



Statement

Nov. 19, 2021
For Immediate Release

On Nov. 20, we mark a very special day on our calendars – National Child Day.

This day acknowledges the rights of all children across the country and celebrates the adoption of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* by the UN on Nov. 20, 1989. The *UNCRC* mandates that all children be treated with dignity and respect and have every opportunity to reach their full potential. Canada ratified the *UNCRC* in 1991.

In May 2006, the *Representative for Children and Youth Act (RCY Act)* was enacted by the provincial government, effectively creating my Office and its mandate for the advocacy of children's rights, particularly for young people in care in B.C. As a rights-based Office, the articles outlined in the *UNCRC* are the foundations upon which our work is built. Children and youth in care, especially First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children and youth, have fundamental rights that must be protected. These rights are crucial throughout the formative years and through the transition to adulthood.

Although First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children and youth represent only about 10 per cent of children and youth between the ages of birth and 19 years in B.C., they represent approximately 67 per cent of children and youth in care. These children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously, to practise their culture, to be free from discrimination, to access education, to access services, and to express their identity. These rights are too often ignored or not taken into account when dealing with the well-being of a child. My duty as Representative is to ensure that children's rights are respected and that they have the knowledge and ability to express those rights.

As the Representative for Children and Youth, I have released a number of reports that highlight gaps in the child-serving system. These reports shine a light on the importance of belonging, equality and fair treatment in the lives of children in care. They are grounded in the rights of children.

In December 2020, we published a report on the struggles of families of children and youth with support needs. *Left Out: Children and youth with special needs in the pandemic*, focused on the difficulties these families have faced, during and prior to the pandemic, when seeking services for their children. The voices shared in this report highlight the inequalities faced by children and youth with disabilities in our system. The fundamental right to the same access to services is outlined in the *UNCRC* under Article 23 “Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.”

The following month, we released the report *Detained: Rights of children and youth under the Mental Health Act*. This report examined the experiences and outcomes of children and youth involuntarily detained under the Act. Through our research with youth, we discovered that young people are not always aware of their rights and that those rights are often ignored. Article 42 of the *UNCRC* clearly states that “*Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.*” In the case of many youth featured in this report, their rights were not being respected.

In June 2021, my Office released a report that focused on the importance of belonging. *Skye’s Legacy* shared the story of a bright, young First Nations girl who, while in care, was disconnected from her family, culture and community, which contributed to her death on her 17th birthday. Her rights as a vibrant individual with a life full of potential were not adequately taken into account. Skye wasn’t provided with any consistent opportunity to connect to her family, Dene culture, or to visit her community, even though she had made requests to do so. This pushed Skye further away from what she needed most – to feel a sense of belonging.

Article 12 of the *UNCRC* highlights that “*Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.*” Skye had a right to express her wishes and to have her voice heard and respected – as do all children and youth.

These are just a few examples of why we must keep advocating for the rights of children. Recognition of child rights plays a significant role in how children and youth are treated, how they develop in their early years, and who they become as adults. On National Child Day, we at the RCY pledge to continue working toward protecting and advocating for the rights of children and youth in B.C.

As we move forward, RCY’s next reports will focus on the importance of quality care plans and care planning for children and youth in care, the rights of children and youth to have their views heard and participate in child protection and family law proceedings, and the importance of the early years and keeping families safely together, all of which will further push for systemic changes in the child welfare system.

To learn more about National Child Day and how you can participate in the celebration, visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/national-child-day.html>. You can also find a summary of the *UNCRC* here: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

If you are child or youth who needs advocacy or if you are an adult looking to help a child, please contact my Office. Children and youth can contact us via text message at 1-778-404-7161, through chat on our website www.rcybc.ca. Children, youth and adults can also reach us by phone at 1-800-476-3933, or email at rcy@rcybc.ca. We’re here to help you.

You can also follow us on social media: Facebook (@rcybc and @rcybcyouth); Instagram (@rcybcyouth); and Twitter (@rcybc and @rcybcyouth) to stay up to date on the latest developments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J Charlesworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth