



Statement

Nov. 20, 2020

For immediate release

National Child Day

November 20th marks 31 years since the ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. The *UNCRC* was signed and ratified by 196 nations – more than any other human rights treaty in history – attesting to the global significance of its universal values and principles. The Convention lays out the rights to health, safety, well-being, culture and education to which every child is entitled, and it provides the foundation for all the work we do here at the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

National Child Day serves as an important reminder that we must continually and creatively work together to ensure that all children and youth have their rights appropriately met – especially during difficult times such as we are all in right now. My Office recently sponsored a report by Simon Fraser University's Children's Health Policy Centre that revealed that the pandemic will continue to elevate mental health risks in children and youth in B.C. Young people who are most vulnerable to heightened anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioural challenges and other mental health disorders were already facing difficulties before the pandemic due to the systemic inequities, inequalities and judgment that they and their families experience. Some of those most vulnerable include children with disabilities, youth in care, First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous children and racialized children.

COVID-19 has imposed enormous challenges on children and youth and their families, particularly for those whose needs were not being adequately met before the pandemic. In addition to mental health concerns, in our Office we are seeing acute needs for youth who are transitioning out of government care, children and youth with special needs, youth who use substances and young people experiencing family violence. This is a crucial time to better support all children and youth – but particularly those who experience greater adversities - so that the challenges they face now do not follow them into adulthood.

This year's National Child Day theme is #seenandheard. At RCY, we bear witness to thousands of young people's stories every year. Many are heartbreaking and troubling, propelling us to advocate for systems change. Some stories are inspiring and humbling. We hear from children and youth in communities across B.C. who are resilient, thoughtful and creative and also angry, sad and disappointed that their voices and perspectives are not valued. We all can and must do better. This past year, I have had the honour of listening to and learning from youth who have been homeless, youth who have struggled with transitioning out of government care, children and youth with FASD, youth who use substances, and children who have a vision for the care they want and need. Whether you are a family member, caregiver, teacher, service provider, neighbour, friend or advocate, how might you see and hear the children and youth in your life?

On this National Child Day, I encourage you to read the *UNCRC* Articles and introduce them to the youth you know. You can find a full copy [here](#), and a child-friendly version [here](#).

Any young person in B.C. who feels they are not being heard or that their rights are not being met can contact my Office. Our Advocates can be reached by phone (1-800-476-3933), by email (rcy@rcybc.ca) or by instant chat on our website at rcybc.ca.

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Representative for Children and Youth