Manitoba Advocate
for Children and Youth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MANITOBA YOUTH UNVEIL MURAL REFLECTING THEIR RIGHT TO PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

Mural is part of The Re-Right Project, aims to educate young people about their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

NOVEMBER 6, 2026 – TREATY 4 TERRITORY AND NATIONAL HOMELAND OF THE RED RIVER MÉTIS, Swan River, Man.

Yesterday, students at Swan Valley Regional Secondary School unveiled a mural showing their interpretation of the right to be protected from harmful substances, including from making, selling or using drugs (UNCRC article 33). The mural is part of The Re-Right Project, an initiative created by the Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS) at the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY).

"To us, this right means more than simply keeping harmful drugs away," said Liz Desjarlais, one of the students involved in creating the mural. "It means building communities where people feel safe, where families can find support, and where those who are struggling with addiction are not forgotten."

Students worked with Winnipeg-based artist Charlie Johnston to bring their vision to life. The mural shows a colourful landscape with a Van Gogh-like painterly treatment, a dark grey cloud of swarming needle-mosquitos, luminous dragonfly helpers, a mosquito net for healing and protection, and a large group hug that radiates light, love, and safety. Dragonfly protectors sit on their shoulders.

"Dragonflies were chosen to represent the heroes; they are a spiritual ally, as they have the ability to capture and contain the needle mosquitoes," said Sam Sakayigun, another youth who worked on the mural. "The dragonflies are wearing symbols of health services, justice, safety patrol, and most importantly – love."

The Swan Valley mural is the seventh in the Project, which originated in 2021. The goal is to paint all 42 rights under the UNCRC, in as many Manitoba communities as possible, to educate young people and all Manitobans about children's rights. Other rights completed to date include:

- Article 31 – The right to play, rest, and enjoy life.

- Article 27 – The right to have basic needs met, including access to essential things like nutritious food, clothing, and a safe place to live.
- Article 6 – The right to be alive. The government must ensure that young people can both survive and develop in the best possible way.
- Article 29 – The right to an education that helps young people reach their full potential. It should develop their personality and respect for others, the environment, and their own and other cultures.
- Article 30 – The right to speak their own language and follow their family's way of life. If the young person belongs to an Indigenous or other minority group, this right has special protection.
- Article 12 – The right to be heard and share opinions freely. Adults should listen and take young people seriously.

This mural would not be possible without the ideas and care from the students who brought this vision to life, the support of the educators at Swan Valley Regional Secondary School, the talent and guidance of Charlie Johnston, the support of Tom Ethans and the Take Pride team, and the Youth Engagement team at MACY.

Learn more about the mural project here: The Re-Right Project - Manitoba Advocate

Download pictures from the unveiling here: Dropbox

-30-

Additional quotes from the students:

Liz Desjarlais

"We believe every child and every young person deserves to grow up in a safe environment where they have an opportunity to live a healthy life without being exposed to dangers of harmful substances."

"Drug use and addiction are serious issues and have affected more than just the person struggling. They can impact families, friendships and entire communities."

"Seeing how it can impact the people we care about has shown me that addiction is not simply a choice or something that can be easily overcome. It can create struggles that extend far beyond an individual, affecting people who love them."

"We also see the effects of substance use throughout our communities. It can make people feel unsafe in places where they should feel comfortable, and it can leave families unsure of where to turn."

"Protecting young people also means giving them the knowledge and guidance to make informed decisions. We see how some children are exposed to harmful substances from an early age."

Sam Sakayigun

"The last part of the mural is a group hug of all the people, of all ages, all ethnicities, who support, protect and love one another. It represents a supportive community and shows that we are not alone. The dragonfly protectors sit on their shoulders; their bright colours represent them and their positive status in the community."

Hiba Faisal

"We designed the mosquito to look dangerous and to look like a needle carrying drugs. The mosquito infects our loved ones and makes our environment unsafe, just like the drugs are doing to our community."

"In the middle of the room, there's a bigger city, and some mosquito netting. This is meant to represent protection from the swarm. It shows the safe places that we have in dangerous environments, such as our friends, family, school and community centres."

-

Media Contact:
Lindsay Ridgley
Manager of Public Education and Youth Engagement, MACY
(204) 451-6111
LRidgley@ManitobaAdvocate.ca

About the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth:

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The office represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or should be receiving, provincial public services. MACY does this by providing direct advocacy support to young people and their families, by reviewing public service delivery after the death or serious injury 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. MACY is mandated through The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, *guided by the* United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *and acts according to the best interests of children and youth.*