

## Child and Youth Advocate Releases Investigative Report “Handle with Care”

Young children experiencing emotional distress need adults who intervene to be well versed in children’s mental health and to be able to respond in ways appropriate for the child’s age and developmental level. This is critically important for a child who has a history of trauma. Child and Youth Advocate Jackie Lake Kavanagh speaks to these systemic issues today as she releases the investigative report **Handle with Care**.



This investigation looked at a case involving a seven-year-old child who experienced a mental health or behavioural episode while residing with her mother at a shelter for victims of family violence. Paramedics and uniformed police initially responded. Police then engaged the mobile crisis response team because of its specialized ability to intervene in mental health crises. However the police officers subsequently handcuffed the young child in the absence of the mental health clinician.

Mobile crisis response teams involving police and mental health clinicians are expanding in Newfoundland and Labrador. This approach recognizes that people in a mental health crisis are experiencing primarily a health issue, not a criminal justice issue. The timing of this report presents an opportunity to incorporate the recommendations from this investigation into these evolving services and responses so that children in distress receive better responses in the future.

There are clear and compelling lessons in this investigation for law enforcement and health care to do better for traumatized children. This is both achievable and necessary. The Advocate said, “Young children experiencing a mental health or behavioral crisis need help, not handcuffs.”

The report identifies two recommendations. The Child and Youth Advocate monitors all recommendations, and publicly reports progress on them annually.

This report is on the OCYA website:

<https://www.childandyouthadvocate.nl.ca/files/HandleWithCareJuly2021.pdf>

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