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It has been one year since I was appointed Manitoba's Children's Advocate. I have been provided with an exciting opportunity where collectively staff, youth, and community can move forward and create a viable child/youth service system.

Over the course of the year, I have seen CEO's of child welfare Authorities entering into projects to enhance outcomes for children. As well, CEO's of child welfare Agencies have requested the OCA play a role in advocating for lower caseloads for protection workers and to support the continuity of placements for youth.

The OCA is truly impressed and grateful to the University of Winnipeg for their Youth in Care Tuition Waiver program that will support 10 young people per year beginning in September 2012. We need to remember that when young people come forward it is more than a request for support. We need to show our commitment to their future by giving youth the resources they need to be successful. We hope this is just a beginning and that other institutions will follow this lead.

The theme of the OCA's recently released annual report is our recommitment to children and youth. This year we are embarking on additional outreach activities, an improved website, and strengthening the OCA's relationship with youth-centered organizations.

Through innovation and determination we can work together to ensure the voices of children are heard.



Let's Highlight Some Rights!!

In this edition we highlight two important and complementary rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

Article 3

(Best interests of the child)

The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Article 12

(Respect for the views of the child)

When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

"If adults are to fulfill their obligations to promote the best interests of children, they need to listen to children themselves."

Please visit www.unicef.org and read "Child's Right to be Heard" for more information.

OCA in the Community

On March 17, 2012, Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network offered youth in and from care, and social workers an opportunity to interact on a fun, personal level by hosting the first annual "Earl Cook Classic" in memory of this inspiring young man.

Attendees honoured Earl and remembered the persistence and inner-strength he showed during his battle with cancer, by playing the game he loved.



Manitoba's Youth In Care
"EMPOWERING YOUTH"



Watch for the 2nd annual Earl Cook Classic early in 2013!
Visit www.voices.mb.ca for more info.
Visit www.hisnameisearl.blogspot.ca to learn more about Earl Cook.

*Congratulations
Corey!*



L to R: Peter Dudding, Darlene MacDonald, Corey LaBerge

The OCA would like to congratulate Corey LaBerge for winning a 2011 Child Welfare League of Canada Achievement Award!

Corey accepted his award on March 22, 2012, in Ottawa along with four other winners.

Corey is employed with Anishinaabe Justice Circle Counsel.

Corey has tirelessly advocated for the rights of youth with FASD to receive fair treatment within the legal system. He has not only advocated for youth individually as legal clients, but also advocated for increased resources and systemic change.

Youth in Care Tuition Waiver Program Announced

On March 15, 2012, the Children's Advocate attended a press release at the University of Winnipeg, where it was announced that a pilot project to waive university tuition fees would begin in September 2012 for youth who have previously been in the care of a child and family services agency.

This is a joint venture between the University of Winnipeg, the Government of Manitoba, and Manitoba's four child welfare authorities. In addition, the Government of Manitoba will cover the cost of textbooks and room and board while the student studies at the University of Winnipeg, until the age of 21.

There are more than 9,500 children and youth in care in Manitoba, and it is estimated that less than 5% pursue a post-secondary education.

This project is an attempt to eliminate one of the barriers which prevents youth from obtaining a university degree. This exciting program will accept up to ten youth a year, and is believed to be the first of its kind in Canada.



Q: When do I include children and youth in case planning?



A: Too often case plans are completed with only the caregiver(s) with the assumption that they will inform the children and youth.

Children as young as early school age can be involved in case planning. While they may not have the developmental ability to fully grasp some of the ideas or plans, they will appreciate being asked for their opinion. Children and youth over the age of 12 have a right to be involved in case planning.

Taking the opportunity to meet with children and youth one-on-one will help inform them, reinforce their right to be heard, and gain their cooperation with the plan. Making sure children and youth are active participants helps ensure clarity for everyone.

Children have the right:

- to know who their Social Worker is
- to know how to contact their Social Worker
- to speak with their Social Worker on a regular basis
- to have a say in their case plan
- to know what their case plan is
- if they are 12 years or older, to go to court and talk to the judge about the plan being made for them



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Check out our website to find out more information about children's rights and our office!
www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca