



# THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD

**A Special Report on the  
Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth's Youth  
Listening Tour, 2021**

*“When you’re heard and people listen to you, you feel like you matter and your opinion matters.”*

**–YOUTH PARTICIPANT**



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*The right to be heard: A special report on the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth’s Youth Listening Tour, 2021.*

## ABOUT OUR OFFICE

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. We represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or should be receiving public services. We do this by providing direct advocacy support to young people and their families, by reviewing public service delivery after the death of a child, and by conducting child-centred research regarding the effectiveness of public services in Manitoba.

The Manitoba Advocate is empowered by legislation to make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of services provided to children, youth, and young adults. We are mandated through *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (ACYA) and guided by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), and we act in accordance with the best interests of children and youth.

**Our Vision:** A safe and healthy society that hears, includes, values, and protects all children, youth, and young adults.

**Our Mission:** We amplify the voices and champion the rights of children, youth, and young adults.

**Our Values:** Child-Centredness; Equity; Respect; Accountability; Independence



# OUR COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

Our office works with children, youth, young adults, and families throughout Manitoba. Therefore, we travel and work on a number of Treaty areas. Our offices in southern Manitoba are on Treaty 1 land and our northern office is on Treaty 5 land. The services we provide to children, youth, young adults, and their families – by phone, online, or in person – extend throughout the province and throughout Treaty areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10, which are the traditional territories of the Anishnaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the beautiful homeland of the Metis Nation.

As an organization, we are committed to the principles of decolonization and reconciliation. We strive to contribute in

meaningful ways to improve the lives of all children, youth, and young adults, especially to the lives of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit young people who continue to be under-served and over-represented in many of the service systems that fall into our scope.

As an office, we are guided by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action*, among others as part of our work. Our hope is that our advocacy and outreach efforts across our programs help support First Nation, Metis, and Inuit voices and results in tangible improvements to their lives.

*“There needs to be more support for Black, Indigenous and people of colour. There needs to be more resources when there are extra barriers with systemic racism.”*

**-YOUTH PARTICIPANT**

*“Sometimes you just feel like your problems aren’t really that important enough. You tell them, and someone would just be like, ‘Oh, well that doesn’t really matter. Everyone else goes through it anyways.’ They kind of normalize it.”*

**-YOUTH PARTICIPANT**

## DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This special report is dedicated to all children, youth, and young adults in Manitoba. With this special report, we strive to honour their voices and lived experiences. The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth wishes to give special thanks to the youth who participated in focus groups, surveys, presentations, and round table discussions during the Listening Tour. Your contributions, insights, and feedback were incredibly valuable and are helping our office ensure our programs and services are effective in your lives.

We also want to thank the schools, communities, and organizations that helped us organize focus groups including Southeast Collegiate, Agassiz Youth Centre, Manitoba Youth Centre, Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), Children of the Earth School, Swan Valley Regional Secondary School, Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre, R.D. Parker Collegiate, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, Deerwood School, and Westwood School.

Finally, thank you to the Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS!) and staff of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, who continue to amplify the voices of children and youth across our province.

# MESSAGE FROM THE MANITOBA ADVOCATE

## YOUTH HAVE THE ANSWERS.

One out of every four Manitobans is a youth under the age of 19 and they have important thoughts, ideas, opinions, and suggestions about what is happening in our communities and what is needed to build a strong future for Manitoba. Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) states “children have the right to express their opinions and to be heard by adults.” Youth have the right to contribute their ideas when decisions will affect their lives, and adults have an obligation to listen.

My job as the Acting Manitoba Advocate is to promote children’s rights and amplify the voices of children, youth, and young adults in our province. An essential part of this role involves listening to youth to understand their perspectives so I can bring these to the attention of the public and decision-makers.

From December 2019 to February 2021, my office carried out an in-person and then virtual Listening Tour with youth across Manitoba. The purpose of the tour was to raise awareness of children’s rights and the UNCRC, while also gathering information about the challenges, strengths, and solutions youth identify in their communities and beyond.

To achieve these goals, we conducted 19 presentations to over 1,000 youth, and heard directly from 293 youth through 11 focus groups and a survey.

While we heard about many diverse issues and concerns, the loudest message from youth was clear: **decision-makers and provincial leaders must prioritize the issues of youth addiction and mental health in Manitoba.** Youth are



calling on leaders and decision-makers to make more investments in accessible programming for mental health and addictions and more recreational activities that provide healthy opportunities for community and belonging.

Mental health is an area of critical concern for my office. It is also the area where the Government of Manitoba has the most outstanding recommendations from special reports issued by the Manitoba Advocate’s office. Based on the findings of this report, I call on leaders at all levels, including community agencies, schools, and governments to listen to the voices of youth. This special report is an essential resource that can be used to make strategic planning and resource allocation decisions, alongside more direct consultations with youth. As one youth told us directly: “You have the power to create change; use your position wisely.”

As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting, the mental health needs of young people are crippling an already struggling mental health system. We must prioritize youth mental health in Manitoba.

Youth addiction and mental health are top issues in our province. What is needed now is clear and effective action so the issues youth have identified and which we all know to be barriers can be rapidly addressed and eliminated.

Sincerely,  
**Ainsley Krone**  
A/Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth

*Youth were clear in what they told us and what they want to see happen. Now it’s up to the rest of us to use our positions and the resources we control to make changes to improve the lives of youth across Manitoba.”*

—AINSLEY KRONE

PHOTO: Notes from a Listening Tour focus group



# MESSAGE DE LA PROTECTRICE DU MANITOBA

## LES JEUNES ONT LES RÉPONSES.

Un Manitobain sur quatre a moins de 19 ans et les jeunes de cet âge ont des réflexions, des idées, des opinions et des suggestions importantes sur ce qui se passe dans nos collectivités et sur ce qu'il faut pour bâtir un avenir solide pour le Manitoba. Selon l'article 12 de la *Convention des Nations Unies relative aux droits de l'enfant* (CNUDE), les enfants ont le droit d'exprimer leurs opinions et d'être entendus par les adultes. Les jeunes ont le droit de s'exprimer sur les décisions les concernant et les adultes sont tenus de les écouter.

À titre de protectrice du Manitoba par intérim, je me dois de promouvoir les droits et d'amplifier les voix des enfants, des adolescents et des jeunes adultes dans notre province. Une part essentielle de mon rôle consiste notamment à écouter les jeunes et à comprendre leurs perspectives de façon à porter celles-ci à l'attention du public et des décideurs.

De décembre 2019 à février 2021, nous avons entrepris une Tournée d'écoute, d'abord en personne puis virtuelle, auprès de jeunes de partout au Manitoba. La tournée visait à sensibiliser aux droits des enfants et à la CNUDE, et à recueillir des renseignements sur les défis, les forces et les solutions que les jeunes perçoivent dans leurs collectivités et au-delà.

Pour atteindre ces objectifs, nous avons fait 19 présentations à plus de 1 000 jeunes et obtenu directement les commentaires de 293 jeunes grâce à 11 groupes de réflexion et à un sondage.

Même si les questions et sujets de préoccupation que nous avons entendus ont été nombreux et divers, le message exprimé avec le plus de force a été très clair : **les décideurs et les dirigeants provinciaux doivent prioriser les problèmes de toxicomanie et de santé mentale chez les jeunes au Manitoba.** Les jeunes appellent les leaders et les décideurs à investir davantage dans des programmes accessibles en matière de santé



mentale et de toxicomanie, et dans des activités récréatives qui sont source de mieux-être et de sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté.

Nous considérons que la santé mentale est un domaine de préoccupation majeur dans lequel le gouvernement du Manitoba doit encore mettre en œuvre un grand nombre de recommandations. À la lumière des conclusions du présent rapport, j'appelle les leaders de tout niveau, notamment des organismes communautaires, des écoles et des administrations municipales, ainsi que les ministres, à écouter les voix des jeunes. Ce rapport spécial est une ressource essentielle qui peut aider à prendre des décisions concernant la planification stratégique et l'allocation des ressources, et qui peut aussi inciter à mener davantage de consultations directement auprès des jeunes.

Comme l'actuelle pandémie de COVID-19 le met en évidence, les besoins des jeunes en matière de santé mentale paralysent un système déjà défaillant dans ce domaine. Nous devons impérativement prioriser la santé mentale des jeunes au Manitoba. Comme nous l'a exprimé un jeune : « vous avez le pouvoir de provoquer le changement, alors utilisez votre position avec sagesse ».

La toxicomanie et la santé mentale chez les jeunes sont le défi no 1 de notre province. Ce qui est requis maintenant, ce sont des actions claires et efficaces pour que les problèmes identifiés par les jeunes, que nous reconnaissons comme obstacles importants, puissent être rapidement traités et éliminés.

**Coridalement,**  
**Ainsley Krone**  
**Protectrice des enfants et des**  
**jeunes du Manitoba par intérim**

Les jeunes ont été clairs dans ce qu'ils nous ont dit et ce qu'ils veulent voir se produire. Maintenant, c'est à nous d'utiliser nos positions et les ressources que nous contrôlons pour apporter des changements afin d'améliorer la vie des jeunes partout au Manitoba."

-AINSLEY KRONE



# MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH AMBASSADOR ADVISORY SQUAD!

As young people, we are constantly learning. We build our own understanding of life and adapt to everything coming our way – just like the generations before us did.

2021

While adults can try to put themselves in our shoes, there are some different issues we are trying to tackle today, along with many longstanding ones in the community, like gangs, violence, and poverty. Therefore, it is important for adults to listen to and seek out youth voices. If you don't listen to us, you will not know what is in our best interests.

Kids are often told to be seen and not heard. What we need are people who are willing to listen; people who will support youth in making change and having their voices heard. It's an act of humbling oneself that adults are sometimes afraid of.

Manitoba youth who participated in the Listening Tour brought up topics like social media, online bullying, and climate change as concerns, as well as racism and discrimination, access to transportation, clean drinking water, and mental health care. All of these issues are important and deserve our attention.

Youth also discussed possible solutions to the issues they see in their communities. We carry new ideas and insights about the world around us. By understanding our perspectives, adults can join us in tackling problems, together.

We are in a stage of our lives where we need guidance and reassurance to help us thrive and grow because we are the future leaders of tomorrow. So, we need older generations to help set us up for success. Please invite us into your conversations because we don't always have the resources to seek you out!

Today's youth will soon be society's leaders and caretakers of those currently in power. Youth need to feel secure and respected by those in power now to be able to offer the same supports to future generations. We need to foster this positive cycle for generations to come.

Sincerely,  
The Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS!)



**Pictured above:** Some of the YAAS! members and MACY staff gathered together for the unveiling of the first mural in The Re-Right Project in July 2021.



# MESSAGE DU GROUPE CONSULTATIF DE JEUNES AMBASSADEURS (YAAS!)

En tant que jeunes, nous sommes toujours en train d'apprendre. Nous nous forgeons notre propre idée de la vie et nous nous adaptons à tout ce qui se présente – comme l'ont fait les générations précédentes.

Les adultes peuvent essayer de se mettre à notre place mais il existe des problèmes nouveaux que nous essayons de régler aujourd'hui, ainsi que des problèmes de longue date comme les gangs, la violence et la pauvreté. Par conséquent, il est important que les adultes écoutent les jeunes et cherchent à s'informer auprès d'eux. Si vous ne nous écoutez pas, vous ne saurez pas ce qui est dans notre plus grand intérêt.

On dit souvent aux enfants qu'ils devraient être vus et non entendus. Ce qu'il nous faut, ce sont des gens qui sont prêts à nous écouter, des gens qui vont aider les jeunes à apporter le changement et à se faire entendre. Il s'agit de faire preuve d'humilité, ce que les adultes craignent parfois.

Les jeunes du Manitoba qui ont participé à la Tournée d'écoute ont parlé de sujets de préoccupation comme les médias sociaux, l'intimidation en ligne et le changement climatique, mais aussi le racisme et la discrimination, l'accès au transport, l'eau potable et les soins de santé mentale. Tous ces sujets sont importants et méritent notre attention.

Les jeunes ont aussi parlé des solutions possibles aux problèmes qu'ils observent dans leurs communautés.

Ils ont des idées et des perspectives nouvelles sur le monde qui les entoure. En comprenant nos points de vue, les adultes peuvent se joindre à nous pour qu'ensemble, nous luttons contre ces problèmes.

Nous sommes à un stade de notre vie où nous avons besoin d'être conseillés et rassurés pour pouvoir nous développer et nous épanouir parce que nous sommes les leaders de demain. Aussi, nous avons besoin des générations précédentes pour qu'elles nous aident à nous mettre sur la voie du succès. Alors, s'il-vous-plaît, invitez-nous dans vos conversations parce que nous n'avons pas toujours les ressources nécessaires pour faire appel à vous!

Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui seront bientôt les leaders de la société et les aidants de ceux qui sont actuellement au pouvoir. Ils ont besoin de se sentir en sécurité et d'être respectés par ceux qui sont au pouvoir maintenant pour pouvoir apporter les mêmes soutiens aux prochaines générations. Nous devons favoriser ce cycle positif pour les générations à venir.

Cordialement,

Groupe consultatif de jeunes ambassadeurs (YAAS!)



**En photo ci-dessous :** quelques membres de YAAS! et du personnel du PEJM rassemblés pour l'inauguration de la première murale du Re-Right Project en juillet 2021.



# BACKGROUND

Children in Manitoba have rights, including the right to be heard. The Government of Canada signed the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) in 1990. This means our country has agreed to do everything in its power to protect the rights of children.

By law, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is guided by children's rights and is responsible for representing the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children in Manitoba. This Listening Tour Project was intended to:

- Raise awareness of the rights of children and youth in Manitoba.
- Listen to the priorities, opinions, and solutions of youth in Manitoba.
- Amplify youth voice through a special report that can guide the work of MACY, local governments, and other youth-serving organizations.

# WHAT WAS OUR PROCESS?

The Listening Tour was a collaboration between MACY's Youth Engagement Program, Research Hub, Public Education Program, and Knowledge Keeper. The MACY team was advised by the Elders Council at our office and by the Manitoba Advocate's Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS!), a group of 12 youth from across Manitoba.

## 1 PLANNING

In consultation with youth, the team defined key audiences and prioritized young people who may face social and structural barriers to participation and who are not often heard in decision-making processes. Indigenous youth, youth living in Northern Manitoba, youth in custody, and youth who have immigrated to Canada were identified as priority populations through focus groups. MACY's Youth Engagement team conducted focus groups in youth custody facilities, First Nations communities, and northern communities. We also hosted a focus group in Winnipeg's inner city with newcomer youth.

communities across Manitoba, had to be cancelled. Instead, MACY launched a survey in the spring of 2020 informed by preliminary focus group data. A total of 198 Manitoba youth participated. Special outreach and promotion to 2SLGBTQ+ youth was undertaken online with the support of various community organizations. In total, 293 youth participated through focus groups and surveys in the 2020-2021 Youth Listening Tour.

## 2 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

A total of 11 focus groups with 95 participants were conducted between January and March 2020. There were also 19 presentations about children's rights given to more than 1,000 youth. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rest of the in-person Listening Tour, including 14 previously scheduled focus groups in

## 3 REFLECTING BACK

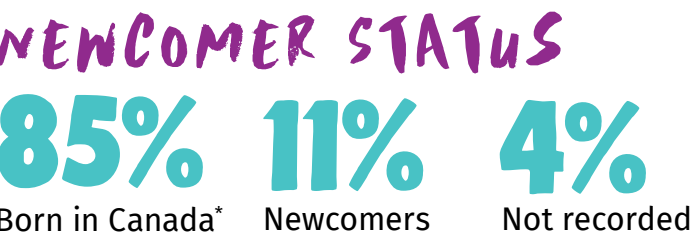
Data from the focus groups and survey were analyzed and presented back to 18 youth participants in May 2021. Youth provided feedback on the findings, and ideas for sharing the information with the public and decision-makers.



# WHO DID WE HEAR FROM?\*



\* Due to rounding, percentages may not equal 100%.



\* 85 missing values were collapsed into the Born in Canada category. As such, the per cent of total newcomers is likely an under-estimate.



293 YOUTH

AGE

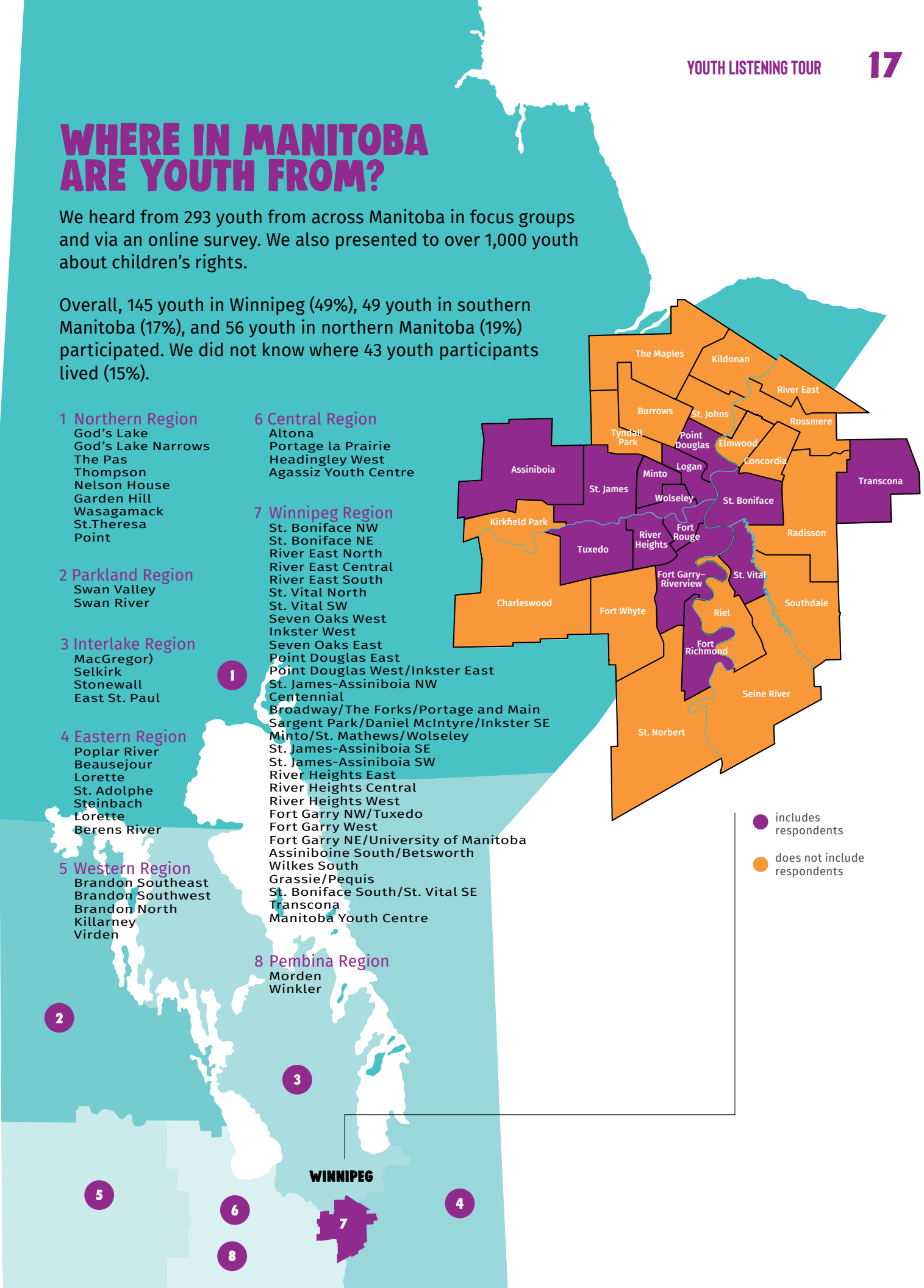
7%	UNDER 14
15%	14
15%	15
18%	16
18%	17
9%	18
8%	19
6%	20
1%	OVER 20
3%	NOT RECORDED

\* Due to rounding, percentages may not equal 100%.

# WHERE IN MANITOBA ARE YOUTH FROM?

We heard from 293 youth from across Manitoba in focus groups and via an online survey. We also presented to over 1,000 youth about children’s rights.

Overall, 145 youth in Winnipeg (49%), 49 youth in southern Manitoba (17%), and 56 youth in northern Manitoba (19%) participated. We did not know where 43 youth participants lived (15%).



# WHAT ISSUES DID WE HEAR ABOUT FROM YOUTH?

The top 10 issues from Manitoba we heard about from youth participants were:

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
1 Substance Use	162	55%
2 Mental health and wellbeing	154	53%
3 Poverty <sup>a</sup>	151	52%
4 Violence <sup>b</sup>	120	41%
5 Racism and Discrimination	105	36%
6 Bullying	74	25%
7 Family conflict/fighting	58	20%
8 The environment/climate change	52	18%
9 Education	42	14%
10 Physical and sexual health	34	12%

<sup>a</sup> Poverty includes issues such as homelessness, housing issues, and access to healthy food.  
<sup>b</sup> Violence includes gangs.

Getting good jobs (10%), access to internet access (4%), and spiritual health (3%) were also emphasized as top issues.

“Kids are scared about climate change. We feel like our future is over before it has even started.”  
-YOUTH PARTICIPANT

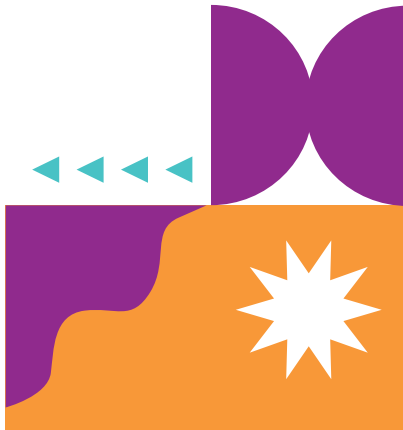
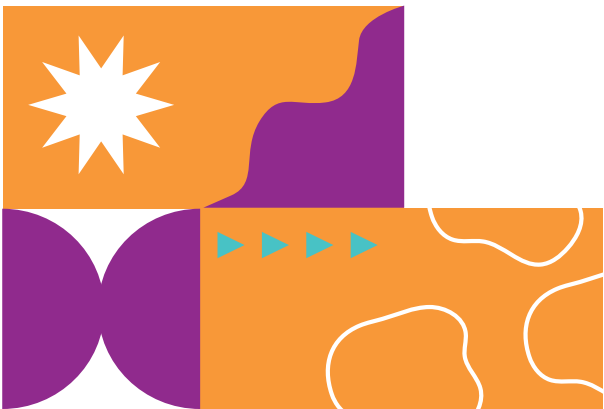
# WHAT SOLUTIONS DID YOUTH WANT TO SEE MORE OF IN MANITOBA?



Manitoba youth also identified ideas to resolve issues, which included:

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT*
1 Mental health – and addictions-related services/programs	174	79%
2 Community-based recreation activities, including sports and art	159	54%
3 Cultural activities (e.g., sweats and ceremony)	86	29%
4 Sexual health programs (e.g., safer sex information )	84	29%
5 Schools and learning centres	65	22%
6 Affordable housing	57	19%
7 Transportation (e.g., public transit)	54	18%
8 Access to computers/internet	36	12%

\* Due to multiple answers being given, percentages will not equal 100 per cent.





# TOP 5 ISSUES

## 1 SUBSTANCE USE

Fifty-five per cent of youth identified alcohol and drug use to be a top issue in their communities. Youth described substance use as a way to deal with boredom, cope with conflict, to socialize, have fun, and escape from stress, anxiety, depression, and hunger.

### WHAT DOES SUBSTANCE USE LOOK LIKE, ACCORDING TO YOUTH?

Youth talked about how their substance use impacts them and those around them.

Youth explained substance use leads to a higher chance of acting violently, driving under the influence, being homeless, engaging in criminal activity, being labeled as a “drug addict,” reducing their future opportunities, and causing long-lasting harm to their body and mind.

For those around them, substance use hurts their families, friends, and community members. For example, one youth commented that improper disposal of needles can put others at risk.

### WHAT SOLUTIONS DID YOUTH SUGGEST?

Youth identified concrete solutions in the areas of prevention and intervention. Above all, they called for **immediate access** to free resources and professional supports. **Youth are tired of waitlists.** One youth said: “I know how long the waiting lists are, and making someone wait even two months is putting them at a high risk to just give up.”

In rural and remote communities there are even fewer services and they worry about confidentiality. Youth see these solutions as critically important because they urgently need addictions treatment where and when they are ready, with fewer barriers.

### YOUTH SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE

- 24-hour drop-in centres
- In-home rehabilitation programs
- Peer-to-peer support
- Harm-reduction strategies (e.g., supervised consumption sites)
- Long-term treatment centres that “do not have an end date”
- Involuntary addictions treatment services
- Restorative justice
- Public awareness campaigns/education on the impacts of substance use
- Free recreational activities
- Criminal punishment for drug dealers
- Culturally appropriate services
- A family, friend, and community-centred response that embraces rather than rejects youth

MACY has made [six recommendations](#) specific to addictions supports in special reports. Recommendations reflect some of the solutions outlined by youth, including the development of involuntary treatment centres, amendments to [The Youth Drug Stabilization Act](#) to allow for longer withdrawal management periods, and the development of a youth addictions action strategy based on a gap analysis of provincial services for youth across Manitoba. None of these recommendations have been fully implemented by the Manitoba government.

If you would like to talk to someone about problems you are having, the following places might be able to help:

**Youth Addictions Centralized Intake Service**  
(toll-free): 1.877.710.3999  
(provincial service provided through Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre)

**Klinik Crisis Line:** 204-786-8686 and (toll free) 1-888-322-3019 and (TTY) 204-784-4097

## 2 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Fifty-three per cent of youth identified mental health and wellbeing as a top issue. Youth described being impacted by both internal and external stressors.

### WHAT DO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES LOOK LIKE, ACCORDING TO YOUTH?

Internal stress factors mentioned included missing a sense of belonging and a lack of identity – be it spiritual or cultural. As one participant described it: “not knowing their history and not knowing where they come from.” Other important sources of stress were low self-esteem, not feeling heard, jealousy, and low motivation.

Youth also spoke of the **physical and social isolation** associated with poverty, being away from home, social media use, family conflict, and substance use in their environment. Youth noted the negative impact COVID-19 restrictions have had on their mental health, including restrictions on seeing family and friends and limits on school attendance.

### WHAT SOLUTIONS DID YOUTH SUGGEST?

Youth told us they need more knowledge about mental health and wellbeing and where and how to access supportive resources. In short, youth spoke about the need for **connection** through easily accessible supports that include peers, cultural activities, and recreation. They also emphasized the crucial need for **more mental health services** and better coordination of services across Manitoba, particularly for those living in remote and rural areas.

Many youth identified schools as places where more mental health education and supports could be provided.



### YOUTH SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- More options for treatment
- Free resources
- More trained therapists/professionals
- Therapeutic companion animals
- Support groups (e.g., for male youth to end stigma to do with showing emotion)
- More recreational activities (e.g., games, sports, and music)
- Spiritual supports and ability to connect with religion
- Cultural activities to build and foster identity (e.g., Indigenous land-based teaching, fishing, and hunting)
- Strong support systems to feel more safe at home and school (e.g., adults, family, and friends)
- Stricter social media guidelines
- Education on how to deal with conflict in a healthy way
- Affordable food and transportation to address poverty
- Guaranteed confidentiality (e.g., access to counsellors outside of remote communities)

Manitoba has one of the highest youth suicide rates in Canada. Alarming, suicide is the leading manner of death for youth between 10 and 17 years old, [according to MACY's research](#).

MACY has made numerous recommendations and public statements to address the mental health crisis, most recently through [a statement](#) together with other child advocates and representatives across Canada that urged governments to increase investment in child and youth mental health during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The mental health system in Manitoba is notoriously difficult to access and navigate. This is a top concern for the Manitoba Advocate as it affects children and youth's right to quality health care ([Article 24, UNCRC](#)).

If you would like to talk to someone about problems you are having, the following places might be able to help:

#### Kids Help Phone

Free, confidential phone and online counseling. Call 1-800-668-6868 or text “CONNECT” to 686868 [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

#### Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line

Available 24/7 – operated by Klinik Community Health Centre. Toll-free 1-877-435-7170 • [www.reasonstolive.ca](http://www.reasonstolive.ca)

3 POVERTY

Fifty-two per cent of youth identified poverty as a top concern. Poverty was described as the root cause of homelessness, housing concerns, overcrowding, and lack of access to basic necessities like food, water, and clothing.

WHAT DOES POVERTY LOOK LIKE, ACCORDING TO YOUTH?

Youth described both direct and indirect impacts of poverty on their day-to-day lives. Direct impacts include limited sources of income to afford food, clothes, diapers, and adequate housing, resulting in overcrowding and homelessness.

*“I would really like to succeed with my goals but I feel like the lack of resources holds me back.” – Youth Participant*

In remote and rural communities, poverty prevents access to transportation for youth, who need to get to and from their community. This, in turn, directly impacts their abilities to access proper health services.

WHAT SOLUTIONS DID YOUTH SUGGEST?

Youth described poverty as being interconnected with racism, mental health, substance use, and community violence issues. The solutions proposed focused on correcting wealth inequalities by increasing opportunities and resources for families and youth that are living in poverty.

These youth-driven solutions to ending poverty highlight the fundamental right of all children to a standard of living that allows them to reach their full potential (Article 27, UNCRC). Manitoba has the highest child poverty rate of any other Canadian province, with First Nations children being disproportionately affected. MACY developed a joint submission with the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba to the United Nations guided by MACY’s Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS!). We recommended that the

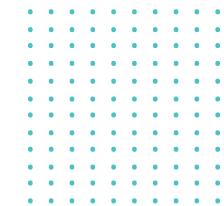
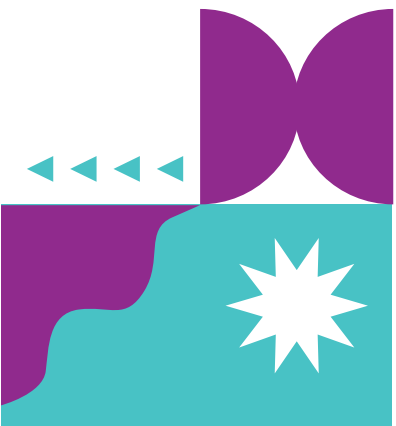
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognize the centrality of addressing Indigenous child poverty nationally as a necessary condition of fulfilling Indigenous children’s rights to nondiscrimination and health.

