



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Representative for Children and Youth says much more needs to be done to ensure young people in care do not continue to go missing

VICTORIA – In acknowledgement of International Missing Children’s Day, May 25th, B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth is calling on “the diverse systems of care” to do more to prevent and better support young people who are lost, fleeing and missing from government care.

“The government has made some significant improvements since my office completed a report on this issue last year, however we continue to receive too many reports of young people who are missing, some of whom are experiencing critical injuries and even death while lost, fleeing or missing,” said Representative Jennifer Charlesworth.

Over a nine-month period in 2022, the office received approximately 500 reports where a young person receiving government services in B.C. was identified as lost, missing, or living away from their care placement. In 2023, RCY received 1553 reports. Those reports represented 425 distinct children, eight of whom died at the time they were missing. There continues to be an over-representation of Indigenous young people who are missing. Approximately 65 percent of children and youth in government care are Indigenous. “Clearly, these numbers continue to be far too high,” said Charlesworth.

“Young people are telling us they are leaving their placements because they don’t feel like they belong. They may be experiencing trauma, exploitation or struggle with mental health or substance abuse issues. They don’t feel like they’re supported or cared for and often feel pushed out and pulled in other directions, whether they’re attempting to find family, drawn to find substances to cope with their trauma, or other things that may make them want to leave where they’re living. Creating safe and supportive places where young people truly feel like they belong is clearly something we all need to come together to create.”

The Representative's 2023 report made nine recommendations, three of which the ministry has made significant progress on. These improvements include implementing improvements in the collection and reporting of data that helps identify, monitor and respond to children who are lost or missing in B.C.'s child welfare system and introducing new practice guidelines that support social workers in identifying young people who are at risk. "While these are important steps, we still need to address the reasons that young people are going missing in the first place," said Charlesworth.

To try to better understand these reasons, later this year, the office will convene youth, families, service providers, First Nations, Métis, community leaders and government representatives to identify cracks in the care system that are contributing to children and youth going missing.

"This is not just a government issue," said Charlesworth. "In bringing people together, we are hoping to have a robust dialogue on how and where we need to strengthen our approaches so that young people have a home life that allows them to thrive. Collective action is needed to make that happen."

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