

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT

To all adults doing what is best for you. (Article 3)

A message to foster parents from the Office of the Children's Advocate:

Foster parents play a central role in the care and safety of Manitoba children and youth. As a foster parent, we appreciate and respect your commitment to the children entrusted to your care. We know that the child welfare system can be overwhelming at times, and we also want to acknowledge the important role that the Manitoba Foster Family Network (MFFN) plays in advocating for the rights of foster families and assisting their navigation through the system.

We have similar goals—our office exists as a part of the support network of advocates for the rights of the children in your care. We are an independent voice, ensuring that children's rights are respected and that children's voices are heard clearly. All children in care have the right to play an active role in decisions regarding their futures. All children have a right to have their spiritual and cultural beliefs respected. They have a right to be protected from abuse and neglect and to have regular contact with their social worker. And all children receiving service from a child and family services agency in Manitoba have a right to an advocate.

As a foster parent, you play an essential role in ensuring that children's rights are honored, and that they are provided with a stable, nurturing home where they are respected, cared for and listened to. We are here to help you support the children and youth who live with you. Do they know they have a right to speak with someone from our office? You can help them by ensuring they know how to contact us and that when they do they can meet with us and speak to us confidentially. Our contact information is included with this information sheet – we ask that you help us reach all children and youth receiving child welfare services by providing a bridge to our office for young people entrusted to your care. Together, we can ensure the voices of all children and youth are heard and their rights protected.

Respectfully,

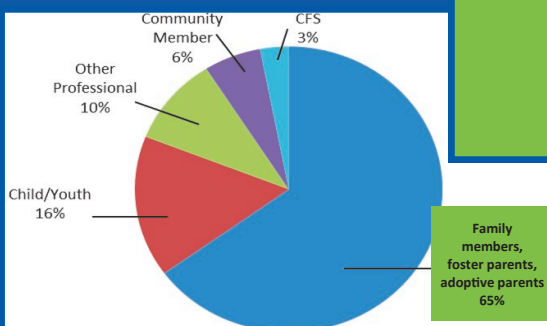


Darlene MacDonal, MSW
Children's Advocate

While 15% of people who called our office last year were foster parents, we want to see that number rise! **You can call us on behalf of a child.** Some of the top reasons foster parents call the OCA include concerns about:

- Visitation plans for children and their birth families
- Reunification and transition plans
- Lack of contact with the social worker
- A foster child being removed from the home

Who Calls Us?



The largest percentage (65%) of our referral base comprises parents, extended family, foster parents, and adoptive parents who contact the OCA on behalf of a child or youth.



The Office of the Children's Advocate

What We Do

The OCA is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. We are here to represent the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or who should be receiving child welfare or adoption services. We do this by 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 Children's Advocate is empowered to review, investigate, and provide recommendations on matters relating to the welfare and interests of children.

The Importance of Having an Independent Children's Advocate

The independent status of the OCA is vital. It allows the Children's Advocate to freely challenge the system and work for change to practices, policies, or legislation when they are not meeting the best interests of children.

Independent means that the Government of Manitoba does not oversee the OCA. We are separate and apart from the child welfare system; **we are not a child welfare agency.**

Children are in particular need of advocates. Our experiences speaking with children and youth in the child welfare system reveal that they can sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them.

ALL CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

BE SAFE—FEEL SAFE—HAVE A SAY—HAVE ADULTS LISTEN TO THEM

...AND TO SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

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