



Unit 100 - 346 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba CANADA R3C 0C3
(204) 988-7440 • 1-800-263-7146 • Fax: (204) 988-7472
www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca

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MEDIA RELEASE

Advocate's Annual Report spotlights anniversary of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Manitoba – Children's Advocate Darlene MacDonald released her 2013-2014 annual report today. The report outlines the office's activities and recommendations for the year set against the theme of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which is celebrating 25 years.

"This anniversary is very important to our office because our ultimate goals are to protect and promote children's rights and to create opportunities where children and youth can flourish," states MacDonald. "The UNCRC outlines more than 40 human rights that relate to children and youth and these provisions guide the work we do on a daily basis."

The Office of the Children's Advocate received 2,155 requests for advocacy services in 2013-2014 and completed 83 child death reviews as part of its special investigations review services.

Advocacy cases often include multiple concerns, but the top issues that continue to dominate relate to case planning, quality of care, and child rights. As in past years, case management has remained a top concern in the OCA's special investigations reviews. The office has seen some improvement in the area of risk assessment, which is part of case management, since the adoption of Structured Decision-Making™ (SDM) tools by child welfare agencies across the province.

The report outlines three themes with recommendations that stem from the trends the OCA sees emerging in the cases that come to its attention:

Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth – A history of sexual exploitation is not uncommon among children and youth in the child welfare system. Despite a number of positive initiatives implemented in the province to address the issue, Manitoba needs to strengthen its response in a number of areas including training for front line workers as well as resources designed to address the specific needs of these children and youth. Specific needs often relate to health issues, gender-specific treatment, and securing personal safety.

Access to Mental Health and Wellness Services – There are inadequate services available to meet the needs of young people experiencing mental health problems. Consequently, children and youth often must go outside of their communities for assessment and treatment. This causes significant hardship to families. The province

has expanded youth mental health services based in the Northern Health region, but the construction on a comprehensive facility the provincial government promised two years ago, called the Northern Youth Crisis Service has yet to begin.

Protecting Child and Youth Rights Beyond Child Welfare – Present legislation governing the OCA limits its ability to advocate for children and youth in our province with respect to the full range of public services they receive (e.g. education, justice, health). A significant number of OCA cases involve children receiving services beyond child welfare. The office recommends an expanded mandate of the OCA under new, independent legislation.

To view the full report visit: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/English-2014-web.pdf>

About the OCA

The Office of the Children’s Advocate is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. It represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or entitled to be receiving, services under *The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)* and *The Adoption Act*. The office does this by advocating directly with children and youth, or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Advocacy also involves reviewing services after the death of any young person where that young person or their family was involved with child welfare services in the year preceding the death.

Contact:

Ainsley Krone, Manager - Communications, Research & Public Education
204-988-7475 or 1-800-263-7146
akrone@childrensadvocate.mb.ca