

Advocate for Children and Youth Tables 2012 Annual Report

REGINA — Bob Pringle, Advocate for Children and Youth, tabled his 2012 *Annual Report* in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly today.

The report details recent developments and provides some advice from the Advocate to the provincial government on the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*, recognition of the rights of young people in legislation and practice, and doing better for Indigenous children and youth in our province.

“This year, I shared with the Cabinet Committee on Children and Youth our concerns that while incremental progress was being made in several areas, the Agenda is losing momentum and not realizing its full potential to affect fundamental change for children and youth in Saskatchewan,” said Pringle. “The intentions of Government to create a collaborative agenda for children appears highly positive, yet it will only take root and grow through youth engagement, public awareness and the support of communities.”

Pringle expressed strong support for the four goals of the Agenda and recognized three successive years of government investment in its four cross-government strategies. He also reaffirmed the need for government to broaden the agenda to include strategies to reduce poverty and the drivers of child neglect, improve mental health and addictions services for children, youth and their families, and measure the impact of the Agenda on young people.

“We suggest that the provincial government demonstrate it is serious about building a sustainable Agenda by integrating it into key strategies, such as *Saskatchewan’s Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*, and more prominently profiling it in key communications, such as the throne and budget speeches,” said Pringle. “To date this has occurred only sporadically, so it is not surprising that when we visit with children, youth, families, professionals and community members across the province there is minimal awareness of and engagement with the Agenda.”

Throughout the report, the Advocate highlights the rights of young people in accordance with the 54 Articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child*, and in particular, the need to embed them into domestic law in Saskatchewan. He notes that the review currently underway of *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act* presents the opportunity to not only define the authority of government, but to also include recognition of citizen’s rights, including children’s rights, as well as the rights of parents, foster parents, extended family or other caregivers, professionals and other stakeholders in the system.

Pringle further notes that funding for a widely accessible program of independent legal representation for children and youth in their own child welfare proceedings was not included in the 2013-14 budget.

“I have recently met with the Minister of Justice and am confident that he shares my views on the importance of addressing this issue,” said Pringle. “Minister Wyant has committed to working with us towards the implementation of this program. The recognition of a child’s right to participate in decisions affecting them and to be represented by independent legal counsel is fundamental to any transformation of child welfare and ensuring that the court system works better as recommended by the 2010 Child Welfare Review Panel.”

Pringle also reiterated that we must do better for Aboriginal children and youth in Saskatchewan and Canada. To that end, the Advocate’s office committed to growing its understanding, support and engagement of Indigenous culture, history and issues in 2012.

Professional development on the *Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families* offered exceptional opportunities for learning and discussions about the family systems of First Nations communities, the history and impact of residential schools and other assimilation policies in Canada, and the links between the loss of parenting capacity in families forcibly separated and the over-representation of Aboriginal children and youth in out-of-home care today.

Subsequently, the Advocate for Children and Youth recommended that the Ministry of Social Services provide training to all Child and Family Services staff on the *Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families* as a first step in achieving better outcomes for First Nations and Métis children and youth. A plan to do this is currently being developed by the Ministry and its partners in delivery child welfare services in Saskatchewan.

“This past year has been one of reconciliation, celebration and coming of age at the Advocate office,” said Pringle. “As we continue to evolve, so do the provincial government services provided to children, youth and their families. In this report, the public will find analysis and perspectives on many issues. In some cases, we may disagree with a ministry or agency. We do this respectfully and with the recognition that some very good work is being done both inside and outside government.”

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For the full report please visit: www.saskadvocate.ca.

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The Advocate for Children and Youth (formerly Children’s Advocate) was established in 1994 and is an independent office under *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*.