIONS THE YOUTH LEAVING CARE HEARINGS HAVE INSPIRED

A number of agencies and organizations have drawn inspiration not only from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings, but also from the actions that have been taken by the Government of Ontario, community agencies, and the combined efforts of young people and the Advocate's Office as a result of the hearings.

For example, many in the private and non-governmental sector—the Canadian Association of University Women's Clubs and the Children's Aid Foundation, to name just two—have created their own initiatives and scholarships for youth in and from care. In 2013, youth in and from care in New Brunswick held their own hearings and invited youth from Our Voice Our Turn to attend.

Meanwhile, Our Voice Our Turn staff and youth representatives have continued in their important work by providing training to all youth probation officers in Ontario as well as to social workers, children's aid societies, youth justice facilities, foster parents, child and youth workers and young people. In addition, they are supporting young people in the building of a movement of youth in and from care and their allies, and supporting the reinvigoration of the former National Youth in Care Network, now known as Youth in Care Canada.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The extraordinary activities that have resulted from the Youth Leaving Care

FROM THE MOMENT WE BEGIN OUR JOURNEY IN CARE, TO THE MOMENT WE LEAVE, PLEASE ENSURE:

- WE ARE SAFE, protected and respected as human beings.
- WE HAVE PEOPLE in our lives who are there for us.
- WE HAVE STABILITY and connections to family, roots and culture.
- WE ARE PART OF OUR LIVES and have a say in what happens to us.
- WE HAVE ACCESS to the information, resources and options we need.
- WE ARE SUPPORTED throughout care to become successful adults.
- WE ARE PART of a strong and proud community of youth in and from care.
- THAT THE BEST EXPERIENCES for some children and youth in care become the standard for everyone in care.



MY DREAM IS
FOR THEM TO STOP
JUST WISHING THEIR
LITTLE BROTHERS AND

SISTERS HAVE A
BETTER LIFE BECAUSE
THEY NOW ACTUALLY
HAVE THAT BETTER LIFE.

SAMANTHA

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Samantha and I'm from Lake Helen First Nation. I have passion for helping young people and ensuring their rights are upheld, as well as the healing power of sports and play. In February 2014, almost a year after the Feathers of Hope (FOH) Youth Forum, the *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan* report was launched in Thunder Bay, Toronto and Ottawa. Since the forum, a movement has been building with First Nations young people and communities. The goal of the forum was to reach out and gift Feathers of Hope to as many people as possible and give First Nations youth across Ontario and Canada an opportunity to use their voices, ignite a spark within themselves, and move forward together to create positive change. We hosted a workshop at the final national event of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada and were honoured to be asked to deliver a statement and put the report into the Bentwood Box. We continue to outreach to various organizations and go into as many communities as possible to spread the movement of Feathers of Hope. Our future promise lies with the young people to achieve their goals, and bring the focus of discussions in the report forward, and work together to make change real for them. My dream for First Nations young people is for them to stop just wishing their little brothers and sisters have a better life because they now actually have that better life. I want all young people to grow up in safe, healthy communities that give everyone the equal opportunity to flourish into the people they really can be.

JEFFREY BALDWIN INQUEST:

Child protection investigations require greater rigour.

The points of protection for children such as schools, doctors, child welfare and neighbours did not work together to provide a supportive safety net for Jeffrey.

The voice of the child was nowhere to be found in the work of the children's aid society involved in Jeffrey's case, hospital staff, neighbours or teachers at Jeffrey's school.

Hearings are just the beginning of what the Advocate's Office has planned in the years ahead. In 2013–2014, we laid the groundwork for fundamental change in a number of new areas.

REVIEW OF SERIOUS OCCURRENCES IN RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES

For children and youth living in residential care, the Advocate's Office has a responsibility to ensure that their voices are heard and respected. Last year in Ontario, 20,429 serious occurrences in residential care were reported to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Our Office is requesting copies of all serious occurrence reports from the first quarter of 2014 (January 1 to March 31) so we can determine how often and why agencies employ measures such as physical restraints and connect with police to deal with the behavior of young people. In addition, we will look at things like injuries, visits to hospital and any other issues that may come to light as the result of our review of serious occurrence reports. We have undertaken significant planning to reach out to more children living in residential care so that we can listen and learn about their experiences and talk with them about the realities of living in residential care and the use of intrusive measures. We also plan to involve service providers in our discussions.

Another aspect of our work over the coming year will be to strengthen the ability of front line workers to be child advocates in their own right. Hearing stories from the front lines is critical to preserving the au-

thentic voice of the children and youth we serve. Therefore, in addition to the above plans, we have laid the groundwork for requesting whistle blower protection for residential care employees who see harm being done to children as a result of the policies and practices of their services.

INQUESTS

The purpose of an inquest is to determine how a person died. An inquest is held like a court proceeding, but instead of a judge sitting in front of the courtroom, there is a Coroner. In Ontario, coroners are medical doctors who are appointed to serve the communities in which they live and whose duties, activities and powers are defined by the *Coroner's Act (1990)*. Inquests have juries who listen to evidence gathered by Crown attorneys. While blame cannot be assessed by an inquest jury, the inquest process must answer the following five questions:

- 1/ Who was the deceased?
- 2/ Where did the death occur?
- 3/ When did the death occur?
- 4/ How did the death occur (i.e., the medical cause)?
- 5/ By what means did the death occur (i.e., natural causes, accident, homicide, suicide or undetermined)?

Juries may also make recommendations to prevent potential deaths in similar circumstances. While jury recommendations are not enforceable by law, they represent the voice of the community and have the potential to result in changes that will benefit those who are most vulnerable to preventable deaths.

OUR WORK

Participating in inquests provides an opportunity for the Office to reduce harm to youth in care systems and make care environments safer for children and youth. We do this, in part, by bringing together young people living in similar experiences and supporting them to develop recommendations to help prevent future deaths or injury to young people. This aspect of our work provides a critical safeguard for children and youth in care. To learn more about the Office's work concerning inquests please use the following link:

 <http://bit.ly/inquestYP>

ASHLEY SMITH

The death of 19-year-old Ashley Smith is a clear instance of when an institutional approach to addressing a compelling human need has had tragic consequences for a young person. In 2013, a coroner's inquest into Ashley's death helped shed light on the need for mental health services in custody settings, and the unique needs of "emerging adults" between the ages of 18 and 24, who require different supports and services than those available to older adults in the corrections system.

The Advocate's Office had standing at the inquest. Following the delivery of tragic testimony, one message became clear: Ashley Smith should have been better protected and supported and could have benefited from interventions that were less institutional, more youth-sensitive

WE NEED A VISION
FOR ONTARIO
IN WHICH ALL
SECTORS OF OUR
SOCIETY—NOT
JUST CHILDREN'S
AID SOCIETIES—
ARE ENGAGED
IN PROTECTING
CHILDREN AND
SUPPORTING
FAMILIES.

and more human. She was a young woman caught up in a system that could not meet her developmental needs. Ultimately, the failure of the system to meet her needs led to her death.

We can honour Ashley's life and help protect the more than 2,000 young people in secure custody settings across Canada by acting on the jury recommendation advanced by the Advocate's Office to create an approach to custody that takes into account the developmental needs of young people.

When we fail vulnerable young people like Ashley, we also fail the communities and families to which they belong and to whom they will eventually return. Advocates from our Office have listened to the stories of a great many young people in custody and heard their hopes for the future. It is our duty to provide the supportive, compassionate programming and counselling they need to turn their lives around. We owe it to Ashley's memory to learn from her experience.

JEFFREY BALDWIN

In 2002, Jeffrey Baldwin died at age five of septic shock, a serious infection that spreads to the blood and causes the whole body to develop inflammation. Jeffrey suffered unimaginable mistreatment at the hands of his caregivers—a tragedy compounded by a series of failures in the system to detect or stop the abuse, and by the failure of people who came into contact with his family to speak up.

Once the justice system had concluded all the criminal matters relating to Jeffrey's death in January 2012, the Advocate's Office asked the Chief Coroner for Ontario to conduct an inquest. The Coroner agreed and an inquest began September 9, 2013, 11 years after Jeffrey's death.

The inquest was our first opportunity to examine the role of our care systems and ask questions of those who were involved in Jeffrey's life. The Advocate's Office had standing at the inquest and convened an internal advisory panel comprising 12 young people from care who have had life



SEEING THE POWERFUL
POSITIVE IMPACT THAT
FEATHERS OF HOPE HAS
HAD ON ALL THOSE

WHO HAVE COME
INTO CONTACT WITH
IT HAS BEEN NOTHING
SHORT OF INSPIRING.

UKO

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

Working on Feathers of Hope has been an enlightening journey. Having been a member of the first group of Amplifiers to help create what has become one of the most inspiring youth-led movements for First Nations youth in Ontario has been a moving experience. I am now a Community Development Advisor at the Advocate's Office and my commitment to the movement remains as strong as ever. As a non-Aboriginal ally, my intent from the very beginning was to help create a strong and viable movement that could be a template for youth and community engagement and be transferrable to all First Nations communities across Ontario.

The name Feathers of Hope was taken from a passage in the *Horizons of Hope* report that talked about the resilience of First Nations youth. Many of the youth

we have worked with over the course of the project have brought the meaning of this passage to life, illuminating their ability and desire to move forward positively to achieve goals for themselves and their communities in spite of many challenges.

As we move forward in this process, partnering with First Nations, provincial and federal governments to carry out the action plan outlined in our report released early in 2014, it is important that we do not forget what brings us together in the first place. This process is centred on empowering, equipping and educating First Nations young people to become leaders of change in their communities. Seeing the powerful positive impact that Feathers of Hope has had on all those who have come into contact with it has been nothing short of inspiring.

THE PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE IS CALLING FOR A FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS SOLUTIONS TO THE POOR OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE.

experiences similar to those of Jeffrey. Children and youth have a great deal of wisdom that comes from lived experience; we wanted the inquest jury to benefit from that wisdom.

Some—perhaps many—resisted the notion of holding an inquest. After all, it had been 11 years since Jeffrey had died and surely the system had been reformed and transformed in the intervening years. What good would come from holding an inquest?

A raft of recommendations

We were certain that we could learn by studying Jeffery's tragic experience and we were right. The inquest provided a snapshot not only of how the child protection system looked 11 years ago, but also of the deficiencies that continue to exist today. It produced 74 joint recommendations to the jury, and the jury's verdict contained more than 100 recommendations.

Major changes are required to better protect young people in Ontario

The Advocate's Office is convinced that Jeffrey's inquest was not enough. That is why we have called for an inquiry process, not necessarily in the legal sense, but an open and transparent public discussion into how we protect children and support and nurture families in Ontario. This discussion would provide an opportunity to engage all sectors—not just children's aid societies—that can be points of protection for children and young people: schools, the children's mental health sector, first responders, businesses, agencies that provide shelter to youth and families, doctors, hospitals, housing providers, psychiatrists, children's aid societies, early years centres, parents, children and youth with experience with the child welfare system and the general public. It will bring Ontarians together to examine how every sector, public and private, can work seamlessly to support families well before a child is in need of protection.

Some in the child welfare system believe that an open public discussion is demoralizing to workers, bad for the system, harmful for young people, expensive and disruptive. We must work with this group and move past their fear of change and transparency and focus on the needs of children. Openness and transparency will lead to better-informed and effective service, which, in turn, will result in better outcomes for children and fewer deaths of young people in Ontario's care systems.

The Jeffrey Baldwin tragedy can be a turning point for Ontario. We can do better. We have a chance to create a vision for the province that makes the world a safer, more supportive place for our children. We urge the Premier of Ontario to establish a means for this important discussion to take place.

English and French copies of the Jeffrey Baldwin Inquest jury's recommendations may be viewed by going to the following links:



ENGLISH http://bit.ly/JB_inquest_en

FRENCH http://bit.ly/E_JB_fr

LETTER TO JEFFREY

A LETTER OF HOPE TO JEFFREY BALDWIN FROM THE 12-MEMBER YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL THAT HELPED THE ADVOCATE'S OFFICE PREPARE ITS SUBMISSION TO THE INQUEST

February 4, 2014

Dear Jeffrey:

We are a group of 12 young people with lived experiences in the child welfare system and we have been hearing about your life. We volunteered to work with the Advocate's Office to learn about what happened to you and provide our thoughts on what could be done so that the same mistakes will not ever be repeated. We have been meeting together twice a month since late August 2013. We have met with the lawyer from the Advocate's Office and helped her to understand the issues from our perspective. Some of us have sat in the courtroom at your inquest and listened to the ways your death could have been prevented. We have followed the testimony and the many reports in the media.

The extensive abuse and neglect that you suffered has left not only us, but the whole community, devastated. Your death opened people's eyes to changes that need to be made. We are so sorry that it took your death for this to happen. Jeffrey, you were kept silent while you were on this earth. We cannot speak for you. No one can. Our own experiences in the child welfare system were sometimes also hard but we do not think for a minute that we went through what you went through in the Bottineau/Kidman household. We did not live your life. It seems to us that there were four victims in that house—you and your three siblings. We were very happy to hear that your siblings are doing well and have hope for the future.

Each week that we met, as we reviewed the evidence, we had your picture in front of us as an anchor. It was to remind us about what brought us together, and that you are not a file, not a "case"—that you are a person. We are writing this letter to you because there have been so many times over the past months that we wished we could have spoken to you—because we feel connected to you. We wish we could have heard from you first hand. We would have told you that you did not deserve what happened to you and that it was not your fault. You did nothing wrong. Having looked at your experiences in light of our own, we have tried to use that knowledge to communicate what we think is important to the jury. Because, Jeffrey, you deserved better.

With hope,

From the members of Jeffrey's Inquest
Youth Advisory Group



WE'RE HELPING
IMPROVE THE LIVES
OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND

CREATING NEW
ROAD MAPS FOR
OTHERS TO FOLLOW.

NATASHA

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

Growing up away from home introduced me to a different version of myself, a sort of altered picture of the things I saw and wanted. The things that I wanted to pursue like higher education or sports weren't possible for me to do once I left home. Life comes at you fast. I never imagined I'd become a savvy street kid looking for ways of being engaged and finding belonging.

I participated in whatever came to me, not what I planned to do. I tried to find belonging in schools, clubs and risky situations but didn't know where I fit in. I didn't have a history or heritage, just awareness of the statistics about who I was supposed to be. I participated in a number of programs and services youth need growing up in the system. I was always migrating from good times to bad times, always in transition from place and place, school to school and trying to integrate into different cultural or minority groups.

I didn't realize it at the time but I was storing up a valuable reservoir of knowledge to draw from. When I got connected to the Advocate's Office I discovered that living in conflict as a youth, and all my experiences, have turned out to be my strongest assets. My past has enabled me to question what I know about how systems work and understand why initiatives that appear to be helpful on the surface aren't ultimately all that helpful for young people. For example, being given a meal at school every day or teaching life skills can help young people better learn and problem solve, but youth still face the challenges of overcoming barriers like living in poverty or with daily experiences of racism. However, working at the Advocate's Office and helping to create change feels like playing freeze tag with a bunch of other young people. We're helping to improve the lives of young people and creating new road maps for government and others to follow.



YOUTH JUSTICE

Young people continue to develop well into their twenties and therefore require special consideration under the law for their still-maturing status. All elements of society, including institutions that provide care to children and youth, share responsibility to help young people through the challenges they face so that they can learn, grow and become positive contributors to their communities as adults.

The youth justice system, in particular, must ensure that the young people in its care have access to skilled and compassionate professionals who can provide them with the developmentally appropriate supports and guidance they need to see them through difficult times. Under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), we as a society have an obligation to ensure the unique needs of all youth are met in ways that are developmentally appropriate and equitable. We owe it not only to the young people in our justice system, but also to their families, their communities and all Ontarians. The youth justice system is, after all, a part of Ontario's children's service system and as such it must ensure the staff providing services in these facilities work from the perspective of it being a children's service system.

OUR WORK

The youth justice system is composed of many elements: for example, police, pro-

bation services, open custody settings and closed custody settings. Calls to the Office can come from youth in any of these settings. When we start to notice patterns in calls or receive large numbers of calls about specific issues, we employ our Office's resources to dig deeper to try and understand the problem.

A REVIEW OF A YOUTH JUSTICE FACILITY

One area of the justice system that has been a focus for the Office recently is the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre (RMYC). A key part of our Office's work in 2013–2014 was to prepare and release *It Depends Who's Working*, a report about the realities of living at RMYC. The report is based on information gathered over two years, interviews with more than 110 youth aged 13 to 21, and a review of 178 complaints received by the Advocate's Office from young people in custody at RMYC. Our interview questions focused on young people's experiences with respect to their

rights and safety, the programming available at the facility and the basic care they received.

One important outcome of our review was that it enabled us to compare RMYC's "relationship custody" model, which the Advocate's Office supports, to young people's lived experiences at the facility—in other words, the extent to which relationship custody has been operationalized in the day-to-day activities of staff and young people at the facility. Relationship custody is a model of care that guides the everyday interactions between staff and youth in the criminal justice system, in every situation and under all circumstances. It is not about a single intervention or particular technique; instead, relationship custody is a way of working with young people to create and maintain a safe environment that supports rehabilitation and reintegration back into communities.

Young people do not do well in a correctional framework. Rather, young people require the support that relationship

“It depends who’s working.”

THE YOUTH REALITY AT THE ROY MCMURTRY YOUTH CENTRE

custody provides. Relationship custody calls for a human solution as opposed to an institutional one and provides young people with an opportunity to use a difficult moment in their lives to turn themselves around. It also provides them with the life and communication skills they need to build and maintain healthy, positive relationships.

IT REALLY DOES DEPEND ON WHO’S WORKING

What we found at RMYC were many long-standing problems related to basic care, safety and violations of rights. In short, we came to understand that the relationship custody model employed at the facility is often inconsistent with the concept as it is used elsewhere or envisioned by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. While our report acknowledged that some young people find what they need at RMYC, for those who do not the stakes are very high. The report argued

TWO MAJOR CONCERNS

One example of a practice that concerns us is how the Ministry of Children and Youth Services deals with allegations about mistreatment of youth by staff. When young people at RMYC or any other youth justice facility allege excessive use of force they, and all of us, must be assured that an effective, transparent and fair investigation will take place. We do not have this assurance today and we believe this undermines the credibility of RMYC’s relationship custody model. Our report, released in August 2013, calls on the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to ensure that investigations are conducted by an external body under the same standards that apply to child welfare workers investigating abuse at institutions. We have also requested that the Ministry grant the Advocate’s Office access to a copy of the investigation report—with the young person’s permission.

A second concern is about young people’s access to the Advocate’s Office. More than half of the youth interviewed stated that they were either delayed or prevented from calling the Advocate’s Office, despite the requirement in legislation that a youth wishing to contact the Advocate’s Office must be permitted to do so immediately upon request. Access to the Advocate’s Office was a particular problem for youth in secure isolation and continues to be an issue for many youth throughout the facility. Because of the privacy provisions in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, there is little public scrutiny of youth justice facilities. Ensuring that youth have a safe, consistent and reliable way to communicate with the Advocate’s Office is essential.



ALL STAFF SHOULD HAVE EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH YOUTH.

RMYC YOUTH



that the quality of care at RMYC and degree of youth safety is unpredictable; it literally depends on “who’s working”. The Advocate’s Office takes the view that this misses the point of relationship custody. RMYC must provide reliable and predictable support to all youth in their care—not support that is dependent on which staff happen to be in the building on a given day.

Our report offers support for RMYC’s mandate. However, the facility’s numerous and well-intentioned attempts to address many problems raised now and in the past have not resulted in effective, sustainable solutions. The report recommends that RMYC, in partnership with youth and other stakeholders, establish a problem-solving approach that includes a system of checks and balances, and strong monitoring and enforcement of policy and practice to ensure that problems are being effectively addressed.

A WAY FORWARD

The Advocate’s Office believes there is a significant gap between the stated goals

of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on the issue of youth justice and the lived experience of young people in custody. Having listened to the complaints and experiences of youth at RMYC, we believe the gap has become wide and in need of immediate attention.

In our estimation, youth custody facilities—in particular RMYC—should be reaching out to the communities from which the young people in their care come and to which they will return. They should be partnering with local support organizations to learn how best to connect with and support the young people they meet in custody. Developing such connections will not only provide RMYC much needed expertise from community-based staff, it will also provide a bridge to support the reintegration of local youth when they leave custody.

View English and French copies of the report *It Depends Who’s Working* via the following links:



ENGLISH http://bit.ly/rmyc_en

FRENCH http://bit.ly/cjrm_fr

“CARDING” AND THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH IN TORONTO

Since 2010, the Advocate’s Office has been working with young people to identify issues that create barriers between police officers and youth. We have partnered with youth and stakeholders across the province to hear from young people about how they experience policing in their communities and to identify recommendations that would foster better relationships between police and youth. In 2013–2014, we focused on examining and understanding two practices detrimental to fostering positive relationships between police and youth: the use of lethal force and a practice called “carding”.

Carding refers to the police practice of stopping and documenting individuals in public places. Young people have directly expressed to the Advocate’s Office a number of concerns about carding. These include: being asked by police to provide personal information about themselves, their families or others; the negative tenor of the interaction between themselves and police when these situations occur;



I'VE LEARNED
THAT YOUTH HAVE

A VOICE,
A POWERFUL ONE.

PAUL

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

Working at the Office has been somewhat of a surreal experience for me. Growing up as a youth, I heard so much about the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth but was never quite sure exactly who they were and what they did. That always made me very curious. As a young man, I sometimes felt I was discouraged from contacting them because I had the impression they were who you called when you wanted to get grown-ups in trouble. One thing I certainly did learn was they were who you called when you felt no one else was listening.

Fast forward to adulthood. I am now a Youth Amplifier working at the Office as part of the Our Voice Our Turn project. I work with an Office that is full of diverse individuals from all walks of life and all of whom have passion for helping young people. There is such an abundance of knowledge and experience here, which drives me and lights my fire. I carry this passion and

fire with me when speaking to audiences of probation officers or classes of child and youth work students at colleges and universities around Ontario. I want to inspire them and make them believe that they can be the difference that a young person needs in their life. I also want to remind them to never forget why they wanted to work with children and youth and to use that memory to fuel their career.

I've come a long way from that curious young boy. My whole perception has changed about what child advocacy means. I've learned how important it is for children and youth to know their rights and have them respected. But most important of all I've learned that youth have a voice, a powerful one at that, which deserves to be heard and respected. And with the right supports and a little encouragement, that voice can and will change the world we live in.



BE AWARE OF
[PROBLEM]
SITUATIONS
AND GET THERE
FASTER TO
HANDLE IT.

RMYC YOUTH



confusion about whether they are required to answer questions posed by police officers; and uncertainty about the legal ramifications if they simply walk away. The Advocate's Office, in submissions to the Toronto Police Services Board, raised a number of concerns about carding, such as the legality of the practice, the nature of the information being collected by police, accountability and transparency, and the provision of information to individuals being carded about their rights.

DEALING WITH PERSONS IN CRISIS

The Advocate's Office monitored a recent inquest into the deaths of three individuals who died of gunshot wounds after approaching police with edged weapons. The inquest made 84 recommendations, many related to the use of force, de-escalation practices, and training for police in dealing with people in crisis. The Office also has standing at an upcoming inquest into the death of a young person who died after an encounter with police in Hamilton.

HOLDING CELLS

The Advocate's Office is mandated under section 15(e) of the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* to provide advocacy "to children and youth with respect to matters that arise while held in court holding cells and being transported to and from court holding cells." As part of the Office's Holding Cells Project we reached out to listen to youth about their experiences in police and court holding cells in northern Ontario. We learned that:

- Youth were retained overnight in holding cells an average of two consecutive nights.
- Cells are typically dirty and cold.
- There are serious issues with the availability and quality of food provided in holding cells.
- Youth are not always treated respectfully.
- Youth in holding cells are often able to see or hear adult offenders.
- There is sometimes more than one youth per cell.
- In some cells, youth are provided with cold cement beds that have no bedding.
- The lights are kept on all night.
- Holding cells provide no privacy when youth are using the toilet.
- Youth are provided with no process to complain about the conditions.

The Advocate's Office is reviewing policy and practice with respect to police and court holding cells and visiting holding cells in the north. Additionally, the Office is working with the Ministry of the Attorney General and police leaders in the north to make recommendations that will change the conditions of confinement and to discuss possible improvements, including signage for court holding cells about young people's right to call the Advocate's Office.



SAVANNA

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

As I wander a world so vast, extraordinary and unique I am confronted with feelings of hopelessness. This sadness takes my heart by the whole and engulfs every positive thought I have ever had, yet I am not the only one who suffers. These feelings, this awareness have become my motivation and purpose for becoming a Youth Amplifier. Although we live in a world that pushes minorities down, I take a positive stand. I believe in hope to bring change because hope has brought me to Feathers of Hope. Feathers of Hope is a movement to bring change to First Nations people, but it is way more than that. Feathers of Hope brings communities and young people together, to help restore what was lost for so long. It is about raising awareness, educating people, taking ignorance away

and creating well-informed individuals, both First Nations and non-First Nations people.

Feathers of Hope brings hope to you from within. I would like to emphasize that Feathers of Hope brings all people together. This is the dream, to walk hand in hand in a very open and diverse world so future generations can flourish and prosper without stigma. To live in a world that doesn't force you to be anyone but you. To reject shame and embrace pride. That is why I am here, to transform hopelessness into something so beautiful you cannot even imagine. I am privileged to say the process has begun and the Feathers of Hope team is flying, so open your hearts and fly with us.



MENTAL HEALTH

The stigma of poor mental health can be unbearable for young people, especially those whose needs have not been adequately met by the system. The Advocate's Office receives calls on a regular basis from youth who complain they have been forced into treatment against their will or that their personal information has been shared without their consent.

That is why in 2012 we welcomed the news that the Ontario government would invest up to \$93 million in a mental health and addictions strategy for Ontario's children and youth. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are undertaking an exercise that will transform the children's mental health system in the province.

However, these ministries are conducting this important work without the benefit of the direct involvement of young people who have experienced poor mental health and have sought out or required mental health services somewhere in this province. They are overlooking a unique opportunity to build from the ground up a substantially improved system that focuses on learning and teaching critical skills tied to self-care to the very people that our mental health system is supposed to serve.

Fully engaging young people in the process of planning moves beyond simply hearing their concerns and helping them

understand their rights and responsibilities as they pertain to the mental health system; done properly, engaging young people provides the foundational learning that they need to navigate the system, make informed decisions about their lives and health care, and become their own self-advocates through what can be for some a lifelong relationship with the mental health system.

OUR WORK

After learning of the government's investment in youth mental health and addictions, the Advocate's Office undertook significant work to learn from young people what they thought about the Province of Ontario's approach to mental health. The result is a report called *Putting Youth in the Picture*, which the Office released in 2013 and that presents the ideas of 46 young people who attended and participated in six separate consultations in the Peterborough area. Peterborough was chosen because, according to 2006 census data, the city

represented average population demographics for the Province of Ontario and also had an online database of community resources considered necessary to conduct the study.

Our discussions with young people revealed that they support the general framework and policies proposed for an overhauled mental health and addictions strategy in Ontario. However, we learned from the youth participants that these solutions fall short of providing children and youth with the supports and services that could really make a difference in their lives.

Above all, young people told us about the importance of being included in any and all discussions about mental health services and program planning. More specifically, they spoke of building interconnections or linkages between their homes, families and schools with the goal of creating more responsive and supportive connections that will, in the end, be of help and a valued resource to them. Strong connections could offer



webs of support that would improve their life skills and ability to cope with difficult times in their lives. The young people spoke of the benefits to their well-being of having safe spaces to meet with their peers, stable and welcoming living environments, access to positive adult role models and of accessible services matched to their needs.

Many young people we spoke to made it clear they are comfortable in their schools and community organizations with teachers and staff they know and trust. In short, youth are more likely to engage in mental health services if they can reach them through a trusted organization or staff.

View English and French copies of *Putting Youth in the Picture* via the following links:

ENGLISH http://bit.ly/PYP_en
FRENCH http://bit.ly/JMTF_fr

THE ADVOCATE'S
OFFICE BELIEVES
THAT MUCH CAN
BE DONE TO
BUILD A BETTER
SYSTEM.

YOUNG PEOPLE:
THESE ARE YOUR
RIGHTS!

- The doctor has to explain everything in a way that you can understand.
- Nobody is allowed to force or trick you into giving permission for a treatment.
- Consent is not a form. It is a full and ongoing conversation.



PROJECT I DO CARE

The aim of Project I Do Care (IDC) is to create greater awareness about young people's health rights so that the system does a better job of integrating those rights into all aspects of program and service delivery. In 2013, the Advocate's Office, supported by young people across Ontario, ran focus groups to hear from youth about their experiences and challenges with the mental health system. By bringing young people together and encouraging them to share their stories, we worked to help them understand whether or not they are receiving relevant mental health support services.

Information gathered in focus groups will also help form the basis of *The Ultimate Health Rights Survival Guide*, which will

be produced by the Advocate's Office in collaboration with an advisory group of seven young people and released later in 2014. This advisory group, known as "Guide-Participate-Support" (or GPS), was involved in making decisions about the project and is co-creating the forthcoming resource booklet *The Ultimate Health Rights Survival Guide* with the IDC Project team. The guide will help children and youth understand their health rights using a practical, step-by-step approach. It will also provide information and worksheets about key health rights and documenting a plan of care.

View English and French copies of Project I Do Care via the following links:

- ENGLISH http://bit.ly/IDC_en
- FRENCH http://bit.ly/IDC_fr

THE ONLY WAY
TO ENSURE THAT
SUCH SOLUTIONS
ARE FOUND IS TO
INVOLVE YOUNG
PEOPLE DIRECTLY
IN THE CHANGE
PROCESS.



IT IS ESSENTIAL
TO PROCEED WITH
A CONSCIOUS MIND
SO THAT THE VOICES

ELEVATED
IN THIS INITIATIVE
ARE THE AUTHENTIC
VOICES.

CRYSTAL

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

At times, it seems it would just be easier if we could just remove the individual youth's challenges or "normalize" young people described as having "special needs". Yet, growing up with a congenital neurological condition has made me realize it's not really about eradicating the challenges; rather, it is about recognizing and accepting what is, and will always be, and simply try to make the best of the unique circumstances each of us has been given.

The word advocate originates from the Latin word: *advocatus*, past participle of *advocare*: to summon,

from *ad* + *vocare* to call, to add voice. Over the past several months, I have had the privilege to learn the true meaning of advocacy while working at the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Using advocacy as a tool to stimulate systematic and structural change means committing to a long and arduous process. However, it is essential to proceed with a conscious mind so that the voices elevated in this initiative are the authentic voices of the children and youth with special needs and their allies living in the Province of Ontario.



SPECIAL NEEDS

“Special needs” is a term that government uses to describe children and youth with physical and developmental disabilities. Like all children, children with disabilities depend on the care system to fulfill their educational, medical, child welfare, residential and therapeutic needs. The needs of young people with disabilities remain consistently underserved. We hear regularly from young people and their caregivers that there remain significant gaps between the policies that government articulates regarding service to children with disabilities and the actual levels of service that are ultimately provided.

OUR WORK

Our Office understands the importance of elevating the voices of these children and youth so that they can engage with the system as “active agents”. Often, children with disabilities and their caregivers require additional supports and resources to support their ability to participate in dialogues about their lives and experiences. We have learned that sometimes we as an Office must partner with interveners, parents, translators and attendant care providers so we can learn how to more effectively listen to children with disabilities who face unique barriers and ensure they have what they need to be active participants in decisions being made about their lives.

In 2013–2014, the Advocate’s Office undertook significant work to engage with children and youth with disabilities and their caregivers, and elevate the voices of this underserved group. Our Special Needs Committee, first established in 2012, and expanded this year to include young people and experienced community members who act as advisors, is now led by Office staff who are highly knowledgeable about the diverse needs of children and youth with disabilities. We also established a youth advisory committee of young people with disabilities. We also have two Youth Amplifiers and a student supporting our work.

A GROWING COLLABORATION AMONG MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL NEEDS COMMUNITY

In December 2013, the Advocate’s Office hosted a dialogue of 80 individuals and groups devoted to discussing how the community can work to elevate the voices of children and youth with disabilities. Attendees offered their assistance in helping the Office hear from young people. A second meeting was held in Toronto at the beginning of 2014. A third meeting is planned for September 2014 in Thunder Bay to hear from people in northern Ontario and help support the development of a northern strategy for this initiative.



THE I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY PROJECT

In 2013–2014, the Advocate's Office launched a project called I Have Something to Say, which represents a major step forward in our work to elevate the voices of children and youth with disabilities. The initiative, like Our Voice Our Turn and Feathers of Hope, will gather the voices of children with disabilities in Ontario, bring the young people together and with them deliver their message directly to decision makers. As a first step, we are working closely with our youth advisory committee to create a website through which children and youth will be able to share their stories. The site is also designed to allow those who serve and care for children and youth with disabilities to access resources through weblinks.

THE ADVOCATE'S
OFFICE HOSTED A
DIALOGUE WITH
80 INDIVIDUALS
AND GROUPS TO
DISCUSS HOW
THEY CAN WORK
TO ELEVATE THE
VOICES OF CHILDREN
AND YOUTH WITH
DISABILITIES.

While use of a website can be an effective way to reach out to this group, we know other means must be used to elicit the voices of children and youth with disabilities. In 2013–2014 we met with individuals who showed us many communication options: teachers showed us how they help children with autism create e-books; young people with complex medical issues showed us they can communicate via their loved ones by using body movements; young people with learning disabilities showed us they communicate best using video. We are designing the I Have Something to Say project with the intention of hearing from children and youth who might want to communicate with us in ways that do not involve use of the website. This could include artwork, videos, songs, e-books or whatever works best and inspires them to express themselves.

ALL KIDS HAVE A
VOICE. ALL KIDS
CAN CONTRIBUTE.
WHAT WE NEED
TO DO IS ADDRESS
THE BARRIERS THAT
LIMIT THE ABILITY
OF CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITIES TO
CONTRIBUTE.

YOUNG PEOPLE: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

What would the world be like if all children with disabilities were supported to realize their full potential? How would that make the world different than it is right now? What should the Advocate's Office know about how to improve the lives of children and youth living in Ontario? To help answer these questions we invite readers of this report to log on to the I Have Something to Say website at: provincialadvocate.on.ca/main/en/ihsts.

Many children and youth need help to raise their voice. We are counting on children's natural advocates (caregivers, teachers, neighbours and others) to support them in the process of making a contribution. If a child or natural advocate needs our assistance to contribute, we are happy to help in any way we can. Children's natural advocates may also want to make their own submissions and we invite them to contribute via the project's website. We want these advocates to speak about their lived experience working with, caring for and loving children with special needs.

Listen!

Support groups

- Support
- acceptance
- awareness
- love
- understanding

Unconditional love

- more outreach
- more services

Under



IT IS A PRIVILEGE
TO BE ABLE TO

HELP CHANGE
THE WORLD.

JONATHAN

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Jonathan. I have been working at the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth for the past seven months. I am Deaf. I work as a Youth Amplifier for the Special Needs project. It has been a privilege to work with the team on this project. It has given me more knowledge about provincial laws, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, issues about access to Special Needs supports and such. This is a huge milestone for me because I am Deaf. The project helps not only Deaf people, but young people from all walks of life with

disability. It is a privilege to be able to help change the world with other Youth Amplifiers on the Special Needs team at the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Growing up and being Deaf, life was a bit of a struggle due to lack of communication access. I am fortunate to be working with an organization that makes communication support so much more accessible and provides employment opportunities for members of the Deaf community and young people with disabilities as well.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, OUTREACH & RIGHTS EDUCATION

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

On November 20, 2014, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) will celebrate its 25th anniversary. Canada is a signatory to the Convention, as is every country in the world except the United States, and a motion in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 1990 to back it received unanimous support.

However, the gap remains wide in Ontario between what the Convention has promised and what has been realized. The UN conducts periodic reviews of each signatory state every five years to assess how it is making the articles of the Convention a living part of how the country meets the rights of young people. In 2012, Canada's compliance was reviewed. As part of the process, Canada had to submit a report on

the occasion of its third and fourth periodic review detailing what it has done to make children's rights a central part of policy.

AN INCLUSIVE REPORTING PROCESS WITH THE UNCRC

Over the last four years, the Office has been committed to working with United Nations processes and committees to raise awareness about children's rights. Having children and youth meaningfully involved in these mechanisms has been an important focus of this work.

Beginning in January 2011, the Office partnered with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada to create and deliver an alternate report, *Our Dreams Matter Too*, to the United Nations on the occasion of Canada's third and fourth periodic re-

view by the UN. Since then our activities have included: traveling with young people to Geneva to attend Canada's pre-session with the Committee on the Rights of the Child; attending Canada's State Review on its implementation on the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and preparing a submission on children's issues to the United Nations in response to Canada's impending Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights.

View English and French copies of *Our Dreams Matter Too* via the following links:

 ENGLISH http://bit.ly/ourdreams_en
FRENCH http://bit.ly/nosreves_fr

We have continued to monitor the processes available through the United Nations to ensure that the voices of children and youth in Ontario are included in policy and legislation and

that young people are given the opportunity to contribute to the international and national dialogue surrounding children's rights. This year our Office partnered with UNICEF to produce a plain language interpretation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Recommendations for Canada that would be easier to read and understand by children and youth. This document, created and developed by youth, translates the technical language and is intended to be used by young people across the province as a way of learning more about their rights and the role of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its work with Canada.

View English and French copies of the youth-friendly language report *Recommendations for Canada* via the following links:

ENGLISH http://bit.ly/UNYFrecs_en
 FRENCH http://bit.ly/NULCrecs_fr

Also in response to Canada's third and fourth periodic review, the Office enabled the Coalition of Youth-Led Agencies and

the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants to provide the review committee with supplementary information that would help address their lists of concerns. We supported a delegation of First Nations young people to meet with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva where they spoke about our alternative report's recommendations. The Provincial Advocate also presented an alternative report from the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) called *Aboriginal Children in Canada Must Do Better: Today and Tomorrow*. The CCCYA is an association of the Child and Youth Advocates from all Canada's provinces and territories. View English and French copies of the report *Aboriginal Children in Canada Must Do Better: Today and Tomorrow* via the following links:

ENGLISH http://bit.ly/ACCMDB_en
 FRENCH http://bit.ly/EJAC_fr



STRENGTHENING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE CONVENTION'S PRINCIPLES

The Advocate's Office is committed to ensuring that the young people of Ontario will participate in Canada's next periodic review in 2017. We will also encourage the Government of Ontario to work openly with the citizens of Ontario, including the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, in preparing the Province's section of Canada's report to the UN.

We have started laying a foundation for this work. In 2013–2014, as part of our community development work, the Advocate's Office conducted more than 30 workshops for children, youth, educators and youth service providers on the rights of children as articulated in the Convention. To mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention and to ready Ontario for Canada's next review, we have begun planning for a listening tour in November 2014 in which the Provincial Advocate will travel across the province to meet with children and youth in

our mandate and hear about what they need for themselves and their communities. We plan to hold at least 15 meetings across Ontario.

ADVANCING HAIRSTORY

In 2013–2014, we renewed our commitment to build on and strengthen the Office's partnership and work with youth in the service system who identify as part of the broader Black community. Through this next initiative of the HairStory community development project we will continue to refine and strengthen the role of the Office as a resource to this broad cross section of young people by creating a space where Black youth can talk about their experiences in care.

ADVOCACY 2.0

The Advocate's Office believes in connecting to young people where they are, which means having a more dynamic presence online. While nothing can replace a face-to-face meeting, we recognize that virtual meeting places can be enormously beneficial for enabling young people to interact with our Office and with one another. We undertook an important initiative in 2013–2014 called Advocacy 2.0 in which we began to build a new website that will incorporate the latest and best in social media technology. Our goal with Advocacy 2.0

is to have everything our Office does available online. The new website will connect young people to Office services and projects through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo and Instagram. The site will provide a dynamic meeting space for young people where they can feel safe interacting with one another and seek information from our Office. The site will also be used to stream live events and host chat rooms for our projects and sponsored discussions. The new website will launch late in 2014.

BUILDING RIGHTS BASED CULTURES IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

In 2010, the Advocate's Office began a pilot project to train students how to teach young people in their care about their rights. The Child Advocacy Initiative Certificate of Completion is blossoming into a full-fledged program for child and youth worker students. Humber College was our main partner and testing ground for the new training certificate. In 2013–2014, our Office met with child and youth work program coordinators from community colleges across Ontario about establishing the program more widely.





IT GIVES FIRST NATIONS
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A VOICE THAT IS
OFTEN NOT HEARD.

SARAH

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Sarah. I am an Anishinaabe kwe from Thunder Bay, Ontario and a member of Couchiching First Nation. I am a northern Youth Amplifier with the Advocate's Office. I first learned about Feathers of Hope when I volunteered to be a note taker at the forum held in Thunder Bay in 2013. The forum had an energetic and hope-filled air about it. I really valued the wisdom that the youth had to offer me and my note taking gave me lots to reflect on afterwards.

The role of Youth Amplifier for the Feathers of Hope movement really spoke to me and I had high hopes I would have an opportunity to work at the Office. After I went to the Office's website and I read the principles that guide the Office's work my excitement grew. I was elated when after my job interview I was phoned and offered one of the advertised Amplifier positions. I think I said "yes" before the person on the other line could finish. I feel Feathers of Hope provides such an

opportunity to unify government, communities and young people to work towards creating a better life for First Nations children and youth. It also provides an opportunity to mobilize First Nations youth to be leaders in their communities. Most importantly, it gives First Nations children and youth a voice that is often not heard. Feathers of Hope is an opportunity to bring First Nations youth together in all their diversity to voice all their concerns.

What I want to see is a new generation of Indigenous youth more empowered than previous generations who do not have to choose between their culture and a good education. I want to see First Nations communities with the resources they need to be able to make their young people's dreams come true. We need government action on the ground and sustained community work to achieve this. I have high hopes that Feathers of Hope can be that bridge.

The program trains child and youth worker students in youth rights and responsibilities, *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, conflict resolution, and techniques for presenting workshops to young people. It also includes information about how the Advocate's Office can support young people. The success of this initiative prompted us to develop a full-credit child rights and advocacy course. We began a pilot of that course at Humber College in 2013. It is aimed at enabling youth service providers to consider and incorporate advocacy and children's rights into their daily professional practice.

INSPIRING YOUNG PHILANTHROPISTS

Young people today are less engaged in traditional forms of philanthropic and volunteer work than were their parents. Conventional ways of thinking about and carrying out philanthropy and civic engagement do not seem to work for many youth because young people have moved past the more traditional forms of philanthropy. The philanthropic sector needs to catch up.

The Advocate's Office partnered with *The Philanthropist*—an online journal for practitioners, scholars, supporters and others engaged in the nonprofit sector in Canada—to explore the question of why young people are less engaged in traditional forms of philanthropy than their parent's generation and to begin to find

solutions. This special edition of the journal was published in the spring of 2013. The edition focused on young people and the future of philanthropy, with adult and youth authors contributing chapters on philanthropy-related issues and the ways in which such issues concern young people. Following the journal's publication, the Ontario Non-Governmental Network's Connect the Sector movement met with the young article writers. From there, the new Connect the Sector Fellowship Initiative was established, which invites young people to work with mentors in sharing ideas and building programs to shape the future of philanthropy.

View the special edition of *The Philanthropist* via the following link:

 http://bit.ly/JPhil_en





WE HAVE MADE IT AN
EMPHASIS IN THE
PROJECT TO ENCOURAGE

SERVICE PROVIDERS TO
INCLUDE THE FORMATION
OF “ALLY-SHIP.”

YESSINIA

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Yessinia. I currently am the Youth Amplifier on the You Are Not Alone (YANA) Project at the Advocate’s Office. YANA focuses on young people’s experiences when identifying as LGBTTIQQ2SA while being in systems of care in Ontario. Having been a Crown Ward, and also identifying as a lesbian at the age of 15, I found that the care system didn’t quite know how to support me as I transitioned into adulthood and a world that was very unfamiliar to me.

After joining the YANA project, it became clear to me that young people across Ontario struggle to get service providers to recognize the challenges that come with living in a small town and also identifying as LGBTTIQQ2SA. Through project activities, young people

shared stories of how suicide was on the rise for youth who didn’t have the needed support from teachers, social workers, parents and legal guardians. There is so much secrecy between LGBTTIQQ2SA youth and the adults and caregivers in their lives. If they are fortunate, some youth are able to find an ally and that helped them find acceptance within themselves. With the stories of these young people in mind, we have made it an emphasis in the project to encourage service providers to include the formation of “ally-ship” in their service models and daily interactions with LGBTTIQQ2SA youth. I hope in the years to come service providers can fill the void that youth feel living in a world that can be unwelcoming and hard to live in when identifying as LGBTTIQQ2SA.



I'M IN LOVE WITH
MY JOB BECAUSE IT HELPS

YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE
ME BECOME INDEPENDENT.

NOTERLEE

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Noterlee. I am a Youth Amplifier at the Advocate's Office and am involved with the HairStory project. HairStory is important community development work and part of the Advocate's Office's commitment to bringing forward the voices of Black youth in care. The project is designed to help Black youth share their stories and experiences and provide recommendations to government and service providers about how to improve the systems of care for Black youth. My role on this project is to help organize HairStory events and ensure everything runs smoothly.

My time at the Advocate's Office has been important to me. I'm in love with my job because it helps young people like me become independent, responsible and prepared for the future. One thing I particularly enjoy is that I'm not only creating change at work but I am able bring my job home. I try my best to create change and awareness in my own community by motivating young kids to achieve their highest potential. I want other young people to know that HairStory is for Black youth, organized by Black youth.

Another project I worked on as an Amplifier at the Advocate's Office was the American Sign Language (ASL) project. My partner on this project was a fellow Amplifier, Kiwayne. We never imagined we would one day work on something to support the Deaf community. Our job was to capture on video a group of Deaf youth translating the 54 articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) from text to sign language. This project is extremely important for the Deaf community because it's translated by youth for youth. This project has helped create for Deaf youth awareness of their rights under the UNCRC. Working with these youth was really a pleasure. I was able to interact with them and listen to their experiences at the provincial school they attended. They had a lot to say and were filled with so much enthusiasm. By working together we were able to do something that has never been done before and help promote change together. We also found a space to bridge different languages of communication, mine being an oral language and theirs being ASL.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The Advocate's Office launched the You Are Not Alone (YANA) project during Toronto Pride Week in 2012 with the goal of making a lasting difference in the daily lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, queer, questioning, 2-spirited and allies (LGBTTIQQ2SA) youth. Since then, YANA has provided opportunities for young people in its mandate to share their experiences and ideas on how we can build a care system that is more supportive of LGBTTIQQ2SA youth.

I WAS LIVING IN A
SMALL NORTHERN
ONTARIO TOWN AND
WAS REJECTED BY
MY FAMILY AFTER
TELLING THEM I WAS
BISEXUAL.

YANA YOUTH

In early 2013, Office staff working on the YANA project travelled across Ontario to hear from and advocate for the LGBTTIQQ2SA children and youth it serves. We asked young people about what the Advocate's Office and others could do to make their lives better. Following the tour, the Office established a working group of LGBTTIQQ2SA youth from across Ontario who could identify themes in the information we gathered. Among the group's findings were that nearly 80 percent of children and youth in a group home reported name calling based on gender/sexual orientation. The working





group developed a proposal with recommendations for our ongoing work in this area and in late 2013 a Youth Amplifier was hired to focus on the project.

BE OUR ALLY CAMPAIGN

In 2013–2014 the YANA Youth Working Group created the Be Our Ally campaign to encourage service providers in Ontario's care systems to be allies to LGBTTIQQ2SA youth and create safe environments that promote acceptance and respect. The Office's campaign team is working on a video that will be screened at the World Pride Human Rights Conference in June 2014.

I FELT I WAS BEING PUSHED BACK INTO
THE CLOSET WHEN I WAS NOT ALLOWED
TO TELL OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE IN MY
GROUP HOME THAT I WAS GAY.

YANA YOUTH





ALL THE WORK
DONE IS PART OF
A LONG-TERM

PROCESS TO
IMPROVE ONTARIO'S
SYSTEMS OF CARE.

KIWAYNE

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

My name is Kiwayne and I am a Youth Amplifier at the Advocate's Office. The Office is a dynamic environment where staff and young people work together using a mixture of old proven ways and new ideas on a mission to create fundamental changes to how the youth of Ontario interact with the province's systems of care. A great example of this was a project I worked on with Office and UNICEF staff translating the United Nations Concluding Observations and Recommendations to Canada into simple language. The original document was created by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a way to report back on Canada's performance in meeting young peoples' rights.

The UNCRC tries to make sure countries like Canada provide the supports and services necessary to meet

the needs of all children and youth, regardless of where they live in the country. The document inspired me to look back at the short period of time that has been given to identifying and monitoring human rights and how much more we need to accomplish when it comes to children's rights. Working at the Office I have seen how each project tries to bring children's rights to life. It took some time for me to understand that these projects didn't just start the year I began working at the Office. All the work done is part of a long-term process to improve Ontario's systems of care by raising the voices of children, acknowledging their rights, needs and life conditions and working together with youth to improve these situations so young people can develop to their full potential.



PROVINCIAL & DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS

Among the many groups of children and youth in the Advocate's Office's mandate are those who live in Ontario's provincial and demonstration schools for the deaf, blind and severely learning disabled. Under the *Education Act*, Ontario's Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for the schools. There are currently eight schools in Ontario. They provide educational services to these young people, many of whom live in residence during the school week.

OUR WORK

Our Office visits these schools every month to identify and address systemic issues. We also respond directly to calls from young people attending these schools who have encountered issues that challenge their rights.

We continue to advocate for enhancements to our mandate that would give us the ability to conduct reviews of provincial schools so we may hear directly from students about any concerns or issues they have with their learning environments. For several years now, it has been our belief that the MOE needs to re-establish the mission, vision and purpose of the schools, and their relationship with the community. We feel this needs to happen because, based on our experience, we know that the students have a lot they want to say.

We continued in 2013–2014 to advocate to the best of our ability for the rights of students attending provincial residential schools. To assist us and provide advice about the best ways to improve our advocacy for this group, we created a youth committee in 2013 of students and former students of provincial and demonstration schools. In addition, during our monthly visits to provincial and demonstration schools, our staff ensured that students were aware of their right to contact our Office.

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE RIGHTS PROJECT

This year we completed a unique project to bring Deaf youth in Ontario a greater awareness of their rights. Two Youth Amplifiers worked together with Deaf

students attending one of the province's provincial schools for the Deaf to translate and produce a video of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) in American Sign Language (ASL). The Amplifiers filmed all 54 articles of the UNCRC in ASL and the resulting video is available on the Office's website. Plans are already in the works to move forward with a Quebec Sign Language rights video production in French.

View the ASL version of the video via the following link:

 https://bit.ly/asl_uncrc



THE OFFICE HAS
TRULY PROVIDED
ME WITH A PLATFORM

TO EXPLORE MY
INTERESTS AND
VOICE MY IDEAS.

MATTHEW

YOUTH AMPLIFIER

I was first introduced to the Advocate's Office by my professor, who put me in contact with the Provincial Advocate when she saw potential in an "app" I had developed for a project in her course. The app, "Ask an Advocate", is a mobile tool designed to connect youth to the Office and other community resources.

I wasn't sure what to expect when I came to the Office. I was nervous because this was the first time that I'd had an opportunity like this. However, when I arrived, the environment was very welcoming. The Office has truly provided me with a platform to explore my interests and voice my ideas. I have had the opportunity to

work on activities such as designing project publications, developing the I Have Something to Say project website and helping create a strategic plan to determine how the Office will use social media in the future.

I have had the opportunity to be involved in a process that pushes the Office to utilize channels that will help further the reach of their message. This process is commonly referred to as Advocacy 2.0. I am inspired by the work I've done with the Office because I believe it is of the utmost importance that we continue to create a safe space for youth to share their opinions and have their voices heard.

STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE

FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2014

	Approved estimates April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014	Actual for the period April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014	Actual for the period April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013
	2014 \$	2014 \$	2013 \$
SALARIES & WAGES	3,821,200	3,485,760	3,443,548
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	878,800	685,867	1,008,904
TRANSPORTATION & COMMUNICATION	851,200	911,504	928,078
SERVICES	2,910,000	2,564,343	2,085,560
SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT	130,400	130,972	252,364
TOTAL	8,591,600	7,778,446	7,718,454

APPROVED



IRWIN ELMAN,
PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENT

For the Year Ended March 31, 2014

1. BACKGROUND

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth serves children and youth in state care and the margins of state care through individual, systemic and policy advocacy. The office is mandated to strive to be an exemplar in youth participation at all levels of its work. The office is also mandated to take a special interest in children and youth with special needs, First Nations children and youth, children and youth in Ontario's schools for the deaf and blind and Ontario's Demonstration schools.

The *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* was enacted to provide an independent voice for children and youth.

2. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICES

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth follows the basis of accounting adopted for the Office of the Assembly as required by the *Legislative Assembly Act* and accordingly uses a modified cash basis of accounting, which allows an additional 30 days to pay for expenditures incurred during the year just ended. This differs from Canadian generally accepted accounting principles in that, for example, liabilities incurred but unpaid within 30 days of the year just ended are not recorded until paid, and expenditures for assets such as computers and office furnishing are expensed in the year of acquisition rather than recorded as fixed assets and amortized over their useful lives.

Expenditures are reported net of recoverable sales tax which is recovered by the Office of the Assembly on the Office's behalf.

3. EXPENDITURES

Expenditures are paid out of monies appropriated by the Legislature of the Province of Ontario. Financial and Human Resources services are provided by the Office of the Assembly without charge.

4. EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth provided pension benefits for its permanent employees (and to non-permanent employees who elect to participate) through participation in the Ontario Public Service Pension Plan (PSPF) which is a multiemployer plan established by the Province of Ontario. This Plan is a defined benefit plan.

Contributions to the Plan are provided by the Office and its employees, with any unfunded liability covered by the Province. The office's contributions to the Plan during the year amounted to \$246,606 and are included in employee benefits.

The cost of unused vacation and earned legislated severance entitlements are recorded in the statement of Expenditure when paid.

5. COMMITMENT

On February 26, 2009, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth leased office space for a term of 5 years with 2 extension options. The first Lease extension option was exercised on 1st August 2014, for the period commencing on December 1, 2014 and ending on November 30, 2019. A two year lease agreement was also signed for an office location in Thunder Bay ending June 30, 2016.

Future minimum rental payments for the two leases are as follows:

	TOTAL
2015	229,025
2016	272,130
2017	276,742
2018	283,460
2019	295,110
THEREAFTER	201,920
	1,558,387

Aggregate future 5 years thereafter to be negotiated by June 30, 2019 for the Toronto Office.

Provincial Advocate *for Children & Youth*

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