



Statement

Nov. 20, 2017

For Immediate Release

Today, as we mark National Child Day and the beginning of Child Rights Education Week (Nov. 20-26), we encourage federal, provincial and municipal governments, and all Canadians, to remember the fundamental rights of children and youth. To recognize this important day at our Office, I am stepping aside from my job and letting youth leader and former youth in care Cheyenne Andy become Representative for the day. Cheyenne will be meeting with my team members, learning about the Office, and letting us know – from the perspective of a youth who has lived experience – her thoughts on how to ensure child rights are upheld in B.C. For Cheyenne and for all staff at our Office, ensuring that the rights of all children and youth are upheld is one of our key priorities.

Child rights are more than a concept; they are clearly outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, a treaty ratified by the Canadian government in 1991. The *UNCRC* is based on an understanding of the fundamental worth of all children.

Among the youth we employ at our Office, we have an established Social Media Youth Team who, over the past two years, have done a substantial amount of work on promoting child rights. Examples include the creation of YouTube videos such as *Rights You Didn't Know You Have* (<https://youtu.be/J3nSjg4nqDY>), a podcast (<http://www.rcybc.ca/louis-world-podcast>), and graphic images. To mark Child Rights Education Week, the team has created a series of social media graphics asking youth to comment on how well they feel their rights are being upheld. We'll be posting these on our Facebook (B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth and RCYBC Youth), Twitter (@rcybc and @rcybcyouth) and Instagram (@rcybcyouth) accounts all week.

Just because child and youth rights are clearly laid out in the *UNCRC*, however, does not mean everyone is familiar with them – a situation that needs to change. Among its 54 Articles, the *UNCRC* ensures that children have the right be heard (Article 12), the right to food, clothing and shelter (Article 27), the right to practice one's own culture (Article 30), the right be free from abuse (Articles 19, 34, 35, 36, 37), the right to health care (Article 24) and the right to education (Article 28).

Recently, former youth in care and their allies and supporters gathered at the Victoria Legislature to meet with government members and rally for public support of their rights. They came to communicate their own often difficult experiences of having to fight to ensure their rights were upheld.

“This is an unprecedented day for youth in care, to be able to speak to those in government directly and so many at one time,” said youth organizer Dylan Cohen, a former youth in care. “I’ve struggled to be heard, but today I feel heard.”

The rally was inspiring and we admire the youth who took part; however, we believe that no child or youth should ever have to struggle to be heard or to have their rights respected.

On National Child Day, we urge everyone to stand up for and actively promote child rights. This is especially crucial in relation to the rights of Indigenous children and youth, who continue to be dramatically over-represented in the child welfare system.

Although Canada is doing well in some areas, our governments are clearly falling short with respect to child rights in others, such as informing children and adults about child rights, and including child rights in school curricula. As one Indigenous youth told us, “*Kids and foster parents need to know child rights at an earlier age and what to do about it.*”

As people who are committed to child and youth well-being, all staff at our Office strive to ensure that children and youth are aware of their rights. It is often difficult for a child or youth to recognize when their rights are being violated. That is why we call upon individual Canadians, as well as governments, to make it a priority to be aware of the *UNCRC*, to take a stand in supporting child rights, and to take action in ensuring the rights of the children and youth in our lives are protected.

What does taking action look like? It means taking the initiative to become informed about child rights. It means helping children and youth in our communities to be aware of their rights. It also means speaking up when a child or youth needs help. And it most certainly means expecting governments to comply with the *UNCRC*, and holding them accountable to do so.

There is no better time than National Child Day to reaffirm our commitment as Canadians and British Columbians to child rights. We hope that everyone, whatever their position, whatever their role, will join us in this commitment to upholding and taking action on promoting child rights. The children and youth of B.C. need – and have a right to expect – nothing less.

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