

## **Advocate for Children and Youth Tables 2022 Annual Report**

SASKATOON – The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Dr. Lisa Broda, tabled her 2022 Annual Report with the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan today.

In this year's report, Broda emphasizes the substantial increase of in-person engagements after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. "Participating in community events and engaging directly with young people and stakeholders has increased our effectiveness in advocating and spreading the word about children's rights," said Broda. "This also heightens our understanding of the acute and long-standing systemic challenges young people face in Saskatchewan of which we work to address to create real change for children," stated Broda.

After ongoing research into how Saskatchewan's primary education system manages bullying and restraints, the Ministry of Education has partially accepted the Advocate's recommendations to standardize definitions and procedures for how and when restraints are used, and how to effectively manage bullying. "The Ministry of Education has only agreed to policy-related change, and not the legislative amendments we believe are necessary to ensure compliance and accountability mechanisms in the use of restraints. While monitoring the Ministry's promised changes, we will continue to advocate for legislative change in this area," stated Broda.

A common theme in our advocacy casework in 2022 was regarding staffing shortages across all sectors and child-serving ministries. Our office was informed about the lack of staff within group homes; vacancies in mental health, counsellor, and case worker positions; the inability to fill support positions within classrooms and schools; shortages of respite caregivers and in-home support workers; and the lack of support workers to transport children to appointments or visits.

Advancing rights for children and youth in mental health and addictions was the focus of *Desperately Waiting*, released in March 2022. With an emphasis on voices and perspectives of almost 500 stakeholders, including youth, the foremost among this report's 14 recommendations was for the development of a provincial Children's Strategy in which child-serving systems would work collectively to address and improve prevention. In response, in August 2022 the Government of Saskatchewan released the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Strategy: Strong Families, Strong Communities. A Better Quality of Life*. "This is a very encouraging response. However, it has yet to include an action-oriented plan that identifies goals, benchmarks, and actions in child well-being that monitors the actual impact of these efforts," stated Broda. The Advocate will monitor the commitments made by all child-serving entities to carry out the 14 recommendations.

Also in 2022, the Advocate was invited by the Ministry of Social Services to consult on proposed amendments to *The Child and Family Services Act*. The Advocate supported several of the Ministry's proposed changes, including increasing the age of a child to under 18 years, an improvement for which the Advocate has long advocated. "We also recommended additional legislative amendments such as incorporating an independent review mechanism, requirements regarding placement considerations for Indigenous children and youth, and improved permanency planning for children to avoid languishing in temporary care without extended supports," stated Broda. This legislation is currently under review by the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan.

The 2022 Annual Report further highlights the office's great success in launching its *Speak for Yourself* self-advocacy workshop this past year. "We prepared materials, resources, and activities in 2021 and consulted our Youth Advisory Committee, in anticipation of offering this workshop on how young people can learn the key components of self-advocating for their rights. We hoped it would be well received, but it has exceeded our expectations and we now have a waiting list of schools and other organizations who are excited for our staff to share this information with youth," said Broda.

*The Advocate for Children and Youth is an Officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. She leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people independent and apart from government. The office's vision is that the rights, well-being, and voices of children and youth are respected, valued, and supported to assist young people to reach their full potential.*

For full details visit [saskadvocate.ca](https://saskadvocate.ca) to view the 2022 Annual Report.

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