**YOUTH SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE POVERTY**

- More money for families in poverty
- Better access to affordable food, housing, and clean water
- Supermarkets required to donate all leftover food
- More training and skill development to help youth get jobs
- Raise the minimum wage
- Eliminate the wealth gap by “taxing the 1%”
- Better access to mental health and addictions treatment in school and out of school

*“They’re basically just giving you enough money to barely even survive. And it’s not even really surviving. It’s like just enough to maybe not die.”*

-YOUTH PARTICIPANT



4 VIOLENCE

Forty-one per cent of youth identified concerns over feeling safe because of violence in their community as a top issue. Youth saw poverty and mental health issues as root causes of violence, gangs, and sexual exploitation – all issues that, in turn, impact their abilities to feel safe.

WHAT DO PERSONAL SAFETY CONCERNS LOOK LIKE, ACCORDING TO YOUTH?

Violence causes youth to feel unsafe in two ways. They worry about being pulled into criminal activity like gangs and also about being victims of a crime.

Youth explained that poverty, peer pressure, mental health challenges, substance use, isolation, or being new to a community are all factors that put youth at risk of being pulled into criminal activity. Youth discussed their fears of being victims of physical and sexual violence. One youth shared that the biggest issue they face is *“Being afraid to go outside, because of violence, gangs, and police.”*

WHAT SOLUTIONS DID YOUTH SUGGEST?

To prevent violence and crime that cause youth to feel unsafe, they call for **community and a sense of belonging**. These solutions focus on developing **healthy alternatives** that give youth “better things to do.” They call for “great sports leagues” and “cultural and arts programs.”

Youth also spoke about wanting to remove gangs and ban all guns from their communities to “keep kids safe” and “do something to stop all the murders in Winnipeg so it’s safe.” While some youth saw the police as a source of safety, others spoke of feeling unsafe due to police interactions and instead suggested community resources as a solution.

Experiencing community and family violence can have a deep impact on the life trajectory of youth. Nearly every child death special report produced by MACY has described the link between adverse childhood experiences

and structural inequalities that can impact a sense of belonging for children and youth. In the absence of timely interventions and supports, youth with exposure to violence are at greater risk of gang involvement and sexual exploitation.

**YOUTH SOLUTIONS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AND CRIME**

- Recreation opportunities, sports and arts programs, and activities to keep busy and keep out of gangs
- Peer groups where they can talk about violence and gangs
- Ways to access their culture
- Positive, non-judgmental mentors and supports who listen
- Resources on how they can take care of themselves, parent, and address low self-esteem
- Free tattoo removal
- Safe transportation and help to relocate
- Access to resources and therapy, including safe shelters 24 hours/day
- Getting rid of guns altogether

Some youth told us they don’t always feel protected from harm in their communities:

*“In some places...kids feel they have to carry bear mace, ‘be strapped,’ carry knives because they don’t feel safe.”*

-YOUTH PARTICIPANT

*“Sometimes people get high so they don’t feel anxious from feeling unsafe. There should be a 24-hour drop-in place.”*

-YOUTH PARTICIPANT



## 5 RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Thirty-six per cent of youth identified racism and discrimination as a top issue. They explained racism as being treated differently because of the colour of their skin. They explained discrimination as being treated differently because of their sexual identity, religion, disability, culture, age, and/or gender.

### WHAT DO RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION LOOK LIKE, ACCORDING TO YOUTH?

Examples of racism shared by youth include unequal treatment of newcomer and Indigenous youth, such as “getting followed in stores because of your skin colour” and “racial profiling.” The people youth see being racist most often are bosses and leaders who abuse their power and authority, they said.

Youth spoke about systemic discrimination and how systems and institutions (governments, schools, police) may not see certain groups as being as valuable as others (e.g., Indigenous, Black, and queer people, and people experiencing poverty). This discrimination leads to unequal access to resources for these groups.

Discrimination also impacts youth due to their age. They experience ageism and some youth are unfairly labelled as “criminal” or as posing a risk to others’ safety. Youth spoke of experiencing discrimination based on their age when seeking employment and being perceived as “less worthy.”

Youth that identified as 2SLGBTQ+ spoke of their experiences and attributed discrimination to “not enough knowledge and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.”

### WHAT SOLUTIONS DID YOUTH SUGGEST?

To combat racism and discrimination, youth call for hands-on education and training on how to confront racist and discriminatory practices

and beliefs. Many youth saw the K-12 education system as playing an essential role in addressing racism and discrimination through enhanced education on Canada’s colonial history and more.

For discrimination based on age, youth called on a reduction in the voting age to youth between the ages of 14 and 17. They explained that by being excluded from the political system they are not being heard. Other youth called for the development of youth councils that “actually have a say in government issues.”

The experiences of discrimination for youth were pervasive. Our office has consistently issued recommendations that speak to the ongoing inequalities, barriers, and legacies resulting from racist and discriminatory practices that continue to disproportionately impact First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children and youth in Manitoba. Most recently, MACY has issued a special report on services for children with disabilities that included nine recommendations for systems change that will bring Manitoba closer to substantive equality. Much more needs to be done to ensure youth in our province are free from discrimination.

### YOUTH SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

- Educate in schools on racism and discrimination from a young age
- Address and confront inequality
- Pay attention to racism and discrimination and respond
- Build awareness through activities that teach about other people’s lives (e.g., “reverse roles” and virtual reality learning experiences)
- Promote not just cultural awareness, but cultural inclusion and knowledge sharing
- Promote acceptance, equality, and fair opportunity
- Develop community-based programs that support and promote cultural activities
- Indigenous mentorship programs

#### Find Community Resources

There are many community resources currently available to children and youth in Manitoba, to help improve some of the issues identified during the Listening Tour. For more resources, please call or visit [211.ca](http://211.ca) and check out our website: [ManitobaAdvocate.ca](http://ManitobaAdvocate.ca)

*Madison Sagert ☺*

**“I think the most important problem facing people my age is discrimination.”**

YOUTH PARTICIPANT

**“I think something almost every person in my generation struggles with is having parents that don’t understand or care to learn what is appropriate. It does depend on your parents, but many are not accepting of LGBTQ+, are racist, don’t understand social media and how it impacts us, our mental health struggles, and so much more. It’s very lonesome with how detached they are from what my generation faces daily. Instead of them educating us, sometimes it is more like we have to educate them.”**

–YOUTH PARTICIPANT

**“Consult queer, Black, Indigenous, disabled... people and include accurate and relevant information like queer sex ed, mental health literacy and anti-racist accurate history as mandatory in curriculums”**

–YOUTH PARTICIPANT

PHOTO: Youth art submission.

# CONCLUSION

When we consider the important feedback in this report that Manitoba youth shared with us during the course of the Youth Listening Tour, it is clear youth have a lot to contribute. We are constantly learning about how to better listen to youth, meet their needs, and support the solutions they have gifted to us based on their lived experiences.

What is also clear from the youth feedback is that many of the issues they encounter and solutions to these issues intersect and overlap. For example, community-based recreation activities can prevent gang involvement. Similarly, cultural activities can serve to increase sense of belonging and help youth heal from the trauma at the root of mental health and substance use issues.

*“You asked me to pick 5 things I’m concerned about in this community but so many of the options I was given are so closely linked, and most of them relate to mental health. Drug abuse is a mental health issue. Bullying is a mental health issue. Violence is a mental health issue.”*

—YOUTH PARTICIPANT

As we have seen, substance use and mental health issues are the main issues of concern for youth in our province. Not surprisingly, their main solutions for the issues they face are more mental health and addiction services and programs.

For years, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth has called on the provincial government to publish an action plan to help Manitoba children and youth who are

experiencing mental health and addictions crises. What we urgently need is a continuum of youth mental health and addiction services and supports that work, are culturally safe, and are available when and where youth need them. Wait lists for youth must finally be eliminated so youth feel like our collective priority. This is not just a gap in our provincial systems, but a fundamental violation of the rights of children and youth in our province to high quality health care (Article 24, UNCRC).

## HOW TO USE THIS SPECIAL REPORT

Governments are responsible for upholding the rights of all children and youth in Manitoba and to consider their views and perspectives when making decisions that may affect them. This report is an opportunity to listen to youth.

All leaders and decision-makers in Manitoba are encouraged to use this special report to help improve the lives of young people in the province by prioritizing action on the issues that matter to youth. This could include local community organizations and governments of all levels, including the Government of Manitoba. We encourage decision-makers to use the voices of youth to make informed decisions about their strategic priorities and funding.

*“Hoping this isn’t collected and kept as information, but actual changes are done based on what youth say.”*

—YOUTH PARTICIPANT

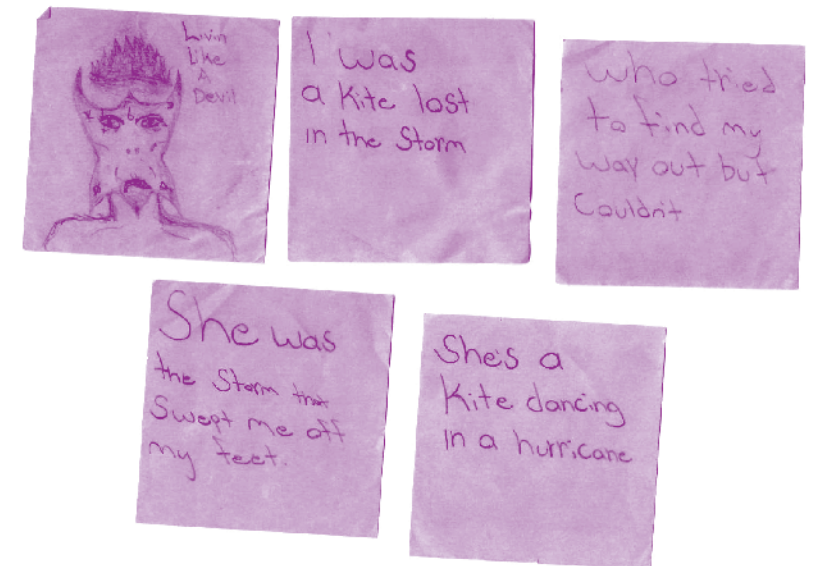


PHOTO: Youth poetry submission.





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