



Statement

Dec. 7, 2020
For immediate release

I want to express my profound sorrow and grief – and that of RCY staff – over the loss this weekend of a shining star of an advocate for young people, Katherine McParland. We learned yesterday of Katherine's untimely death; to say we are broken-hearted doesn't come close. We are gutted by this devastating loss.

Katherine was a bright light who suffered much in her earlier life. She was open about her time in foster care and her experience of aging out into homelessness, and she never forgot the desperation of those days. With a single-minded resolve, and with characteristic tenacity, fierceness and grace, Katherine set about changing the world, starting in Kamloops where she founded A Way Home Kamloops and then growing her reach and influence both provincially and nationally. She was determined to do everything in her power to change the trajectory of youth homelessness, and to make life better for the youth who would come after her. In her own words, "*Our most horrific life experiences that cause the deepest wounds can sometimes become our life purpose.*" That was certainly the case for Katherine.

Countless people have been touched by Katherine's warmth and inspired by her passion for social justice, her huge heart, her deep intellect and her unceasing desire to learn, grow and make a lasting difference in the world. She was a tireless advocate for youth who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness and she put young people and their voices at the centre of all she did. Her report *From Marginalized to Magnified – Youth Homelessness Solutions From Those with Lived Expertise*, done in collaboration with my Office, was a shining example of this. She put youth in the driver's seat, and not only listened to what they had to say but insisted that government and decision-makers did the same. Young people felt valued, respected and heard by her. She helped people see that homelessness is grounded in systems failures, not the failings of the young people experiencing it.

At my Office, we were fortunate enough to work closely with Katherine and to support her in pursuing her dream of ending youth homelessness. Her passing leaves a huge hole and a terrible pain in our hearts. It will take time for all who knew, worked with and shared Katherine's values to process her loss, but I know she would want us to regroup and carry on with this important work. She often closed her presentations with the following: "*Together we must prevent and end youth homelessness in our communities and our province. There is no time to wait. I stand rooted in action. Please stand with me.*" In her memory, we most certainly will.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth