



SASKATCHEWAN  
**advocate**  
FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

# 2024

A N N U A L  
R E P O R T





## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

April 2025

The Honourable Todd Goudy  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Legislative Building  
2405 Legislative Drive  
Regina, SK. S4S 0B3

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with section 39 of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, it is my duty and privilege to submit to you and members of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan this Annual Report from the Advocate for Children and Youth for the year 2024.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Broda".

Lisa Broda, PhD  
Advocate for Children and Youth

# Table of Contents

Message from the Advocate .....	1
Legislated Mandate .....	2
A Foundation of Rights .....	3
Reconciliation & Elder Guidance .....	5
Youth Advisory Council .....	7
Public Awareness & Education .....	10
Intake & Regional Advocacy .....	19
Systemic Advocacy .....	22
Child & Family Services Regulations .....	22
Missing Persons Data Standards - Statistics Canada .....	22
Other Systemic Issues .....	23
Recommendations Update .....	23
Ministry of Social Services .....	23
Recommendations Fully Completed .....	23
Person of Sufficient Interest (PSI) Program .....	24
Ministry's Review of the PSI Program .....	24
Mental Health & Addictions .....	26
<i>Desperately Waiting</i> Recommendations .....	26
Saskatchewan's Children & Youth Strategy .....	27
Ministry of Education .....	28
Bullying & the Use of Physical Restraints in Schools .....	28
Use of Preferred First Name & Pronouns By Students .....	28
Registered Independent Schools .....	28
Systemic Advocacy with the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates .....	29
Child Death & Injury/Incident Analysis .....	31
Drug Toxicity .....	32
The Next Year & Beyond .....	36
Budget .....	37
Advocate for Children & Youth Staff .....	38

# Message from the Advocate



The office of the Advocate for Children and Youth is dedicated to helping children and youth have their voices heard — voices which are often the most silent in matters and decisions that impact and shape their lives.

As an independent office of the Legislature, we are responsible for the oversight and monitoring of children and youth services and support programs, ensuring such services achieve the desired outcomes for young people.

It has been an absolute honour to serve as the Advocate for Children and Youth for the past five years. As I end my first tenured appointment, I have reflected on what has been working, not working, and what needs to be addressed to ensure young people receive the services to which they are entitled. In many respects, their rights have not been upheld and we need to work collectively to change this.

This is a time of extreme challenge for Saskatchewan children, youth, and their families. These young people face deeply rooted, multi-layered issues and have complex concerns and needs. The majority do not have strong natural advocates to support them in navigating the much-needed ministry, agency, and/or publicly funded health services.


The complexity of these cases requires considerable time to unpack the core elements of the specific concerns, which most often relate to abuse, neglect, food insecurity, homelessness, mental health, addictions, self-harm/suicide ideation, or suicide, which is the gravest of outcomes. The implications can be serious and, as we all know, poor access to services leads to an overall poor quality of life.

Given the impact of broader social and economic conditions and the complexity of existing systems and programs, achieving improvements to services is not an easy undertaking. Solutions are not simple, often requiring change at a broader systemic level.

This Annual Report reflects the advancement of our systemic work where we consulted extensively with several sectors that serve children, that included research, project reviews, and recommendations in the areas of health, social services, and education.

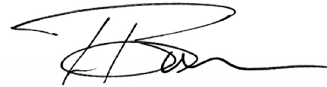
We are encouraged by the resource development and efforts to build the capacity of services for young people in Saskatchewan. However, we continue to receive and investigate a large volume of files that signal much more needs to be done. This means putting children and youth at the centre in a way that is strategic, meaningful, and demonstrates accountability that the services provided are actually working to give them the best possible chance in life.





I wish to thank all stakeholders who work with children and youth for the support, care, and attention you give these young people who are our most vulnerable. We have a deep appreciation for those in all sectors that serve children, youth, and their families. We recognize and acknowledge the obstacles and challenges you face in systems that lack the resources needed to help children live to their full potential. Our office will continue to call on governments to do better and to implement a full strategy for children and youth that tells us its improving. That's our mandate and our commitment.

Last, thank you to our team, who uphold the mandate of our office and who work diligently and passionately to ensure that the rights of young people are upheld, and that they receive the services to which they are entitled and deserve. I look forward to our next five years together to make it better for the young people of Saskatchewan.



**Lisa Broda, PhD**

*Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth*

# Legislated Mandate

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an Independent Office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. Our mandate is defined by *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*.

## **We do:**

### **ADVOCACY**

on behalf of children and youth receiving services from a provincial ministry, agency of the government, or publicly-funded health entity.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

to raise awareness of the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth.

### **INVESTIGATIONS**

into any matter concerning, or services provided to, children and youth by a provincial ministry, agency of the government, or publicly-funded health entity.

### **RESEARCH AND ADVISE**

on any matter relating to the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth.

These functions are all interconnected and lead to the work we do systemically to ensure Saskatchewan children and youth receive the services to which they are entitled.

# A Foundation of Rights



Our work is guided by the following principles:

## UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC)

All people have human rights. Children and youth (under 18 years of age) require special protections because many decisions are made on their behalf by adults. In 1991, Canada ratified the UNCRC, a legally-binding international human rights instrument that guarantees these special protections.

The UNCRC has 54 articles protecting children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil, and social services.

### The UNCRC has three categories of rights:

- **Protection:** Protecting children from all forms of harm and exploitation.
- **Provision:** Providing children with the resources needed for healthy development and survival.
- **Participation:** Allowing children to be an active participant.

### The core principles of the UNCRC are:

- *Non-discrimination:* The rights of each child are to be respected without discrimination of any kind. It does not matter if children are rich or poor, what their sex, gender, religion, ethnicity, or language is, or whether they have special needs. All children have rights.
- *Best interests of the child:* When decisions are made that affect the lives of children, it is very important to think about what is best for the child.
- *Right to life, survival, and development:* Governments should do their best to protect children from harm, and to help children live and grow to be the best they can be.
- *Respect for the views of the child:* Children and youth have the right to give their opinions in all matters that affect them and to have their voices heard. The views of young people should always be taken seriously.

## UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT (UNDRIP)

UNDRIP is an international human rights instrument, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2007. It sets minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples throughout the world. In 2021, Canada passed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which provides direction for the Government of Canada to implement the Declaration in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples.

UNDRIP references 46 articles that speak about rights to:

- Land
- Culture and language
- Self-determination
- Non-discriminatory or oppressive practices
- Protection of elders, women, and children
- Survive and develop
- Liberty and freedom
- Participate in any decision that affects Indigenous peoples

Articles 21 and 22 specifically reference that attention shall be paid to the continuing improvement of the social and economic conditions as they pertain to the special needs of elders, women, youth, and children. It also references that the 'State', in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take measures to ensure Indigenous women and children are afforded special protections.

## SASKATCHEWAN'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH FIRST PRINCIPLES

Our office simplified the 54 articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into eight principles most applicable to Saskatchewan children and youth. In 2009 the Government of Saskatchewan adopted the Saskatchewan's Children and Youth First Principles, which state:

All children and youth in Saskatchewan are entitled to:

- Those rights defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Participate and be heard before any decision affecting them is made.
- Have their 'best interests' given paramount consideration in any action or decision involving them.
- An equal standard of care, protection, and services.
- The highest standard of health and education possible to reach their fullest potential.
- Safety and protection from all forms of physical, emotional, and sexual harm, while in the care of parents, governments, legal guardians, or any person.
- Be treated as the primary client, and at the centre of all child-serving systems.
- Have consideration given to the importance of their unique life history and spiritual traditions and practices, in accordance with their stated views and preferences.

## TOUCHSTONES OF HOPE FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The Touchstones of Hope, created by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, is a guide to reconciliation in a variety of sectors in which children are served.

The Touchstones of Hope promote relating, restoring, truth telling, and acknowledging.

The process is based on five principles:

- Self-determination
- Respect for culture and language
- Importance of structural intervention
- Non-discrimination
- Holistic approach



# Reconciliation & Elder Guidance

The work of the Advocate office embraces reconciliation as a priority. In 2024 and beyond, this continues to be a key focus of our strategic planning and also our advocacy within the government systems and entities that serve children. We do this by continuing to engage with Elders on many aspects of our work and through our cultural, community and family connections when it comes to service provisions for Indigenous children and youth.

Our office also continues to model reconciliation by incorporating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, and *an Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families* within our work and within our consultations on legislation and policy, in addition to recommendations arising from our investigations.

Elders provide invaluable wisdom and guidance in our work and emphasize the importance of culturally appropriate services related to Indigenous ways of knowing to support children and families and provide early intervention. Our office has been fortunate to continue to benefit from the guidance of Elders and we are extremely grateful for their expertise, their time, and their commitment to the work of our office.

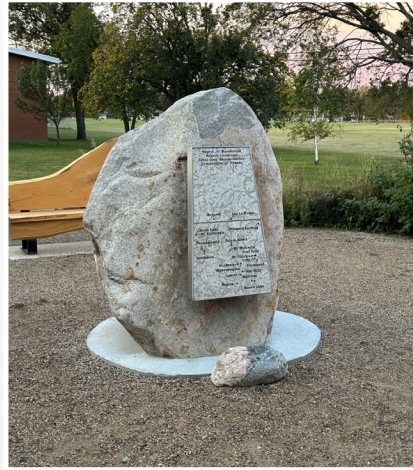


*In October 2024, Elder Julie Pitzel was presented the King Charles III Coronation Medal by the Honourable Russ Mirasty, former Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan.*

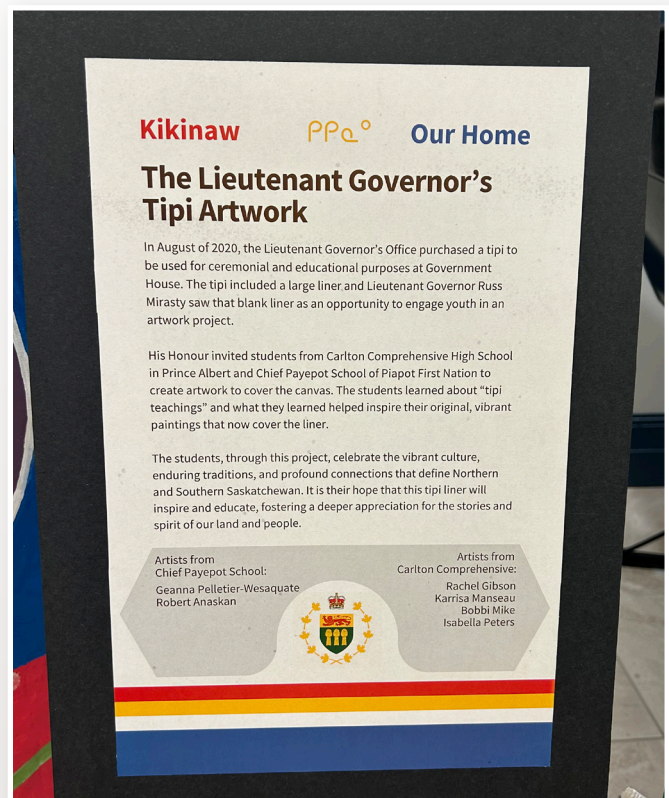


***Our office was deeply saddened by the loss of Elder Gilbert Kewistep, who passed away in October 2024. It was a tremendous honour to know Elder Gilbert and have him part of our advisory council as he was an outstanding role model and leader. His knowledge, wisdom, and guidance to the work of the Advocate office, his teachings and his role at the First Nations University, and his support and advocacy to children, families and communities will be deeply missed in Saskatchewan and beyond.***





***Saskatchewan Residential School Memorial – Government House – Regina***



***The Lieutenant Governor's Tipi Artwork***

# Youth Advisory Council

We formally bid farewell to our founding Youth Advisory Council (YAC) members as their terms with our office came to an end in 2024. We have such gratitude for this group of young people who set the foundation for our first-ever structured YAC. This group of young people demonstrated courage, tenacity, and leadership during their tenure. The Advocate is deeply appreciative of these amazing youth for their work in making recommendations reflective of the needs of the young people we serve by providing their perspective and lived experience as youth in this province.

We thank these members for their contributions over the years, and for their support in welcoming and mentoring a new group of youth onto the Council. We have watched our founding members grow into incredible young adults and wish them all the best as they move forward in their lives.

The new members joining the Council reside throughout the province, representing northern, central and southern parts of the province, both urban and rural. We have continued to hold regular meetings and have heard from the youth on various topics that matter to them and are pressing or concerning issues for youth in Saskatchewan. The insights of these young people are invaluable. The youth of Saskatchewan are well represented by our new Council members, and we look forward to working with them over the next few years.



*"Thank you so much for the opportunities and experiences I've been able to have from being on the committee. It truly was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I feel like it's helped me grow into the person I am today."*

– Piper (founding YAC member)



*On November 2, 2024, Daniell (founding YAC member) appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights as a panel witness discussing "Aging Out of Foster Care". Daniell advocated for integrated service provision with funding for wrap-around approaches, standardized supports across the country, removing age limits for "aging out" of care, greater flexibility for youth moving provinces so they can continue to receive extended supports, and involving more youth in important conversations such as this.*



In October 2024, Alexis (founding YAC member) was presented the King Charles III Coronation Medal by the Honourable Russ Mirasty, former Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan. The King Charles III Coronation Medal was created to celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and honour those who have made a significant contribution to Canada. Alexis was awarded this honour for her work in developing an online Mental Wellness 30L high school course that is available to all students in the province.



In April 2024, the Honourable Russ Mirasty, former Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, hosted a visit by the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon. This was Her Excellency's official visit to Saskatchewan. The Advocate, her officials, and founding members of the Youth Advisory Council were invited to attend.



In November 2024, we held an in-person event celebrating our YAC members who had completed their terms and welcoming our new members, providing them an opportunity to meet in person. In addition to our new YAC learning about our office and our work, we got to know each other through some fun and team-building bowling.

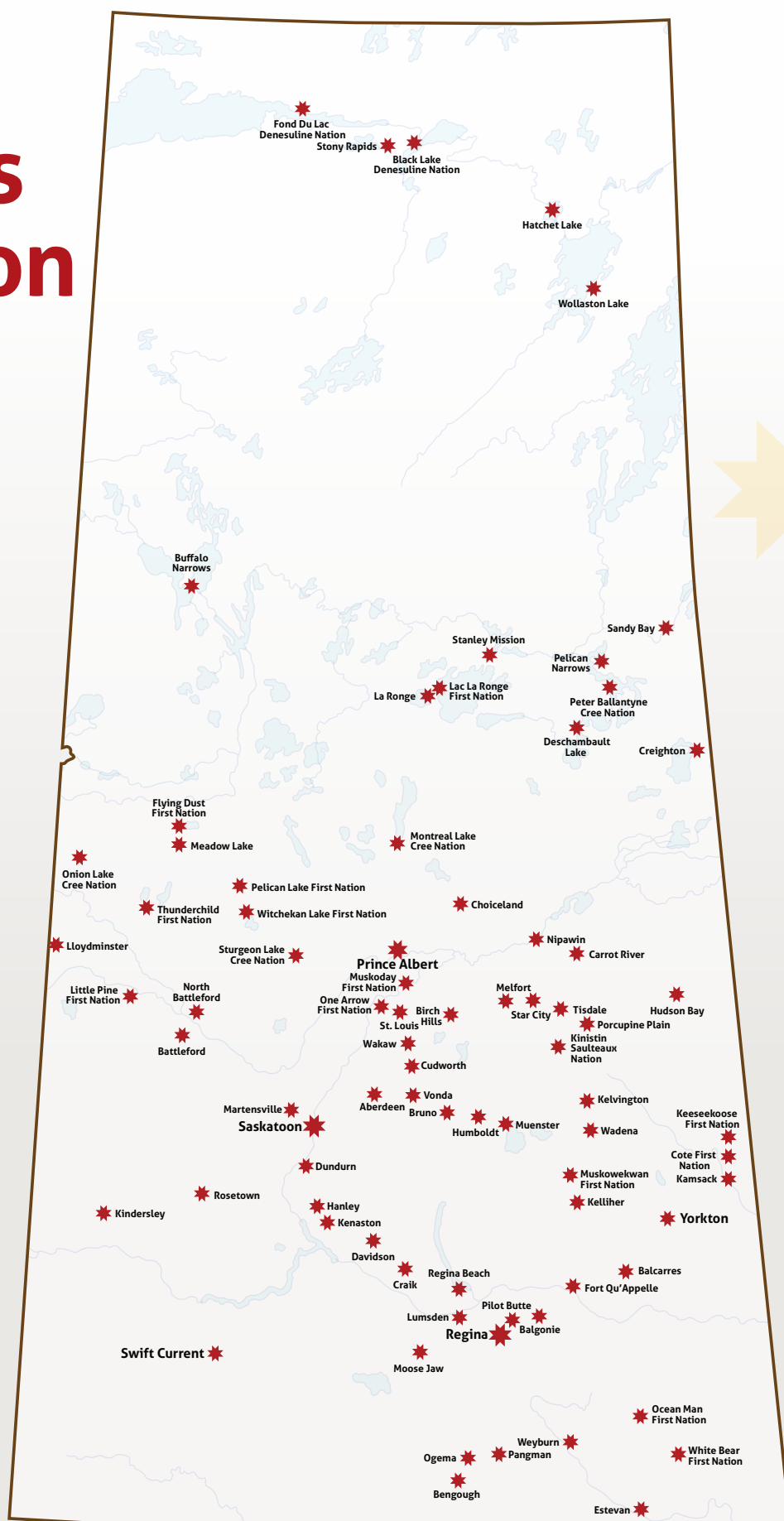




# Public Awareness & Education

## COMMUNITIES REACHED IN 2024

To uphold our strategic priority and legislated mandate to engage in public education, our staff travel across the province to meet with children, youth, their families, community members, and service providers. In 2024, our office engaged in over 500 public education events across Saskatchewan. Sharing information about our office and children's rights results in stakeholders having an increased awareness and willingness to reach out to our office for assistance.

