



November 20, 2017

MEDIA RELEASE

Children's Advocate Annual Report Anticipates Expanded Mandate

Manitoba – Manitoba's children's advocate, Daphne Penrose, released her 2016-2017 annual report today. The report outlines the office's service statistics and activities while highlighting pending changes to its mandate with the theme, *Creating the Web of Advocacy*.

"Our office has been working hard to prepare for *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*," states Penrose. "This new legislation will significantly broaden and strengthen our mandate, allowing us to create strong partnerships to better support children and youth across a spectrum of public services."

The new legislation, expected to come into force in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, will enable children, youth, and young adults, from birth to age 21, to access advocacy support beyond child welfare and adoption services. The new Advocate for Children and Youth Office will have added advocacy and investigative responsibilities in the justice, education, mental health, disability, addiction, and victim support services systems. In addition, the public reporting abilities of the office will expand, as will its Manitoba-focused research capabilities.

"Many of the children and youth we now serve have involvement in multiple systems, but we've been constrained from advocating beyond child welfare and adoption because of our limited mandate," states Penrose. "The new legislation recognizes that these systems are not silos. They need to work together to lift up and support the children and youth who need them."

In its 2016-2017 fiscal year, the Office of the Children's Advocate opened 2,581 cases for advocacy services and initiated 53 child death special investigation reviews. Children and youth contacting the office themselves initiated half of all of the cases opened for advocacy supports. Issues related to child and family services case planning and case management remain the most frequently identified concerns in both advocacy and special investigation review services.

Although most child deaths that the office reviewed this year were the result of natural causes, five (10%) were the result of suicide. The OCA continues its multi-phase study on youth suicide in Manitoba and this year worked in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association to develop a mental health promotion resource for middle-school-aged children, a group identified in previous phases of the study as being underserved in the area of suicide prevention, and mental health and wellness.

To read the full annual report visit: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016-2017-OCA-Annual-Report.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 when that young person or their family was involved with child welfare services at the time of death or in the year that preceded the death of the young person.

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