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‘The right to be heard’: Advocate releases Youth Listening Tour report

Report follows consultations with hundreds of Manitoba youth who discussed community issues, proposed solutions for a better future

WINNIPEG, TREATY ONE TERRITORY, HOME OF THE METIS NATION – The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is releasing a new special report today that upholds children’s rights and amplifies youth voices from across the province.

The Right to Be Heard special report features the thoughts and opinions of Manitoba youth who were consulted in 2020 as part of a province-wide Youth Listening Tour. In addition to presenting to more than 1,000 young people, MACY heard directly from 293 youth in 63 locations through 11 focus groups and an online survey. The purpose of MACY’s tour was to raise awareness of children’s rights and the *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), while also gathering information about the challenges, priorities, and solutions youth identify.

Because some young people may face social and structural barriers to participation and are not often heard in decision-making processes, MACY wanted to prioritize hearing directly from youth to help inform its own work and better serve youth needs. The Youth Listening Tour focused on hearing from Indigenous youth, youth living in northern Manitoba, youth in custody, and youth who have immigrated to Canada.

“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,” said Ainsley Krone, Acting Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth. “An essential part of my role involves listening to youth to understand their perspectives so I can bring these to the attention of the public and decision-makers. With this first Listening Tour, we hope to show youth directly: your opinion matters.”

MACY heard about a number of challenges youth encounter, including the issues of substance use (mentioned by 55 per cent of youth), mental health and wellbeing (53 per cent), poverty (52 per cent), violence (41 per cent), and racism and discrimination (36 per cent). When given the opportunity to propose solutions, 79 per cent of youth identified the need for more mental

health and addiction services in Manitoba. Youth also wanted more community-based recreation activities, such as arts and sports programs, cultural programs, and improved access to sexual health programs, schools, affordable housing, and public transportation.

Many of the issues youth described also intersect and overlap. As one youth participant said: “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.”

Based on the findings of today’s report, substance use and mental health are the main issues of concern for youth in our province – two issues the Advocate’s office has been raising repeatedly with the provincial government since 2018. Clear and effective action is required.

“As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting, the mental health needs of young people are overwhelming an already struggling mental health system. We must prioritize youth mental health in Manitoba,” said Krone. “I encourage all decision-makers to listen and use the voices of youth in this report to make informed decisions about strategic priorities and funding. Youth have the answers. We just need to listen.”

To read *The Right to Be Heard* report, click [here](#). To read MACY’s past special reports, recommendations, and to view recommendation compliance tracking, visit our website: ManitobaAdvocate.ca.

About MACY: MACY is an independent, non-partisan 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 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 under provincial law to make recommendations to government and other public bodies, 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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