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DON'T MISTAKE TRAUMA FOR RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN IN CARE: NEW REPORT FROM MANITOBA'S CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

MANITOBA – In an effort to help children and youth in care come to terms with traumatic events, well-meaning adults in their lives can be hesitant to dig below the surface. Abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, living with caregivers who are struggling with addiction, all of these can be traumatic for the child and can bring a family to the attention of the child welfare system. When home conditions deteriorate and children are brought into protective care, separation from parents, siblings, community, and familiar routine can also be traumatic events. The uncertainty that can follow in the life of the child, and the powerlessness many of them feel can further exacerbate the issues of loss and grief, according to a new report released today by Darlene MacDonald, Manitoba's Children's Advocate.

"We have to make sure we are listening carefully to children and youth and taking our cues from them in terms of what is important to discuss and what information they might need to regain some sense of peace and control. As much as we may want to protect young people from the sorrow they may feel about their family situation," said MacDonald, "we need to understand that children and youth who have lived through trauma are frequently experiencing more distress than we may realize."

Today's report, *Don't Call Me Resilient: What Loss and Grief Look Like for Children and Youth in Care*, was built on a foundation of listening to the voices of youth. The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) brought together current and former youth in care to discuss issues of loss and grief. The OCA asked youth to share how they felt when coming into care, what they understood about the reasons for child welfare involvement in their lives, who they identified as their sources of support, and more. The report features the voices of many youth who shared their experiences of sadness, relief, hope, loss, and grief.

The report also includes highlights of emerging research on issues of trauma and resilience as well as information on ways to address trauma including customary care, family group conferencing, life books, and other meaningful planning methods. The OCA makes two recommendations in the report that are designed to increase awareness and training for child welfare professionals on the experiences of children and youth as they relate to loss and grief, and both recommendations engage the skill and expertise of Voices: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network, who were consultants for the OCA on this report. The full report can be accessed on the OCA's website: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Loss-and-Grief-FINAL-web.pdf>.

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The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The OCA represents the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or who should be receiving, services under The Child and Family Services Act and The Adoption Act. This includes advocating directly with children and youth and by reviewing services after the death of any young person who received child welfare services in the year preceding his or her death. The OCA also regularly publishes information and resources for the public on its work with Manitoba's children and youth.