

Advocate for Children and Youth Tables 2024 Annual Report

SASKATOON – The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Dr. Lisa Broda, tabled her 2024 Annual Report with the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan today.

The report outlines some positive movement within services to children, however, highlights the increasing challenges Saskatchewan children, youth, and their families are facing. “Children, youth, and their families are dealing with multi-layered, complex issues, in addition to struggling to meet their basic needs due to the current social and economic conditions,” stated Broda.

“Families reach out for support only to discover that, often, there is insufficient services to meet the demand,” said Broda. This, paired with human resources shortages experienced by many child-serving systems, impacts accessibility to service provision or results in a lack of service.

The Advocate stresses that “young people have the right to receive services to meet their needs. We all need to work collectively to achieve this.” Broda acknowledges there are efforts being made to build the capacity of services for young people in Saskatchewan. However, much more needs to be done.

The report highlights the advocacy, investigations, and systemic matters reviewed this past year, as well as the Advocate’s monitoring of recommendations made to various Ministries to systemically improve service provision to young people in Saskatchewan.

In 2024, the Advocate was pleased to close several recommendations made to the Ministry of Social Services as fully completed. Of note, after nearly two decades of advocacy, the Advocate’s recommendation calling for the age of a child under *The Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA) to be raised, was finally closed, after the CFSA was amended to redefine a “child” to “a person under the age of 18 years.”

The Advocate also closed one recommendation from her 2021 report, *Someone to Watch Over Us*, as the Ministry of Social Services developed and staffed the Group Home Operational Oversight Unit, a resource which provides support to group home operators to ensure adherence to policy compliance, and accountability in group home services.

The report highlights some notable progress on recommendations from our 2022 report, *Desperately Waiting*, which includes the expansion of the Mental Health Capacity Building initiative in schools and development of mental health homes for youth, both of which are much-needed supports for young people. However, the Advocate also notes concern with delays in the implementation of other *Desperately Waiting* recommendations.

In response to a recommendation in the Advocate's 2023 report entitled, *In Their Sufficient Interest?*, the Ministry of Social Services completed its review of the Person of Sufficient Interest (PSI) program and developed a multi-year plan to address key action areas. Unfortunately, some necessary steps may not be taken until 2028.

The Advocate made recommendations in 2021 to the Ministry of Education to enhance protections and safeguards related to bullying and the use of physical restraints in schools. Work on these policies has been stalled. There has also been little movement with respect to the Advocate's recommendations pertaining to the Ministry's oversight of registered independent schools.

The Advocate will continue to follow up and/or assess progress on all outstanding recommendations. "The urgency in which recommendations need to be fulfilled cannot be understated. Continued delays and lack of progress is unacceptable and can lead to poor service for children," said Broda.

Keeping children's best interests, as a primary consideration, and at the center of every decision being made by child-serving systems, could be achieved through a 'children's strategy,' as recommended in our *Desperately Waiting* report. Despite initial optimism regarding the release of the government's *Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Strategy*, unfortunately it does not include the elements required of a targeted and measurable strategy. Ultimately, the current strategy serves as a list of helpful resources rather than a robust and fulsome strategy.

"Our Annual Report highlights the immense complexity of issues and increasing risks to children and youth. To give them the best possible chance in life, the young people of our province need a tangible, action-oriented, and authentic children's strategy now more than ever," stated Broda.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The Advocate 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 to view the 2024 Annual Report.

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