

ANNUAL REPORT & SERVICE PLAN

2023
2024

2024/25 to
2026/27



Amplifying
Voices
for Change

RC&Y Representative
for Children & Youth



The Representative and staff, who do their work throughout the province, would like to acknowledge that we are living and working with gratitude and respect on the traditional territories of the First Nations peoples of British Columbia.

We specifically acknowledge and express our gratitude to the keepers of the lands on the traditional territories of the Lheidli T'enneh peoples (Prince George) and the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations (Victoria) where our offices are located.

We also acknowledge our Métis and Inuit partners and friends living in these beautiful territories.

Sept. 30, 2024

The Honourable Raj Chouhan
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Suite 207, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is my pleasure to present the 2023/24 Annual Report and the 2024/25 to 2026/27 Service Plan of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth to the Legislative Assembly.

This document reports on the period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 and covers activities underway and planned for the April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2027 period. It has been prepared in accordance with part 5, sections 17 and 19 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth
Province of British Columbia

pc: Ms. Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Emotional Trigger Warning

This report touches on stories and topics that are very challenging and may trigger strong feelings of loss or grief, or memories of personal or familial experiences related to child and family services.

If you require emotional support, the following resources are available:

Kid's Help Phone (1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to Canadians ages five to 29 who want confidential and anonymous care from a counsellor.

KUU-US Crisis Line (1-800-588-8717) is available to support Indigenous people in B.C., 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Métis Crisis Line (1-833-638-4722) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Youth in BC (<https://youthinbc.com>) Online chat is available from noon to 1 a.m. in B.C.

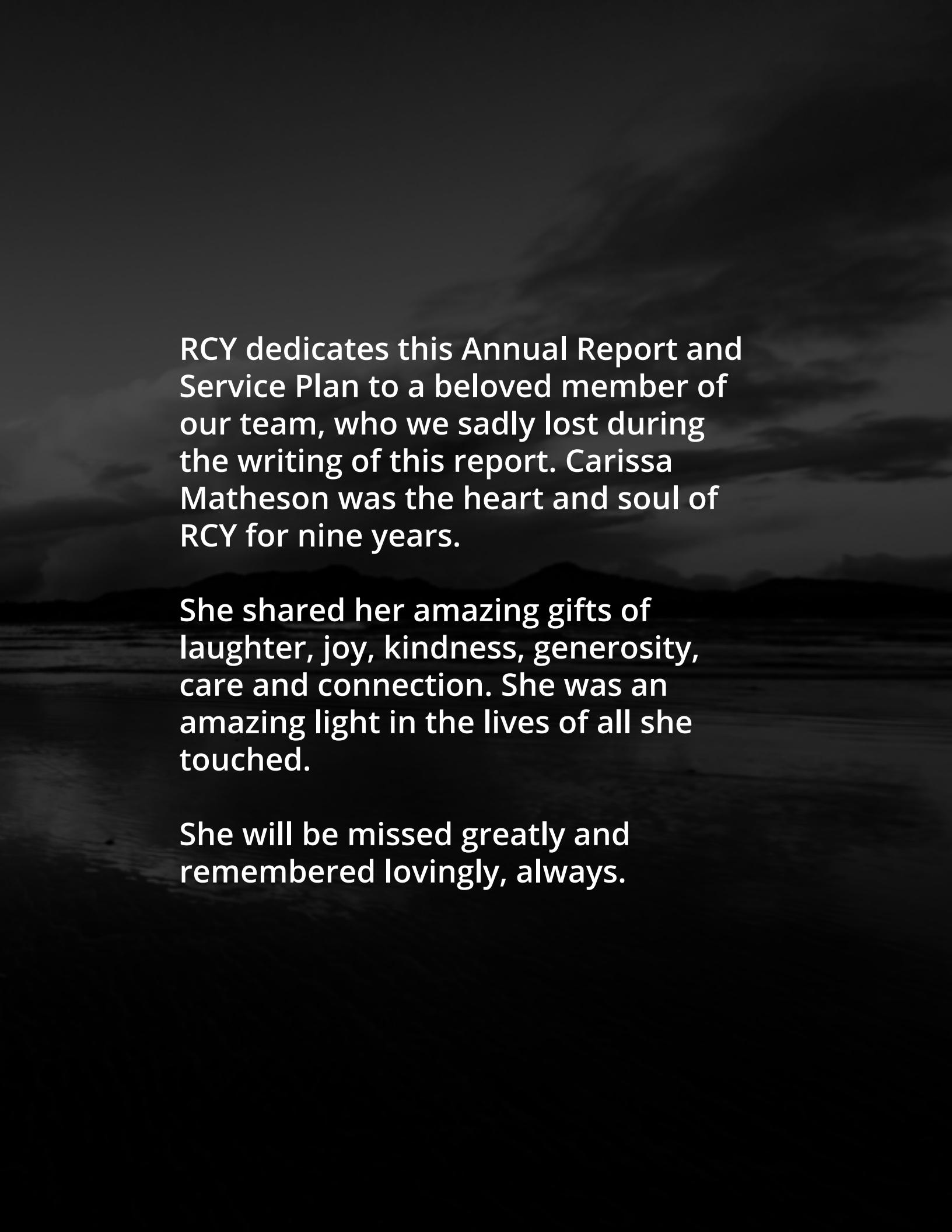
Mental Health Support Line (310-6789 – no area code) will connect you to your local B.C. crisis line without a wait or busy signal, 24 hours a day. Crisis line workers are there to listen and support you as well as refer you to community resources.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Crisis Line (1-844-413-6649) is available to individuals impacted by issues concerning missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The National Indian Residential School Crisis Line (1-866-925-4419) provides 24-hour crisis support to former Indian Residential School students and their families.







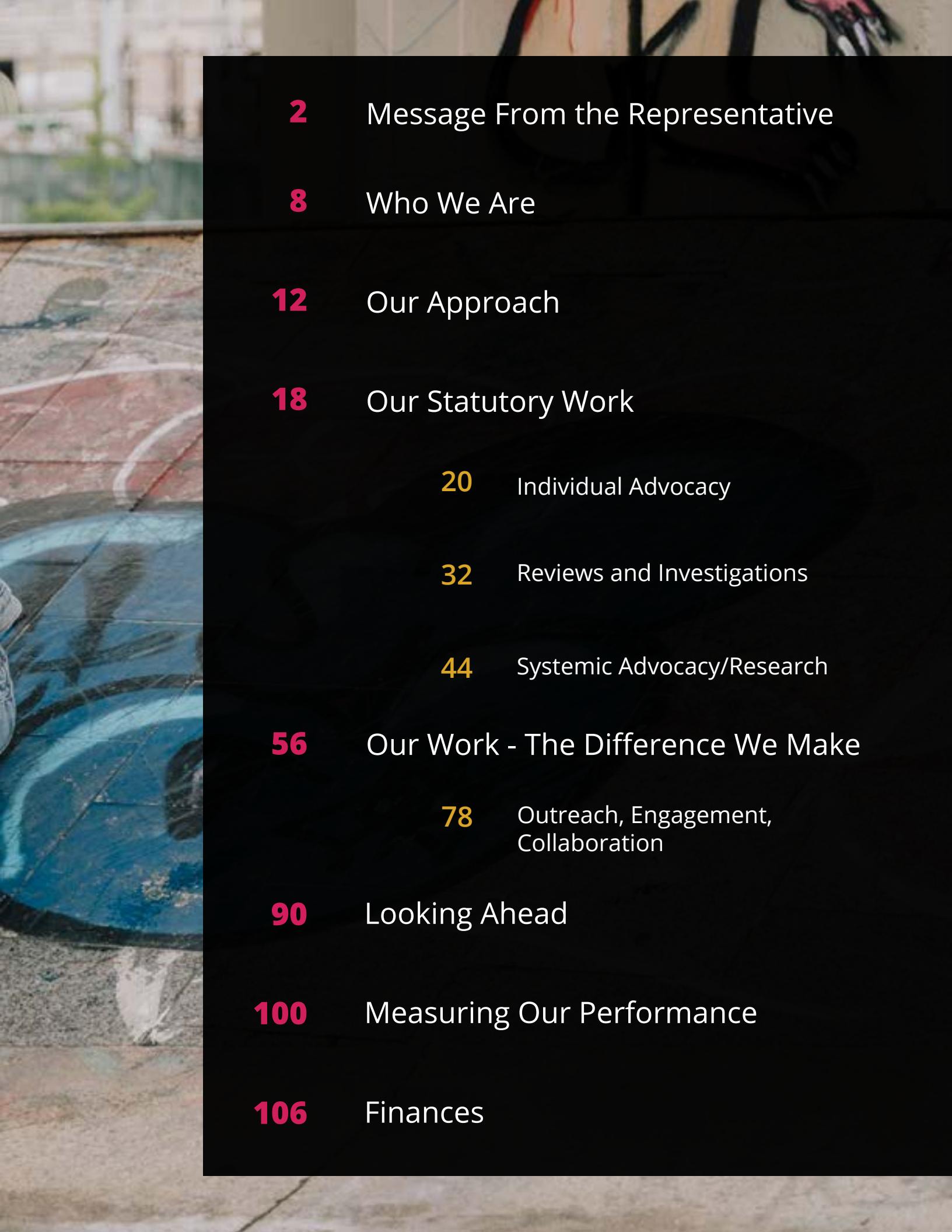
RCY dedicates this Annual Report and Service Plan to a beloved member of our team, who we sadly lost during the writing of this report. Carissa Matheson was the heart and soul of RCY for nine years.

She shared her amazing gifts of laughter, joy, kindness, generosity, care and connection. She was an amazing light in the lives of all she touched.

She will be missed greatly and remembered lovingly, always.

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Representative for Children and Youth



Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth is a second-generation settler to British Columbia with roots in the Scottish Highlands, southern England and Wales. She is deeply grateful to live in the traditional territories of the *lək'ʷəŋən* and *WSÁNEĆ* peoples and to have raised her family on these beautiful lands.

Dr. Charlesworth has been British Columbia's Representative for Children and Youth since Oct. 1, 2018. She was reappointed for a second five-year term that began Oct. 1, 2023.

Dr. Charlesworth has 47 years' experience in the social and health care sectors and has maintained a keen focus on and commitment to child, youth and family well-being throughout this time. Prior to being appointed Representative, she held diverse direct service child welfare, social policy, program management and executive roles within the provincial government. She also worked extensively in and with community social services, including as Executive Director of the Federation of Community Social Services of BC.

Dr. Charlesworth has a PhD in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria, and a Global MBA from Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, England, with a specialization in social innovation. She is an award-winning teacher, author, activist, and a joyful parent of two vibrant social justice advocates who remind her daily of the power and promise of young people.



A Message From the Representative

How and when do systems change? What enables transformational systemic change? What gets in the way? Why do systems – and the people working within them - often revert to old patterns despite widespread agreement that change is necessary? What is RCY's role in effecting meaningful change?

These are some of the questions that we have been grappling with over the past year as we reflect upon the history of child welfare, the history and impact of RCY, and dive into a far-reaching and ambitious systemic and structural review of the child welfare system in B.C. Through our day-to-day work, we gain a unique perspective on what is and is not working for the thousands of children, youth and young adults – and their families – that are trying to access social and health care in B.C. We celebrate the strengths and exceptional practice and programs when we see them, but too often we see situations in which children's rights are not being upheld and young people are not receiving the services and supports that they need to thrive and feel safe, nurtured and connected.

It would be relatively easy to blame and criticize people, programs, agencies or public bodies when we see young people not getting what they need. However, we don't think that this is very helpful. Instead, we recognize that RCY is part of vast social and health systems and we have a unique and important role to play

as an independent oversight body – one of illuminating what young people and their families need to thrive, what is and is not working well, what could be different, and how we might get from where we are to where we collectively want to be to support child and youth well-being and thriving. Fundamentally, we want to help systems transform to better meet the contemporary needs of children, youth, young adults and their families, who often face unimaginable and complex challenges in life.

This Annual Report and Service Plan describes not only who we are and what we do, but just as importantly, how we do our work to be an agent of change. Over the past four years, we have been on a positive journey towards becoming a more culturally attuned, anti-racist, trauma-responsive and restorative organization. We have broadened the scope and reach of our work as well as the ways in which we try to make change happen. This includes: "quiet conversations" with decision-makers; sharing findings from comprehensive reviews; commissioning and conducting research; preparing statements and issue briefs; offering workshops and knowledge sharing opportunities; monitoring and reporting on progress; shining a light on strong practices; and publicly releasing investigative and special reports.

We are continually learning, reflecting, improving - and sometimes struggling. But our aims are clear: be an organization that

supports staff well so that they can do their exceptional work; be a well-connected, trusted and responsive resource to people and groups outside of the RCY; and make a positive difference in the lives of children, youth, young adults and families. In all of our work, we are guided by Indigenous Cultural Advisors, Matriarchs and Elders to uphold six sacred teachings - what we call the 6Rs - that hold us to a high standard of practice and relationship.

As you will see in the pages that follow, 2023/24 has been an extremely busy year. Not only have the demands in our core statutory work in individual advocacy and reviews and investigations increased year-over-year, but the context for our work has become even more complex. Every day, we see the toll that the toxic illicit drug supply, mental health concerns, housing affordability challenges and lack of services close to home are taking on young people and families. We also see how hard people in the systems of care are working, and how stretched the workforce is in ministries, health authorities, Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies and community agencies. While we are very concerned about the lack of capacity in the workforce to build relationships with people served, provide timely services, follow policy and practice guidelines, deliver quality care and innovate to meet emergent needs, we know that this reflects broader systemic and structural issues.

In 2023/24 we have endeavoured to understand and illuminate these systemic and structural issues in a wide range of ways. For example, our work in support of children and youth with disabilities and their families included: the administration of an in-depth survey that was completed by close to 1,200 families; visits with families and service providers in the communities being served by the pilot

Family Connection Centres; visits with families who informed previous RCY reports, *Excluded* and *Left Out*; meeting with dozens of families and service providers in the system; commissioning and reporting on research on the mental health needs of children with neurodevelopmental conditions; and supporting a conference with the newly established B.C. Disability Collaborative. All this work has given the RCY a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the service landscape for children and youth with disabilities, and what systemic changes could make a difference. These findings will be brought forward in a report in 2024/25.

Substance use and the toxic illicit drug supply is having a significant impact on young people and families and has proven to be extremely challenging to address. In 2023/24 we decided to try some different approaches to address our many concerns. This included launching a social media campaign to raise public awareness and understanding of the direct and indirect impact of substances on young people and what young people have told us would be helpful. Our hope was to contribute to the work that many other groups are doing to build understanding and empathy, speak to the interconnections between substance use, mental health and trauma, reduce stigma and discrimination, reinforce that there is no simple or quick fix and advocate for a robust continuum of care. We also began work with the Wosk Centre for Dialogue that will culminate in a gathering of approximately 100 people from across social, health, mental health, education, justice, disability and research sectors, all of which have an important role to play in addressing the impact of the toxic drug crisis in young peoples' lives. Our aim is to co-create a stronger systemic response to the crisis.

These and other examples of RCY's diverse work and approaches are described in the pages to follow, but by far the most extensive and complex area of work for the RCY in this past year has been the sacred story investigation and systemic review that we have undertaken in response to the horrific and tragic torture and death of a young First Nations child at the hands of his extended family care providers. In June 2023, these care providers were sentenced to 10 years for manslaughter. As the story about what had happened to the young boy and his younger sister came to light during the sentencing hearing, there was understandable outrage, heartbreak and demands for change. The criminal investigation and prosecution was thorough and no doubt extremely difficult, but now it was our responsibility to address the many questions on the public's, Nations' and provincial governments/legislators' minds – how and why could this have happened and most importantly, what needs to be done to ensure that history does not repeat itself? In June 2023, we committed to undertake both a child death investigation (that we refer to as a sacred story investigation) and a systemic review, and to issue a public report by summer, 2024.

Anyone who has followed child, youth and family issues for more than a few years knows that – while this child's story was particularly egregious and heartbreaking - there has been no shortage of other tragedies leading to investigations, inquiries, reports, analyses, recommendations, pronouncements and commitments to make sweeping changes. But not much really changes. What could be different this time?

We began by approaching the sacred story investigation and systemic review in a new way for the RCY. We have been guided by

three Cultural Advisors – Matriarchs Deb Foxcroft and Judy Wilson and Hereditary Chief Wedlidi Speck – and a Circle of Advisors from across Canada. We have also hosted extensive engagement and consultation sessions to ensure that we bring forward the voices, perspectives and ideas of those working within the social and health systems that serve children and families. The pace of activity has been intense; investigation reports typically take 18-24 months to complete, and not only did we commit to completing this work in less than a year, but we also braided it with an extensive systemic review and engagement, which has never been done before. Nonetheless, we are excited and hopeful that this report will lead to the positive systemic and structural changes that many have advocated for over decades. It will set the course for RCY's work in 2024/25 and beyond, which is reflected in the service plan accompanying this annual report.

The systemic review has also highlighted the importance of jurisdiction and transitions. In the 2023/24 fiscal year we have seen significant and exciting developments as a growing number of First Nations move towards resuming jurisdiction over their children's welfare and well-being. But we also see that the pathway forward is far from clear. The Supreme Court of Canada confirmed the constitutionality of the Federal *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* in February 2024. However, many Nations and leaders are concerned about the adequacy of proposed provincial and federal funding models, as well as the Final Settlement Agreement put forward by the federal government to address the findings of discrimination made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT). RCY aims to be a supportive ally and accomplice to Nations and Indigenous Governing Bodies

as their diverse journeys unfold. We will continue to uphold the rights of Indigenous children and youth and advocate for changes that will improve access to high quality and culturally-attuned services and supports right now and for the years to come.

It continues to be my greatest honour to serve as Representative, working alongside an incredibly talented, passionate and dedicated RCY staff. I am grateful to the many young people, parents, family care providers, foster caregivers and service providers that have spent time with RCY team members and me, often in circle, sharing their experiences and struggles with and within the systems that they should be able to depend upon.

I am grateful for relationships that I have had the opportunity to build with First Nations and Métis leaders, cultural advisors, matriarchs, elders, service providers and communities, and for their many teachings and trust. This has been a significant year of learning and leaning in together to unpack and address the systemic issues that are too often causing

harm to their beloved young people. I also raise my hands to the Members of the Legislative Assembly who have served on the Select Standing Committees on Children and Youth (SSCCY) and Finance and Government to whom RCY reports. Many of the members will be moving on from their political careers following the upcoming election. We will miss your support, insights and the commitment that you have demonstrated to the well-being of children, youth, young adults and families. Committee members have demonstrated that child and youth well-being is a non-partisan issue that requires all of us to care, lean in and act.

I am a better person for the many lessons I have learned from this broad network of people who share our passion for meaningful change and service so that young people experience love, nurturance, belonging and receive the supports that they need in life to thrive.

In kindness,
JC



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we
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Me



The Representative for Children and Youth (Representative) is an independent officer of the Legislature in British Columbia. Through her legislated mandate, the work of the Representative helps members of the Legislative Assembly monitor and assess government programs, procedures and performance. Because of the independence of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY), the Representative is able to – and, in fact, must – advocate for children, youth, young adults and families, compel evidence for investigations, write and publicly disseminate reports, make recommendations, comment publicly and hold government to account without concern of reprisal. As a rights-based organization, RCY is guided by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP).

The Representative advocates for the well-being of all children, youth and young adults, with a specific focus on those who are receiving government services. The Representative's mandate under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* is threefold: to provide individual advocacy for designated services to children, youth, their families and included adults; to review, investigate and report on critical injuries and deaths of children and youth; and to monitor, review, conduct research, prepare reports and make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of designated government services.

¹ Included adults means an adult under 27 years of age who: (a) is receiving or is eligible to receive community living support under the *Community Living Authority Act*, or (b) received, as a child, a reviewable service;

The overall intention is to ensure that government provides the necessary services to allow children, youth and included adults¹ to thrive.

Five teams are responsible for RCY's work. The teams work both independently and together to meet statutory requirements and undertake various systemic projects and initiatives to ensure the needs of young people are met.

The **Individual Advocacy and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Engagement (IAFNMIE)** team is responsive to requests for advocacy from children, youth, and included young adults, helping them navigate complex systems and ensuring their rights are upheld. Staff provide information, advice and assistance to children, youth, young adults and their families who need help in navigating the designated or prescribed services² or programs provided or funded by government; to help them to become effective self-advocates with respect to those services; to support and promote the development of advocacy services within communities; and to comment publicly on advocacy services for children and their families with respect to designated services. This team also conducts community and youth outreach to raise awareness about young peoples' rights and services available

² Designated services mean any of the following services or programs for children and their families provided under an enactment or provided or funded by the government: (a) services or programs under the *Adoption Act*, the *Child Care BC Act*, the *Child Care Subsidy Act*, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, the *Community Living Authority Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*; (b) early childhood development and child care services; (c) mental health services for children; (d) addiction services for children; (e) services for youth during their transition to adulthood; (f) additional services or programs that are prescribed under section 29 (2) (a) of the RCY Act.

to them and how to become effective self-advocates.

The **Reviews and Investigations (R&I)** team is responsible for reviewing, investigating and reporting on critical injuries and deaths of children and youth receiving reviewable services.³ By analyzing these injuries and deaths, RCY is able to take both immediate and systemic action. Immediate action includes making referrals to the IAFNMIE team for individual advocacy or raising concerns about the care being provided to a child with the responsible public body or Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency. The team identifies areas for systemic improvement and advocates for changes to prevent future harm.

The **Systemic Advocacy, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Research (SAFNMIR)** team has responsibility for monitoring the progress of public bodies in implementing recommendations made by the Representative in investigative and special reports. The team also completes research projects and reports on the larger systemic

and structural issues affecting children and youth, and the necessary changes needed in systems of care. The SAFNMIR team identifies common challenges, barriers or gaps in the system of services for children, youth and their families and supports the Representative to advocate for changes in policy, practice and legislation that will improve outcomes and well-being of children and youth who access designated services.

The **Strategic Communications and Knowledge Mobilization** team provides a variety of supports to the Representative and the entire Office by handling both external and internal communications. The team also leads the Representative's knowledge mobilization initiative, extending the reach of RCY reports and initiatives, and educating the public, government staff, decision-makers and others on report insights, findings and recommendations.

All of the work is supported by the **Corporate Services** team: an essential backbone for RCY. The services provided and the work done on behalf of front-facing staff are key enabling mechanisms for high quality advocacy on behalf of children, youth, included adults and their families. Corporate services comprise finance, human resources, administration, records coordination, project coordination, Information management and technology and privacy support services for RCY.

³Reviewable services are services or programs under the *Child, Family and Community Services Act* and the *Youth Justice Act* and include: child welfare; addiction services for children; mental health services for children; and youth justice services. Public bodies delivering reviewable services are required to report to the Representative the critical injury or death of a child if the child or family was receiving services at the time of, or in the year prior to, the injury or death. This is known as a Reportable Circumstance (RC). Currently, the public bodies delivering reviewable services include the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD), Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs) and health authorities. MCFD submits RCs for its reviewable services and also submits RCs received from ICFSAs. To date, the Ministry of Health and health authorities have not complied with the legal requirement to report the critical injury or death of children receiving reviewable services although a commitment has been made to fulfill this reporting requirement in 2024/25.



Admiral
on
the
Race





RCY uses the metaphor of canoes on a shared journey to undertake the work of the office. The canoe represents RCY itself and embedded in the design and construction of the canoes are our core values. The paddlers in the canoe represent RCY staff – and others with whom they engage and collaborate – who are united by their passion for and commitment to the well-being of children, youth and young adults. They paddle together to effect meaningful and sustainable change in child, youth and young adult services and systems.

Given the many challenges and heartbreaks inherent in RCY's work and journey, staff health and well-being are an essential organizational responsibility which is supported by the enabling corporate mechanisms noted above and the supplies in the canoes, described below. The paddles represent what RCY is pulling for. This includes the realization of the four principles that are foundational to the work of RCY as well as our shared goals and strategic priorities. The paddles also embody the projects that shine a light on the experiences of children, youth and young adults and identify how practices, services and systems can better meet their needs and aspirations.

The supplies in the canoe include the project charters, research designs and methodologies, plans, resources, tools, materials and engagement strategies that the paddlers need to be nimble and effective in addressing the issues that impact young people in B.C. RCY staff are pulling together towards systemic change for young people and families – the waters are often challenging to navigate but RCY is guided by the wisdom and teachings of Indigenous advisors, mentors and colleagues as well as a wide network of partners who care deeply about young people.

RCY's approach is guided by four key principles and values (6Rs) that inform all RCY's policies, practices and ways of being.

The Six Rs

RCY is committed to live by the values of the “Six Rs,” which guide the work of the Office both externally and internally.

Given the imperative to address the over-representation of Indigenous children in B.C.’s child welfare system, RCY’s approach is informed by an Indigenous worldview and six key values. These reflect the “Sacred Teachings” and guidance from RCY’s cultural advisors.

Relationship

We are one with all things in heaven, the air, land, and sea.

Respect

When we see all things as sacred, our actions are guided with wisdom.

Relevance

In our leadership, we listen and respond to what is being called for.

Responsibility

We stand in our leadership and do our best to fulfill our duties, roles, and responsibilities.

Reciprocity

In a sacred world, we learn to express gratitude and appreciation for gifts given.

Repair

Repair is to make better, to heal, to restore, and to achieve reconciliation.

The Four Principles

The Office is also guided by four key principles that inform the RCYs policies, practices and ways of being.



Year At a Glance





1,764

Number of calls to our office for advocacy



6,437

Reports of injuries and critical incidents our office received

Individual Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Engagement



2,627

Advocacy issues requiring assessment, information, advice and support



1,699

Children, youth, and young adults receiving advocacy

Reviews and Investigations



6,437

Injuries and deaths reported to and assessed by the RCY



536

Monthly average of Injuries and critical incidents reported



2,908

In mandate critical injuries and deaths reported reviewed by RCY



11 +1

Comprehensive Reviews + One investigation currently in process

Systemic Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Research



72

Recommendations being monitored



11

Monitoring assessments



6

Reports

Organizational Outreach and Engagement



90

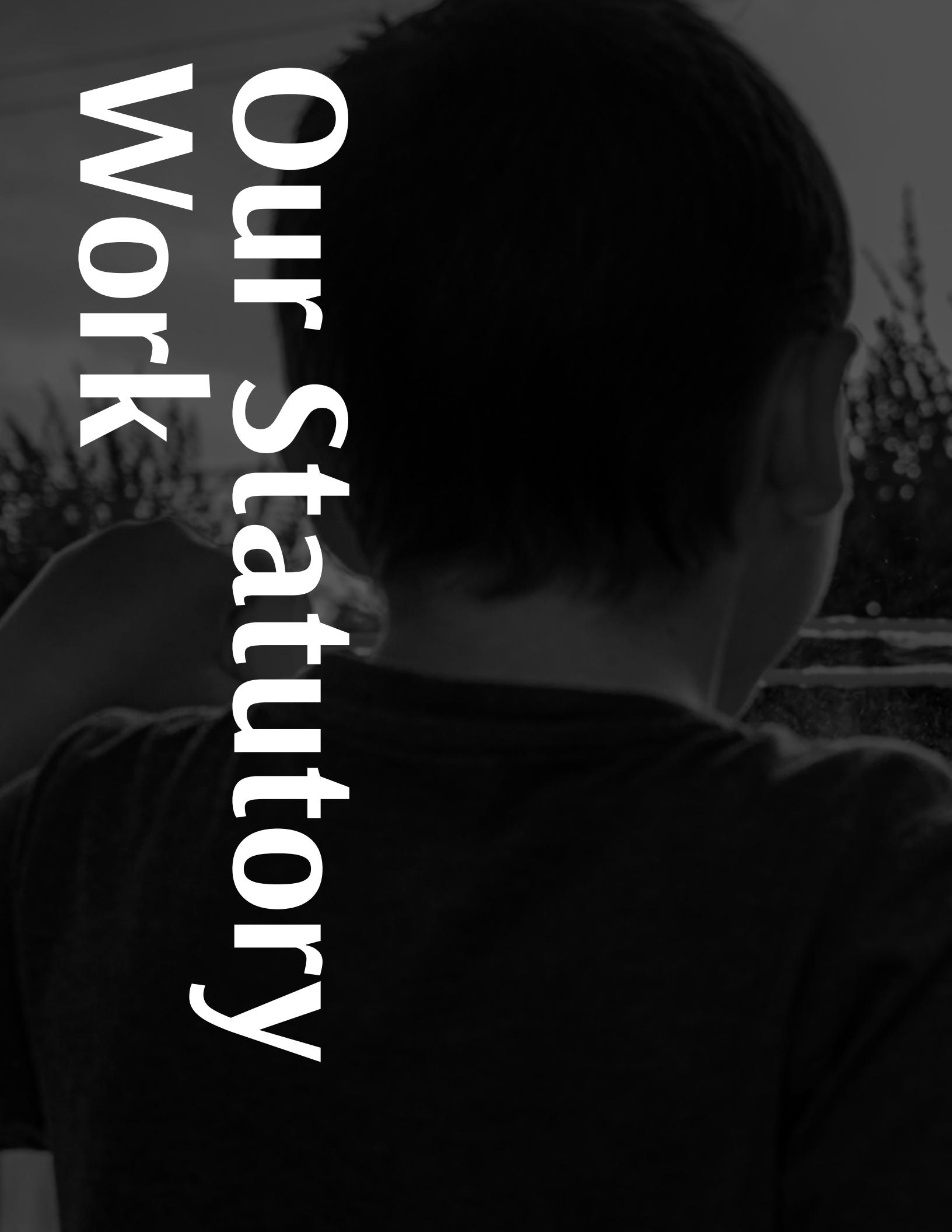
Approximate number of outreach events



6,976

Approximate number of people we engaged with

Work Our Story



Individual Advocacy

Advocacy for young people is at the heart of RCY's work. The **Individual Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Engagement** team has primary responsibility for two key areas of work at RCY: advocacy for children, youth and young adults, and youth and community outreach and engagement. Providing high quality advocacy services to children, youth and young adults and their families is essential to ensure that young people are supported to access the services and supports they need. The team is also responsible for undertaking broad youth and community outreach to enhance awareness of both RCY and children's rights; support capacity development in child- and youth-serving organizations; provide tools on effective self-advocacy; and engage with and establish relationships with First Nations, Métis and Urban Indigenous communities and organizations.

“

The advocate didn't just help me with my immediate problems—they taught me how to advocate for myself.

That's a skill I'll use for the rest of my life.

What We Do to Help

In many circumstances, if a young person, who may or may not be receiving government-funded designated or prescribed services, feels that they are being treated unfairly, or if they think they're not being heard, an RCY advocate can step in and provide help to the individual.

RCY advocacy staff provide advice and insight about how to access and navigate services. They also provide education about applicable rights and services, provide coaching, attend meetings with or on behalf

of children, youth and young adults, and engage with multiple levels of decision-makers to support good outcomes and uphold young peoples' rights. The work is often complex and nuanced and requires strong communication, mediation, conflict resolution, negotiation and advocacy skills.

Advocates also provide information for parents, guardians, and front-line workers looking for guidance on how to navigate and access government services for children and youth.

Ages We Help

**0 - 18
years of age**

- Children and Youth With Support Needs
- Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Services
- Permanency Planning/Adoption
- Child Protection and Family Support
- Youth Services
- Youth Justice
- Early Childhood Development and Child Care Services

- SAJE Program – Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment
- Provincial Tuition Waiver Program
- Community Living BC Services for Young Adults

**19 - 27
years of age**



Advocacy Intake for Children, Youth and Young Adults

The Representative for Children and Youth makes sure the voices of B.C.'s young people are heard. We know that situations can be complicated and sometimes it's scary to ask for help. That's one of the reasons we're easy to contact.

What happens when you call our Advocacy line at 1-800-476-3933 or email rcy@rcybc.ca?



You'll be put through to an Advocate.

What you say will be kept private.



That person will determine how we can help you.

- Maybe you don't know how to make connections to services you need.
- Maybe you want to discuss your rights and what to do if those rights are ignored
- Maybe you need information about the right organization to talk to or suggestions on how to explain what you want.



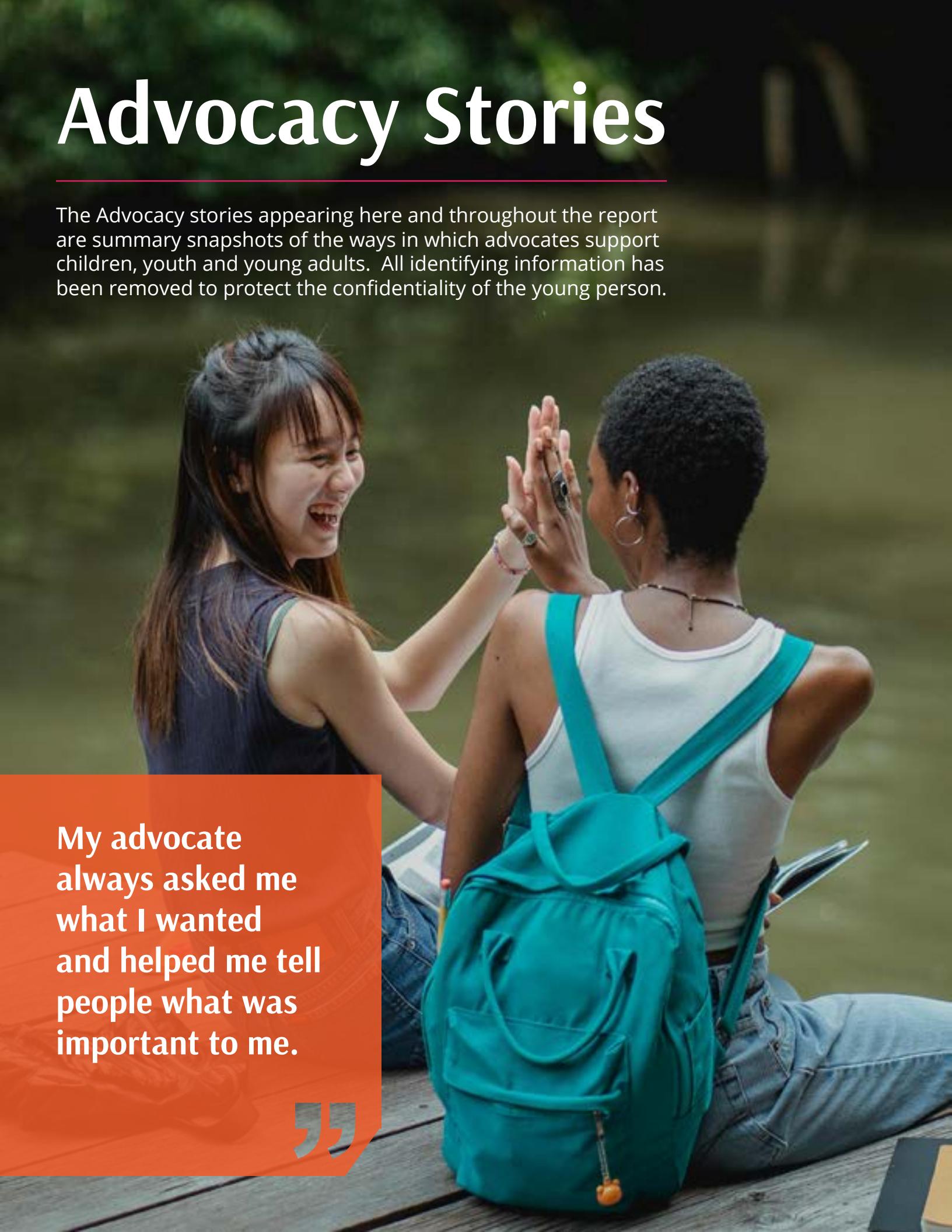
Sometimes you might need more help from us to fix the issue.

If that's the case an Advocate will help amplify your voice and promote your rights

- An Advocate can help you get the care and services you need. You might want help reconnecting with your family, community or culture or putting together an action plan. Maybe you feel like your social worker isn't listening to you or including you in planning. An Advocate can support you to speak up in a way that might resolve the issue.
- Depending on the circumstances, an Advocate can help to ensure your needs are planned for as you transition out of MCFD care or connect to CLBC services. An Advocate can also provide you with information and support regarding the Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment program (SAJE) and Tuition Waiver program.

Advocacy Stories

The Advocacy stories appearing here and throughout the report are summary snapshots of the ways in which advocates support children, youth and young adults. All identifying information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the young person.

A photograph of two young women sitting on a wooden bench outdoors. One woman, with long dark hair and a black tank top, is laughing and giving a high-five to the other woman. The second woman, with short dark hair and a white tank top, is wearing a large teal backpack and is smiling. They are in a park-like setting with green grass and trees in the background.

**My advocate
always asked me
what I wanted
and helped me tell
people what was
important to me.**

,

Zoey and Taya's Fight for Permanency with RCY's Support

Zoey, 17, and her 14-year-old sister Taya had been in care since they were young. They were on the verge of being placed permanently with their long-term foster parents, but the process was suddenly halted, leaving the sisters uncertain and distressed, which led to their contact with RCY.

The RCY advocate quickly engaged with the situation, drawing on a comprehensive understanding of child welfare legislation, which allowed them to effectively challenge the delays and advocate for the girls' right to live with their foster parents.

The advocate worked closely with Zoey, Taya, their social worker, foster parents, and the Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency (IFCSA) involved in the case. Through persuasion and relationship-building the advocate identified the root causes of the delays, including protocol issues and staffing shortages, and collaborated with all parties to resolve them. Zoey and Taya's voices were amplified with the support of the advocate and together they worked to ensure that their concerns were heard by all members of their team. This joint effort, facilitated progress toward the guardianship transfer which is expected to be finalized shortly.



Reuniting Taylor with His Family

Taylor, an Indigenous infant caught in the complexities of the B.C. child welfare system, was removed from his mother's care shortly after he was born. Initially placed with foster parents who believed they had a paternal connection, Taylor's future became uncertain after a paternity test revealed no biological link. His mother's adopted sister Jenny, living in another province, only learned of his situation through a phone call from her sister's boyfriend. Ready to provide a stable home for her nephew, Jenny was puzzled as to why MCFD had never contacted her, especially knowing her family history.

Jenny quickly applied for guardianship with the support of Legal Aid, and a home study confirmed she could provide a safe and loving environment. However, despite MCFD's policy to prioritize family placement, they seemed torn between supporting Jenny and the foster parents, who had gone ahead with a cultural adoption.

Frustrated and confused, Jenny contacted the RCY for guidance. An advocate from RCY stepped in, explaining the process and walking alongside Jenny as she navigated the complex child welfare system. The advocate raised critical questions about why MCFD wasn't fully backing family

placement and ensured Jenny understood each step of the court process.

While the decision was pending, the advocate helped secure visitation for Taylor with his aunt, allowing them to strengthen their bond. Ultimately, the judge ruled in favour of placing Taylor with Jenny. The RCY advocate continued to support Jenny as Taylor transitioned into her home, ensuring a smooth and stable move.

Taylor's story underscores how advocacy support can play a critical role in reuniting young people with their families, while ensuring their rights and well-being remain central to every decision being made about their lives.



Ensuring Continuity and Care for Amy

Eight-year-old Amy, an Indigenous child with complex medical needs, has been with her foster caregiver since she was two months old. Despite financial challenges preventing adoption, Amy is a permanent part of the family, supported by her Nation. The family relies on financial support from MCFD to cover Amy's extensive care needs.

Recently, administrative changes disrupted those payments, leaving the caregiver struggling to pay for Amy's support workers and equipment. Repeated requests for assistance were met with delays, forcing the family to use credit to cover costs. Pre-approved home modifications for Amy's safety went unreimbursed, adding further strain.

Desperate for help, the caregiver reached out to RCY. The RCY advocated for Amy, working with MCFD and her Nation to resolve the funding issues, renew the caregiver's contract, and ensure consistent care for Amy. This collaboration provided immediate relief and highlighted the importance of involving families in decision-making.

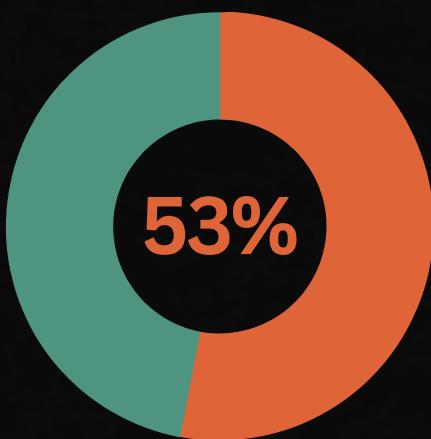
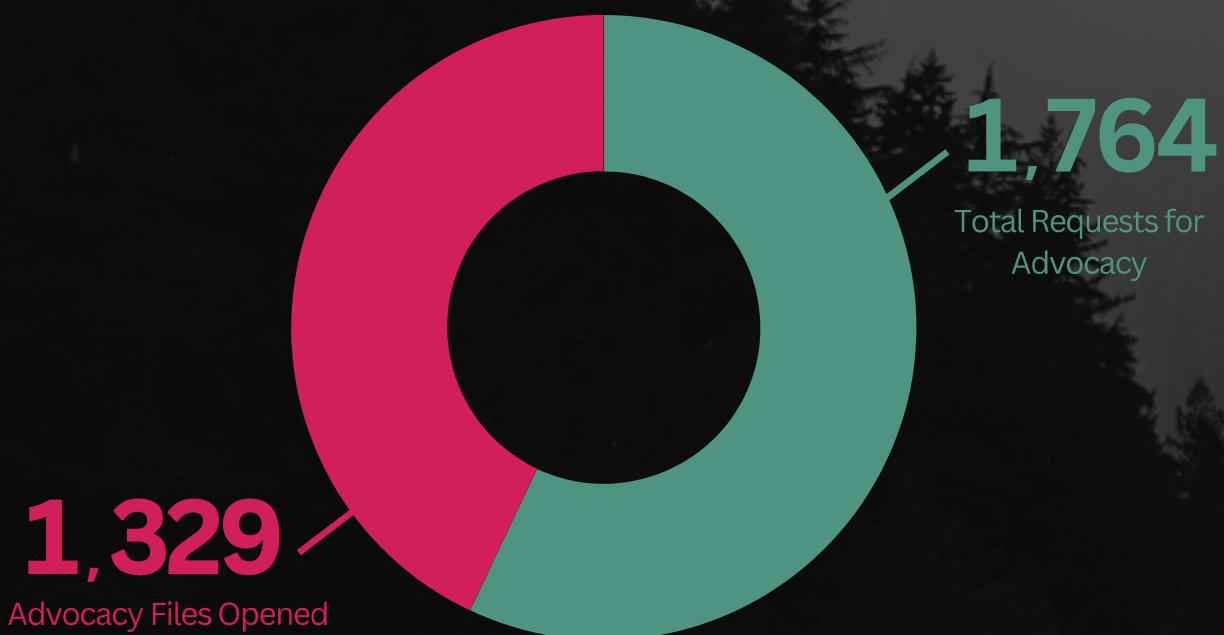
Amy's story was one that

highlighted the importance of strong collaboration when working to resolve issues. RCY advocates are well positioned to bring people together and provide a neutral setting where all voices are heard and understood. Through this collaboration, Amy's caregiver was able to continue providing Amy with the love and support she needs to thrive, ensuring that she remains in a stable, nurturing environment where she is cherished and able to maintain relationships with her biological family and her Nation.

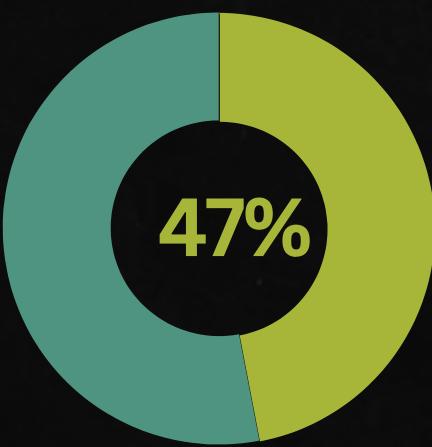


Advocacy Requests

Advocacy Calls and Enquires Received



Concerns addressed
and closed at Intake



Number of calls
referred to Advocates

Concerns People Contacted Us About

1,764

The total number of requests for advocacy received by RCY

2,627

The total number of identified issues requiring assessment, information, advice, and support

559

Calls about ineffective planning/support

414

Calls for information requests

373

Calls about disagreements or concerns about a decision

214

Calls about lack of respectful engagement

190

Calls about basic needs not being met

168

Calls about denied services or funding

152

Calls about participation and clear, timely communication

151

Calls about family access

116

Calls about contracted placements

80

Calls about placement instability

51

Calls about permanency planning

50

Calls about waitlists or funding delays

44

Calls about conflicts within the care team

20

Calls about cultural supports

71

Other

In the 2023/24 fiscal year, RCY's Advocacy team received an average of 147 requests for advocacy per month – totaling 1,764 requests from the public by phone, email and chat/text. From those requests, 2,627 issues were identified that required assessment, information, advice and/or support and 1,329 advocacy files were opened. Each file opened can include multiple children and multiple issues. The total number of issues captured in all files this past fiscal year was two per cent higher than last year. Within the 1,329 files opened, 1,699 children, youth and young adults were served. Of those served, 54 per cent were of First Nations, Métis or Inuit heritage.

Approximately 47 per cent of intake files created (1,329) in 2023/24 were forwarded to an advocate for deeper assessment and/or further advocacy. It is important to note that the percentage of files assigned to advocates continues to increase. Overall, advocacy workload has increased between 2022/23 and 2023/24 fiscal years, with an 11 per cent increase in calls, a 15 per cent increase in files opened, and a 27 per cent increase in files assigned to advocates from intake.

The bulk of RCY's advocacy work remains focused on designated services that are connected to child welfare (80 per cent), with 66 per cent (1,098) involving MCFD and 14 per cent (231) involving an Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency (ICFSA). Four per cent of issues (69) are CLBC-related, maintaining the doubling of involvement from the 2021/22 fiscal year to 2022/23. Issues related to provincial and regional health authorities account for just 2 per cent of issues (38).⁴

The top five most frequent service areas in

RCY's advocacy work during the last fiscal year were child protection, guardianship, family support, youth services and residential resources.

Top three issues at the advocacy intake stage:

- Ineffective planning/supports (21%)
- Information requests (16%)
- Disagreement with or concern about a decision (14%)

Additional issues raised at the intake stage include the following:

- Disrespectful engagement (8%)
- Basic needs not met (7%)
- Disagreement with or concern about a decision (6%)

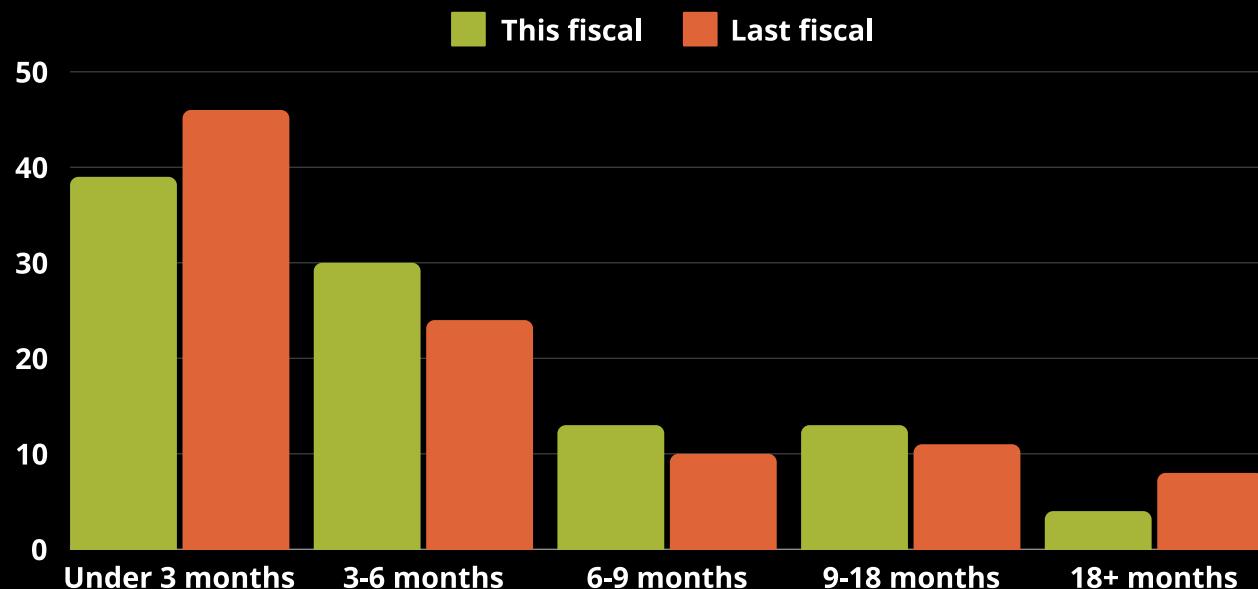
⁴ This is a much smaller number than RCY would expect to see given that the health authorities are responsible for delivering or funding some mental health and all substance use services for children and youth and that RCY consistently sees the impact of mental health and addictions concerns on the well-being of young people. It is likely that health authority staff do not provide information to young people and families about RCY as consistently as MCFD and the ICFSAs do as there is no requirement for them to apprise young people of their right to independent advocacy services and there remains a lack of awareness and understanding about RCY within the health authorities.

Active Files

The average number of months that RCY advocacy files remained in “active” status increased slightly, from seven months in 2022/23 to 7.5 months in 2023/24, and

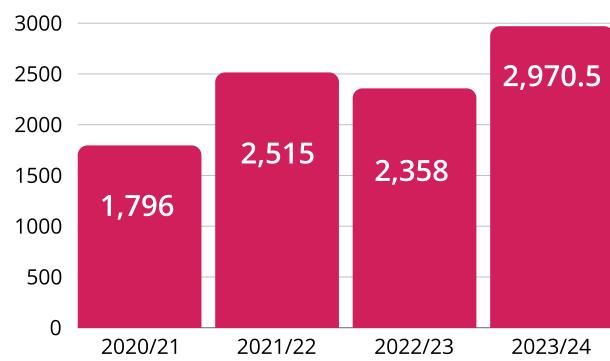
there was an increase in the number of files remaining open between nine and 18 months.

The average number of months files remained open at RCY in the last two fiscal years



In 2023/24 the complexity of RCY advocacy files continued to increase. The figure shows the numbers of total hours spent by advocates in either in-person or virtual meetings for the past four fiscal years. This increased effort is driven by advocates increasingly needing to engage staff from multiple service streams, as the children, youth and young adults we serve more often require an array of simultaneous and coordinated supports e.g., services for support needs, mental health and substance use. Such complex situations require more frequent communications and meetings to resolve issues.

Meeting Hours



Reviews & Investigations



RCY's Reviews and Investigations team is responsible for reviewing, investigating and reporting on critical injuries and deaths of children and youth receiving reviewable services. Reviewable services are services or programs under the CFCS Act and the Youth Justice Act and include:

- child welfare
- addiction services for children
- mental health services for children
- youth justice services⁵

Public bodies delivering reviewable services are required to report to the Representative the critical injury or death of a child if the child or family was receiving services at the time of, or in the year prior to, the injury or death. This is known as a Reportable Circumstance (RC). Currently, the public bodies delivering reviewable services include MCFD, ICFSAs and health authorities. MCFD submits RCs for its reviewable services and also submits RCs received from ICFSAs. To date, the Ministry of Health and health authorities have not complied with the legal requirement to report the critical injury or death of children receiving reviewable services.⁶

All injury and death reports - Reportable Circumstances (RCs) are reviewed to determine if the reviewable services involved may have been a factor in the death or critical injury. Review analysts assess injury types and enter their analysis into the RCY database to enable future thematic analysis.

An examination of trends and patterns emerging from the roughly 530 RCs reviewed each month provides the foundation for a range of issues to be

raised and addressed through reports, statements and through aggregate reports. Where there is a specific and immediate concern for the safety of a child or youth a Case of Concern⁷ can be brought to the Provincial Director of Child Welfare, requesting an assessment of whether planning in a local service delivery area (SDA) is adequate. Where there is an indication that services are not being provided as needed, a child or youth can be referred to the IAFNMIE team for advocacy to ensure that they are receiving the supports they need. When there is media coverage of a child receiving reviewable services or the Representative needs an immediate update, analysts write a priority or media briefing note.

⁵ Both services under the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act and the Child in the Home of a Relative Program are prescribed as reviewable services.

⁶ Reviewable services are defined in s.1 of the RCY Act as "services and programs under the Child, Family and Community Service Act or the Youth Justice Act and mental health and addiction services." The Ministry of Health and Health Authorities provide some of the mental health and addiction services in B.C. that are available to children and youth. RCY has been working with the Ministry of Health and health authorities to ensure compliance with the requirement to submit RCs but this was put on hold over the past few years due to COVID-19. RCY is re-engaging with the Ministry of Health and health authorities to encourage and enable reporting compliance.

⁷ Cases of Concern (CoC) are written to the Director of Child Welfare in MCFD when an RCY review analyst believes there continues to be unaddressed safety issues with the likelihood of significant future harm. This analysis is limited to written documentation in MCFD's and Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSA's) data management system, ICM.

Case of Concern

The following is a summary of a Case of Concern sent to MCFD's Provincial Director of Child Welfare. Identifying information has been removed to protect the confidentiality of the youth.

Injury Summary

Over the past three years, RCY has received 16 injury Reportable Circumstances (RC) for Ruth (age 17). Two recent RCs will be highlighted throughout this Case of Concern. Ruth was recently assaulted on two separate occasions by a 21-year-old male who stated to police he is Ruth's boyfriend. RCMP arrested this male and charged him with assault. Ruth was punched and hit on her face and body, strangled and had been confined in the apartment. She had injuries to her face and red marks around her neck. She also presented with older red marks around her neck from a different assault the night before.

A month later, police responded a second time when Ruth called RCMP as this male was not complying with Ruth's request to stop abusing her. RCMP arrived and Ruth stated she had been strangled and "pushed around." This male was providing a place to live and forcing Ruth to have sex with him in order to remain in the home.

Background and History

MCFD was involved with Ruth's mother's family due to violence and substance use in the home. Ruth's mother was removed when she was 12 and was in the care of MCFD until she was 19. She then became involved with MCFD again when she gave birth to Ruth. Ruth was removed from her mother's care at age two and placed in a foster home for a period of time. Ruth's mother struggles with alcohol and substance misuse and what MCFD describes as "chronic domestic violence" by partners, which was often witnessed and experienced by Ruth and her two siblings.

Ruth and her siblings were in and out of foster homes as children due to reunification efforts with their mother being attempted and then breaking down. Ruth has been in several group homes in the past two years.

Summary and Possible Recommendations

Ruth has experienced ongoing violence, including, but not limited to confinement, change in relationship and exploitation due to housing insecurity. Ruth is at high and possible imminent risk of death considering the domestic violence risk factors present. RCY is concerned that the team leader's

recommendation to seek the support and guidance from the Director of Practice for Domestic Violence and System Coordination did not occur. There is a lack of coordinated planning with regards to a safety plan.

It is noted that Ruth was denied a Youth Agreement as she was “not engaging.” RCY is unclear how MCFD is measuring “engagement” as there is no written plan on the file and Ruth has been meeting with her social worker regularly. Ruth has stated she does not feel safe in her group home and is being sexually exploited due to having no safe place to live. It is recommended that MCFD reassess Ruth’s need for a Youth Agreement to address the housing insecurity that is likely a significant contributing factor to the unhealthy relationships she engages in.

It is also recommended there be an immediate assessment to determine if a Protective Intervention Order (PIO) is appropriate to prohibit this male from having contact with Ruth. MCFD has relied on a police no contact order versus using the Child Family

Community Services Act (CFCSA) to provide safety (i.e. use of a PIO). There is no record of Ruth’s social worker filling in the “Domestic Violence Risk Factor Assessment” to guide practice and types of services and intervention required.

Finally, it is recommended that appropriate counselling be provided to Ruth that addresses her history of trauma, abuse, neglect and use of substances. Ruth has been strangled multiple times and there is no evidence she was offered adequate medical support to understand the signs and symptoms that occur in the body following strangulation.

Although the Provincial Director of Child Welfare is not required to report back on outcomes from a case of concern (CoC), R&I analyst will review records and/or RCY advocates will be part of future planning to ensure a child or youth needs are met. Positive outcomes are being evidenced through processes such as CoC’s which have resulted in collaborative solutions for other youth in similar circumstances.



The Reviews & Investigations Process

The Reviews and Investigations process ensures that critical incidents involving children and youth are thoroughly examined. This process aims to identify areas for improvement and provide recommendations to enhance services and outcomes for all children and youth.



Critical Injury or Death Report

A critical injury or death (RC) of a child or youth receiving reviewable services is received by the RCY.



Initial Review

The RC is assessed, coded by injury type, mandate or out of mandate and entered into RCY data base. In mandate RCs are further analysed to identify emerging themes and if immediate action may be required.



Case of Concern, Priority Briefing Notes, Advocacy Referral

When there is evidence of imminent or unaddressed future harm, a Case of Concern is sent to MCFD or an ICFSA and an Advocacy referral may be opened. Priority Briefing Notes inform the Representative of media involvement or RCs that require immediate review.



Monthly Initial Review Meeting

All RCs entered the month prior are reviewed with Executive. Possible actions: advocacy referrals, Briefing Note or a Comprehensive Review to determine if an Investigation should occur.



Aggregate and Investigation Reports

Public reports may have recommendations that support systemic improvements to enhance the well being of children and youth.

Listening Deeply to Children and Youths' Stories

On a monthly basis, all in-mandate RCs are reviewed at an Initial Review meeting that is hosted by the R&I team and includes representatives from the IAFNMIE and SAFNMIR teams, senior executive and the Representative. This meeting provides the opportunity for the R&I team, as well as members of senior executive and the Representative, to identify whether the critical incident or death of a child/youth requires a more detailed review by the team. In those instances, it is determined whether a briefing note or a lifetime analysis through a full comprehensive review is required.

Comprehensive Reviews (CRs) often take a number of months to complete as they include the family and child's experiences with reviewable services throughout the child's lifetime. CRs provide an understanding of the child's and their family's experience, where gaps may be present, and they identify opportunities for meaningful change to policy and practice. After the completion of a CR, the Representative may call for a full investigation which typically takes 12-24 months to complete depending upon complexity and team capacity. Where briefing notes and CRs yield consistent patterns of experiences for children and youth, several reviews can be brought together in an aggregate review or special report under S.20 of the RCY Act. These reports are released publicly and may include recommendations to government to improve access, responsiveness and effectiveness of services and supports.

Sharing Child and Youth Stories Through Numbers

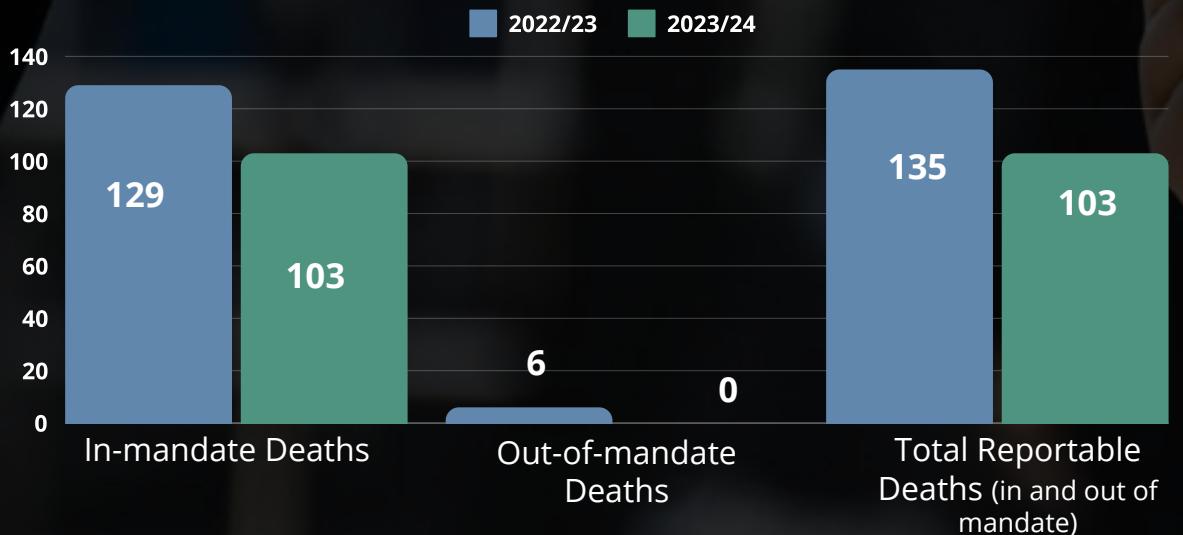
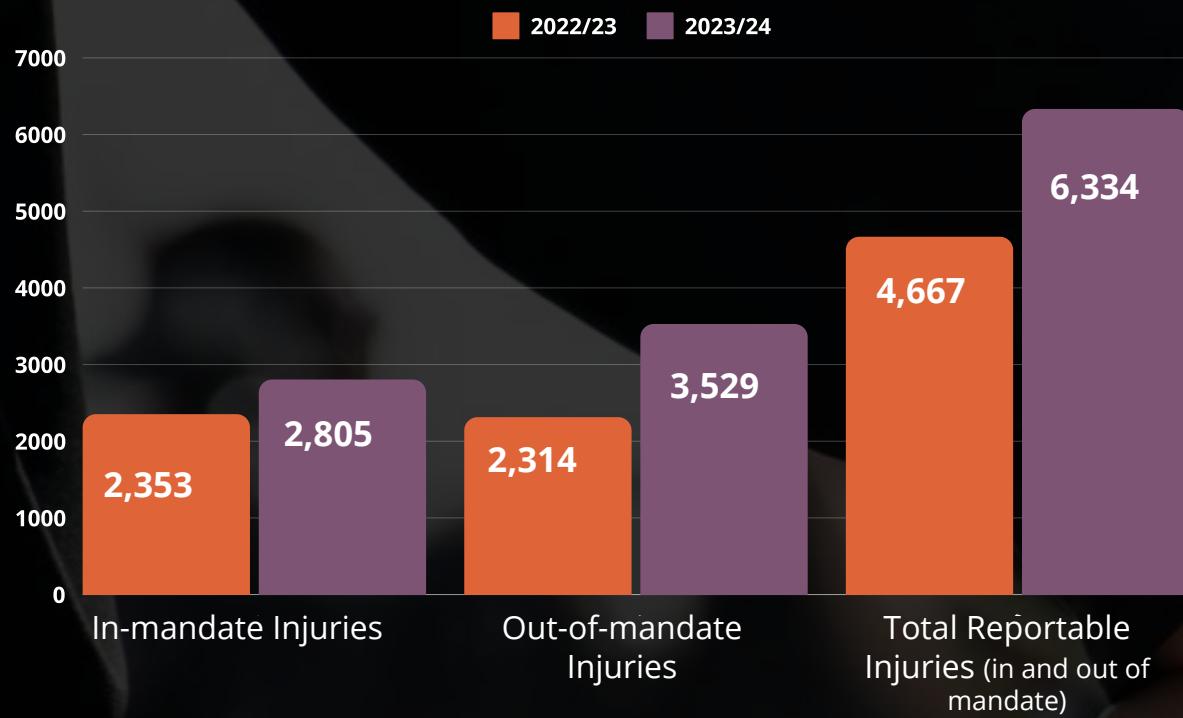
In 2023/24, RCY received and reviewed an average of 536 RCs each month with the goal of understanding and documenting each young person's story in a way that respects their experience and helps to inform individual and systemic change. In 2023/24, 6,437 RCs were received, of which 45 per cent fell within RCY's mandate. 2,908 RCs received were assessed as critical injuries (in-mandate), and 11 of these were taken to the comprehensive review stage in 2023/24. One of these was taken to investigation (see below for a detailed update).

Of the 2,908 reports of in-mandate critical injuries and deaths in 2023/24, 103 were reports of in-mandate child and youth deaths.



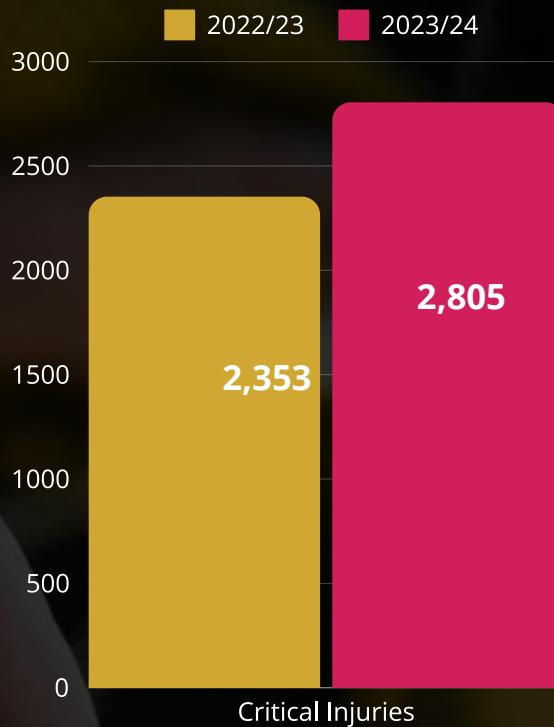
Total Reportable Circumstances

received in 2023/24

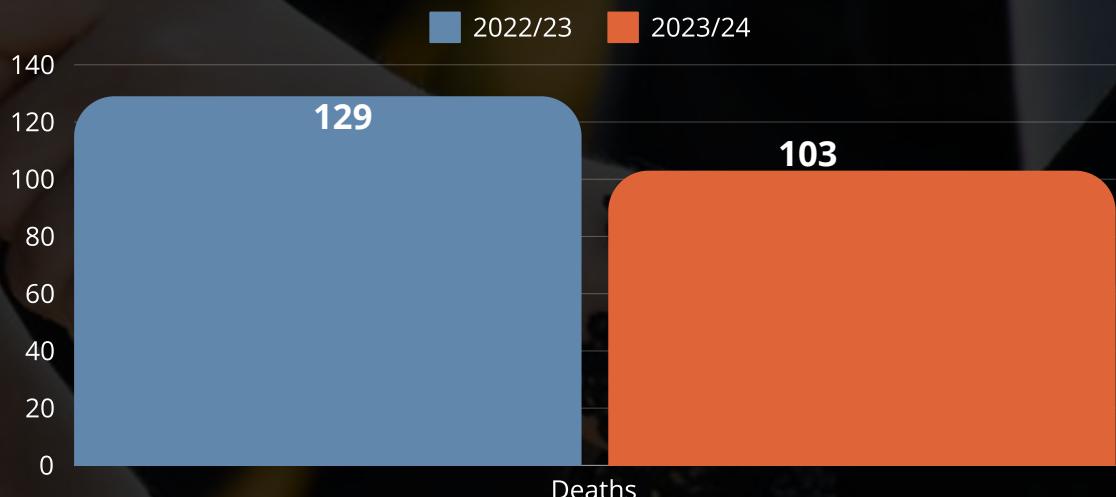


Number of In-Mandate Critical Injuries and Deaths of Children and Youth

2022/23 to 2023/24



In 2022/23 the total number of in-mandate critical injuries and deaths were 2,482. In 2023/24 the total number increased by 17 per cent to 2,908.*



* The 17 per cent increase from last year is likely due to a number of factors, including more reliable reporting from MCFD.

Critical Injuries by Indigeneity and Care Status

2023/24

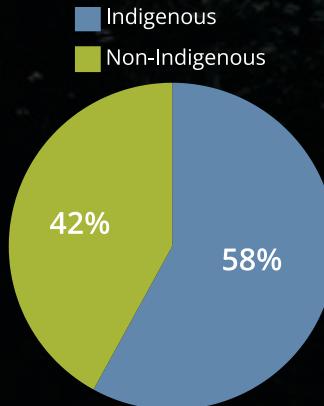
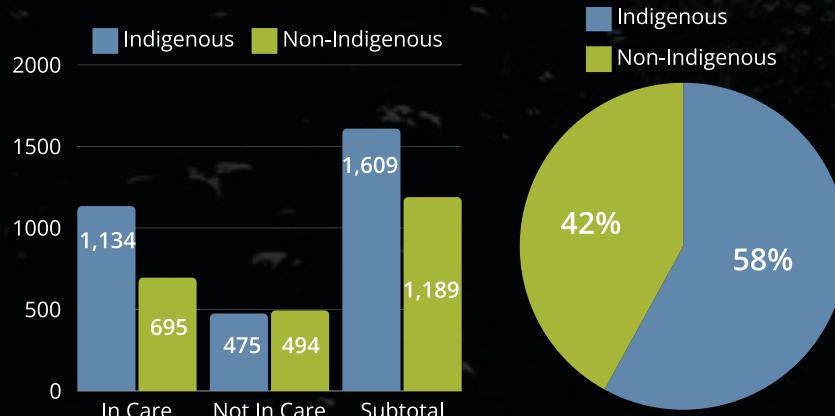
RCY is keenly aware of the over-involvement of the child welfare system in the lives of Indigenous children, youth and their families. The figure below makes clear that this over-involvement is also reflected in RCY reportable injuries:

- of the 2,805 in-mandate critical injuries reported to RCY in 2023/2024, 1,609

critical injuries (57 per cent²) were experienced by Indigenous children and youth.

- 1,134 (41 per cent) of the total in-mandate critical injuries (2,805) were experienced by Indigenous children and youth in government care.

	In Care	Not In Care	Total
First Nations	937	175	1,112
Métis	377	88	465
Inuit	8	0	8
Indigenous: Unspecified*	10	14	24



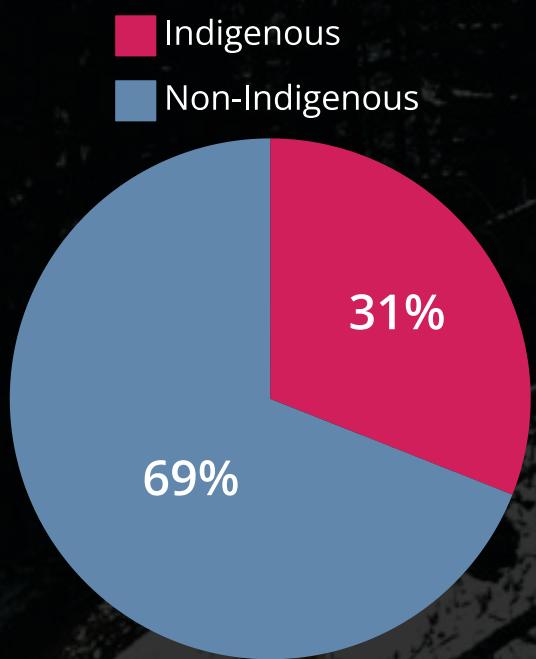
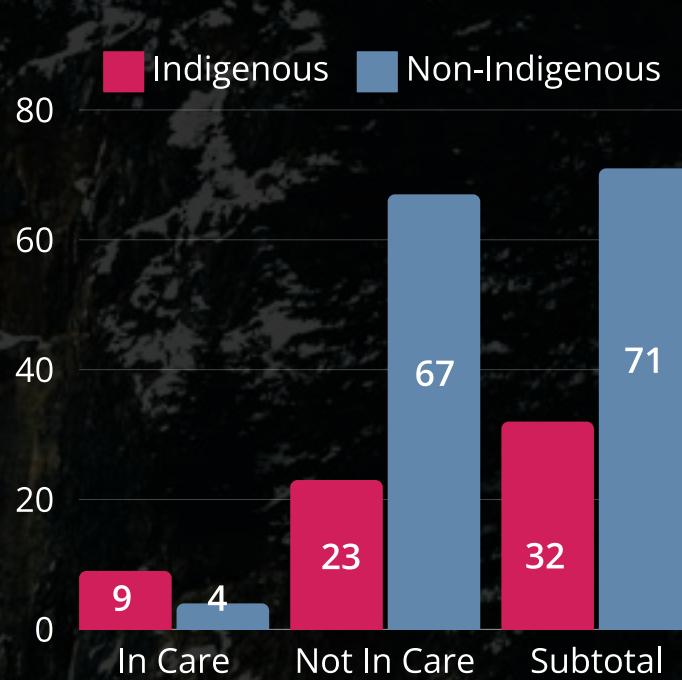
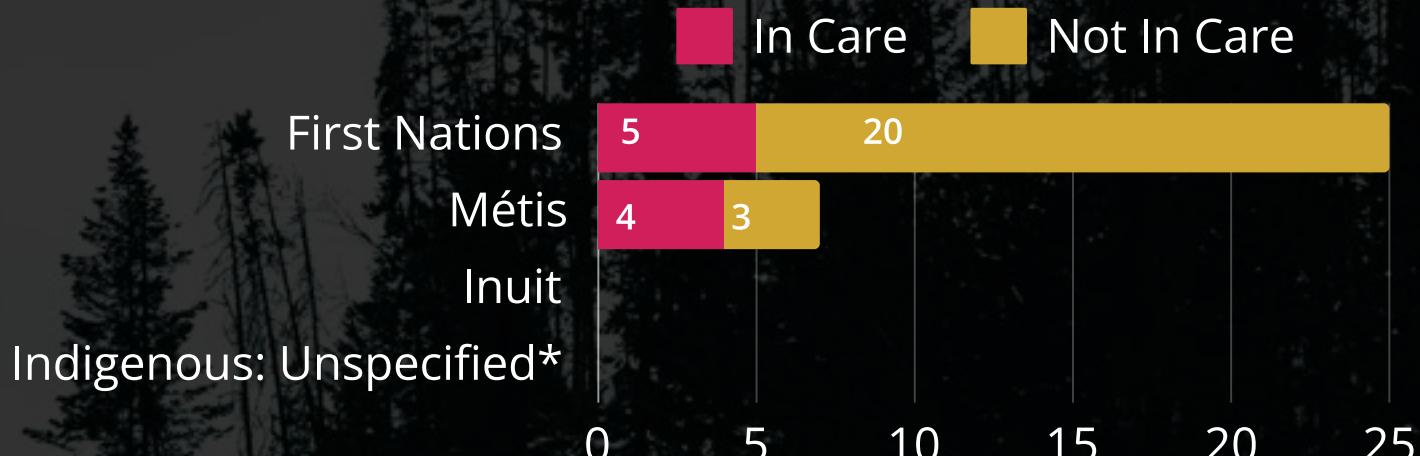
* A child/youth is identified as "Indigenous: Unspecified" when MCFD practitioners are aware that a child is Indigenous but do not know that child's specific heritage (i.e., whether that child is First Nations, Métis or Inuit). This is usually the case when a child

is newly connected to MCFD. Six records where Indigeneity is unknown and one blank record have been removed from the total injury count.

* R&I data, First Nation includes non-status or status children across Canada.

Deaths by Indigeneity and Care Status

2023/24



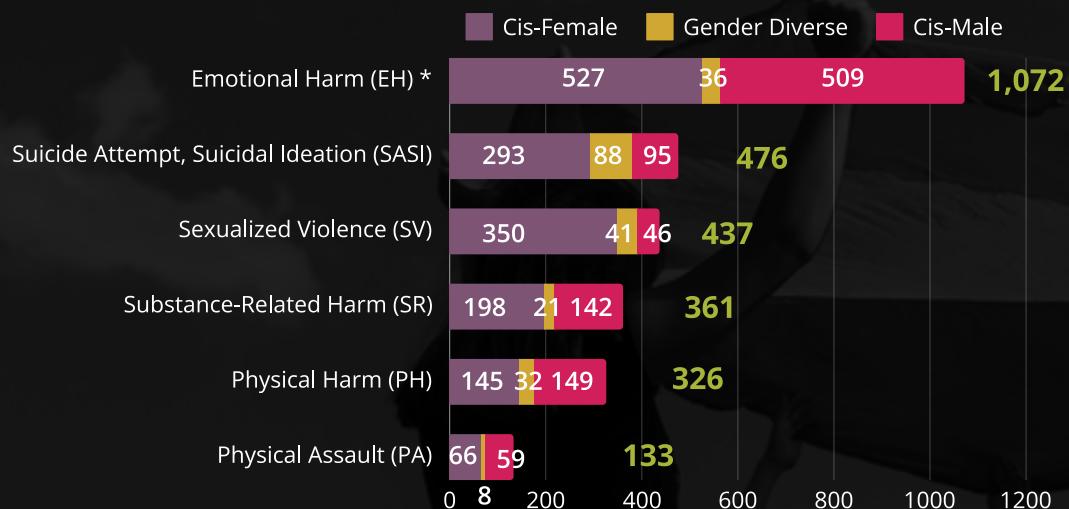
Of the 103 deaths, nine (nine per cent) were Indigenous children or youth in government care.

RCY Reportable Circumstances also provide insight into the nature of critical injuries experienced by children and youth as well as insight into the main causes of death among children and youth. RCY is paying particular attention to emotional harm in part due to the increase in deaths from toxic drug supply. Many youth are

experiencing emotional harm from the death of parents or siblings due to toxic drug poisonings.

The graph below shows in-mandate critical injuries by type of injury and by cause of death.

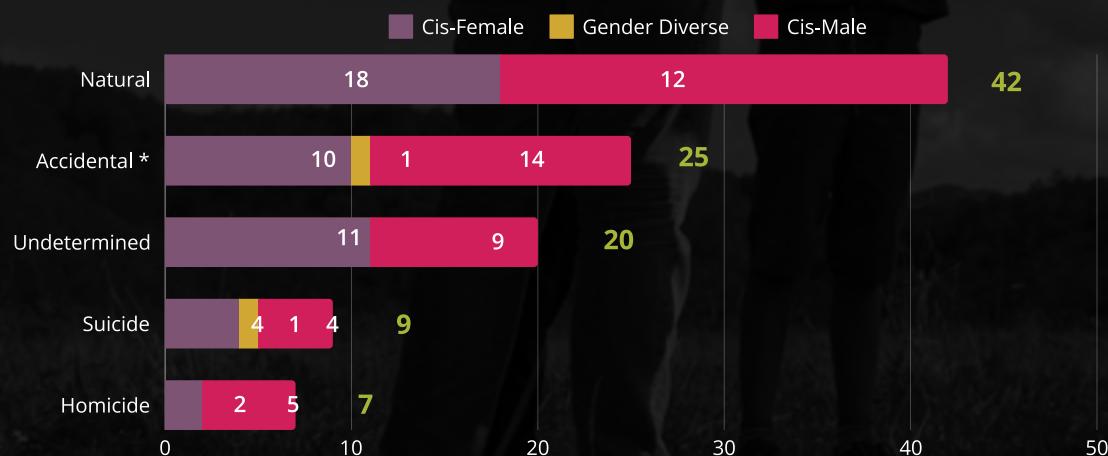
In-Mandate Critical Injuries by RCY Classification and Gender- 2023/24



*Emotional Harm refers to an incident that may cause an emotional injury to a child/youth. For emotional harm to be considered in-mandate for RCY, it must reasonably be seen as having a potential to cause serious or long-term emotional or psychological harm to the child/youth. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Death of, or injury suffered by, a significant person (parent(s), significant caregiver, etc.)
- Mistreatment/inappropriate behaviours by an approved caregiver or usually trusted person
- Witness to traumatic event (such as witness to drug poisoning, murder, etc.).

In-Mandate Deaths by RCY Classification and Gender- 2023/24

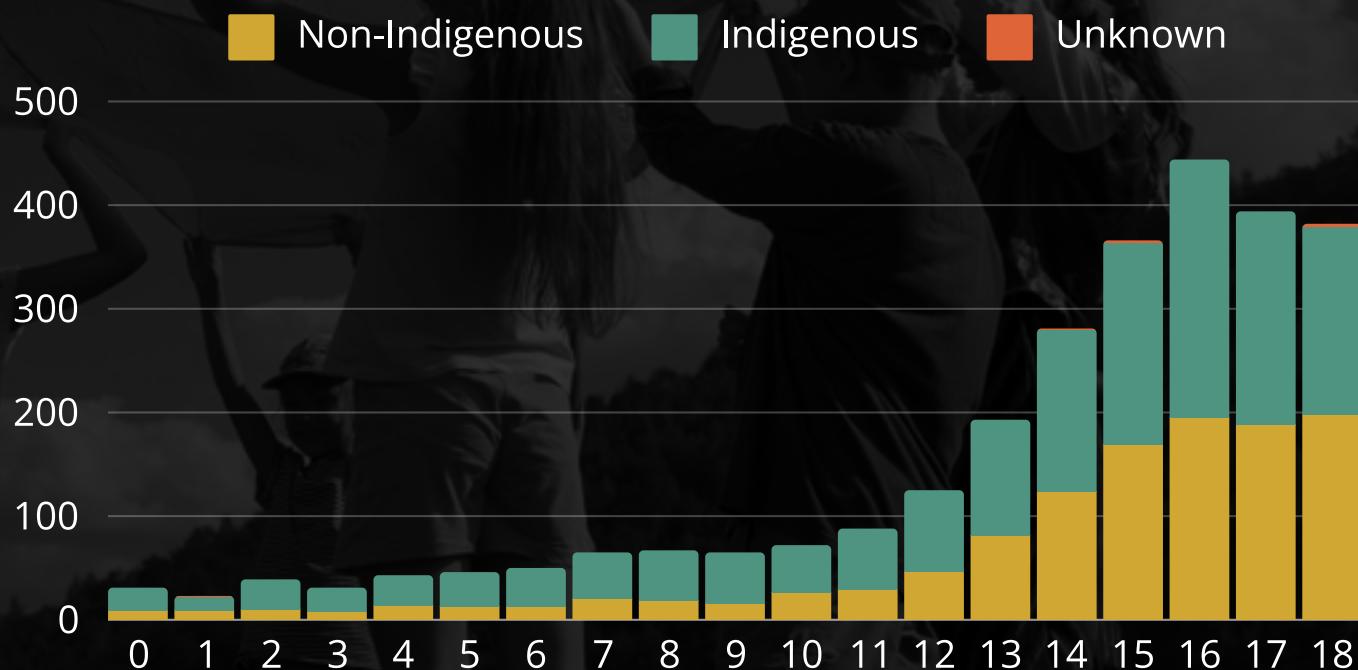


*Of the 25 deaths determined to be accidental, 13 (52 per cent) were related to suspected drug poisoning.

RCY data also provide insight into the ages of children and youth when they experience critical injuries or death. Injuries and deaths trend upward as children enter their middle years and then adolescence.

Of all critical injury reports received by the Representative in 2023/24, most were experienced by children and youth ages 12 and older. This age group experienced 78 per cent of critical injuries. 54 per cent of critical injuries were experienced by Indigenous children and youth.

Age Distribution of In-Mandate Critical Injuries by Indigeneity – 2023/24



* Age recorded is the age a young person was when the critical injury or death occurred.

Systemic Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Research





The Systemic Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Research (SAFNMIR) team is responsible for identifying common challenges, barriers or gaps in the system of services for children, youth and their families and for advocating for long-term changes in policy, practice and legislation to improve outcomes and well-being of children and youth who access these designated services. Systemic advocacy issues are identified in three ways:

- regular review of individual advocacy concerns and reportable circumstances brought forward to the Representative and analysis of the systemic patterns and trends
- ongoing monitoring of the current state – and possible future states – of child and youth needs and services in B.C. and in Canada through review of diverse data sources, research and the assessment of progress and impact of recommendations made by the Representative for changes to policy, practice and legislation
- engagement with children, youth, young adults and families, service providers, researchers, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, partners and leaders and members of the Legislative Assembly.

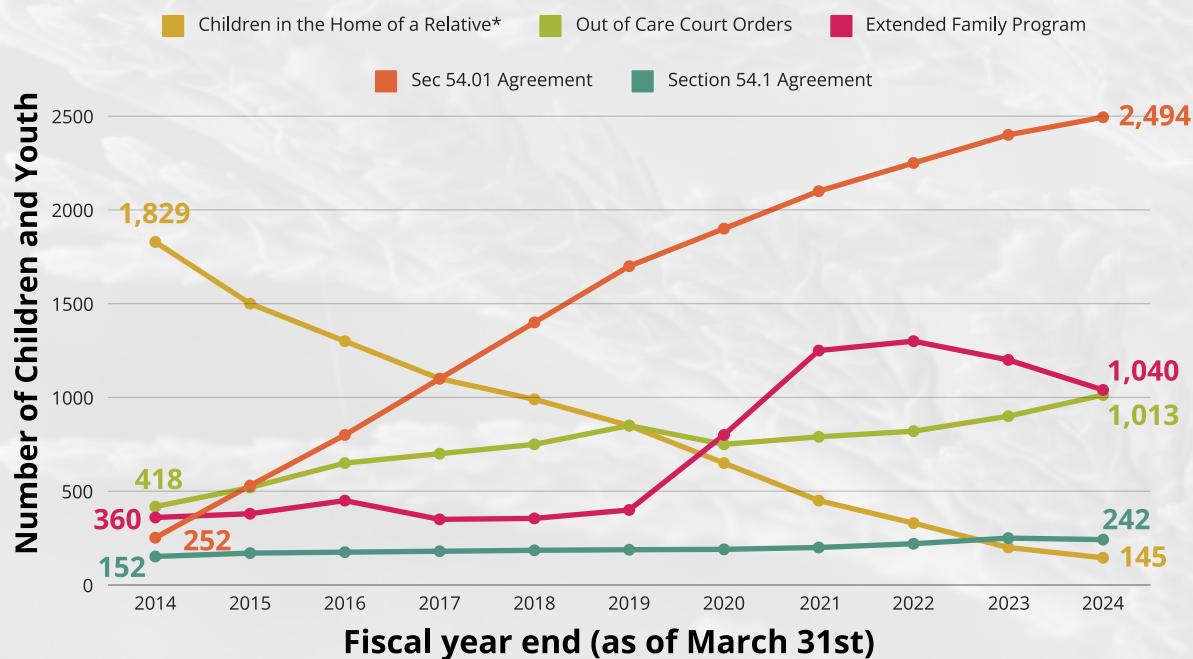
Monitoring Systemic Issues that Impact the Well-being of Children and Youth

Quantitative and qualitative information including case examples and findings from individual advocacy case work, comprehensive reviews, enable SAFNMIR to identify and analyze policy gaps, practice concerns and service delivery problems that impact the quality of care that children, youth, young adults and their families receive.

This year, one of the systemic issues RCY has monitored is the number of children and youth in out of care arrangements along with the supports

and services available to them and their kinship caregivers. These children are often placed with family members when there are protection concerns at home, but the family steps in to ensure that they are not brought into government care. The Representative has observed that, over the last ten years, there has been a substantial increase in number of children and youth living in out of care arrangements, rising from 3,011 in 2014 to 4,934 in 2024 (+63.9 per cent), while there has been a significant decrease in children and youth brought into government care.

Children and Youth in Kinship Care, March 31st, 2014-2024



* The decrease in the number of children and youth placed through the Child in the Home of a Relative program is attributed to the termination of the program on March 31, 2010. Since the termination of the program, new applications are not accepted but benefits continue to be provided to those who were in the CIHR program prior to April 1, 2010 until the child turns 19 or the child's circumstances e.g., the child returns home.

While keeping children close to home in safe and supported extended family placements is preferred over the removal of children to foster or group care settings, there are concerning reports from RCY advocates that reveal patterns of inequity and exclusion for these children and youth who are cared for in out of care arrangements, as well as for their care providers. In February 2024, RCY met with a kinship care advocacy group, Fairness for

Children Raised by Relatives (FFCRR). The FFCRR group, primarily made up of grandparents caring for their grandchildren, raised concerns about inequitable funding supports for children and youth in different types of out of care arrangements including ineligibility for medical and dental benefits and exclusion from youth transition supports such as the post-majority supports offered through MCFD's new Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment (SAJE).

**“
We step up and
raise kids when
no one else
would and we are
rewarded with
living in poverty.**

- Kinship Care
Grandparent – The State
of Kinship Care in BC
(revised 2021)⁸

RCY gathered reports from families and advocates and completed a preliminary policy analysis which revealed that inequities in kinship care disproportionately impact Indigenous families as well as grandparents and siblings who may be relying on fixed or lower income and fewer resources. Further financial analysis found that while MCFD has taken steps to improve supports for out of care arrangements by increasing the monthly service fees to be equal to the base rate of foster parents, families are still not eligible for the additional service payments offered to foster parents.

⁸ 5 Parent Support Services Society of BC, "The State of Kinship Care in BC" (2021), 67.

Payment Comparison Table

Type of Agreement	Monthly Payment	Additional Payment	Annual Payment
Family Law Act (FLA) Guardianship			
	\$0	\$0	\$0
Private Adoption			
	\$0	\$0	\$0
Child in the Home of a Relative Program*			
Ages 14-17	\$402.70	\$8797.36 (annually)	\$13,629.76
Age 18	\$454.32	\$8177.92 (annually)	\$13,629.76
Adoption through MCFD- Post Adoption Assistance**			
Ages 0-11	Up to \$849.36	\$0	Up to \$10,192.32
Ages 12-19	Up to \$1,135.81	\$0	Up to \$13,629.72
MCFD-Out of Care (includes Extended Family Program and Permanent Transfers of Custody under section 54.01 and 54.1 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act)			
Ages 0-11	\$1,531.70	\$0	\$18,380.40
Ages 12-19	\$1,711.50	\$0	\$20,538.00

MCFD-In Care (includes Temporary and Continuing Care, Special Needs Agreements and Voluntary Care Agreements)***			
Ages 0-11	\$1,531.70	Level 1 – \$591.90 (monthly)	\$ 25,483.20
		Level 2 – \$1,473.74 (monthly)	\$36,065.28
		Level 3 - \$2,347.67 (monthly)	\$46,552.44
Ages 12-19	\$1,711.50	Level 1 – \$591.90 (monthly)	\$27,640.80
		Level 2 - \$1,473.74 (monthly)	\$38,222.88
		Level 3 - \$2,347.67 (monthly)	\$48,710.04

* The Child in Home of Relative Program (CIHR) is a concluding income assistance program that was created under the Employment and Assistance Act (EAA), to provide financial support to relatives caring for children/ youth. As of summer 2023, care providers can apply for an annual affordability payment for children and youth in their care.

** Post-Adoption Assistance is only available to families who meet the eligibility requirements. Families are income tested and a social worker must determine that the child's situation requires financial assistance.

*** Foster caregivers who provide specialized care for children and youth with moderate to extraordinary support needs receive a service payment in addition to the maintenance payment per child or youth. This additional payment recognizes the special caregiving skills and extra time required to meet the needs of a child or youth

This systemic analysis has provided the foundation for the Representative to advocate for equal access to the necessary supports and services when children and youth in kinship arrangements, and their caregivers,

need them. The results of this systemic issues analysis will inform the systemic review and raise awareness about practice and service delivery concerns that need to be addressed.

Monitoring Government Progress on Recommendations

In 2019, the RCY Recommendations Monitoring Guidelines were developed in consultation with the ministries that RCY directed the majority of recommendations to at the time. The guidelines support ministries' engagement in the recommendations process including the development of detailed action plans for each recommendation, along with annual self-reported progress that is assessed by the Representative and publicly reported on the RCY website.

The Representative designed the recommendations monitoring process to provide a measure of change as it is seen and felt by children, youth, young adults and families. As such, an RCY recommendation is not deemed complete until all activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete. To assess the progress of recommendations, RCY reviews evidence provided by ministries and public bodies, alongside monitoring data available from other sources to verify that evidence.

This year, the SAFNMIR team completed 11 monitoring assessments across 72 recommendations and published its second Annual Summary of Recommendations Monitoring Report. This year's annual summary reviewed recommendations compliance and implementation progress from April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024. The Representative also identified the systemic and structural issues and barriers that continue to challenge government efforts to improve services for children, youth, young adults, and families.

This year's annual summary report showed more engagement of government in responding to recommendations as compared to the previous fiscal year but continued delays in implementation of change. Ensuring meaningful and timely Indigenous engagement and interministerial collaboration continued to be challenging this year whereas political and public engagement were enablers of timely and effective response to recommendations.

The 2023/24 annual Summary of Recommendations Monitoring report can be found [here](#).



Recommendations Development

- Recommendations developed from investigation/report findings
- Recommendations reviewed with advisors, subject-matter-experts, and research partners
- Recommendations shared with public bodies (includes government ministries) for feedback
- Feedback on timelines, feasibility and challenges are considered and final recommendations are issued by the Representative

1

Recommendations Action Planning

- RCY meets with public bodies to review Representative's recommendations, their intentions and desired impact
- RCY provides relevant information from investigation/report findings to support implementation planning
- RCY requests a detailed Action Plan from public bodies within six months of public release
- RCY assesses the Action Plan and provides feedback to public bodies based on investigation/report findings

2

Recommendations Monitoring

- RCY monitors recommendations progress through evidence submissions from public bodies and systemic monitoring data
- RCY completes a 'Recommendations Monitoring Report' for each report annually
- RCY provides monitoring reports to each public body along with the Representative's annual assessment of progress
- Monitoring reports are posted publicly and shared with the Select Standing Committee for Children & Youth

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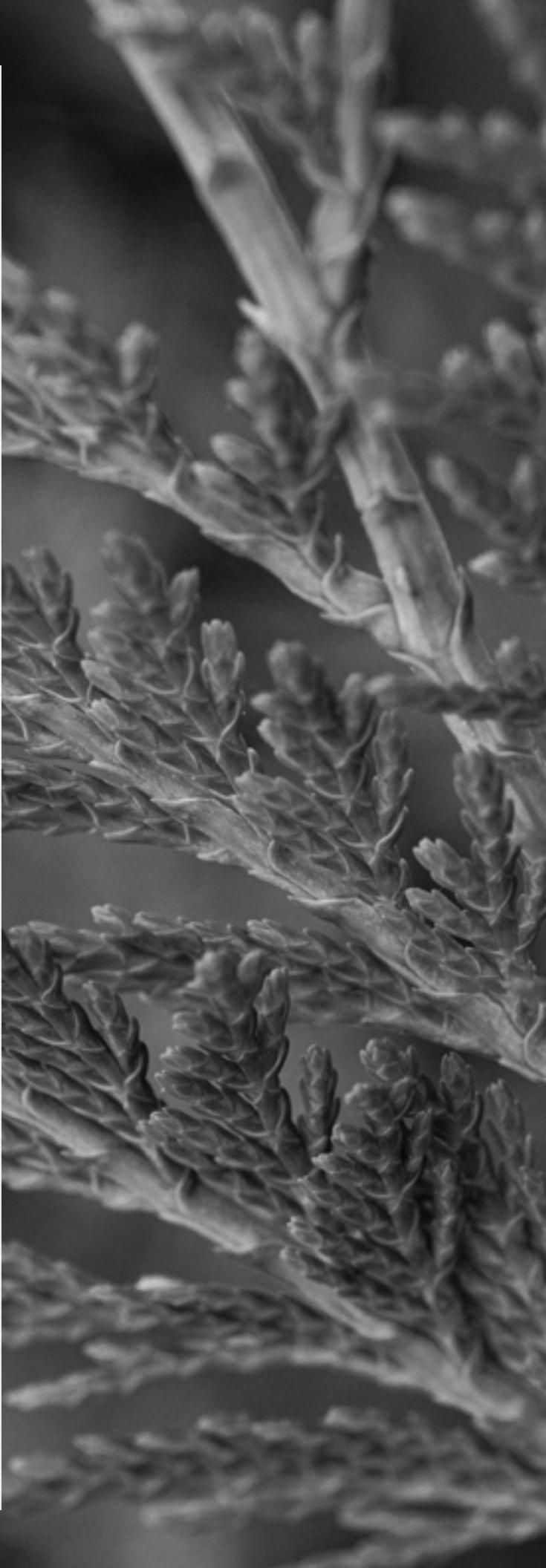
Recommendations Status

for March 2023 - April 2024

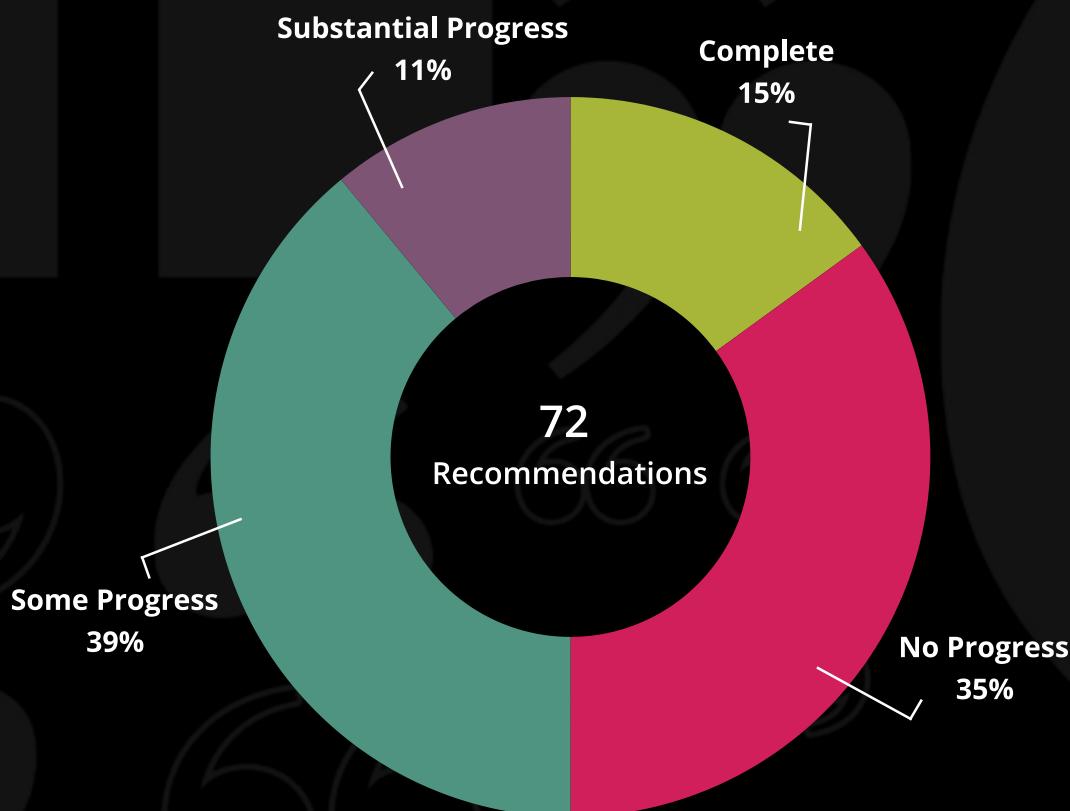
RCY is responsible for advocating for improved effectiveness and responsiveness of services for children, youth, young adults, and families in B.C. RCY does this work through individual and systemic advocacy efforts, walking alongside youth and families navigating services and independently monitoring the efforts of policy makers and service providers striving to meet their needs. Through this work, the Representative provides advice and recommendations to the Legislature, ministries and other public bodies and the public through investigations and special reports and assesses compliance with these recommendations over time.

Between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, SAFNMIR assessed the annual progress of 72 recommendations. Of the 72 recommendations assessed, 15 per cent were assessed as Complete, 11 per cent were assessed as having made Substantial Progress, 39 per cent were assessed as having made Some Progress and 35 per cent were assessed as having made No Progress.

The 72 recommendations currently monitored by RCY call for legislative, policy, practice and service delivery improvements across several priority service types including: children and youth with disabilities, child welfare, child and youth mental health and addictions, education and youth transitioning to adulthood.



RCY's Recommendations Progress



No Progress

None of the activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete (pre-planning may be underway but there has been no progress in formal planning or implementation)

Some Progress

Some of the activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete

Substantial Progress

Most of the activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete

Complete

All activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete

Championing Youth Rights: RCY's Support for Theo's Journey to a Stable Home

Theo's case highlights the critical role of the RCY in advocating for young people with complex needs. As a young person under a Continuing Custody order with MCFD and diagnosed with multiple conditions, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Theo required consistent and skilled care. RCY was contacted by a community member to advocate for Theo. After experiencing multiple placement breakdowns, over a couple of years, Theo was placed with two skilled caregivers who could meet his unique needs.

When one of the caregivers left their position, the remaining caregiver struggled to support Theo adequately, leading to an escalation of challenging behaviours and increased incidents, resulting in emergency response and hospitalization. RCY's advocacy became even more essential. Following an incident and Theo's disclosure of

physical assault by his caregiver, a protocol investigation was initiated, leading to the closure of the unsuitable placement.

RCY's advocacy continued, but securing a new placement for Theo proved challenging. RCY worked tirelessly to ensure that Theo was placed in a temporary facility with skilled staff, even though it was outside his community. Understanding the impact of this move on Theo, RCY advocated for his right to regular visits with his family, recognizing the importance of maintaining those connections.

Over the course of ten months, RCY remained a steadfast advocate, pushing for a permanent placement for Theo within his home community. When a potential home was identified, delays in the transition to CLBC complicated the process, and RCY continued to press for timely solutions. RCY's persistent efforts kept the focus on Theo's needs, ensuring that the process did not stall and that his well-being remained the top priority.

Finally, after six months of advocacy and coordination, a move-in date was set for July 2024. RCY's advocate working alongside Theo and his team resulted in Theo being able to transition to a stable and supportive home within his community, ensuring that he received the care he needed close to his family and support network. Theo's story is not an outlier. MCFD and ICSFA's are facing growing challenges in arranging skilled and nurturing quality care in foster and staffed homes.





The difference we make

OUR WORK





Progress on our 2023-24 Priorities

In RCY's 2022/23 annual report, we outlined strategic priorities that would guide our 2023/24 work to improve the lives of children and youth in British Columbia. Over the past year, we have made significant strides in addressing most of these priorities.

Priority: Indigenous Child Welfare

Consistent with the 6R's, RCY continued to work closely with Indigenous communities and organizations to understand their needs and discuss how we can support the changes they desire for child and family services and resumption of child welfare jurisdiction. RCY receives monthly briefings from MCFD regarding Nations that are resuming their inherent rights through CFCSA S. 92 coordination agreements or through the federal An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children and families. Additional dialogue and shared learning is occurring with Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors' Our Children Our Way Society (OCOW) and the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) to better

understand how RCY can support Nations which are moving towards jurisdiction. This is an area where RCY seeks to be a trusted "accomplice" in this complex and emergent pathway for Indigenous communities.

The subject of jurisdiction as well as the well-being of Indigenous children, youth and families is being considered in the systemic review due for release in summer, 2024. To support this work, RCY has engaged key organizations including FNLC, OCOW, The Métis Nation British Columbia, B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Nations and other Indigenous organizations, to inform the systemic review.

Priority: Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN)

Given the challenges and systemic inequities that many children and youth with disabilities and their families experience, RCY has held a strong focus on CYSN for the past six years. Through diverse methodologies including visits with families, communities and service providers, surveys, focus groups, interviews, convenings, comprehensive reviews, data collection and analysis, policy reviews and an investigation, RCY has gained a deep understanding about the challenges that children with disabilities and their families and caregivers experience and what would be helpful. This knowledge has been reflected in one investigative and five special reports since

November 2018.

In 2023/24, RCY undertook a survey of families and held a number of discussion groups for families to determine what has changed since 2018. RCY and expert advisors also visited the 49 communities that are being served through MCFD's new Family Connection Centre pilots. To draw attention to persistent gaps for children with support needs and hold the government accountable for strengthening support, RCY prepared and released two reports on CYSN. The first is described below and the second is described under the mental health priority below.

Still Left Out: Children and youth with disabilities in B.C.

November 2023

MCFD does not understand how this system is experienced by families. The reality is that any change to the system has to be grounded in a deep understanding of the current system as it is experienced by families with medically complex children. This is urgent. We've been ignored for far too long.

- Bobbi

”



This is a follow-up report to *Left Out: Children and youth with special needs in the pandemic*, calling on the provincial government to immediately provide much needed supports for children and youth with disabilities and their families across British Columbia who are currently under-served. RCY followed up with the 10 families who participated in *Left Out*, as well as the four families who participated in our 2021 Excluded report, to determine

if anything had changed or improved for them in the past three years. RCY also conducted an anonymous survey for families and caregivers of children with disabilities across the province. This report urges government to move forward on immediate and medium-term actions to support CYSN families and to make progress on recommendations that have been brought forward in past RCY reports.

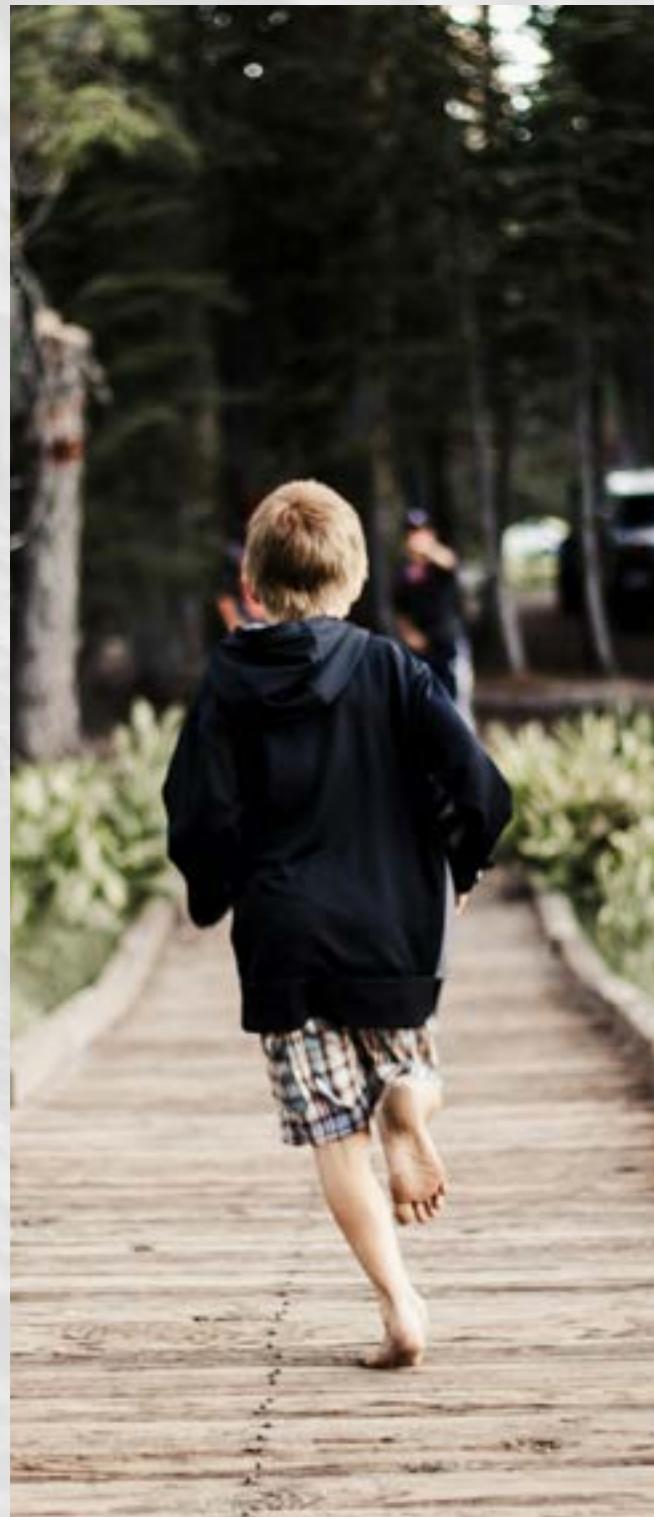
Navigating Complex Needs

Isaac, an 11-year-old with a rare neurological disorder and several mental health diagnoses, faced significant challenges at home. His family struggled without access to key services like respite and therapy, as Isaac didn't qualify for Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) support. Repeated denials from Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) left them without a case manager or coordinated care.

Overwhelmed, Isaac's mother turned to RCY for help. RCY advocates stepped in, connecting with the family and collaborating with CYMH to ensure Isaac received the necessary care. The advocate pushed for a case manager, organized Integrated Case Management (ICM) meetings, and ensured the family had a voice in the process.

As a result, Isaac began receiving support from a clinician, counsellor, and youth worker. His mother enrolled in parenting classes, and the family connected with additional support, including a family development worker. Isaac also found a mentor and was moved to an alternative education setting where he thrived.

Though they haven't opened a formal Family Services file, RCY helped the family explore interim solutions and continues to support them as they navigate Isaac's care.





Priority: Mental Health

Mental health care is another enduring strategic priority for RCY, with the absence of timely and appropriate mental health care often contributing to other challenges for young people and their families including substance use, family conflict and breakdown, and suicidality. RCY continued

work on a series of focused mental health reports and worked with Children's Health Policy Centre (CHPC) at Simon Fraser University to understand the mental health needs of children and youth with neurodevelopmental conditions. The resulting report was released in April, 2023.



Toward Inclusion:

The need to improve access to mental health services for children and youth with neurodevelopmental conditions

April 2023



“ Children and youth with neurodevelopmental conditions experience significant challenges in their daily living due to the effects of their disability alone... there is an extraordinarily high prevalence of mental health challenges amongst these young people which obviously leads to compounding vulnerabilities and additional challenges in daily living for many of them, and for their caregivers.

RCY, in conjunction with the Children's Health Policy Centre (CHPC) at Simon Fraser University, released this report providing robust evidence that mental health challenges are much higher for children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and intellectual disabilities (ID).

The report is the second in a series of RCY reports on mental health and wellness for distinct populations of children and youth.

The findings in the report suggest that mental health disorders are causing a pronounced burden for children with neurodevelopmental conditions, compared with other children.

In the report, the Representative made four new recommendations to government, including reiterating a call to fully fund and implement mental health screening, assessment and treatment for children and youth with neurodevelopmental conditions.



RCY's Role in Wyatt's Journey to Stability

When Wyatt, a young person in care, turned 19 in the fall of 2023, he found himself without a stable home to transition to through Community Living BC (CLBC). RCY was contacted about the tenuous circumstances. Recognizing the urgency of his situation, RCY stepped in to advocate for Wyatt's right to a safe and supportive living environment. Despite the lack of an immediate CLBC placement, RCY's persistent advocacy ensured that Wyatt remained in his Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) resource under a temporary housing agreement



(THA), which was renewed in March 2024.

RCY closely monitored Wyatt's case as CLBC identified a potential home. However, extensive renovations, including hazardous waste abatement and subsequent flooding issues, caused significant delays. RCY's continued involvement kept the focus on Wyatt's needs, pushing for timely solutions and ensuring that Wyatt's situation was not overlooked during this challenging period.

Even as Wyatt's current agency faced staffing challenges, RCY's advocacy ensured that Wyatt's safety and well-being remained a priority. When another youth was placed in the basement of Wyatt's temporary home, causing additional strain, RCY worked to address the impact on Wyatt and advocated for his rights to a stable environment.

Wyatt's story reminds us of the importance of perseverance and being steadfast in your efforts to collaborate and work toward resolution. Everyone working together, despite differences in mandates or policies, was beneficial for Wyatt and resulted in renovations being approved for completion by July 15, 2024. RCY will continue to monitor and support the progress to ensure that Wyatt's transition is successful.

Priority: Substance Use

Data increasingly show the direct and indirect impacts of the toxic illicit drug supply on children and youth. Reportable Circumstances that RCY reviews each month include an average of 30 critical injuries associated with substance use, that are causing life-long harms. The Coroner reported 28 deaths of children and youth associated with the unregulated toxic drug supply (i.e. overdose deaths) in 2023 and RCY reviewed 13 substance use deaths in 2023/24. The Reportable that RCY also show the impact of toxic drugs on children's networks of care as parents, significant caregivers and siblings are dying. Such losses and consequent grief have a substantial impact on children's lives.

However, despite widespread recognition of the impacts and challenges, the path forward is not clear. Given diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives in the field, RCY determined that a valuable role that we could play was to bring people from diverse disciplines and sectors together and attempt to determine a positive approach to meeting the needs of young people who

use substances. In 2023/24, RCY engaged the [Wosk Centre for Dialogue](#) at Simon Fraser University and began planning and preparing for the dialogue, which will be held in winter 2024/25. The Wosk Centre has deep expertise in facilitating transformative conversations that encourage real-world influence. As part of the preparatory work, Wosk staff met with two dozen practitioners, researchers and policy advisors to seek their advice on how best to ensure that the dialogue sessions are productive and effective.

In addition to preparing for the convening sessions, the Representative has served on the Coroner's Death Review Panel on the toxic drug supply and contributed to the report, [An Urgent Response to a Continuing Crisis](#), which was released by the Coroner in November 2023 and calls for an enhanced model for safer supply. RCY also launched a social media campaign on the toxic drug supply and impacts on children and youth, centering the voices and experiences of young people.

Priority: Child Rights, Voice, and Participation

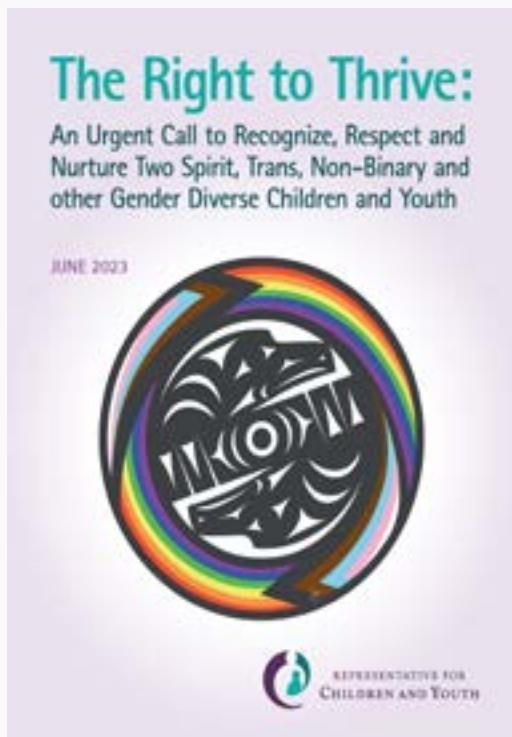
RCY has continued to advocate for child rights including calling for stronger legislative protections for Two-Spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse children and youth. To address this priority the RCY

worked with researchers from the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, and other experts and advocates to prepare a special report on the rights of gender diverse children and youth.

The Right to Thrive:

An Urgent Call to Recognize, Respect and Nurture Two Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary and other Gender Diverse Children and Youth

June 2023



This report calls on the provincial government to play a proactive role in protecting Two-Spirit, trans, non-binary and gender diverse (2STNBGD) young people. It is vital that government ensure that 2STNBGD children and youth are free from discrimination and stigma, are safe and cared for, and have access to the services and supports that they need to thrive and experience belonging.

B.C.'s child-serving system is responsible for meeting the needs of all children and youth receiving services, no matter their gender identity or expression. Findings through research for this report raised

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Far too often, young people face a lack of gender affirming care, support, and awareness from health care providers and society. When this happens, we are failing them, and this must change.

– Jennifer Charlesworth.

serious concerns about the experiences of, and outcomes for, these young people, who were doing consistently less well on many measures than their cisgender peers. The Representative concluded that it was not the gender diversity that lay at the root of the differential outcomes, but rather the way in which young people are treated.

The Representative makes eight recommendations to government in *The Right to Thrive* including, notably, that B.C.'s Attorney General identify opportunities to enhance legislative protections for 2STNBGD children and youth and lead the drafting and passage of these protections.

Priority: Early years and early help for children and their families

RCY focused increasingly on upstream family support and continued pushing for policies that help keep families safely together. Family Support and Kinship Care were major themes identified in the sacred

story investigation and systemic review released in summer 2024. Moving forward, these areas will be further explored and be major components of RCY's strategic priorities over the next several years.

Priority: Understand and Improve Systems to Address Complexity in the Lives of Children, Youth and Families

RCY engaged with service providers and government agencies to address the systemic failures in providing care for children with complex developmental, mental health, and behavioural needs, advocating for more tailored and effective services.

Over the past two years, the RCY has worked with Indigenous knowledge carriers, academics, care providers, care teams and youth in care, to explore the experience of girls in B.C.'s child and youth serving system on a System Failing Girls initiative. The Representative witnessed girls from different cultural backgrounds from all over the province, who are experiencing complexity in their lives and are increasingly facing negative health and social outcomes on multiple fronts. The resulting critical injuries reported to RCY included sexualized violence, suicide attempts and/or ideation, substance-use related harms, and physical assault or even premature death.

RCY hosted research ceremony guided by Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Carriers and conducted an in-depth policy analysis

that identified the lack of systems response that led to the death of six girls. While each girl's story is unique, all share the experience of being let down repeatedly by systems struggling to meet needs. This work will be shared through RCY's first ever, aggregate death review that draws on Indigenous research methodologies and is centered in Indigenous worldviews.

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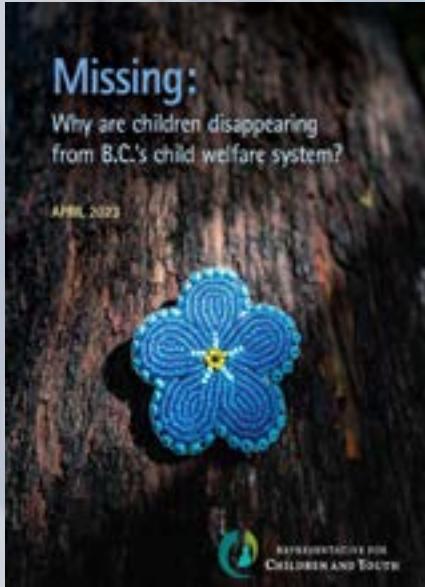
Through dialogue, we will learn what is being called in for our children and youth who are lost or missing. The wisdom of all is needed to understand and determine how we must respond and move this forward together.

– Wedlidi Speck, Head Chief of the Gixsam namima (clan) of the Kwagul tribe

Missing:

Why are children disappearing from B.C.'s child welfare system?

January 2024



Stories of children and youth who are lost or missing from the child welfare system continue to emerge as an area of concern across Canada, in some cases resulting in tragic and preventable injuries and deaths. *Missing* presents findings by RCY on children and youth who are missing, “running from,” or “hiding from,” the care system.

This report is the culmination of a review of more than 500 reports received over a nine-month period regarding children and youth in provincial government care who were lost, missing or away from their placement, and who experienced a critical injury or were considered at risk of harm during the period. These reports to RCY represented 198 distinct children, four of whom died.

RCY found that, for many children and youth who were reported as lost or missing, there had been a pattern of inadequate and ineffective services that are unable to meet the children’s needs and adequately support them and their families. RCY also found that

the rights of children and youth who were reported as lost or missing were routinely not upheld, including the right to adequate care, the right to protection, and the right to be heard. RCY’s work has identified policy, practice and service barriers that are infringing on those rights and proposed actions that could be taken in the short and medium term, which government accepted.

Missing aims to shift the conversation away from the current focus on individual “risk factors,” “problems,” “issues,” or “behaviours” and towards systemic factors that lead to children being lost or going missing in the system of care.

The Representative calls for a special convening of the child-serving systems, and the children, youth, families and communities they serve, to respond to the cracks in the system that are contributing to children and youth being subjected to increased risks of serious incidents or critical injuries and deaths.

RCY launched a social media campaign in May 2023 and provided several public presentations with service providers, policy makers and the Select Standing Committee for Children and Youth (SSCCY) to raise awareness about the findings of this report.

This past fiscal, RCY worked with Sarah Underdown (Delorme), a Nehiyaw/Saulteaux/Lakota woman from Treaty 4 territory of Ka Awasis Nation (Cowessess) to create a beaded forget-me-knot for the lost and missing children of the Missing Report. The forget-me-not flower is the symbol for International Missing Children’s Day, recognized each year on May 25.

Priority: Accountability

RCY is committed to ensuring that there is a consistent and comprehensive approach to assessing government's action on recommendations in a number of reports. *Advocating for Change* is the first RCY report that provides a detailed assessment of government action.

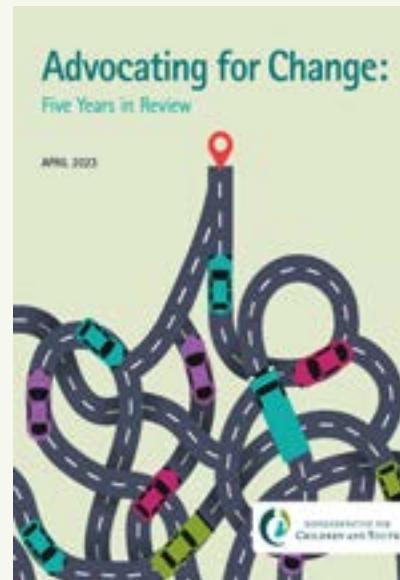
Advocating for Change: Five Years in Review

April 2023

“ Words don’t change children’s lives. Real action by the government and equality would.

— Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Gitksan First Nation advocate, scholar and Executive Director of the First Nations Caring Society of Canada

Advocating for Change takes a closer look at how well recommendations made by the Representative are implemented by government. Over the past five years, the Representative has monitored 63 recommendations, in eight reports, to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of designated services in B.C. This report examines the enablers of, and barriers to, progress along the pathway to implementation, to identify challenges and delays in actioning recommendations.



The Representative is responsible for making recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of designated services in B.C., in accordance with the Representative for Children and Youth Act (RCY Act). To do this, RCY works closely with children, youth, young adults and families, subject matter experts, service providers, public bodies, child advocates and Indigenous leadership to make recommendations for change. To date, RCY has made 216 recommendations.

Of the 63 recommendations evaluated in this report, 14 per cent were assessed as Complete and 40 per cent were assessed as No Progress. For the five-year review period, only nine of 63 recommendations have been completed.



Advocating for a safe home for Juanita

Juanita, an 18-year-old, had been confined in an adult psychiatric ward for five months due to the lack of a proper housing plan. With no safe place to go and her psychiatrist unwilling to discharge her to a youth shelter, Juanita's situation was further impacting her mental health, so she contacted RCY for support.

The RCY advocate recognized the critical need for a solution and immediately stepped in, leveraging a deep understanding of the child welfare system, relevant policies, and standards. Using persuasion and a thorough knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the advocate argued for Juanita's right to a safe and supportive discharge plan.

Juanita's story highlights the importance of relational practice and meaningful collaboration to uphold the rights and dignity of young people. With Juanita's team walking alongside her and the RCY, a plan that ensured that the adults in her life met Juanita's needs was able to be developed. Supporting Juanita to have her voice amplified and her rights upheld, resulted in a placement in a supportive housing program, where she could transition safely from the hospital. The advocate along with Juanita and

her entire team continued to engage in strong relational practice to support a smooth transition for Juanita into adult services.



Mandeep's Road to Independence Guided by RCY



Mandeep, a 16-year-old, was enduring bullying and mistreatment from his foster parent. He felt that MCFD was not hearing him despite his complaints. Feeling isolated and vulnerable, Mandeep reached out to RCY for help.

The RCY advocate worked to build relationships with Mandeep, his support worker, and MCFD, facilitating a meeting to address the concerns. The advocate secured Mandeep's move to independent youth housing through collaboration and persistent advocacy. The advocate also ensured that

Mandeep was connected with essential resources, including the Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment (SAJE) program and Autism funding, to support his transition to adulthood.

The RCY advocate played a crucial role in empowering him to take control of his future by amplifying Mandeep's voice and advocating for his rights. The advocate's work exemplifies RCY's commitment to protecting the rights of young people and ensuring they receive the support they need to thrive.

Our 2022/23 Annual Report also referenced other priority areas. Given the need to pivot resources to undertake the sacred story investigation and systemic review, our action on two of these priorities has focused on internal monitoring and review in preparation for deeper work in 2024/25 and the third priority area resulted in a public report focused toward Youth Justice and custody. This reflected RCY's growing awareness of the very small number of youth in custody at the Prince George Custody centre in particular, and concerns about the allocation of resources - especially given the lack of resources in other areas of service.

- **Youth Transitions:** Monitoring and advocating for more robust transitional support for youth aging out of care and in custody, emphasizing housing, education, and employment.

RCY has focused on monitoring the impact of the new SAJE program delivered by MCFD and noting both positive progress and gaps/challenges with the new approach to post-majority services for young people formerly in government care.

- **Residential Services:** Improving the quality of care in residential settings, particularly for children with complex needs and female-identifying youth.

RCY has continued to gather data and stories and analyze patterns and trends through our critical injury and death reviews and advocacy cases. This will support a more detailed assessment in 2024/25.

- **Youth Justice: *Missed Opportunities:*** A review of the use of youth justice resources

This report highlights the gross under-utilization of scarce resources by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. While the number of youth committing crimes and being sentenced to custody has dramatically dropped over the past 20 years, government has not yet repurposed the surplus resources that are no longer needed, resulting in the waste of taxpayer dollars, and leaving too many young people with other needs under-served. The report also shows that the youth justice system – like the child protection system – disproportionately affects Indigenous youth. In 2022/23, 53 per cent of the youth in custody and 41 per cent of those under community youth justice supervision in B.C. were Indigenous. The Representative calls for government, in consultation with youth, the First Nations and Métis Justice Councils and with ministry partners, to carefully review the underutilization of youth justice services and implement a plan for the redeployment of resources so that the needs of young people are better served.

An additional strategic priority emerged in the summer of 2023 that guided a significant amount of RCY time and energy across the second two quarters of 2023/24. The sacred story investigation and systemic review is described in the feature section below.



Missed Opportunities:

A review of the use of youth justice resources

January 2024

Missed Opportunities:

A review of the use of
youth justice resources

JANUARY 2024



REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

“

Although government had been aware of this significant under-utilization for several years, it was not until after a draft of this report was shared for administrative fairness review that an initial step was taken to address the issue with MCFD's announcement in November 2023 that the Prince George Youth Custody Services Centre would be closed...



Sacred Story Investigation and Systemic Review

Feature

In June 2023, RCY initiated the most extensive investigation and systemic review ever conducted in our 17-year history.

In 2021, a young First Nations boy died in one of the most egregious series of circumstances that RCY has ever seen. In June 2023, his caregivers were sentenced to 10 years in prison. With the conclusion of these criminal proceedings, RCY was able to launch an investigation into this child's and his family's life, what led to his death and how the child- and family-serving systems did and did not respond. While RCY has extensive experience in child death investigations, the First Nations Leadership Council, the Our Children Our Way Society and others urged RCY to simultaneously undertake a systemic review to illuminate the underlying issues that contribute to poorer life outcomes for some children and identify opportunities for deeper and more effective transformation in child welfare. It also became clear that RCY needed to undertake significant engagement to fully understand systemic issues and opportunities. Thus, RCY embarked on braiding the investigative, systemic and engagement work together. This work is well underway as the fiscal year comes to a close.

In the spirit of decolonization, RCY is referring to the investigative work as a sacred story investigation. The RCY team, including three First Nations Cultural Advisors, continues to collect thousands of pieces of documentary evidence and is conducting dozens of interviews to piece together the complex interplay of circumstances that led to the death of this child.

RCY is also taking a broad look at the systemic issues that not only impacted the child that is at the center of the sacred story investigation, but that continue to impact many others. A lack of family and kinship care support, the role of intimate partner and family violence, the lack of communication and coordinated planning, poor accountability and the lack of capacity in the social welfare workplace let this boy down. The Representative also sought to understand how the Nations and MCFD need to work together to ensure that children do not fall between the cracks when the province is in a significant transition toward First Nations jurisdiction.

RCY has committed, through both the sacred story investigation and systemic review, to engage broadly with service providers, First Nations and Métis

community leaders, and families to determine what changes will be most significant and how to ensure that true transformation is achieved. By March 31, 2024, RCY had met with over 600 community service providers, ministry staff, community and family members, Indigenous leaders and organizations and others. We have launched a survey for child welfare workers, with the support of both the BCGEU and MCFD and we will soon be launching surveys for community service providers and families. RCY has also established a Circle of Advisors involving experts and researchers from across Canada to guide our thinking and the formation of final findings and recommendations.

“ **Every one of us has to do what I did and that is to kick yourself over that line where life leads into darkness and realize you have to be a hero for kids.**

- Cindy Blackstock



Outreach, Engagement, Collaboration

Meaningful outreach and engagement is a core value of RCY. In order to ensure that our work is relevant to the needs of children, youth, young adults, families and service providers, it is critical to ensure that their voices and perspectives inform the work across all teams. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, RCY's efforts were broad and diverse, encompassing direct conversations with families, participation in and engagement with youth at conferences, community presentations, and targeted working sessions with service providers and policy makers. This approach ensures that RCY's statutory initiatives are informed by the needs and living experiences of the populations it serves and have a tangible, positive impact on these communities.

RCY's outreach, engagement, and collaboration approach in 2023-2024 reflects a comprehensive strategy to foster meaningful dialogue with all interest holders. By listening to the living and lived experiences of children, youth, families, and service providers and integrating these insights into its systemic and individual advocacy work, RCY continues to push for positive change in the systems that impact the lives of children and youth across B.C.. RCY's dedication to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, building relationships with Indigenous partners, and engaging youth in diverse settings highlights its commitment to a collaborative and impactful approach to advocacy.

90

Approximate number
of outreach events

7,000

Approximate number of
people we engaged with

- **Youth (non-advocacy connections)**
- **First Nations IGBs**
- **Ministries: Leadership and Staff**
- **Indigenous Leadership**
- **Health Authorities**
- **School Districts and Leadership**
- **Indigenous Cultural Support, Advisors, Knowledge Keepers, Elders**
- **Indigenous Service Providers**
- **Conferences, Presentations, Panels and Keynotes**
- **Mental Health and Addiction Service Providers**
- **Gender Diversity Service Providers**
- **Indigenous Service Providers**
- **Children and Youth with Disabilities Service Providers**
- **Child and Family Service Providers**

Youth and Community Outreach

RCY's goal to maintain consistent and meaningful outreach throughout the year, was strategically enhanced by expanding our capacity for engagement with the addition of two Youth and Community Engagement Specialists (YCES). This expansion, driven by our commitment to serving the community, will significantly increase our ability to connect with youth, families, and communities across B.C. The YCES support individual advocacy by equipping youth with the tools and support needed to advocate for themselves and access critical services. The addition of the YCES team members underscores RCY's commitment to deepening direct connection with young people and fostering stronger relationships with communities.

Outreach within youth custody settings has been a consistent aspect of our engagement strategy. RCY advocates regularly visit youth in custody in Prince George and Burnaby, providing in-person opportunities to voice concerns and receive support on issues such as mental health, substance use, and education. Advocates worked closely with youth to address concerns during the closure of the Prince George Youth Custody Centre in early 2024, ensuring their voices were heard regarding family visitation and cultural programming. Monthly connection sessions at the Burnaby Youth Custody Centre allowed for informal, trust-building interactions where youth could seek advocacy on matters affecting their well-being. This outreach reflects RCY's dedication to supporting some of the province's most vulnerable youth, empowering them to advocate for improved care and services.

Strategic Engagement

Across all program areas, RCY staff attend adult and youth conferences, workshops, and presentations, which remain critical components of RCY's engagement strategy. RCY conducted numerous sessions in partnership with friendship centers, school districts, youth organizations, and foster parents, focusing on topics like self-advocacy, child rights, Indigenous rights and creating belonging. These sessions educated youth and caregivers about their rights and created spaces for participants to share their stories and seek support from RCY advocates.

Attendance at events such as the Victoria Native Friendship Centre's 2-Spirit Gathering and the annual Gathering Our Voices youth conference exemplified RCY's commitment to building trust and fostering dialogue with Indigenous and gender-diverse youth. RCY attended the BC Alternative Educator Conference and presented at the B.C. Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs on the rights of infants to chest feed. RCY also presented to MCFD offices about our work in general and specifically presented to MCFD on the themes related to belonging, fulfilling the recommendations from Skye's Legacy report (2022). RCY also presented data on intimate partner violence to the Community Coordination for Survivor Safety working group hosted by EVA BC. The Representative also joined the B.C. School Trustees Association, First Nations Education Steering Committee and Ministry of Education and Child Care's Indigenous Education Advisors to present full day workshops for all school trustees and superintendents in each region, to raise understanding about Indigenous learners.

and ways to support positive educational experiences.

Building and maintaining relationships with Indigenous communities is critical to engagement at RCY, given the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the care system. Collaborating with organizations such as the Our Children Our Way Society and participating in working sessions with leaders from First Nations and Métis organizations are cornerstones of our work. These efforts ensured that Indigenous voices were central to RCY's advocacy and policy recommendations regarding Indigenous children and youth. RCY leadership strengthened its relationships with Indigenous leaders through sustained engagement, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth remain a priority.

RCY's engagement was key in the preparation of several key reports during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The Still Left Out report followed up on families from the 2019 Excluded report and the 2020 Left Out report, assessing whether services had improved for children and youth with disabilities. Many families faced systemic barriers despite prior recommendations, including long waitlists and resource shortages. The Right to Thrive report, focused on the experiences of two-spirit, trans, and non-binary (2STNBGD) youth, gathered insights through community gatherings and interviews, emphasizing the need for community-driven recommendations.

Website

As we have highlighted for the Committee in the past, our website has needed a serious refresh for some time. Our online "front door" needs to be more youth-friendly, accessible, and easy to use. We also need our reports, statements, monitoring progress assessments and other influential products to be well-archived and easy to access.

Site development is moving along efficiently, and we are on track with planned expenditures. We have completed a series of engagements and gathered feedback from our partner organizations, government, and the young people we serve. We are doing this in-person and via an online survey which will ensure our new site meets the needs of our key users, including young people who need our advocacy services. We expect a final design approach to be completed by mid-May. Visual design and brand elements that will be pulled into the website and will extend further into the overall refreshed and modernized look and feel of our site is on track for completion by late October.

We are seeing our new site as a cornerstone of our knowledge mobilization efforts. We are building robust knowledge mobilization strategies and approaches that are designed to increase the visibility and impact of our work, and therefore our ability to influence child and youth serving systems.

Corporate Services

RCY made substantial progress on the corporate priorities set in our last service plan.

Improving Corporate Services to Better Meet the Evolving Demands and Needs of RCY

By the end of 2023/24, RCY and OHRC had completed a carefully planned transfer of corporate services to the BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (OHRC). With OHRC now operating at full capacity corporate responsibilities, previously provided by RCY, was assumed by OHRC. The change was cost neutral for both offices.

Ensuring that the Financial Resources are Used Appropriately, Efficiently and Effectively

The process of budget review and assessment is ongoing as every opportunity is taken for both efficiency and allocation of resources for the greatest impact. Even though RCY took on a substantial sacred story investigation and systemic review, and also embarked on a website redevelopment, careful forecasting and expenditures in a range of STOBs allowed RCY to remain within budget and even return funds to general revenue.

Continue to Evolve RCY's Organizational Structure to Strategically Allocate Resources for Greater Impact and to Enhance Effectiveness and Relevance

RCY focused on a range of human resource and organizational structure and capacity issues to ensure that each team has the people and resources needed to fulfill its contribution to RCY's work and responsibilities. These included on-going

renewal of RCY's human resource practices based on a commissioned consulting report, the start of improvements to RCY in-office locations to support staff collaboration and youth walk-ins, an evolution of RCY's administrative and project coordination functions and additional staffing to ensure sufficient capacity to complete large priority projects.

Fostering Belonging, Inclusion and Wellness Within RCY

RCY has committed, through its Six Rs and Four Ps, to an organizational approach that emphasizes belonging, inclusion and wellness for all staff. For the 2023/24 fiscal year, three areas of work continued to be a focus: ensuring strong Indigenous cultural practice, with the support of Cultural Advisors to guide all RCY in-person and virtual gatherings, meetings, and priority projects and investigations; completion of a "wellness bundle" to guide the on-going redevelopment of RCY's colonial human resource policy framework toward a framework of wellness; and continued attention to accessibility across all aspects of RCY.

Improving Understanding of RCY Data

In 2023/24, RCY began the process of developing an organization-wide data strategy to guide all aspects of RCY's data approach. Data entry, including improved coding and quality assurance approaches across all RCY teams, continued. The majority of the year required significant attention to necessary improvements to RCY's CITAR data system. Further data strategy work will continue into 2024/25.



Meaningful Participation

In 2023/24, RCY continued to collaborate with Access to Justice BC's Transforming Family Justice Collaborative (TFJC) to advance the family justice system's capacity to uphold the rights of children and youth to meaningfully participate in decisions being made about their lives through the Family Law Act and the CFCSA. RCY, TFJC, Youth Voices and the Society for Children and Youth collaborated to design and host a child and youth family justice conference for professionals and advocates in September 2023. RCY provided funding for the event and honoraria for the youth involved in all aspects of the design and delivery. The conference was co-designed by an equal number of youth with lived and living experience expertise and adults over an eight-month period. All panel presentations were youth-led. The day-long hybrid conference was attended by over 200 people, including 56 young people under the age of 26. The proceedings from the conference will be released in June 2024 to inform ongoing enhancements to the family justice system's respect for child rights.



Collaborative and Relational Practice

At the heart of the Six Rs – and foundational to all the rest – are Relationships. Although the Six Rs are interlocking and interdependent, the R of Relationships is the bedrock without which the other Rs would not be possible. Consistent with the ‘R’ of Relationship, RCY strives to be in relationship with children, youth, young adults and their families, as well as diverse partners. We are committed to building strong, respectful and reciprocal relationships with many individuals, organizations and networks including Elders and Matriarchs, Knowledge Keepers, leaders in Nations and provincial governments and agencies, researchers, service providers, family members and, of course, young people themselves. These relationships are essential to RCY’s ability to mobilize collective responses to systemic issues in the child, youth and young adult serving systems.

The Representative and her staff are committed to listening deeply and with intention to the experiences of those we serve. We are also committed to listening to our partners as we act as a convenor and catalyst to learn about and act upon

the systemic issues that create barriers for children, youth and young adults to thrive. This commitment to collaborative and relational practice is realized through engagement and partnerships with others within the system to effect meaningful and sustainable change in child, youth and young adult services and systems. This includes strengthening relationships and reciprocity with the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), Métis Nation BC (MNBC), B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centers (BCAAFC), Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs), Indigenous leadership and other Indigenous-led organizations. RCY’s focus on relationships and reciprocity with the ICFSAs – including with the ICFSA Directors and the Our Children Our Way Society – helps RCY to understand and better support the evolving Indigenous child welfare landscape.



Research Partnerships

Over the past year, RCY has continued to build on its engagement with academic institutions to bring the best current research evidence forward to inform and illuminate RCY's priority areas and projects.

Systemic Review Research Areas

In June 2023, RCY initiated an investigation into the horrific torture and death of a First Nation's child who was in the care of MCFD and living with MCFD and Nation-approved family caregivers. RCY was urged by First Nation's leaders to review and address the underlying systemic issues that contributed to this child's death and the deaths of other children receiving government services. Based on the learnings from the investigation and other reviews, the Representative identified nine areas for in-depth review. To complement RCY's in-house research expertise, RCY engaged nine external researchers and two researchers from the [FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children](#) at Simon Fraser University to undertake literature, jurisdictional, policy and practice reviews on: the history of child welfare in B.C.; family and intimate partner violence; family support; kinship care support; interagency communication and collaboration; quality improvement and accountability; child welfare policy; promising child welfare practices; and human resource practices. The research was initiated in January 2024, for completion by April 2024. The research informed the systemic review report that will be released in summer 2024.

Developmental Trauma and Culturally Responsive Care – University of Victoria

In spring 2023, RCY wrapped up the first phase of a research collaboration with Dr. Fred Chu and Dr. Tim Black at the University of Victoria explored developmental trauma and culturally responsive care, as well as promising practices and future direction. The research revealed system-wide applications of trauma informed care and promoted broad child welfare changes, which included working alongside the child or youth, caregivers, staff members, and other helping professionals and therapeutic models of care that could be considered in B.C.

Mental Health and Well-being for Indigenous children – Concordia University

In winter 2023, RCY collaborated with Dr. Catherine Richardson at Concordia University, to explore mental health and well-being for Indigenous children involved in the child welfare system. The final report considers the possibilities of integrating Indigenous child and youth mental health initiatives within the scope of child protection practice and stresses the importance of holistic perspectives of wellness and promoting the well-being of Indigenous children, youth, families and communities to move away from harm-inflicting colonial legacies.

Sexual Exploitation of Female Youth by Older Males - Ending Violence Association of B.C. (EVA BC)

RCY continued its 2023 research project with [EVA BC](#). RCY data gathered from child and youth death and critical injury reports and advocacy files identified a group of female-identifying youth who have experienced sexual exploitation by older males. This partnership resulted in EVA BC completing research and engagement with community partners who are providing supports to female-identifying youth who are being sexually exploited.

Some of the findings include: *“there are significant barriers to survivors seeking supports that prevent them from accessing safety and healing. Some of the consistent barriers mentioned by service providers are lack of confidentiality, transportation, cultural safety, safe and/or affordable housing, and service provider continuity due to high turnover.”* Findings from this research will be incorporated into RCY’s ongoing and future work on the prevalence and impact of violence.

Legal Rights of Children and Youth - Society for Children and Youth of BC (SCYBC)

SCYBC’s [Child and Youth Legal Centre](#) advances the legal rights of young people in B.C. through the provision of legal support for children and youth who are experiencing problems relating to family law, child protection, human rights and many other legal issues. Given their depth of expertise, RCY engaged SCYBC to prepare a series of research reports

concerning key family justice issues that have arisen in RCY’s work on child rights in family justice matters, especially when there is conflict, family violence and young peoples’ voices are not being heard. These issues include: determination of the best interests of the child; child capacity; consent and participation in the areas of family law; child welfare and adoptions; health care; mental health law and involuntary civil commitment. These reports are informing RCY’s ongoing work on child rights and meaningful participation with Access to Justice B.C.’s [Transform the Family Justice System](#) Collaborative and will be released in conjunction with an RCY report on child rights in 2024/25.

Youth Experiences of Toxic Drug Crisis and Interventions - Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR)

Through critical injury and death reports and advocacy, RCY sees the profound and disturbing impact that the toxic illicit drug supply is having on children, youth and families in B.C. Due to the rapidly evolving and increasingly dangerous illicit supply and the diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives on what actions should be taken, RCY knew that young peoples’ experiences, voices and perspectives needed to be considered. [CISUR](#), based at the University of Victoria, was engaged by the RCY to consult with young people about their experiences with substance use, the toxic illicit drug crisis, prescribed safer supply, treatment and harm reduction. Guided by principal investigators Drs. Brittany Barker, Karen Urbanoski and Bernie Pauly, the research team has engaged young people in all stages of the study – including design, recruitment,

analysis and interpretation. Findings will inform RCY's work on the impacts of substance use on children, youth and families and recommendations for action.

Mental Health Care for Children and Youth with Neurodevelopmental Conditions - Children's Health Policy Centre (CHPC), Simon Fraser University

RCY has worked with the [CHPC](#) on a series of mental health reports in the past four years. In 2023, their research provided robust evidence that five of the most common mental health challenges are much higher for children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and intellectual disabilities (ID) than they are for neurotypical children. For example: anxiety disorders were nearly eight times higher for children with ASD; major depressive disorder was 28 times higher for children with FASD; and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder was more than double for children with intellectual disabilities. CHPC researchers Drs. Charlotte Waddell and Christine Schwartz also identified the most promising mental health interventions for children with neurodevelopmental conditions. This research informed and was appended to RCY's report, [Toward Inclusion: The need to improve access to mental health services for children and youth with neurodevelopmental conditions](#), released in April 2023.

Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC), University of British Columbia

[SARAVYC](#) - a respected research centre lead by Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc - investigates how stigma, discrimination, violence and trauma affect young peoples' health. To better understand the needs and risks for two spirit, trans, non-binary and other gender diverse (2STNBGD) children and youth, RCY engaged SARAVYC to conduct two literature reviews and a series of analyses using data from the 2019 Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey and the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey. The Centre also interviewed 2STNBGD young people so that their voices and experiences would play a central role in the research. Their study found that most 2STNBGD young people faced frequent misgendering, long delays in care, lack of access to knowledgeable providers, greater exposure to violence in communities, and worse health outcomes than their peers. However, when 2STNBGD young people receive gender-affirming care and positive supports, their outcomes are every bit as good as their peers. This research informed and was appended to RCY's report, [The Right to Thrive: An Urgent Call to Recognize, Respect and Nurture Two Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary and other Gender Diverse Children and Youth](#), released in June, 2023.

LOOKING AHEAD





RCY regularly reviews its strategic priorities to ensure they are reflective of the current environment and that the organization remains responsive and attuned to the evolving issues facing children, youth and young adults and their families.

The following section outlines the key projects and strategic activities that are underway or planned for the 2024/25 fiscal year and across the following two years. These are in addition to the core statutory work undertaken by each RCY team.

The report(s) and recommendations arising from RCY's sacred story investigation and systemic review will set a clear direction for the work ahead. Although this work will not be complete until July, 2024, broad direction for RCY is already emerging. This "North Star" reflects a shift in orientation from child protection to child well-being that requires a whole-of-government approach and a broad transformation of the systems that serve children, youth, young adults and families.

The outline of priorities laid out in this service plan is intentionally broad to allow for the insight that will come from the finalization of our sacred story investigation and systemic review. In addition, RCY is constantly attuned to large patterns and trends that influence child well-being in the province, revealed by the statutory work of our teams. Our commitment is to be responsive and relevant.

With the knowledge that the sacred story investigation and systemic review will be setting out a North Star for child and youth well-being and recommending short-, medium- and long-term actions to achieve systems' transformation, RCY is entering into a new phase of service planning to ensure that we also reach for that North

Star and contribute to meaningful systems' change. Grounded in the 6R's and four principles, RCY is re-energizing our vision, mission, strategic priorities and goals. We are continuing to build new monitoring and key performance indicator frameworks so that we can more effectively and clearly evaluate the impact that our work is having on the lives of young people and the systems that serve them. A fresh beginning is also grounded in a new look and feel for our organization, one that is bold and impactful and reflects the spirit and intention of our work moving forward. As we dive into this work we have identified the following key priorities for the upcoming year.

Ongoing Commitment to Statutory Responsibilities

The RCY Act requires that RCY maintain high quality, effective and integrated mandated services. Each of the RCY teams plays an important role in ensuring that RCY remains relevant and responsive. This service plan therefore includes on-going action to ensure that we continually adapt to enhance our efficiency and effectiveness.

Individual Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Engagement

Goal: Continue to adapt and improve advocacy procedures and practices to ensure that RCY remains responsive to the immediate needs of children, youth, young adults and those that support them. This is especially important considering the stress experienced in the broader system and lack of resources available to young people and their families and caregivers.

Goal: Continue to support children, youth and young adults in their advocacy,

amplifying their voice and views and providing support to develop the skills to be an effective self-advocate.

Goal: Continue to enhance and expand outreach to children, youth and young adults to ensure that they are aware of RCY and the advocacy supports available and to build young peoples' awareness of their rights. This will be achieved through:

- Broad-based engagements with children, youth, young adults, and service providers across B.C.
- Hosting reciprocal relationships with children, youth and young adults, to enhance and support the strategic work of the RCY to ensure that youth voice and perspective is present.

Reviews and Investigations

Goal: Continue to review, adapt and improve procedures and practices to ensure that RCY remains able to adequately review and analyze the increasing numbers of critical injuries and deaths being reported to RCY.

Goal: Ensure that processes and an improved data management system are in place to support the start of health authorities fulfilling their legislated mandate to send reportable circumstances to RCY.

Goal: Increase the power of RCY's influence on systemic issues that influence child and youth health and well-being through the preparation and release of aggregate reports.

Systemic Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Engagement

Goal: Continue to build an effective and broad-based approach to monitoring

the progress of government bodies in implementing recommendations, especially considering the recommendations anticipated from the sacred story investigation and systemic review.

Goal: Continue to expand RCY's monitoring activities to include accountability reporting, impact assessments and outcomes measurement to better understand the accessibility, timeliness, relevance and quality of care available to children and young people.

Goal: Expand monitoring to dive more deeply into patterns and issues emerging from the sacred story investigation and systemic review and through the work of RCY's statutory teams.

Strategic Communications and Knowledge Mobilization

Goal: Complete the RCY rebrand and new website and ensure that resources are accessible, relevant and influential for multiple audiences.

Goal: Continue to build focused knowledge mobilization strategies related to key areas of RCY interest including Belonging and the rights of gender diverse children, youth and young adults.

Goal: Expand and deepen RCY's strategic alliances with a wide range of partners and colleagues on key systemic and pressing issues. Amplify the voices of experts and leaders in many sectors by leading generative dialogues and convenings, working with partners on joint initiatives, and building accords to get work done in association with others.

Priorities and Actions

2024 to 2027

RCY's priorities addresses a range of complex issues that have a profound influence on the health and well-being of B.C.'s children, youth and young adults. RCY has a unique ability through its mandated work, to have insight into both existing issues but also emerging patterns and trends. We maintain a stable focus on critical long-standing issues while also being aware of and responding to new and emergent issues.

Commitments and Through Lines

The long-standing issues that RCY will continue to focus on during the next three fiscal years are noted below. These are issues that are of immediate importance to children, youth, young adults and families.

Residential Services

Data and stories gathered through the Individual Advocacy, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Engagement (IAFNMIE) and Reviews and Investigations (R&I) teams indicate significant challenges within current staffed residential care services, including the lack of suitable placements close to a child's community and family, lack of staff capacity to meet the needs of young people in their care, mistreatment of children and youth, utilization of staffed care for an increasingly younger population, use of police to manage children's behaviours and children

fleeing or missing from placements. RCY will undertake an in-depth review of staffed residential services (now called Specialized Homes and Supports Services by MCFD). Our goal is to enhance the quality of care and accountability in residential settings. Strengthening oversight and improving outcomes for children and youth in these environments will be central to our efforts in the next two fiscal years.

Mental Health and Substance Use

Data and stories gathered through RCY's IAFNMIE and R&I teams as well as broader research affirms that young people are trying to manage with mental health and substance use concerns and they, and their families struggle to obtain the services that they need to prevent harms and restore well-being. RCY has an ongoing commitment to advocate for improvements to the health and social care systems that support young people facing mental health and/or substance use challenges.

In 2024/25 RCY will continue to work with the Wosk Centre for Dialogue to convene dialogues on the impact of the toxic illicit drug supply on children and youth and identify realistic and evidence informed approaches to reduce the harms, broaden voluntary care and ensure timely responses to children and youth impacted by substance use.

Children and Youth with Disabilities

RCY will release a spotlight report concerning children and youth with disabilities (CYD). It will describe the current state of CYD services and what has and has not changed over the past five years and will then propose a path forward as government grapples with how best to meet the needs of CYD and their families. The report will be informed by consultations and surveys with families and caregivers.

Responsiveness and capacity of systems to meet the needs of children and youth in complex circumstances

The *Systems Failing Girls* project has explored gender-based disparities in care, through Indigenous research ceremony and in-depth policy analysis. In spring and summer, 2024, RCY will participate in visiting circles in communities across B.C. to expand our understanding of families, caregivers and girls' experiences of current systems and how they are failing to meet their needs, and also what is making or could make a positive difference. The findings of this research will be finalized in 2024/25 and will be incorporated into public reporting and systemic advocacy efforts at RCY.

The work of *Missing*, which highlights young people who are lost or missing from government placements, will continue this year with a series of community-led engagements with young people who are experiencing the push and pull factors of belonging in B.C.'s child and youth serving system. RCY will share a summary of what

we learn from young people in early 2025, to inform further systemic advocacy efforts and recommendations to improve the quality of care and responsiveness to lost or missing youth in B.C.

Children's Rights

RCY has commissioned five research reports from the Society for Children and Youth on children's rights in family law, child protection, health and mental health. Drawing on the research literature, practices in other jurisdictions and conversations with young people who have experience with the *Family Law Act*, *CFCSA* and the *Mental Health Act* the reports will describe and provide direction on issues related to children's best interests, consent, capacity to participate, rights under involuntary detention and approaches for meaningful participation. These reports will be released in fiscal 2024/25 and will inform RCY's in-depth report on children rights and participation in family justice matters.



Emergent Priorities

The work to-date on the sacred story investigation and systemic review is pointing toward the need for a widespread and transformational change across the child, youth and family serving system; one that shifts from a narrow focus on safety and protection towards a focus on child and family well-being so that children are safe, nurtured, thriving and have a sense of belonging. The resulting reports and recommendations will provide a clear direction for RCY's actions including convening dialogues and activating key levers of change that will result in systemic and structural reforms.

Six themes are emerging as priorities for RCY attention and are intricately connected to building systems that support children and youth to thrive, these include:

- **Supporting Jurisdiction:**

Playing an active and supportive role in the transition of responsibility of child welfare from MCFD to Nations. This transitional period is critical to tend to so that no children fall through the cracks.

- **Addressing Violence:**

Addressing the epidemic of violence in many families and communities.

- **Supporting Families:**

Catalyzing a system-wide conversation about how families can be better supported to safely stay together by receiving early non-stigmatizing help when challenges first arise and supports early in the life-course of young children.

- **Supporting Kinship Care Providers:**

Ensuring that when kinship carers step up to care for children who are unable to safely live with their parents, they receive the information and resources they need to support children in their care.

- **Enhancing Communication and Coordination:**

Addressing siloing in government ministries, health authorities and community agencies and emphasizing the need for much improved interagency and interministerial communication, coordination and collaboration to ensure children, youth and families are seen, heard and receive the services and supports they need when they need them.

- **Supporting Workforce:**

Addressing the critical under-resourcing and challenging working environments of child welfare social workers that is hampering effective service delivery for children, youth and young adults.

Four broad strategies will be used to ensure that the learnings from the sacred story investigation and systemic review are consistently held up and used to catalyze action toward the North Star of child well-being.

- **Recommendations** will be a key component of the report(s) arising from the sacred story harvest and systemic review. RCY will work closely with the public bodies to whom recommendations will be directed to monitor process and progress towards the short-, medium- and long-term actions needed to achieve systems' transformation.
- **Convening** dialogues and comprehensively engaging with a broad array of leaders, partners, government staff, families, children, youth and young adults to advance the work that will be necessary to improve services and care in the short term while working towards systems' transformation
- **Building an evidence base** of the most recent science and research connected to our areas of priority will be essential

to support system-wide transformation. This strategy will include the preparation and release of issue briefs, data and monitoring reports.

- **Identifying and sharing promising practices in B.C. and other jurisdictions** as part of the sacred story investigation and systemic review. These have the potential to inspire and inform action in B.C. A comprehensive knowledge transfer will be an important component of RCY's strategy.

RCY recognizes that strategic engagement and relational trust are vital to achieving these ambitious goals. Strengthening partnerships with Indigenous and provincial social services and expanding youth and community outreach will be critical in driving meaningful change. We will continue to build and implement a robust knowledge mobilization strategy, ensuring that evidence and promising practices from the systemic review are shared widely. We will drive collaboration and action by convening dialogues with all stakeholders involved in the child welfare system.

Enabling Mechanisms to Support These Goals

RCY's Corporate Services team is an essential backbone for RCY: the services provided, and the work done are key enabling mechanisms that support staff to effectively and efficiently meet RCY's statutory mandate and focus on making a difference for children and youth in B.C. Corporate services comprise finance, human resources, administration, records coordination, project coordination, information management and technology and privacy support services.

The stories and issues that RCY staff

deal with every day are often painful and impactful. RCY is continuing to build a healthy workplace culture that uplifts staff wellness, inclusion and sense of belonging.

RCY continues to embrace the options of fully remote (virtual), hybrid or in-office (in Victoria or Prince George) work. Staff continue to make these arrangements work well and have appreciated that RCY has made a long-term commitment to these options. This has enabled RCY to hire highly skilled staff in communities across B.C., who tell us the flexibility that we provide allows them to continue living in communities of their choice, have a better work/life balance and have a sense of empowerment.

To ensure that staff feel psychologically and culturally safe and well-supported, RCY is continuing to provide a range of training opportunities on the four principles. Some of this work is through formal training and some is immersive and applied.

Building on work in past years, RCY has established the following goals for enabling mechanisms in 2024/25 and beyond:

Goal: Refining RCY's organizational structure to strategically allocate resources for greater impact and to enhance effectiveness and relevance.

RCY will continue to focus on a range of human resource and organizational structure and capacity issues to ensure that each team has the people and resources needed to fulfill its contribution to RCY's work and responsibilities. This includes a staff development and training plan that addresses technical, cultural and leadership training opportunities.

Goal: Improving in-office working environments and experiences for staff.

While RCY continues its commitment to

remote work and to decentralization, mechanisms for fostering connection through in-person and virtual gatherings for all staff and regular staff updates remain a priority. RCY will be completing projects to improve in-office space in 2024/25 in both Victoria and Prince George while ensuring both are fully accessible.

Goal: Fostering belonging, inclusion and wellness within RCY.

RCY has committed, through its Six Rs and Four Principles, to an organizational approach that emphasizes belonging, inclusion and wellness for all staff. For the 2024/25 fiscal year, four areas of work will continue to be particularly important:

- Continuing work on a wellness framework and adjustment of all RCY policies and procedures to both decolonize and centre wellness and well-being
- Implementing a range of approaches – including a staff wellness survey and reflections - to understand staff well-being and use results to guide ongoing innovation and improvement
- Ensuring strong and comprehensive Indigenous cultural practice that guides all RCY in-person and virtual gatherings, meetings, projects and investigations, including the on-going guidance of Cultural Advisors, Elders and Matriarchs
- Building the influence of RCY's Accessibility Committee, formed in late 2022/23. RCY will also continue to hold at least one seat on the Independent Officers of the Legislative Assembly Accessibility Committee.

Goal: Improving corporate services to better meet the evolving demands and needs of RCY.

At the end of fiscal 2023/24, RCY handed responsibility for corporate services back to the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, having delivered services to both offices for just over five years. In 2024/25, RCY will complete a reorganization of corporate service functions, both strategic and transactional, to ensure that the needs of RCY staff are met in an efficient and effective way.

Goal: Ensuring that the financial resources provided to the organization are used appropriately, efficiently and effectively to fulfill RCY's mandate.

The process of budget review and assessment is ongoing as every opportunity is taken for both efficiency and allocation of resources for the greatest impact.

The process of budget review and assessment is ongoing as every opportunity is taken for both efficiency and allocation of resources for the greatest impact.



Performance
Measuring
Our





Consistent with our commitment to greater accountability, RCY is continuing to adapt its key performance indicators (KPIs) to align with our strategic priorities and improve our ability to measure the influence RCY has on the systems that serve children and families. In 2023/24, RCY met with the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth (SSCCY) on several occasions to learn what the members would like to see measured and then to present the revised KPI approach that reflected their preferences. The proposed approach was endorsed by the Committee members and will be implemented in 2024/25.

The SSCCY requested that the RCY continue to track some of the performance measures that have acted as a foundation for the past 15 years in the areas of Relevance, Responsiveness, Accountability, and Excellence – which have primarily been input and output measures – while adding measures that could better reflect outcomes and impact. The aim of the new KPI outcome measures is to better understand the effect of our work on both the systems that serve children, youth, young adults and families and the well-being of those we exist to advocate for, as well as gain insights about how we could improve. On-going work on our KPIs will continue to be informed through consultation with the SSCCY and the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government (SSCFG).

On the next page are descriptors of KPIs that measure performance on inputs and outputs. RCY's KPIs guide our understanding of our performance based on inputs and outputs or activities. The body of this Annual Report provides a picture of RCY's substantial performance in meeting these indicators.

Relevance – means that the Office:

- addresses issues and areas of concern within its mandate and of interest to the Legislature and the public
- is aware of and reacts readily and appropriately to issues brought to its attention through its monitoring and review and investigation activities, its liaison and collaboration with public bodies and by legislators, community partners and the public
- produces reports that are useful to, accessible and understood by the public, community partners and the Legislature
- makes recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of designated programs and reviewable services with the goal of improving the child-, youth- and young adult serving systems.

Responsiveness – means that the Office:

- addresses requests from children, youth, young adults and their families for support, assistance, information and advice in a timely and sensitive way
- analyzes and takes timely and appropriate action in relation to reported critical injuries and deaths of children and youth receiving reviewable services
- reaches out to children, youth, young adults and their families, the child-, youth- and young adult-serving systems and communities to build awareness of the rights of children, youth and young adults and the services of the Office.

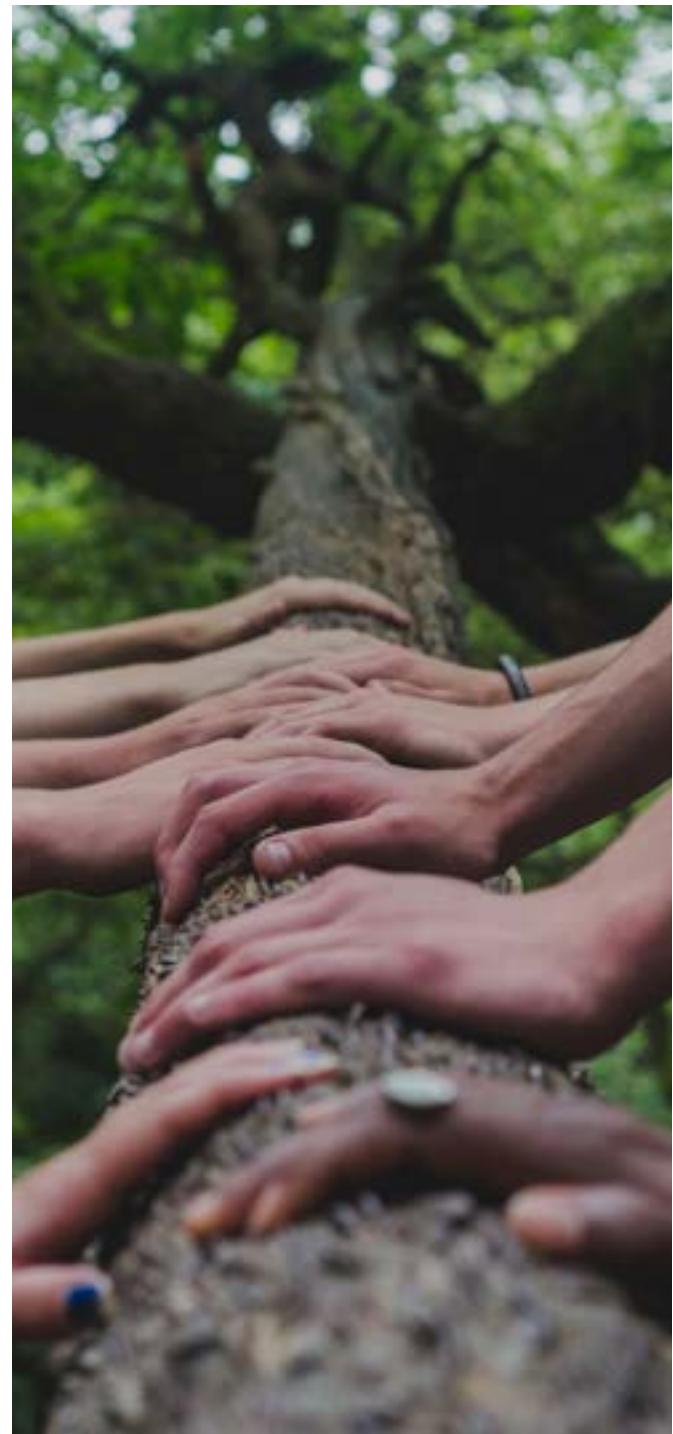
Accountability – means that the Office:

- reports regularly and in an open and transparent way about its activities to the Legislature and British Columbians
- provides information on its plans, activities and performance to SSCCY for review and scrutiny.

Excellence – means that the Office

meets high standards of professional and corporate conduct through:

- a competent, ethical and diverse staff
- rigorous application and compliance with established requirements in all its operations.



Measuring Outcomes

As RCY is also taking on the challenge of building greater accountability for real life improvements in the experience and well-being of children, youth, young adults and their families. An outcome based approach, grounded in the principles of developmental evaluation and theory of change is being employed. The graphics provides an insight into RCY's current understanding of how changes can be catalyzed and will be adapted as we learn more.

RCY Activities: Measures that document and report on what RCY does

- Reportables, Reviews and Investigations
- Individual Advocacy
- Community and youth outreach
- Reports and recommendations
- Convening and engaging with partners
- Internal RCY health and well-being

Short Term Outcomes:

Measures that document and report on the immediate effect of RCY's work

- Scope of RCY connections
- Quality of RCY services
- Trusting relationships with partners
- Accountability
- Changes in RCY structures and process

Medium Term Outcomes:

Measures that record the influence of RCY's work on the structures and processes that are in place for children, youth and families.

- New Investment in children, youth and families
- Policy adaptation
- Innovation in program & service offerings
- Practice innovation
- Shifts in core values that support thriving
- Government-wide strategy
- Strong inter-ministerial structures

Long Term Outcomes:

Measures that describe influence of RCY on system-wide changes and transformation, including mental models

- Programs and policies reflect a well-being approach
- Families have access to the support they need
- High levels of satisfaction with services
- Communities wrap around children, youth and families

Impact: Children, Youth and Young Adults have the opportunity to thrive

Child and Youth well-being indicators at a population level

Short Term Outcome Measures – Levers of Influence

Short term outcome measures will track the RCY's effectiveness at building a strong foundation for individual advocacy and systemic change including:

- RCY is trusted as a credible source of information and recommendations by the Members of the Legislative Assembly, public bodies, services providers and Indigenous leaders and organizations
- RCY has established a broad array of respectful and reciprocal relationships with service provider organizations and Indigenous leaders and organizations
- RCY supports a skilled, healthy and engaged workforce that has the capacity to do the work that is required to fulfill our statutory mandate
- RCY is highly responsive to advocacy requests and in the receipt and review of reportable circumstances
- RCY has clear processes to monitor and document progress on recommendations
- RCY is skilled and effective at engaging and consulting with children, youth, families, young adults and service providers so that the actual needs of children, youth, families and young adults are understood and incorporated into RCY's work.

To date, there is anecdotal evidence of progress for each measure including:

- Indications from the SSCCY and SSCFG that they trust the RCY's work and integrity
- External review by Taiji Brand Group that revealed very high regard for the work of the RCY and the Representative, amongst diverse service providers and organizations
- Consistently high numbers of well-qualified candidates for advocacy and

review and investigation positions, with candidates indicating that RCY is a "destination employer" or "employer of choice"

- Invitations from key organizations to participate in forums or collaborative initiatives to advance child rights and well-being (e.g., B.C. School Trustees Association, Federation of Community Social Services of B.C., First Nations Leadership Council)
- Increased engagement of public bodies in the recommendations monitoring process and modest improvements in progress
- High level of engagement in service provider forums associated with the systemic review.

Medium Term Outcome Measures – Structural and Behavioural Changes in Systems

Medium term outcome measures will track evidence of shifts in funding, policies, practices, behaviours and attitudes, and structures, because of RCY's work, that better address needs and improve well-being of children, youth, young adults and their families. Measures include:

- Public bodies make new investments in child, youth and family services
- Public bodies change or adapt policies and procedures to improve services
- Public bodies, Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs) and community service providers develop innovative program and service offerings, informed by evidence and community input as well as RCY's reports and briefs
- Public bodies, ICFSAs and community service providers embrace language,

attitudes, mindsets and priorities that reinforce an orientation to child well-being, belonging, and respect and counter bias, stigma, discrimination and racism

- Public bodies establish mechanisms and structures to enhance interministerial collaboration and responsive to complex social and health issues such as substance use, mental health and disability services.

Importantly, the focus of RCY's performance measurement will be on indicators that are within the control of RCY. It is clear through RCY's Advocating for Change report that, though recommendations are made, they are not always implemented as RCY recommendations are not binding.

Long Term Outcome Measures

The long-term outcomes that RCY aspires to include:

- children and youth have access to the supports and services that they need, when they need them, and are safe, nurtured and thriving
- government priorities, investments, policies, services and programs reflect a child well-being approach.

As an example, in 2023/24, RCY engaged in knowledge mobilization to lift up *Skye's Legacy* and encourage public bodies, ICFSAs and community service providers to integrate the five dimensions of belonging into their practice. This was done through presentations, workshops, resource sharing, a dedicated web microsite on belonging and videos. Though more work is needed to determine the best way to measure change, RCY has noted that MCFD has begun to consistently refer to the dimensions of belonging in policy, practice consultants in MCFD have developed resources to assist

staff in integrating belonging into case plans and several school districts have advised that they are integrating the five dimensions of belonging into school-based planning.

Advancing Our Understanding of Impact

The ultimate demonstration of RCY's impact will be seen as population level indicators of child and youth well-being suggest that things are improving. RCY is one organization amongst many, including a range of government ministries, that has the ability to shift trajectories positively, and so is committed to work with others toward increased accountability.

Accountability requires a robust, multi-faceted child well-being outcome measurement framework. This collective responsibility is a North Star that must involve all the constellations of public bodies and community service providers who play a part in the lives of young people and their families.

In developing RCY's own accountability approach, a number of specific accountability frameworks and data gathering initiatives will form a foundation. B.C. has a strong platform to build from and some of the best data available in Canada, thanks to work of the McCreary Centre, the Human Early Learning Partnership, and data collected by various ministries and a range of organizations. Nationally, there is a strong foundation of longitudinal work through the Canadian Incidence Study, and work has been underway on the development of National Outcomes Measures in child welfare. Important work is being led by the First Nations Data Governance Strategy, the Caring Society, Assembly of First Nations, the National Advisory Committee on First Nations Child and Family Services and the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy.

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Budget and Expenditures



RCY is funded by the Legislative Assembly to spend funds through a voted appropriation. The vote provides separately for operating expenses and capital acquisitions. Any unused appropriation cannot be carried forward for use in subsequent fiscal years.

Budget shown in the tables below is based on budgeted expenses approved by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in December 2022 (Annual Review of the Budgets of Statutory Offices – December 2022). The following tables compare the voted appropriation to total operating and capital expenditures for fiscal year 2023/24.

The table to the right does not include supplementary funding requests (access to contingencies) approved by Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in December 2023 (Annual Review of the Budgets of Statutory Office – December 2023) totalling \$266,000 in operating and \$18,000 in capital for the systemic review of child, youth and family services connected to an investigation that RCY is conducting and to rebuild RCY's website. Supplementary funding was not accessed.

2023/24

Budget and Expenditure

Operating Expense Type	Budget	Actual
Salaries and benefits (incl. Representative)	10,049,000	9,377,161
Employee Travel	373,000	280,608
Professional Services	473,000	1,023,158
Information Technology	696,000	738,327
Office and business expenses	405,000	322,690
Utilities, materials and supplies	5,000	6,031
Amortization	55,000	15,405
Building occupancy	837,000	849,926
Research grants	5,000	185,291
Transfers under agreement	5,000	-
Other	1,000	1,656
Recoveries	(713,000)	(977,849)
Total Operating	12,191,000	11,822,404
Capital Expense Type	Budget	Actual
Information technology	45,000	1,455
Office furniture and equipment	5,000	47,962
Total Capital	50,000	49,418

2024/25 – 2026/27

Looking to the Future - Approved and Planned

The table below illustrates operating and capital budgets approved for 2024/25 and planned for 2025/26 and 2026/27. The table does not include supplementary funding requests (access to contingencies) approved by Select Standing Committee on

Finance and Government Services in April 2024 and August 2024 totaling \$480,000 for unanticipated salary/benefit increases and additional costs associated with the systemic review.

Operating Expense Type	Note	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Salaries and benefits	1	10,316,000	10,316,000	10,316,000
Employee Travel	2	373,000	373,000	373,000
Professional Services	3	687,000	473,000	473,000
Information Technology	4	708,000	696,000	696,000
Office and business expenses	5	405,000	405,000	405,000
Utilities, materials and supplies	6	5,000	5,000	5,000
Amortization	7	55,000	55,000	55,000
Building occupancy	8	1,818,000	1,818,000	1,818,000
Research grants	9	150,000	150,000	150,000
Transfers under agreement	10	5,000	5,000	5,000
Other	11	1,000	1,000	1,000
Recoveries	12	(1,057,000)	(1,057,000)	(1,057,000)
Total Operating		12,829,000	12,603,000	12,603,000
Capital Expense Type	Note	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Information technology	13	63,000	45,000	45,000
Office furniture and equipment	14	5,000	5,000	5,000
Total Capital		68,000	50,000	50,000

Note 1

Base salaries, supplementary salaries (first aid allowance, maternity / parental leave, auxiliary health & welfare, etc) and benefits (including relocation) for all regular and auxiliary staff including the Representative.

Note 2

Employee travel includes costs for staff on official Office business, including prescribed allowances.

Note 3

Professional services includes fees and expenses for professional services rendered directly to the Office for the provision services in the delivery of our programs, the provision of services required by statute or legislation and are billed directly to the Office, and the provision of services that will assist the development of policy and/or programs or improve / change the delivery of programs, such as management consulting services.

Note 4

Information technology (operating) includes all contract fees and costs related to data, voice, image, and text processing operations and services, such as data and word processing, data communications, supplies, repairs, maintenance, and short-term rentals of information processing equipment.

Note 5

Office and business expenses includes supplies and services required for the operation of the Office.

Note 6

Utilities, materials and supplies includes the cost of services such as the supply of water and electricity, materials and supplies required for normal operation of government services.

Note 7

Amortization includes the amortization of

the cost of capital assets and prepaid capital advances over their useful lives.

Note 8

Building occupancy includes payments for the rental and / or maintenance of office accommodation, including tenant improvements that do not meet the criteria for capitalization.

Note 9

Research grants includes payments to individuals, businesses, non-profit associations, and other entities which may include stipulations as to the use of the funds and which are not entitlements or shared cost arrangements.

Note 10

Transfers under agreement includes payments made under the terms of a contract or agreement for which the Office does not receive any direct goods or services.

Note 11

Other expenses includes expenses, such as financing costs, valuation allowances, and other expenses, which cannot be reasonably allocated to another category.

Note 12

Internal and external recoveries include the recovery of costs from other officers of the legislature, ministries, participants and sponsoring organizations for activities described within the vote.

Note 13

Information technology (capital) includes the purchase or capital lease cost of mainframe and other systems hardware, software and related equipment.

Note 14

Office furniture and equipment (capital) includes the cost or capital lease cost of office furniture and equipment.

Emotional Trigger Warning

This report touches on stories and topics that are very challenging and may trigger strong feelings of loss or grief, or memories of personal or familial experiences related to child and family services.

If you require emotional support, the following resources are available:

Kid's Help Phone (1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to Canadians ages five to 29 who want confidential and anonymous care from a counsellor.

KUU-US Crisis Line (1-800-588-8717) is available to support Indigenous people in B.C., 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Métis Crisis Line (1-833-638-4722) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Youth in BC (<https://youthinbc.com>) Online chat is available from noon to 1 a.m. in B.C.

Mental Health Support Line (310-6789 – no area code) will connect you to your local B.C. crisis line without a wait or busy signal, 24 hours a day. Crisis line workers are there to listen and support you as well as refer you to community resources.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Crisis Line (1-844-413-6649) is available to individuals impacted by issues concerning missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The National Indian Residential School Crisis Line (1-866-925-4419) provides 24-hour crisis support to former Indian Residential School students and their families.



Contact Information

Phone

In Victoria: 250-356-6710
Elsewhere in B.C.: 1-800-476-3933

Text (children and youth)
1-778-404-7161

Chat (children and youth)
rcybc.ca/get-help-now/chat

Email

rcy@rcybc.ca

Offices

Suite 400, 1019 Wharf St.
Victoria B.C.
V8W 2Y9

404, 1488 - 4th Ave
Prince George, B.C.
V2L 4Y2

Fax

Victoria: 250-356-0837
Prince George: 250-561-4624

Website

rcybc.ca

Social Media



B.C.'s Representative for
Children and Youth and
RCYBC Youth



Rep4Youth



@rcybc and @rcybcyouth



@rcybcyouth

RC&Y

Representative
for Children & Youth