



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 27, 2019

2018-2019 Annual Report by the Manitoba Advocate Highlights the Launch of New Initiatives and the 30th Anniversary of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

MANITOBA, TREATY ONE TERRITORY – To mark the 30th anniversary of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), today the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth released her 2018-2019 annual report. The report provides a summary of the activities of the office, including the launch of exciting new programs and initiatives this past year.

“The UNCRC influences and guides the work across all of our programs,” explained Penrose. “This is a good opportunity for all Canadians to learn more about the UNCRC, to think about how rights are important to young people in our country, and understand in what ways these rights are recognized – or not recognized – in the lives of all children and youth here in Manitoba.”

“This has been an important year of growth and change at our office and these changes have been guided by the voices of children and youth,” added Penrose. Highlights of this year’s annual report include the launch of several new initiatives at the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY), including:

- activating a structured Youth Engagement Program,
- beginning of the Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS!),
- creating an Elders Council,
- hiring a Knowledge Keeper,
- instituting MACY’s ReconciliACITON committee,
- establishing a child-centred Research Hub,
- opening of MACY’s regional office in Thompson, and
- the launching of MACY’s new website.

Of particular note was the release of four special reports. Three of the reports were based on the child death investigations of Circling Star, Angel, and Tina Fontaine. The fourth public report was based on systemic advocacy concerns that came to light related to the uses of solitary



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confinement and pepper spray in Manitoba youth custody facilities. **Based on these special reports, 23 formal recommendations were issued by MACY to the Manitoba Government to improve child-serving systems. Towards a commitment of transparency and accountability, a public reporting process was also launched by the Advocate, which includes a newly-created recommendation tracking database that is available to the public on MACY's website.** As Penrose emphasizes, "I have a direct responsibility under Section 11(d) of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* to monitor the implementation of recommendations included in these reports and to ensure the public is aware of progress on their implementation."

In the 2018-2019 fiscal year, MACY staff travelled outside of Winnipeg 193 times to provide case related support, conduct community outreach, youth engagement, provide presentations, visit facilities, and attend conferences or training. MACY also delivered 55 public education presentations to service providers and youth-serving organizations, and attended 77 outreach events.

In addition, this past year was the first full year during which MACY provided support in new designated service areas that came into effect via *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (ACYA). **MACY responded to 3,012 requests for Advocacy Services, and saw a 25% increase in ongoing open advocacy cases compared to last year.** "Mental health and addiction service challenges were a common theme that appeared again and again across all of our services areas," Penrose highlighted. Further, the majority of children, youth, and young adults we supported faced co-occurring challenges across systems. Indeed, 55% struggled with more than one service need and 15% were dealing with service challenges across more than five service areas.

Throughout the year, MACY was notified of 199 deaths of children, youth, and young adults, including 32 deaths by suicide. **In the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the Advocate's Investigations and Child Death Review program completed 57 child death reviews into CFS-related services** provided to children, youth, and young adults who died between 2014 and 2018. To provide a program highlight for the public, today the Manitoba Advocate is also releasing a companion report, *The 2018-2019 Child Death Review Roll-Up*, which provides a summary of that work.

We are ready for the proclamation of phases two and three of the ACYA. While the majority of the ACYA (phase one) came into force on March 15, 2018, expansions to the Advocate's child death review responsibilities (phase two) and ability to centrally collect, analyze, review, investigate, and report on how children, youth, and young adults are sustaining serious injuries (phase three) were passed in the legislature but have not yet been brought into force. The ACYA was prompted by recommendations made in the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, received



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universal support from all three parties in the provincial legislature, and demonstrates Manitoba's commitment to the rights of children. It also recognizes the fundamental difference a professional advocate can make in a young person's life.

Current key concerns for MACY include the critical need for improved mental health and addiction treatment especially in rural and remote communities, the ongoing use of solitary confinement on youth in custody, unsafe sleep related deaths of infants, and the high rate of deaths by suicide of children and youth in our communities. The Manitoba Advocate intends to release public reports about each of these issues in the coming year.

To read the full annual report, visit: <https://manitobaadvocate.ca/annual-reports/>

About MACY – MACY is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. It represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or entitled to be receiving public services including child and family, adoption, disability, mental health, addictions, education, victim supports, or youth justice. The office does this by advocating directly with children and youth, or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Advocacy also involves reviewing public services after the death of any young person when that young person or their family was involved with a reviewable service as defined in *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (the ACYA). Additionally, the Manitoba Advocate is empowered to make recommendations to government, conduct child-centred research, disseminate findings, and educate the public on children's rights and any other matter under the ACYA.

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