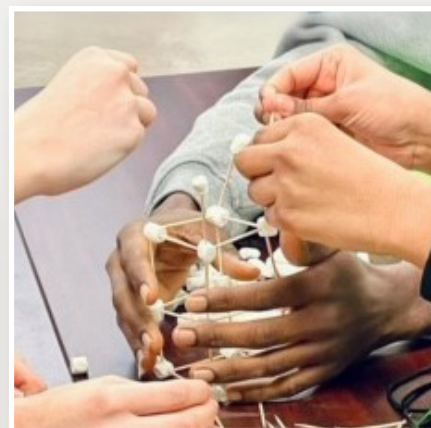
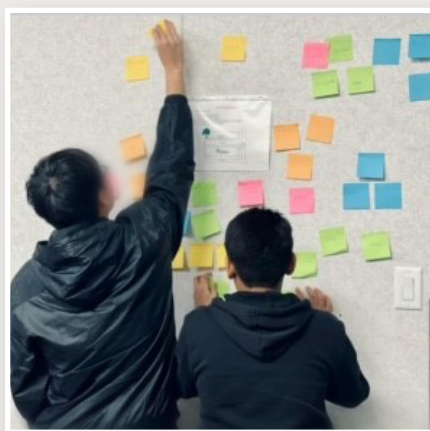


## SELF-ADVOCACY WORKSHOP

In 2024, we completed 79 sessions of our Speak for Yourself self-advocacy workshop, involving approximately 1357 children and youth. Since its inception in April 2022, our office has had the privilege of connecting with almost 6000 young people through this workshop. Teaching young people about their rights is key for them to know how to be strong advocates for themselves when facing issues and barriers that impact them.



*Speak For Yourself Workshop – Regina Open Door Society – January 2024*





## NATIONAL CHILD DAY

In 2024, our office celebrated National Child Day by hosting an event for children and youth who reside in group home care in Saskatoon. We facilitated educational activities to teach about the importance of National Child Day and about child and youth rights and self-advocacy. We thank all those who came to our event and appreciate the opportunity to connect, learn and celebrate this especially important day!



*Collaborative Colouring Activity – Children and youth designed individual pages which were placed together to create one large piece of artwork*



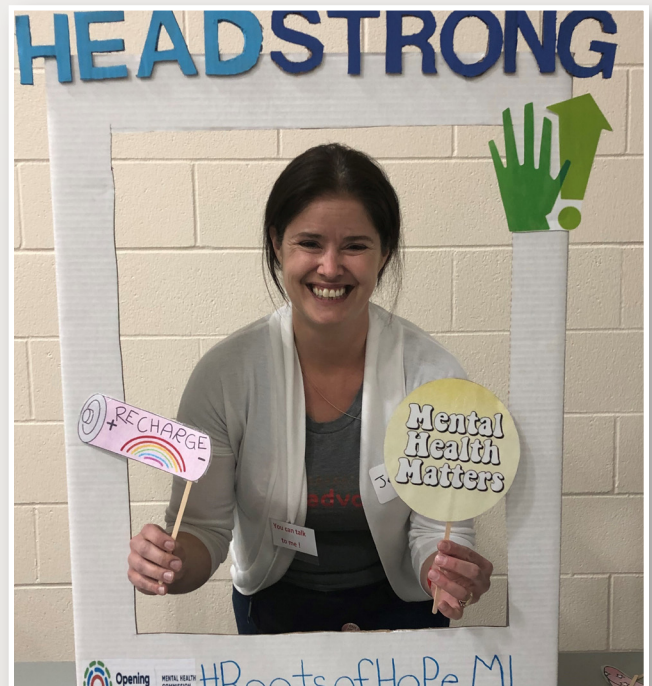
## CONFERENCES, EVENTS & OTHER ENGAGEMENTS



*National Day for Truth & Reconciliation with the Honourable Russ & Donna Mirasty – September 2024*



*Lakeview Elementary School Michif Kindergarten Class –  
Meadow Lake – June 2024*



*Roots of Hope Headstrong Summit – Meadow Lake – November 2024*





*Teddy Bear Picnic – North Battleford – May 2024*



*Ranch Ehrlo Youth Awards Night – Regina – May 2024*





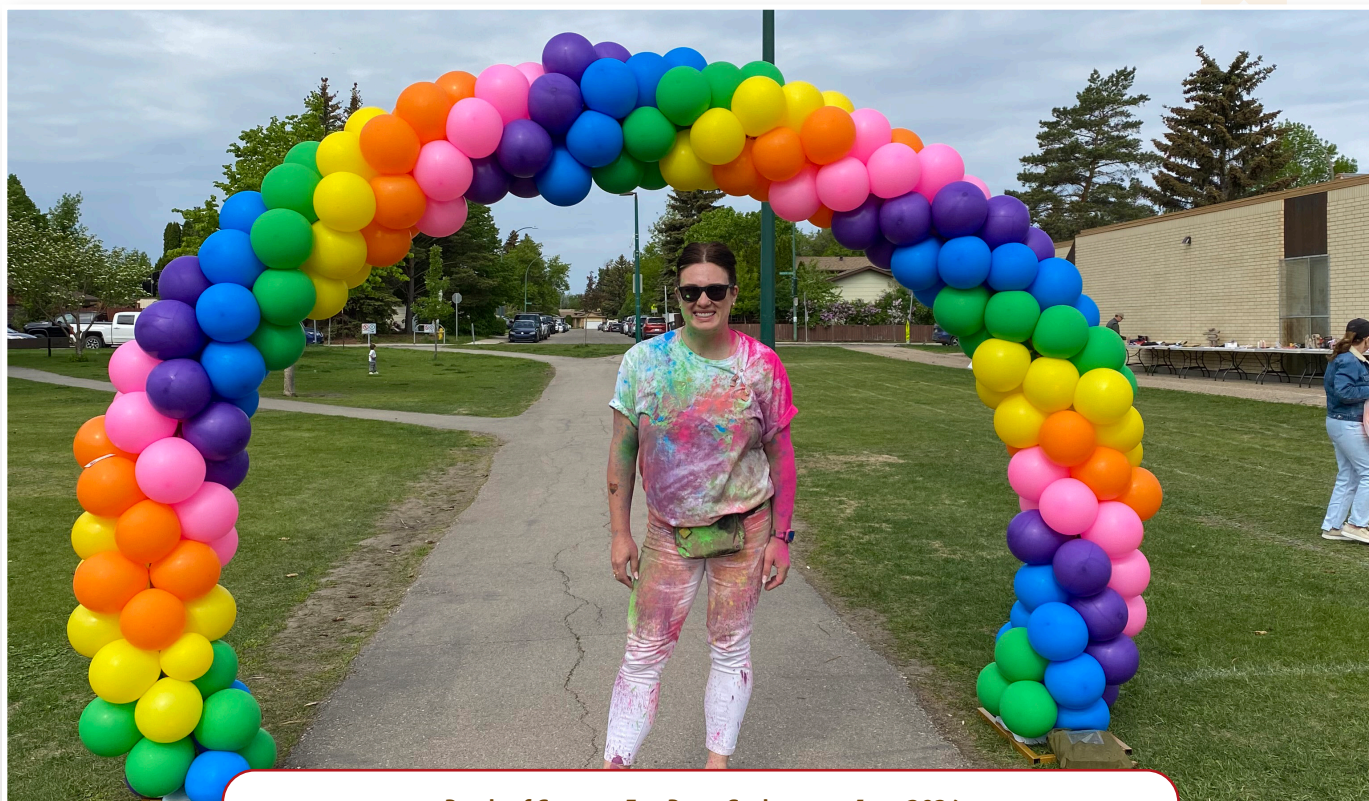
*Saskatchewan Youth in Care & Custody Network and The Evermore Centre Round Dance – Saskatoon – November 2024*



*Community Building Youth Futures Our Legacy Youth Conference – Prince Albert – April 2024*







*Beads of Courage Fun Run – Saskatoon – June 2024*



*Mother Teresa Middle School – Regina – June 2024*





**150 Year Celebration Pow Wow – Cote First Nation – July 2024**



**Fond Du Lac and Stony Rapids – June 2024**



**National Indigenous Peoples Day with Rebecca Strong – Prince Albert – June 2024**







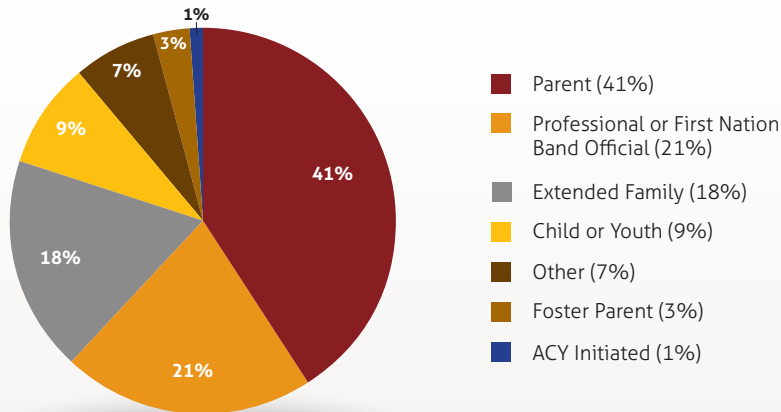
*Immigration Partnership Saskatoon Neighborhood Connections Fair – Saskatoon – September 2024*



*Pride Parade – Prince Albert – June 2024*

# Intake & Regional Advocacy

## WHO CONTACTED THE ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN 2024\*



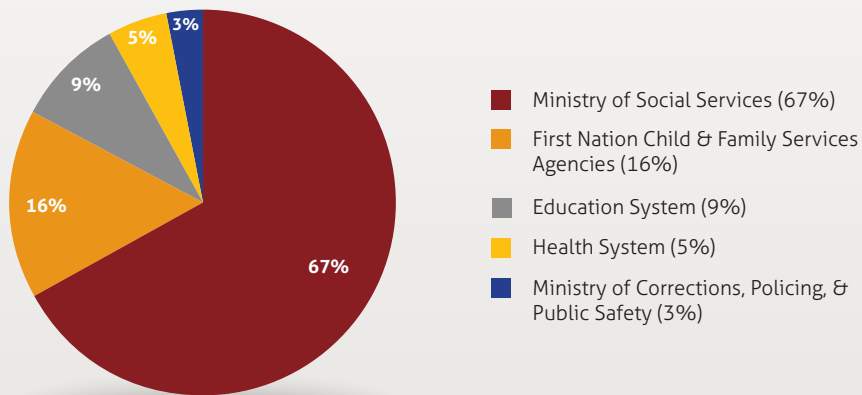
\* Advocacy files only.

Parent includes parents, stepparents, non-custodial parents, legal guardians, caregivers, alternate caregivers, and persons of sufficient interest.

Other includes interested third parties such as babysitters, neighbours, or anonymous callers.

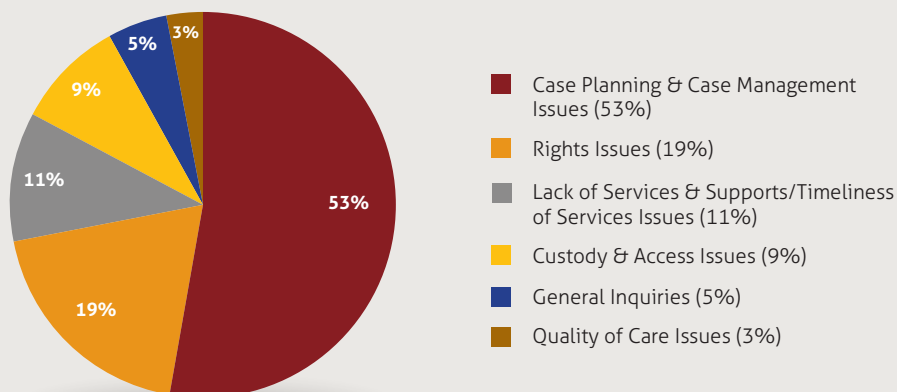
ACY Initiated is when our office initiates advocacy after becoming aware of a situation through means such as the media.

## MINISTRIES OR AGENCIES THE ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH RECEIVED CALLS ABOUT IN 2024\*



\* Advocacy files for ministries and agencies within our jurisdiction.

## MOST COMMON ISSUES FOR THE ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN 2024\*



\*General Inquiries represents issues that require a referral to another resource or agency.

Custody and Access Issues are beyond the mandate of our office. They also require referral to other resources or agencies.



Over the past several years, our office has reported an increase in the complexity and severity of issues faced by Saskatchewan children and youth. This upward trend continued in 2024 as our office received an increase of more than 600 advocacy issues. This is a strong indicator that children, youth, and their families are struggling to have their needs met due to the current social and economic conditions.

Some of the issues we handled pertained to the basic needs of children not being met (these issues nearly tripled over 2023), the health and safety concerns of physical living environments (these issues quadrupled over 2023), and callers that reported they lacked financial means to support children and youth (these issues doubled over 2023). There is no question that failure to meet children and youth's basic needs has compromised their well-being and fundamental human rights to live to their full potential. When not able to meet their basic needs, understandably the physical and mental health of children and youth will suffer.

Over the past decade, our office has also seen a steady year-over-year increase in young people who cannot access mental health and addictions services. In 2024, our advocacy on this issue was five times greater than we received in 2020.

Although there have been some positive changes and improvements to the services and supports available to young people experiencing mental health and/or addictions, gaps in services continue to exist, including but not limited to:

- Youth remaining in acute hospital care for extended periods of time, beyond their possible discharge dates, due to the lack of placements and supports available to safely place the young person back in the community;
- Young people repeatedly and frequently admitted to a hospital emergency room due to continued suicidal ideation or suicide attempts due to lack of outpatient services available within the community; and,
- Appropriate addictions in-patient services not being available to young people due to their geographical location or other factors, such as the youth's needs or behaviours posing a risk to others, which led to the denial of services.

The ongoing lack of supports led to delays in receiving the treatment the young people required and, at times, contributed to an escalation in mental health concerns and/or relapse or prolonged addiction concerns.

### UNCRC ARTICLE 28

*States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.*

In 2024, we also noted a substantive increase, nearly double from 2023, in issues pertaining to the lack of supports for children with disabilities and for children within the education system. Specific to the education system, in many situations, the student was on a modified educational plan — attending school in some capacity, however, their days were considerably shortened, and they were only permitted to be in their classroom or school for short periods of time. In some cases, students were being excluded from the school setting completely. Parents, extended family members and professionals who contacted us were concerned about that child's right to education (UNCRC Article 28) and standard of care (UNCRC Article 23), in addition to falling behind academically and developmentally. Our advocacy follow-up on these

### UNCRC ARTICLE 23

*States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community [...]. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care.*

cases found that planning was completed to the best of the ability of service providers involved, considering the resources available. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases, there was simply insufficient supports available to meet the demand, especially in rural and remote locations.

The overall majority of the issues we handled in 2024 pertained to case planning and case management. With human resource shortages facing many child-serving systems, case management has been negatively impacted. The issues related to failure or refusal to investigate child protection concerns doubled from 2023. In addition, issues regarding staffing concerns more than doubled, with many callers citing a lack of contact with their case workers as the primary issue. Our office received five times more requests over 2023 to assist callers in obtaining a new worker.

In addition, callers citing unreported child protection concerns more than doubled. In most of these cases, the callers perceived child welfare agencies as being unresponsive so stopped calling them. As mentioned in our 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports, case workers and service providers are striving to meet the needs of the families they serve, however, it has become increasingly difficult when positions are continuously vacant. Ministries and community-based organizations are actively attempting to address these human resource shortages with different incentives and initiatives; however, significant gaps remain. The social and economic challenges, and the increased complexity of the issues young people are experiencing, are exacerbated when children and youth face barriers in receiving services.

Our office continues to receive an increasing number of calls from professionals and First Nation band officials, equating to nearly 300 calls in 2024. Consulting with all available stakeholders results in more informed decision-making on the services young people and their families receive and increases the chances of children and youth's rights being respected and actualized; allowing young people to reach their full

potential and achieve an adequate standard of living to which they are entitled (UNCRC Article 27).

### UNCRC ARTICLE 27

*States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development [...].*

*States Parties [...] shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.*

The overall increase in the complex and multi-faceted nature of the issues that came to the attention of the Advocate in 2024 has been substantial. Our office engages our advocacy in these acute matters on a case-by-case basis to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and youth within the services and supports available within each child-serving sector. We utilize this data to inform and influence system change, in addition to holding the entities that serve children to account toward real and meaningful outcomes.

# Systemic Advocacy

## CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES REGULATIONS

Subsequent to amendment of *The Child and Family Services Act*, in 2024 the Advocate was invited to provide input into corresponding amendments to *The Child and Family Services Regulations*. Our office appreciates any opportunity to provide our independent lens to legislation, regulation, and policy development. While not all our feedback was implemented, elements of our submission that were accepted by government included clarification of the ability of a child or youth to request access to their own information, and information on a deceased family member, whether that information is held by the Ministry of Social Services or delegated First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies. These changes better protect the right of children and youth under UNCRC Article 8 to preserve their identity through receiving information related to their personal records and history, as well as information on their family relations.

### UNCRC ARTICLE 8

*States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.*

We had previously advocated for an independent process to appeal decisions related to information disclosure to be built into *The Child and Family Services Act*. Although this was not included within the Act, a review process overseen by an individual appointed by, and reporting to, the Minister was included within the Regulations. While it would be preferable for the reviewing body to be independent of the Ministry, we appreciate the inclusion of a review process within the Regulations. Our office made recommendations related to improving the

accessibility of the review process for young people, including the opportunity to request a review of a breach of privacy under the Act, and requiring the Minister to make a decision, and provide reasons for such, in a timely manner. These recommendations were not accepted.

The Advocate is discouraged that the Regulations did not embed language identifying the right of young people in care to communicate confidentially with the Advocate. While this right is codified within *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, it would be of benefit to children and youth for this to also be embedded within child protection legislation, as it is within *The Youth Justice Administration Act* and that Act's Regulations.

## MISSING PERSONS DATA STANDARDS - STATISTICS CANADA

The Advocate was invited to consult on Statistics Canada's Missing Persons Data Standards Project. The intent of this project is to advance the Calls for Justice arising from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) by improving consistency in reporting and investigative efforts. In 2018, we participated in the National Inquiry on MMIWG, where we put forward recommendations related to the collection of disaggregated data and the need for a national initiative to measure and report on outcomes for Indigenous children and youth within child welfare, education, and health (see our 2018 Annual Report). Through our consultation on the Data Standards Project, we shared our perspective on existing potential data sources, information needs, and risk factors. We advocated for direct consultation with Indigenous girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and also connected the consultation team with EGADZ Saskatoon, which has expertise in this area further to its development of a Risk Assessment and Missing Youth Saskatchewan app.

## OTHER SYSTEMIC ISSUES

The Advocate regularly reaches out to ministries, agencies of the government, and public health entities on issues that come to our attention with the potential to impact the interests and well-being of children and youth. For instance, our office connected with the Ministry of Health upon the closure of Valley Hill Treatment Centre to clarify reasons for the closure, discuss how the service needs of youth would continue to be met, and to ensure any operational and governance issues would not negatively impact youth in the future.

The Advocate also connected with the Ministry of Education when it announced the implementation of its policy on Personal Electronic Devices Responsible Use in Schools (i.e. the Cell Phone Policy). Our office reviewed the policy to ensure it considered students in relation to their privacy, safety and accommodation for their medical/learning needs. We also consulted with our Youth Advisory Council on the matter.

In both instances, we were satisfied with the steps being taken by the relevant Ministry and determined that no further systemic advocacy was required.

Our systemic work also includes monitoring trends arising from child death and critical injury notifications to our office (see Child Death & Injury/ Incident Analysis section of this report). In 2024, we noted a pattern related to harm caused by illicit drugs, such as fentanyl and methamphetamine, in children 0-5 years of age. Following some preliminary research, the Advocate triggered a systemic investigation into the efficacy of the child protection response in protecting very young children from the harms of exposure to these substances. This work is ongoing.

We also noted a concerning pattern related to the support and oversight provided by the Ministry of Social Services to some of its delegated First Nations Child and Family Services agencies, and the subsequent impact on services to children and youth. This prompted the Advocate to request and review the quality assurance processes implemented

between the Ministry and these agencies. In one case, the Ministry took additional action to further support improvements to service provision. Our assessment of related issues in several other cases is ongoing.

## Recommendations Update

Monitoring implementation of the Advocate's past and current recommendations is a substantial and continuous part of the work of our office. In 2024, significant work was done to follow-up on and monitor the implementation of open recommendations made to the various child-serving ministries, agencies of the government, and publicly funded health entities.

### MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FULLY COMPLETED

This past year, the Advocate closed five recommendations made to the Ministry of Social Services as fully completed. One of these had been a long-standing recommendation — initially made in 2006 — calling for the age of the child under *The Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA) to be raised. The former and current Advocate rigorously advocated for its implementation during pivotal points in the government's CFSA legislative review processes from 2012 until it stalled in 2015. However, our office continued to monitor and push for the implementation of this recommendation, viewing it as critical to the safety and well-being of children aged 16-18. Saskatchewan was one of only two provinces that had not made the change.

In 2023, the CFSA was finally amended to redefine a "child" from "an unmarried person actually or apparently under 16 years of age" to "a person under 18 years of age." This change will facilitate the provision of necessary supports to young people in this province who continue to be vulnerable, despite their age, as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. It also aligns the definition of a child with other provincial legislation and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. After nearly two decades of advocacy, we were pleased



to close this recommendation in 2024, once the commensurate regulations and policy changes had been finalized.

The Advocate also closed a recommendation calling for agreements between the Ministry and extended family caregivers to include a concrete plan for contact between the child and their biological family (when safe to do so). This change is a crucial step in ensuring children and youth in the care of extended family members or persons of sufficient interest have their right to family and identity fulfilled.

Our office was able to close a recommendation made in 2023, calling on the Ministry to include guidelines in policy on when and how to seek a warrant under *The Youth Drug Detoxification and Stabilization Act*. This addition will better equip case workers to support youth challenged with severe addiction. Another 2023 recommendation was also closed as the Ministry fulfilled its spirit by reflecting on actions taken to advance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action related to child welfare. We are encouraged by the Ministry's swift attention to, and action on, these recommendations.

We were also able to close one of the recommendations from our 2021 report, *Someone to Watch Over Us*, as the Ministry developed and staffed the Group Home Operational Oversight Unit, which is a permanent resource for group home operators that provides a clear point of contact for inquiries, assesses and supports program delivery, and identifies and responds to training needs.

Our office continues to engage with the Ministry to gather information and assess the implementation status of our other recommendations related to group home services, policy and oversight that are still in progress.

### PERSON OF SUFFICIENT INTEREST (PSI) PROGRAM

In 2023, our office released our special investigation report of the Person of Sufficient Interest (PSI) program, titled *In Their Sufficient Interest?* The Advocate made eight recommendations arising from the findings of that investigation. Our 2023 Annual

Report outlined the initial progress made by the Ministry, and we are encouraged that this progress continues. Efforts are being made to better inform both potential caregivers and Ministry staff of roles and responsibilities under a PSI order.

Our office was able to offer feedback on a guide developed by the Ministry to share with prospective caregivers. From the perspective of the Advocate, it is of utmost importance that potential caregivers are made aware of all legal options of support available to them and the child — and the differences between the long-term implications of each — before consenting to a PSI order. We have also offered suggestions for enhancing the permanency planning process to better assess whether a recommendation for a PSI order would be in the best interest of a child. The Ministry indicates that it is taking this feedback into consideration.

### MINISTRY'S REVIEW OF THE PSI PROGRAM

A significant development in 2024 was the Ministry's completion of its review of the PSI program in response to Recommendation #7 in our report. This review resulted in seven 'Key Action Areas for Improvement.' In early 2025, the Ministry released a multi-year project plan to address these action areas. Our office is still assessing the extent to which the Person of Sufficient Interest (PSI) Action Plan may fulfill our recommendations. If implemented, there is potential for several aspects of our recommendations to be addressed. These include enhancing the ability of staff to identify and assess the impacts of intergenerational trauma on potential PSI caregivers, developing standards to address quality of care concerns, and ensuring the views of a child are sought and documented in Annual Reviews. However, the timeline identified in the Ministry's Action Plan indicates that some necessary steps may not be taken until as late as 2028. Considering the historical concerns the Advocate and her predecessors have raised with the Ministry regarding the PSI program, and that the Advocate's report, *In Their Sufficient Interest?* was released in early 2023, this delay is discouraging.

Additionally, the Ministry's PSI Review and Action Plan do not address all elements the Advocate identified as requiring change. For instance, the Ministry has not yet put forward tangible actions related to preventing foster parents from being overloaded if/when recommending a PSI order for a child in their care, strengthening policy and practice to ensure a child has access to legal representation within a PSI application, offering increased support for a PSI caregiver who requires specialized training to meet the needs of a child, and exploring mechanisms to address non-compliance with PSI agreements. Our office continues to engage with the Ministry on these particular recommendations.

The Advocate appreciates the attention and resources provided by the Ministry in conducting its review of the PSI program, as per our recommendation. It is also positive that the Ministry included the voices of young people with lived experience in PSI care in its review. However, the Ministry had indicated to our office that we would have an opportunity to see a draft of its review prior to finalization. This did not occur, and the publication of the Ministry's review occurred before our office could comment.

The Advocate noted concerns with the incongruence between the findings of the review and the Ministry's overall conclusion that "[y]outh and most caregivers view PSI care as the preferred permanency planning option for children." While youth participants identified the ability to reside with extended family as a positive aspect of the PSI program, they called for enhanced services from the Ministry, including elements of support that are not embedded within the PSI program, such as:

- more frequent contact with caseworkers;
- more voice in their care; and,
- extended support past the age of 18.

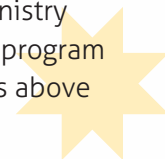
These findings align with what stakeholders reported to the Advocate in *In Their Sufficient Interest...?*, giving rise to our recommendations.

This raised the question then, of how the Ministry concluded that young people prefer the PSI program over other streams of care when the findings above suggest otherwise.

Upon further exploration in a meeting with the Ministry, the Advocate learned that youth participants in the Ministry's review were not meaningfully informed of other permanency options, such as a long-term wardship order, that would offer them the supports they were calling for, while still allowing them to remain with extended family as alternative caregivers - as opposed to placement in a foster home or group home care.

Therefore, the Ministry's conclusion that PSI care is "the preferred permanency planning option" is a misrepresentation of the review's findings.

As identified in our 2023 Annual Report, the Ministry has declined our recommendation to extend support for youth in PSI care to age 21. However, it must be noted that several of the young people who participated in the Ministry's PSI Review requested extended support past the age of 18 and financial support for post-secondary education. Accordingly, our office will continue to advocate for this change.





## MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS

### DESPERATELY WAITING RECOMMENDATIONS

Our office continues to monitor the implementation of the 14 recommendations put forward in our 2022 special report on the child/youth mental health and addictions system, titled *Desperately Waiting*. In our 2023 Annual Report, we acknowledged that significant action had been taken in relation to several recommendations considered “active” by the government. Throughout 2024, and into February 2025, we continued to engage with the inter-ministerial oversight team tasked with responding to the recommendations, meeting in person on two occasions and requesting additional written information.

We continue to be encouraged by progress on a number of recommendations, such as the expansion of the Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCb) initiative in schools. MHCb is now operating in 15 schools, across 14 school divisions — with more schools to be onboarded in the near future. Additionally, more service providers now have access to an electronic mental health record, as the Mental Health and Addictions Information System (MHAIS) has been rolled out to community services across the province. However, our office is still assessing whether this recommendation can be considered complete, as we learned that not all emergency departments or urban inpatient mental health and addiction units have seamless access to MHAIS and are still required to cross-reference multiple information systems or find other “workarounds.” As highlighted in *Desperately Waiting*, this was also a recommendation put forward by the Provincial Auditor, who has deemed it only partially implemented due to its lack of implementation within detoxification units and for all healthcare professionals, such as physicians.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministries of Health and Social Services continue to develop mental health homes for youth in fulfillment of our recommendation for “middle-tier”

care as a step-down option between inpatient care and community counselling. In addition to Garden of Hope in Saskatoon, a second home has opened in Regina, operated by Eagle Heart Centre Inc. There are already waiting lists for these resources, and efforts are being made to open more homes in Saskatoon and Prince Albert. As these resources are further developed, the Advocate will continue to assess whether their services meet the therapeutic intent of the recommendation.

We are also encouraged that steps are being taken to enhance communication and coordination across the continuum of service provision to children and youth in response to our Recommendation #13. A ‘Guide for Sharing Information about Children and Youth’ under *The Health Information Protection Act* (HIPA) has been developed. Our office has been invited to and is in the process of providing input on this guide. Communication protocols have been developed, or are in development, between mental health inpatient units, child protection services, justice services and schools. While these are not yet coordinated with each other, we look forward to seeing the next steps. Additionally, although not specifically related to this recommendation, the province continues to develop HOMEBASE Hubs under the Integrated Youth Services model, wherein services for young people are co-located in one accessible location. By virtue of proximity, necessary information-sharing and seamless transitions between services will be enhanced through this approach.

Unfortunately, wait times for mental health services continue to be a challenge and this is not unexpected considering the calls to our office on this matter and the human resource shortage across sectors. The Advocate acknowledges that efforts are being made to address the backlog of children waiting for psychological assessment and to create and fill child psychiatry and psychiatric nursing positions. Our office is awaiting updated information on wait times, including those for community counselling, and will continue to monitor.

<sup>1</sup> Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan. (December 2023). 2023 Report – Volume 2: Report of the Provincial Auditor to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. Regina, SK: Author (Retrieved from: [https://auditor.sk.ca/pub/publications/public\\_reports/2023/Volume%202/2023-report-volume-2.pdf](https://auditor.sk.ca/pub/publications/public_reports/2023/Volume%202/2023-report-volume-2.pdf))

We also note that substantive progress has been stalled in recommendations related to:

- the development of youth advisory councils;
- outreach-based mental health services;
- evaluation of the efficacy of existing addictions services on modern experiences of youth; and,
- the enhancement of culturally appropriate services for Indigenous children.

Despite having been considered 'active' by the government for one to two years, ministry and health authority representatives report that they are still in the information-gathering or scoping stage of projects aimed at addressing these recommendations.

According to the implementation timeline set out by the government, work on our recommendations to develop in-home support options for children struggling with mental health and addictions and adopting a consistent approach to consent based on capacity is set to begin in 2025.

Action on recommendations for improving the transition from youth to adult services, and for increasing mental health counsellors and Elders/ Knowledge Keepers in schools is not due to begin until 2026.

The Advocate appreciates the work being done, however, emphasizes the urgency with which all recommendations need to be fulfilled in order to meet the needs of, and improve outcomes for, children and youth.

### **SASKATCHEWAN'S CHILDREN & YOUTH STRATEGY**

Despite previously expressing optimism on Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Strategy, it has now been confirmed to our office that the government does not intend to incorporate the required structural elements to operationalize a strategy, such as identifying benchmarks of child well-being, setting immediate, medium and long-term goals, identifying key actions to achieve those goals, and developing indicators to measure results.

Our Recommendation #14 was for a Children's Strategy "to address and improve prevention

related to the social and environmental factors that negatively impact the well-being of children and youth." Without these elements, as written, Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Strategy remains only a helpful list of valuable resources for children and families but does not offer a path to move the dial forward on child well-being and for the government to be accountable to its provincial strategy to see if what it is doing is working for young people.

After nearly two years of advocating for the backend accountability of what has been publicized as a 'provincial strategy' for children and youth, the Advocate is discouraged that our office cannot consider this recommendation to be implemented. Without the key methodological components cited previously, that accompany any robust and fulsome strategy, it will continue to be unnecessarily difficult to identify specific deficiencies and pursue targeted improvements. With this, our recommendation cannot be met. We are continuing our discussions with the government on this matter.

As evidenced by the increasing risks to children and youth highlighted in the sections of this report on the complexity of advocacy issues and child death and injuries, the children of our province need a tangible and authentic strategy now more than ever.



## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

### BULLYING & THE USE OF PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS IN SCHOOLS

In 2021, our office made recommendations to the Ministry of Education to legislate enhanced protections and safeguards related to bullying and the use of physical restraints in schools. The Ministry has elected to take a policy, rather than legislative, approach in this regard. The Ministry advised that it hoped to have a finalized Respectful School policy (Bullying) released for the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year and that it anticipated beginning consultations with school divisions on a draft policy on the Use of Physical Restraint and Seclusion in Schools in the fall of 2024.

In early 2025, the Ministry of Education advised our office that work on these policies had not yet moved forward. We continue to advocate for the implementation of these recommendations.

### USE OF PREFERRED FIRST NAME & PRONOUNS BY STUDENTS

As indicated in our 2023 Annual Report, our recommendation for the Ministry of Education to amend its Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns by Students policy was closed as “declined” by the government after the content of the policy was embedded, without our recommended amendments, into legislation.

Our second recommendation was not impacted by the new legislation and remains open. That recommendation called upon the Ministry to increase the capacity of schools to provide supports to facilitate parental inclusion regarding matters related to gender identity, when appropriate and in the best interest of the student. This recommendation recalled our findings from other investigative and advocacy work, including *Desperately Waiting*, that more school supports for student well-being were already needed, even prior to the implementation of the requirements around consent.

In 2024, the Ministry of Education responded that it “partially accepts” this recommendation. The Ministry pointed towards a four-year funding agreement with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association that was reached in relation to the job action taken by educators in early 2024. The Ministry states that Boards of Education are expected to use this funding to provide supports and services, such as employing and retaining professionals whom it says, among other duties, will be able to support students as called for by our recommendation. We understand the results of the negotiations between the Teachers’ Bargaining Committee and Government-Trustee Bargaining Committee may also impact availability and sustainability of student supports. Our office continues to assess the status of this recommendation.

### REGISTERED INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

In 2024, our office also followed up with the Ministry of Education in its response to the recommendations in *Making the Grade: Moving Forward in Independent Education*.

The Ministry accepted, partially accepted or “accept[ed] in concept” 26 of the 36 recommendations put forward. For instance, we are encouraged that the Ministry committed to strengthening inspection and supervision forms and to adjustments to The Registered Independent Schools Policy and Procedures Manual. However, we note that the Ministry has not accepted, or fully accepted, any recommendations seeking amendments to *The Education Act, 1995* or *The Registered Independent Schools Regulations*.

Two of these recommendations relate to giving students the same access to their own records and protection of their privacy as is afforded to students in provincial schools. In this regard, we note that the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner, in its June 2024 report on its Proposed LA FOIP/FOIP Amendments, made a parallel recommendation that registered independent schools be considered similar to a board of education or a conseil scolaire and be made “local authorities” under *The Local*

*Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (LAFOIP).*<sup>2</sup> This would have the same effect on access to, and privacy of, information as called for by the Advocate in *Making the Grade*.

Additionally, although the Ministry of Education has not accepted recommendations related to better supporting registered independent schools in fulfilling their obligations under *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*, we note that the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has initiated “a [systemic] project aimed at improving the process of accommodation for students with disabilities in independent schools in Saskatchewan.” The SHRC stated in its Annual Report 2023-2024 that, “[t]his project is ongoing and will assist the Ministry of Education in responding to the recommendations of the Advocate’s report.”<sup>3</sup>

We are hopeful that collective advocacy around these issues will help support the Ministry in moving forward on the recommendations it has not accepted. The Advocate has invited a meeting with the Ministry to discuss and better understand any barriers to implementation for those recommendations either not accepted, or not fully accepted. We look forward to further engagement with the Ministry on these important recommendations.

## Systemic Advocacy with the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

The Advocate continues to serve as the President of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) for a second term. In this capacity, the Advocate engaged with the Senate in support of Bill S-282 — An Act respecting a national strategy for children and youth in Canada. Bill S-282 passed a second reading in the Senate in June 2024 and was referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology for consideration. On

behalf of the CCCYA, our office led the submission of a brief to the Committee that both supported the Bill and put forward suggestions on how it could be further strengthened.

The Advocate was also invited to appear as a witness before the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights in its Study on Aging Out of Foster Care. In her dual role as Saskatchewan Advocate and CCCYA President, Dr. Broda appeared virtually before the Committee. Our office also submitted a written brief to the Committee on behalf of the Saskatchewan Advocate as part of our advocacy for youth on the matter of aging out of care. This brief identified the rights and vulnerabilities of children and youth in care, the challenges associated with aging out of care, and a potential role for the federal government in supporting provinces to fulfill their responsibilities to young people transitioning to independence. Our office successfully advocated for the Senate Committee to hear directly from young people who had lived experience with being in care, resulting in one of the founding members of our Youth Advisory Council being invited to appear as a witness before the Committee to share her perspective, experiences and recommendations (see Youth Advisory Council section of this report).

### Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

*The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) is an association of statutory officers of the Legislatures in their respective provinces and territories. Each holds a legislative mandate to hold their government to account for the services provided to children and youth, to uphold their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to do so in accordance with their provincial legislation. The CCCYA works collectively to address mutual areas of concern that impact young people nationally (cccy.ca).*

<sup>2</sup>Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner. (June 2024). Proposed LA FOIP/FOIP Amendments. Regina, SK: Author (Retrieved from: [https://oipc.sk.ca/assets/la-foip\\_foip\\_explanatory-document.pdf#page=23](https://oipc.sk.ca/assets/la-foip_foip_explanatory-document.pdf#page=23))

<sup>3</sup>Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. (2024). Annual Report 2023-2024. Saskatoon, SK: Author. (Retrieved from: <https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/annual-report-2023-2024/systemic-initiatives-2023-2024/>)



Unfortunately, with the prorogation of Parliament on January 6, 2025, all Senate business, including work on Bill S-282 and the Study on Aging Out of Foster Care, was terminated. Our office will monitor whether these projects are re-introduced or resume in the next session of Parliament.

As CCCYA President, the Advocate also participated in a virtual meeting with the Senior Officials Committee Responsible for Human Rights<sup>4</sup> in December 2024. The purpose of this meeting was to hear updates on the work of all levels of government since the 2023 Forum of Ministers on Human Rights (FMHR) (discussed in our 2023 Annual Report) and to discuss agenda items for the 2025 FMHR to be co-hosted by the Government of Saskatchewan.

As the 2025 FMHR will focus, in part, on Canada's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), our office advocated for discussion to include enhancing support for students with disabilities/intensive needs in schools. We also drew attention to the correlation between the national discussions occurring at the Senate level regarding youth aging out of government care, and obligations under the CRPD to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities in care.



*Hope's Home Summer Camp – Christopher Lake - August 2024*

<sup>4</sup>The Senior Official Committee Responsible for Human Rights (SOCHR) is composed of federal, provincial and territorial representatives at the Assistant Deputy Minister level. The SOCHR was formed to enhance collaboration among the different levels of government to strengthen information-sharing and offer leadership on Canada's adherence to international human rights instruments, such as the UNCRC.

# Child Death & Injury/Incident Analysis

While our jurisdiction to investigate child deaths and critical injuries extends to other government ministries, agencies, and publicly funded health entities, the Advocate has a formal notification process with the child welfare and youth justice systems. The Advocate is notified by the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety when a child or youth in receipt (or recently in receipt) of child welfare or justice services dies or is involved in a critical injury/incident that will have a significant impact on their life.

In the child welfare system, this may include cases of active investigations into abuse or neglect, and where children are being supported to stay with their families or to live independently. It may also include children in care or in the custody of a person of sufficient interest. In the justice system, this most often involves young people serving a community sentence and, more rarely, those in a custody facility.

Each ministry conducts its own review of these circumstances to determine whether they could yield learnings for service improvement and report their findings and action plans to our office. We assess each case to determine whether further investigation is required and to identify risks and service provision issues to young people that may require systemic advocacy.

While the circumstances of each child's death or injury vary, within our assessment of cases arising from the Ministry of Social Services and its delegated First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies, we have noted persistent issues related to case practice and policy compliance. Within its internal reviews, the Ministry often concludes that these lapses would not have contributed to the injury or death in question. However, children and youth touched by

this system are among the most vulnerable and are entitled to a system operating at optimum capacity to ensure their rights to safety, protection and well-being are safeguarded. The Advocate continues to monitor these issues as we assess opportunities for systemic advocacy.

Injury notifications received from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety highlight an increase in youth serving community sentences experiencing significant incidents of violence. These incidents vary in type, including 11 youth incurring stab wounds, three being victims of physical assault and one youth having been intentionally hit by a motor vehicle and are external to the Ministry services provided to youth. In 2020, we noted an alarming escalation in violence against children and youth in both the justice and child welfare systems, which appeared to correlate with pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this trend dissipated over the last few years, this recent surge is concerning. Our office will continue to assess and monitor this trend, however, the current social and economic conditions that children and youth are facing may be a contributory factor.

Despite these challenges, our aggregate review of notifications received from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing, and Public Safety in 2024 illustrates the benefit of comprehensive and competency-based risk assessment and case management practices. Overall, we found that appropriate planning, inclusive of clinical supervision referrals and follow-up at times when challenges with mental health were a factor, was done well. In the very few instances where risk assessments or case planning documentation were not completed within policy requirements, it was due to factors beyond the control of ministry staff, such as difficulties locating the young person despite significant efforts to do so.

The Advocate applauds this Ministry for its efforts to ensure that their case management model is competency-based, leading to better outcomes for the youth it serves.

## DRUG TOXICITY

Among the notifications received by our office over the last two years, we have noted a theme related to deaths caused by accidental drug toxicity. In particular, methamphetamine and fentanyl appear to pose the largest risk to young people. In 2024, five youth between the ages of 18 and 20 died from combined drug toxicity. All five young people had methamphetamine in their system at time of death, and four of the five had also ingested a form of fentanyl. The death of a sixth young person is suspected to be related to drug toxicity, although official confirmation has yet to be received from the Coroner.

Over the course of 2024, we also received confirmation that two additional deaths in 2023 were the result of combined drug toxicity.<sup>5,6</sup> This brings deaths in 2023 of children and youth involved in either the child welfare or justice systems due specifically to drug toxicity to seven – six of which involved methamphetamines and/or various alterations of fentanyl. (One of these 2023 deaths involved a toddler exposed to fentanyl).

The lethality of illicit drugs has increased substantially, with a corresponding increase in deaths due to fentanyl and methamphetamine in the general population, leading to tragic outcomes. The Government of Canada warns that, “Fentanyl is commonly found in the toxic illegal drug supply and is the main driver of overdose-related harms and deaths in Canada. You can’t see, taste or smell fentanyl, and a few grains can be enough to kill you.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, according to a study in the United States, methamphetamine has increased in potency 130% since 2007.<sup>8</sup>

Recognizing this imminent risk to young people, the Advocate made a recommendation in *Desperately Waiting*, that:

The Ministry of Health and the Health Authorities formally evaluate the current detox and addictions treatment model to determine whether it is appropriate for meeting the current needs of youth in relation to the:

- evolving type and severity of problematic substance use;
- availability and accessibility of inpatient treatment;
- transitions between detox and inpatient treatment; and,
- transitions from inpatient treatment to the community.

The government accepted this recommendation in 2022, but did not schedule work to begin on its implementation until 2024. At the beginning of 2024, the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority reported that they were exploring resources to determine the scope of their evaluation. However, it was not until February 2025 that our office was advised a proposal had been created, and a working group had been developed to begin this work.

Due to the increasing risk of these substances to young people in Saskatchewan, we continue to advocate for the urgent implementation of this recommendation, so that the addictions system can better meet the needs of our young people.

<sup>5</sup>Our office also received confirmation that another death in 2023 was caused by acute alcohol toxicity.

<sup>6</sup>This information was not available at the time our 2023 Annual Report was released.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/overdose-crisis-toxic-illegal-drug-supply.html>

<sup>8</sup>Meays, B. et al. (2019). ‘Children exposed to methamphetamine in settings where the drug is being used’. *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 104, September 2019, 104393 (Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104393>)



Older youth who use or misuse substances are not the only ones at risk. Over the last five years, our office has been notified of nine deaths and two critical injuries of children under the age of five, in which the child had been exposed to illicit drugs, such as methamphetamine and fentanyl. Two of these deaths and both critical injuries were directly caused by drug toxicity, while the cause in six of the seven other deaths was “undetermined.” All of these children had some level of involvement with the child welfare system.

With drug fatalities increasing in the general population, we have been monitoring the risk of exposure of young children to these substances and, therefore, risk of harm. Accordingly, the Advocate commenced a systemic investigation in 2024 to explore the efficacy of the child protection response in protecting very young children from the harm of exposure to these illicit — and lethal — drugs.

### UNCRC ARTICLE 33

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.*



## 2024 CHILD DEATH DATA

Ethnicity	Total: 41
First Nations and Métis <sup>9</sup>	34
Non-First Nations or Métis	7
Unknown	0
Age	Total: 41
0 to 5	15
6 to 10	4
11 to 15	6
16 to 18	10
19+	6
Type of Service at Time of Death <sup>10,11</sup>	
CFS – In Care	9
CFS – Receiving Other Services	16
CFS – Received Services Prior to Death (In Care or Other)	11
Corrections – Custody (Open and Secure)	0
Corrections – Community	6
Corrections – Received Services Prior to Death (Custody or Community)	0

## 2024 CAUSES OF DEATH

Cause	Total: 41
Cause Not Available Yet <sup>12</sup>	14
Undetermined	3
Suicide	5
Medically Fragile <sup>13</sup>	3
Homicide (Charges Laid or Conviction)	3
Motor Vehicle Collision/Crash	1
Hit By Motor Vehicle	0
Fire	3
Illness	0
Drowning	2
Drug/Alcohol Toxicity (Accidental)	5
Other	2 <sup>14</sup>

## Update – 2023 Causes of Deaths

At the time our 2023 Annual Report was published, information on the cause of death for 16 children and youth was not available. We have now received this information for 12 of these young people.

Six of these cases involved infants one year of age or less, whose cause of death was deemed “Undetermined” by the Saskatchewan Coroners Service. In five of these six cases — although it could not be definitively determined as contributing to death — sleep-associated risk factors were identified as being present.

Three children or youth died of accidental drug or alcohol toxicity. One infant died of an accidental burn, and one medically fragile child died of complications of their medical condition.

Finally, while the death of one youth was understood to be the result of a medical event, it was not investigated by the Coroners Service. Therefore, an official cause cannot be reported.

We continue to await official information on the cause of the remaining four deaths that occurred in 2023.

<sup>9</sup>This category includes children and youth who are Métis, Status and Non-Status First Nations.

<sup>10</sup>The Advocate is notified of the death of a child or youth who is currently receiving, or has recently received, child and family services (CFS) from the Ministry of Social Services or by a provincially delegated First Nations Child and Family Services agency. CFS – “Other Services” may include active investigations into neglect and abuse, in-home support services, support services to older youth transitioning to independence, and children and youth living in the care of a “person having sufficient interest”. The Advocate is also notified of deaths of young people currently receiving, or who have recently received, services from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing & Public Safety (Corrections). These notifications include youth who are in custody (either sentenced or remanded) and those serving a community sentence.

<sup>11</sup>The numbers under this heading total one higher than the number of deaths, as one youth was dually involved with both Child and Family Services (CFS) and Corrections.

<sup>12</sup>When available, information reported regarding the cause of death is determined from Coroner’s Reports, which are pending for a number of 2024 deaths. In the absence of a Coroner’s Report, cause of death may be obtained from information reported by the Ministry involved or other reliable sources. The category of “Cause Not Available Yet” is used when the Advocate has not yet received reliable information on the cause of death. This is to be distinguished from the category of “Undetermined”, which is used by the Coroner where the cause of death has been reviewed by the Coroner but cannot be determined.

<sup>13</sup>The term “medically fragile” is used by the Advocate to describe the death of a child or youth that was caused by a pre-existing condition or circumstances that were likely to lead to their death. This is different than the category of “illness,” which refers to a new or unexpected natural disease.

<sup>14</sup>One of these children died by choking. The other died as a result of a heart attack brought on by chronic substance use disorder.

## 2024 CHILD CRITICAL INJURY/INCIDENT DATA

Ethnicity	Total: 48
First Nations and Métis <sup>15</sup>	47 <sup>16</sup>
Non-First Nations or Métis	1
Unknown	0
Age	Total: 48
0 to 5	4
6 to 10	0
11 to 15	15
16 to 18	24
19+	5
Type of Service at Time of Injury/Incident (by child/youth) <sup>17,18</sup>	
CFS – In Care	11 <sup>19</sup>
CFS – Receiving Other Services	5 <sup>20</sup>
CFS – Received Services Prior to Death (In Care or Other)	1
Corrections – Custody (Open and Secure)	2 <sup>21</sup>
Corrections – Community	36
Corrections – Received Services Prior to Death (Custody or Community)	0

## 2024 CAUSES OF CRITICAL INJURY/INCIDENT

Cause	Total: 48
Suicide Attempt/Ideation	19 <sup>22</sup>
Self-Harm	0
Motor Vehicle Collision/Crash	0
Hit by Motor Vehicle	1 <sup>23</sup>
Drug/Alcohol Toxicity (Accidental)	1
Assault with a Knife or Blade	11
Shooting	4
Physical Assault - Other	3
Sexual Assault	3
Burn	0
Fall	1
Suspected Non-accidental and/or Child Abuse	1
Medical Condition	1
Illness	1
Other	2 <sup>24</sup>

<sup>15</sup>This category includes children and youth who are Métis, Status and Non-Status First Nations.

<sup>16</sup>In 2024, there were 48 critical injuries/incidents involving 42 children and youth. Three youth attempted suicide a total of nine times.

<sup>17</sup>The Advocate is notified of the death of a child or youth who is currently receiving or has recently received, child and family services (CFS) from the Ministry of Social Services or by a provincially delegated First Nations Child and Family Services agency. CFS – "Other Services" may include active investigations into neglect and abuse, in-home support services, support services to older youth transitioning to independence, and children and youth living in the care of a "person having sufficient interest". The Advocate is also notified of deaths of young people currently receiving, or who have recently received, services from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing & Public Safety (Corrections). These notifications include youth who are in custody (either sentenced or remanded) and those serving a community sentence.

<sup>18</sup>This total is seven higher than the total number of injuries, as the Advocate learned that seven youth involved in notifications received from the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety were also in the care of — or receiving services from — the Ministry of Social Services (MSS). Due to differences in reporting criteria internal to the ministries, the Advocate was not notified by MSS of these injuries.

<sup>19</sup>The Ministry of Social Services notified our office of five critical injuries/incidents involving children or youth in care that met its criteria for notification. However, the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety notified our office of an additional six youth who experienced an injury that met its criteria for notification, and who were also in care at the time.

<sup>20</sup>The Ministry of Social Services notified our office of four critical injuries/incidents involving children or youth receiving services that met its criteria for notification. However, the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety notified our office of one additional youth who experienced an injury that met its criteria for notification, and who was also in receipt of services from MSS at the time.

<sup>21</sup>This reflects one youth who attempted suicide twice.

<sup>22</sup>This number involves 13 youth, three of whom attempted suicide multiple times.

<sup>23</sup>This youth was intentionally hit by a motor vehicle.

<sup>24</sup>These youth did not sustain an injury. Rather, we received notifications of these incidents from the Ministry of Social Services, as it determined that they required review. One youth was charged with manslaughter in the accidental death of another person, and another youth had multiple admissions to secure detox due to severe substance misuse.

# The Next Year & Beyond

Our work in 2024 illustrates that children, youth, and families continue to face significant, co-occurring, and deeply complex issues due to a range of hardships, resulting not only from the current social and economic conditions, but also due to a lack of, and/or barrier to, services required to assist in meeting their basic needs. Children and youth are at the mercy of not only the issues they face day-to-day but also the deficiency in the systems to provide the services these young people desperately need for their safety, protection, and well-being.

While we acknowledge significant investments, particularly in mental health and addictions, we will continue to support, while at the same time, hold the government and all entities that serve children to account for the services it provides across all sectors.

We anticipate that the complexity of the issues children and youth are experiencing will continue to increase, and that these cases will continue to require more time and resources to achieve resolution to ensure that young people receive the services to which they are entitled, as is their right.

As we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, we will be setting our new strategic priorities for 2025-2030 and set goals and actions that will continue our momentum systemically, and to continue working to have government implement our recommendations. This will include meeting regularly with all child-serving sectors, agencies, health entities, and the government overall to work toward our goal that a meaningful child and youth strategy is actualized.



# Budget

Non-Statutory Expenditures	2023-24 Budget	2024-25 Budget
Personal Services	\$2,122,000	\$2,122,000
Contractual Services	\$490,705	\$500,705
Advertising, Printing and Publishing	\$52,580	\$53,540
Travel and Business	\$99,265	\$104,265
Supplies and Services	\$9,810	\$8,850
Capital Assets	\$12,640	\$12,640
Budgetary Total	\$2,787,000	\$2,802,000
Statutory Expenditures		
Personal Services	\$239,000	\$239,000
Statutory Total	\$239,000	\$239,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,026,000</b>	<b>\$3,041,000</b>





# Advocate For Children & Youth Staff

(at December 31, 2024)

**Saskatchewan Advocate  
for Children and Youth**

Lisa Broda

**Deputy Advocate**

Leeann Palmer

**Director, Advocacy**

Jacqueline Peters

**Director, Investigations &  
Systemics**

Marci Macomber

**Executive Administrative  
Assistants**

Michelle Beattie

Sara Lindberg

**Manager, Human Resources**

Wanda George

**Manager, Finance and  
Administration**

Caroline Sookocheff

**Manager, Communications**

Kendall Horan

**Investigator**

Virginia Lane

**Regional Advocates**

Terri Chatterson

Christie Jesse

Jennifer Peterson

Alicia Serhan

Crimson Taylor





## **UNCRC Article 2**

Protection from discrimination



## **UNCRC Article 3**

Protection of the best interests of the child

## **UNCRC Article 6**

Right to survival and development

## **UNCRC Article 12**

Freedom of opinion and right to be heard





## SASKATCHEWAN ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

500 - 350 3rd Ave N., Saskatoon, SK Canada S7K 6G7

Email: [contact@saskadvocate.ca](mailto:contact@saskadvocate.ca)

Phone: 306.933.6700 | Toll-free: 1.800.322.7221



For more info, visit [saskadvocate.ca](http://saskadvocate.ca)



SASKATCHEWAN  
**advocate**  
FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH