

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate



Annual Report 2024-25

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Message from the Child and Youth Advocate

I was pleased to be appointed as the Child and Youth Advocate (A) in February 2025. It truly is a privilege to serve in this role and to advocate for the rights of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is my pleasure to present the 2024-25 Annual Performance Report for the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA). This report has been prepared in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act** provisions for a Category Two entity. As the Child and Youth Advocate, I recognize my obligations under this **Act**, and I am accountable for the results in this report.



This is the second report on the latest Business Plan which outlines our goals and objectives for 2023-26. The work and initiatives presented in this report profile the significant work completed by this Office to fulfil its mandate during the fiscal year.

This year we connected with approximately 2,400 children, youth, parents, post-secondary students, professionals and members of community groups through our public education mandate, and we also responded to over 360 requests for individual advocacy assistance. We continued our review of mental health services provided for young people in the province, holding 145 sessions in 40 communities across the island and in Labrador, meeting with over 90 young people and over 620 adults representing parents and professionals.

All of the lines of business of our work aim to advance, champion, and protect the rights of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador and to ensure children and youth have access to the services they require.

I hope this report provides readers with an understanding of the important work we do with, and on behalf of, young people in the province.

Sincerely,

Karen Gray, MSW, RSW
Child and Youth Advocate (A)





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Overview

Mandate

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) is an Independent Statutory Office of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are responsible for promoting and protecting the rights of all children and youth in the province and provide public oversight of government programs and services. We advocate to ensure children and youth have access to services they are entitled to, that their issues receive appropriate attention, and their voices are heard in matters affecting them.

We are mandated by legislation through the **Child and Youth Advocate Act**, to protect and advance the rights of children and youth. Our advocacy work is also guided by the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** and other policies and laws. Our primary clients are children and youth under the age of 19. If a young person is in extended care or custody, that age range is extended to the age of 21.

We help children and youth by standing up for their rights in dealing with child serving systems. We help young people speak up for themselves, we speak up with them, or we speak up for them.

We encourage young people to contact us if they are having an issue accessing services, if they feel their rights are not being respected, or if their viewpoint is not being heard. We also work closely with family members, professionals, other supporters, and champions working on behalf of children and youth.

We offer individual advocacy, as well as systemic advocacy where groups of young people are affected. We investigate and review complaints, and deliver public education on the rights of children and youth. The voices and rights of young people are integral to the work we do and guide all of our advocacy efforts.



Section 3 of the **Child and Youth Advocate Act** states the Office is established:

- (a) to ensure that the rights and interests of children and youth are protected and advanced and their views are heard and considered;
- (b) to ensure that children and youth have access to services and that their complaints relating to the provision of those services receive appropriate attention;
- (c) to provide information and advice to the government, agencies of the government and to communities about the availability, effectiveness, responsiveness and relevance of services to children and youth;
- (c.1) to review and investigate matters affecting the rights and interests of children and youth; and
- (d) generally, to act as an advocate of the rights and interests of children and youth.

Financial Information

The budget approved for Fiscal Year 2024-25 was \$1,281,500.

Staff

Our dedicated staff are passionate about standing up for the rights of children and youth. In addition to the Child and Youth Advocate, there are 13 permanent staff members on our team with diverse educational and professional backgrounds. These backgrounds include social work, social sciences, education, and psychology. Our administration staff serve important support roles to ensure advocacy and investigative staff can dedicate their efforts directly to issues affecting children and youth every day. Our office is located in St. John's, however we provide services throughout the province.



What We Do

Individual Advocacy:

All children and youth have rights, and these rights create expectations about the responses and services young people deserve. When we become aware that a child or youth is experiencing barriers to these rights and services, and that responses are not sufficient, we advocate on an individual level for that young person.

Systemic Advocacy:

Systemic issues affect groups of young people. These systemic issues may involve gaps, changes, or reductions involving services, programs, policies, or laws. When we see broad issues that negatively impact the rights of children and youth, we advocate for broader systemic change to benefit these groups of young people. We will do this work regardless if anyone makes a complaint or request to our office.

Reviews/Investigations:

We may formally investigate or review a matter on behalf of a child or youth or group of children or youth. This is a very serious matter which may involve witnesses being required to provide information under oath or affirmation. By law, we can compel the disclosure of documents and case files to this office and we may review policies, legislation, and other information. After determining the facts, we typically make recommendations for changes in policies, services, programs, and/or laws to better protect and advance children's rights in the future.

Education and Outreach:

We are mandated to provide education on children's human rights. In this role, we are able to connect with children and youth, to learn directly about their issues at the community level, and to hear from others who are committed to improving services and responses to young people in Newfoundland and Labrador. In our education role, we may offer sessions to schools or youth groups, provide book readings to young children on rights-based themes, speak at conferences, deliver professional development workshops, and participate in cultural and community events.



Our Vision

A province where every child's and youth's rights are understood, protected, and respected.

Our Values

Integrity:	We act honestly, ethically, and sincerely in all areas of our work.
Equity	We work to ensure all young persons have access to the services they require and advocate for systems to be responsive to their individual needs.
Inclusiveness:	We provide a safe space for all children and youth where differences in experiences and expression are valued and respected.
Relationships:	We listen to learn and practice person-centred approaches that build mutual trust and understanding.
Leadership:	We strive to be an agent of positive change by promoting the rights of children and youth while pursuing fairness, transparency, and accountability within the systems that serve them.



Highlights and Accomplishments

We advocate for the rights of young people to be respected and protected. During fiscal year 2024-25, we responded to over 360 requests for assistance. We are also mandated to provide education on child and youth rights. This past fiscal year we facilitated 50 engagement and outreach sessions for children, youth, and community groups. This does not include the engagement sessions held as part of the systemic review into the mental health services for young people in the province.

Systemic and Investigation Work

There were four investigations and seven reviews ongoing throughout the year. Pursuant to Section 29(1) of the **Child and Youth Advocate Act**, the Advocate may publish these reports where it is in the interest of children and youth, in the public interest, or in the interest of a person, department, or agency of the government.

One of the four investigations noted above was an Order in Council (OC2024-159) from September 2024. An Order in Council (OC) is made by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, acting on the advice of the Cabinet or Premier. The OC stated: “Under the authority of paragraph 15(l)(a) and section 16 of the **Child and Youth Advocate Act**, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council is pleased to direct the Child and Youth Advocate to review, investigate and report on the policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in receipt of protective intervention services where a report is received alleging that a child or youth has been sexually abused or exploited”.

A review of mental health services for children and youth was also ongoing throughout the fiscal year. Staff met with over 90 young people, as well as over 620 adults representing parents, family members and professionals in 40 communities. More detail is provided in the report on performance section of this report on page 21.

This Office continues to follow and attend the various hearings held regarding the ongoing Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences, and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System. The Inquiry was officially launched by the Provincial Government on April 29, 2022. The OCYA was granted standing for most facets of this Inquiry, which has allowed the Office to be present at hearings and to review many of the documents and exhibits associated with the Inquiry.



Submissions

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate was invited to present to the Education Accord NL in October 2024. This Accord aims to address critical issues spanning early learning, K-12 schooling, and post-secondary education. In addition to the presentation, a written submission was also provided by the Office outlining important issues relevant to the education of young people here in the province.

Engagement and Outreach

During 2024-25, we engaged in 50 outreach sessions reaching over 2,400 children, youth, parents, post-secondary students, professionals and community groups.

School Outreach

During 2024-25 we held outreach sessions with over 900 students in the following schools:

- ▶ Beachy Cove Elementary
- ▶ Bishop Field Elementary
- ▶ Hazelwood Elementary
- ▶ Holy Cross Elementary
- ▶ Holy Family Elementary
- ▶ Learys Brook Junior High
- ▶ Mary Queen of Peace Elementary
- ▶ Prince of Wales Collegiate
- ▶ St. Mary's Elementary

Community Outreach

During the fiscal year, we visited and delivered sessions throughout the community. We engaged with over 1,000 young people and adults at events such as:

- ▶ NL Schools Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) Event
- ▶ Association for New Canadians Enrichment Program and Summer Camps
- ▶ Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador
- ▶ Community Education Network, Stephenville
- ▶ Teen Healthy Relationships, Planned Parenthood - Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Health Centre
- ▶ Multi Cultural Womens Organization Kids Group, Parents Group, and Family Fun Day
- ▶ NL Youth Centre



- ▶ Rabbitown Community Centre
- ▶ Choices for Youth Family Fun Day and Youth Advisory Council
- ▶ Miss Teen Trinity Conception delegates

We also hosted booths at the Anti Racism Summit, Foster Families NL Annual Conference, and Sharing our Cultures Annual Event at The Rooms.

Professionals and Post-Secondary Students

We were pleased to connect with and present to over 450 professionals and post-secondary students at:

- ▶ Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner
- ▶ AMAL Youth and Family Centre
- ▶ Bachelor of Social Work students at Memorial University
- ▶ Social Worker Orientation, Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development
- ▶ Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador
- ▶ Centre for Collaborative Health Professional Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland
- ▶ Bachelor of Education students at Memorial University
- ▶ Newfoundland Aboriginal Womens Network
- ▶ People Of the Dawn Indigenous Friendship Centre

National Child Day

On November 20th each year, Canada celebrates National Child Day in recognition of the country's commitment to upholding the rights of children. The day also recognizes two historic events: the 1959 signing of the **UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child** and the adoption of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** in 1989. This is a very important day for our office and we celebrate for a full week. We broadcasted radio ads, created a poster, and visited approximately 130 young people at:

- ▶ Buckmaster's Circle Community Centre
- ▶ Brighter Futures Coalition of St. John's
- ▶ A.P. Low Primary School, Labrador City
- ▶ Sharing Our Cultures After School Program
- ▶ Harbour Grace Community Youth Network
- ▶ Splash Centre
- ▶ St. John's "Move It" Event



Young Artist Program

We always want to hear directly from young people. We are here to listen when they have concerns they require assistance with and when they have talents they want to share with us. Our Young Artist Program exists to help create an awareness of our office among young people as well as to celebrate the artistic talents of young people throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. All year long we accept art from young people under 21 years old, and we send out a prize package of promotional materials to each person who submits art. We display this art throughout our office. We also use the artwork received on our website, in our reports and in other resource materials about children's rights. We are interested in artistic creations such as drawings, paintings, pictures, and poetry.

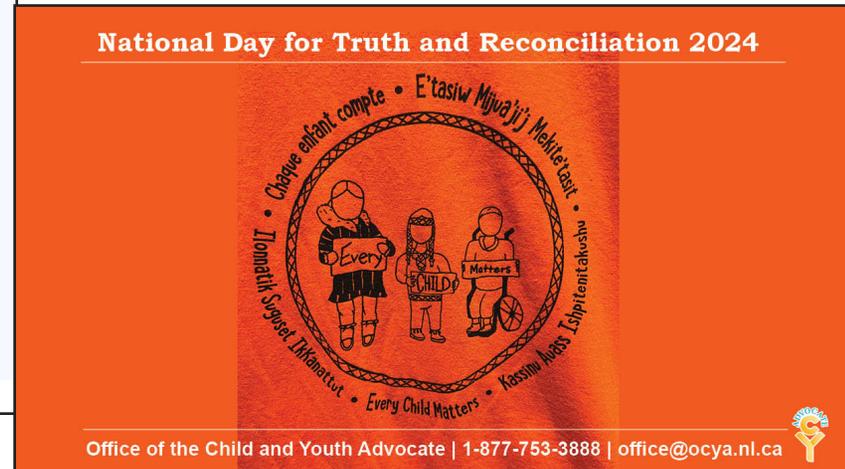
We held a Holiday Card Contest again in December 2024, as a special initiative of the Young Artist Program. We received over 180 submissions from throughout the province. We were so pleased with the interest and with the art. The winners of the contest were Zoey Sharshonov of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Carly Snook of Belleoram, Kayley Collins of Corner Brook, and Kinley Evans of St. John's.

If you would like to learn more please visit <https://www.childandyouthadvocate.nl.ca/YoungArtistProgram.htm>.



Supporting Initiatives Important to Young People

During each year, our Office participates in activities that support issues of importance to young people. This includes attending events in the community. Here are some photos of us supporting important initiatives.



Continuous Learning and Information Sharing

We are committed to lifelong learning and continually seek professional development opportunities as we strive to advocate for the rights of children and youth. This fiscal year we participated in a variety of learning and information sharing opportunities. Topics included:

- ▶ Youth Mental Health
- ▶ Youth Transition Supports
- ▶ Reconciliation
- ▶ Youth in Care
- ▶ Cyber Security
- ▶ Neurodiversity
- ▶ Trauma Informed Care
- ▶ On-line Gaming
- ▶ Harm Reduction and Addiction
- ▶ Inclusive Practices
- ▶ Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence
- ▶ Voice of the Child Reports

We also welcomed the following groups to our Office and learned more about their ongoing work:

- ▶ Lifewise
- ▶ Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
- ▶ Family Justice Services
- ▶ Foster Families Newfoundland and Labrador
- ▶ Quadrangle
- ▶ Doorways
- ▶ Coalition Against the Sexual Exploitation of Youth (CASEY)
- ▶ Canadian Mental Health Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Branch
- ▶ Wellness Division, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
- ▶ Journey Project



Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) is an association of children’s advocates and representatives across the country who have mandates to advance the rights of children and youth, as well as to amplify their voices.

Through the Council, Advocates identify shared concerns at the national level. Members share resources, discuss best practices, common issues, as well as teaching and learning opportunities. Each province benefits from the network that the Council has developed.

In 2024-25, the Council discussed child and youth issues from a national perspective and began work to arrange all CCCYA’s systemic investigations into a readable summary. This work (from the various provinces and territories) is near completion, pending review and input from the Council.

The Saskatchewan Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth is taking the lead to prepare the next report for the United Nations 2022 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Council has various Communities of Practice (CoP) which focus on particular topics such as Communications, Investigations, etc . These CoP are made of members from the various provinces and territories and focus on sharing best practices, experiences, and knowledge. The terms of reference documents for these existing communities of practice were finalized by the Council to provide guidance to the teams and maintain structure for the Council.

All reports and submissions of the CCCYA can be found at <https://www.cccya.ca>.



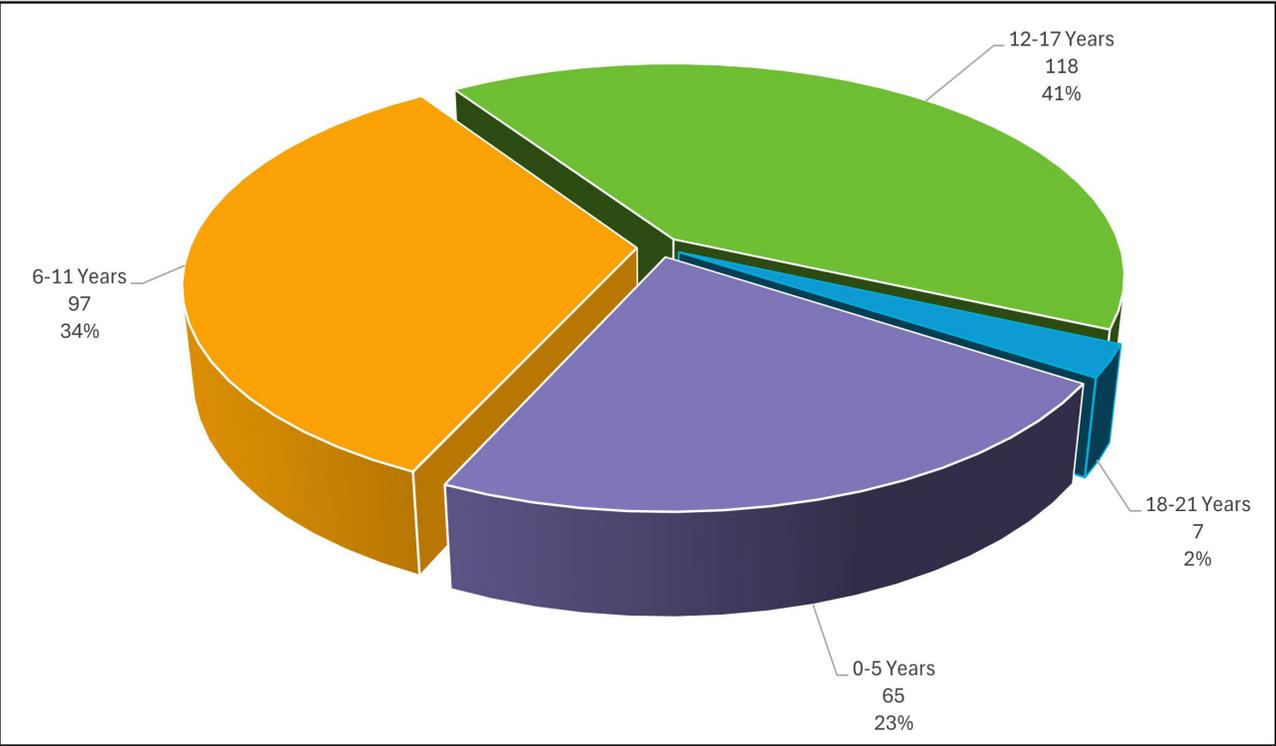
OCYA Statistical Highlights

Service Delivery and Performance

We responded to 369 requests for services and advocacy assistance. This includes 82 shorter-term requests for information as well as assistance with navigating various systems of government and its agencies.

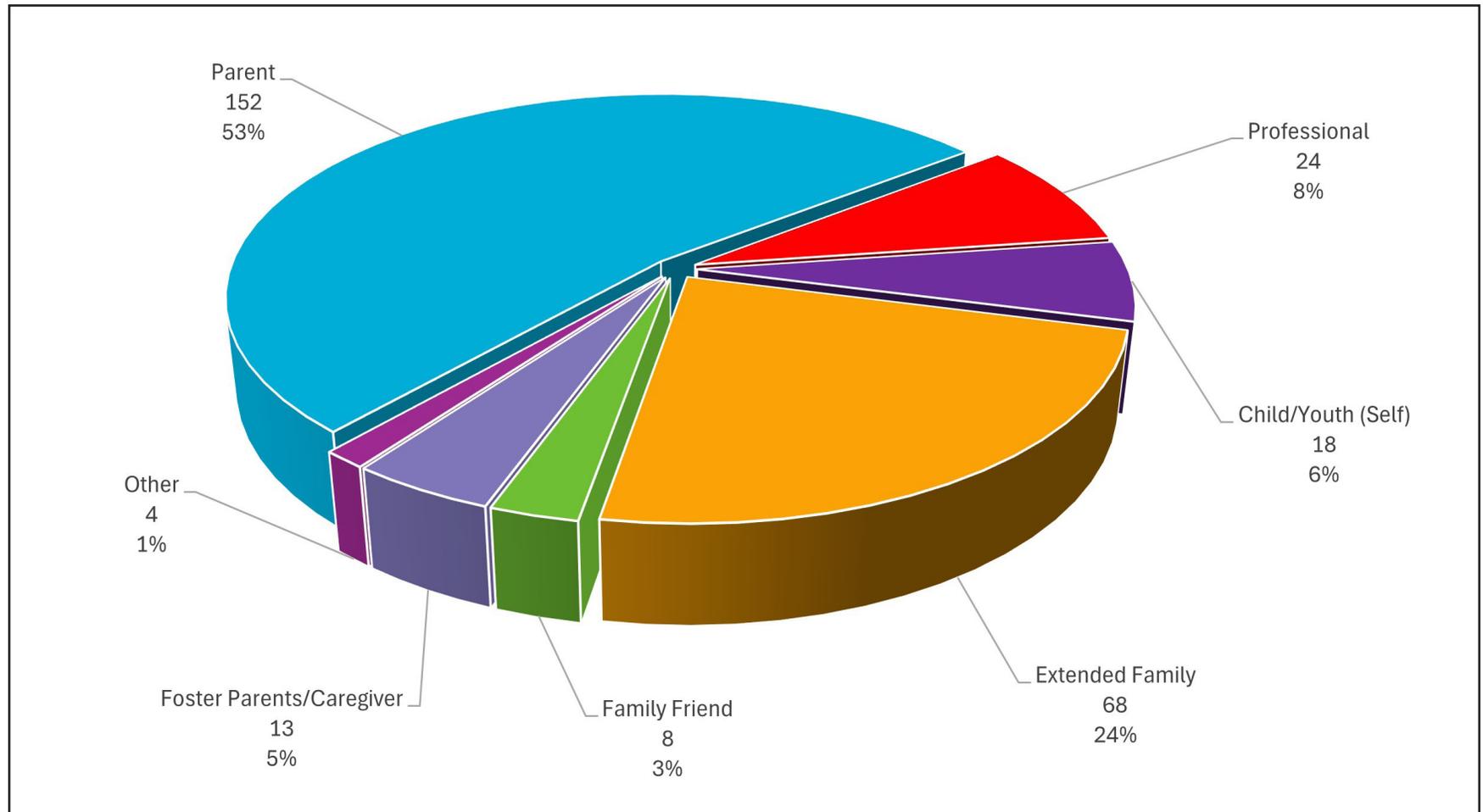
Age of Client

This chart identifies the ages of clients who were the subject of the requests for advocacy assistance. This fiscal year, young people aged 12-17 years were the focus of the most requests for advocacy at 41%. Last year, young people aged 6-11 years were the focus of the most advocacy requests.



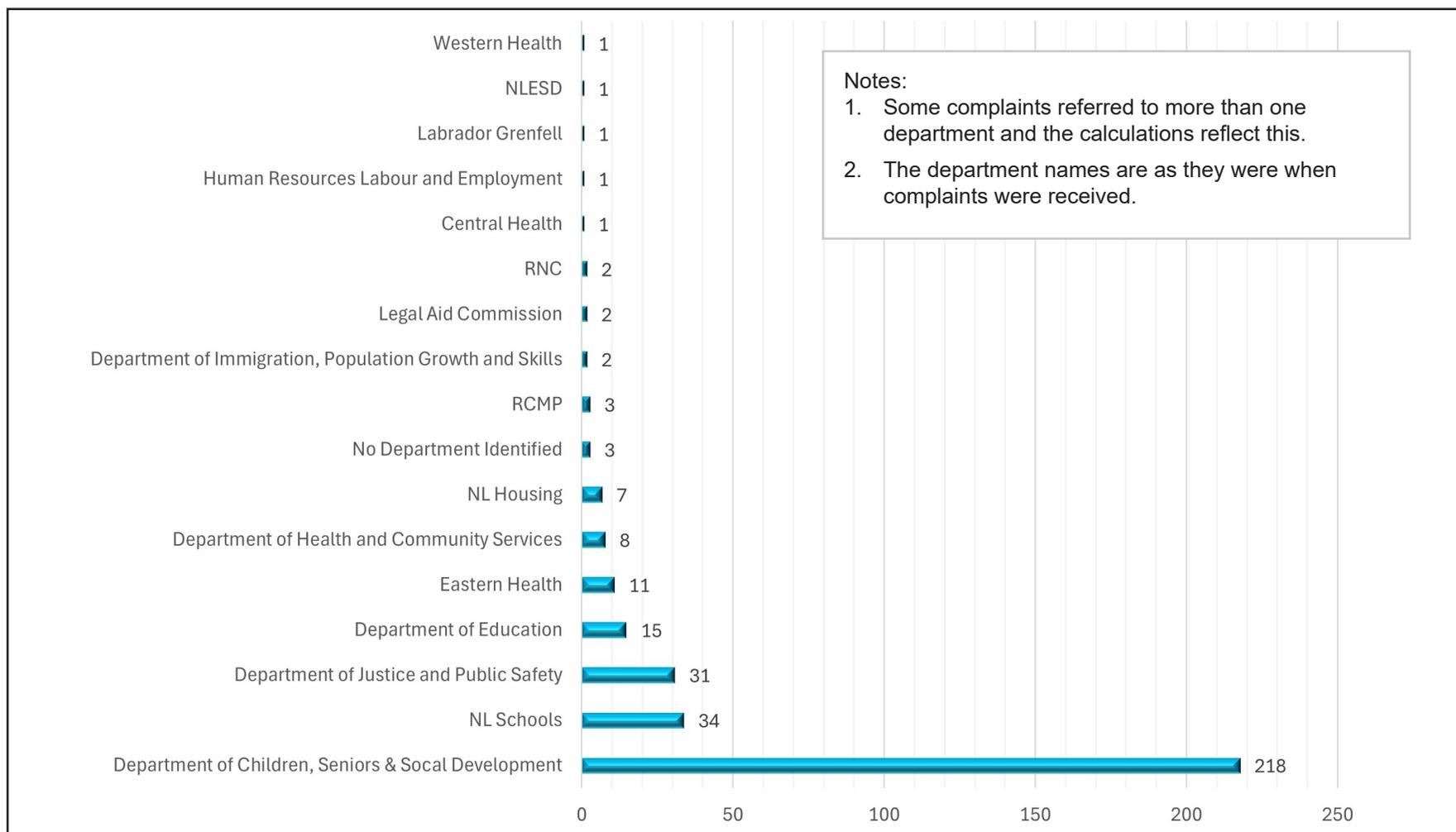
Person Requesting Advocacy for Child/Youth

This chart identifies the person requesting advocacy assistance. Consistent with previous years, parents continue to be the primary group requesting advocacy services for their children (53%) followed by extended family (24%).



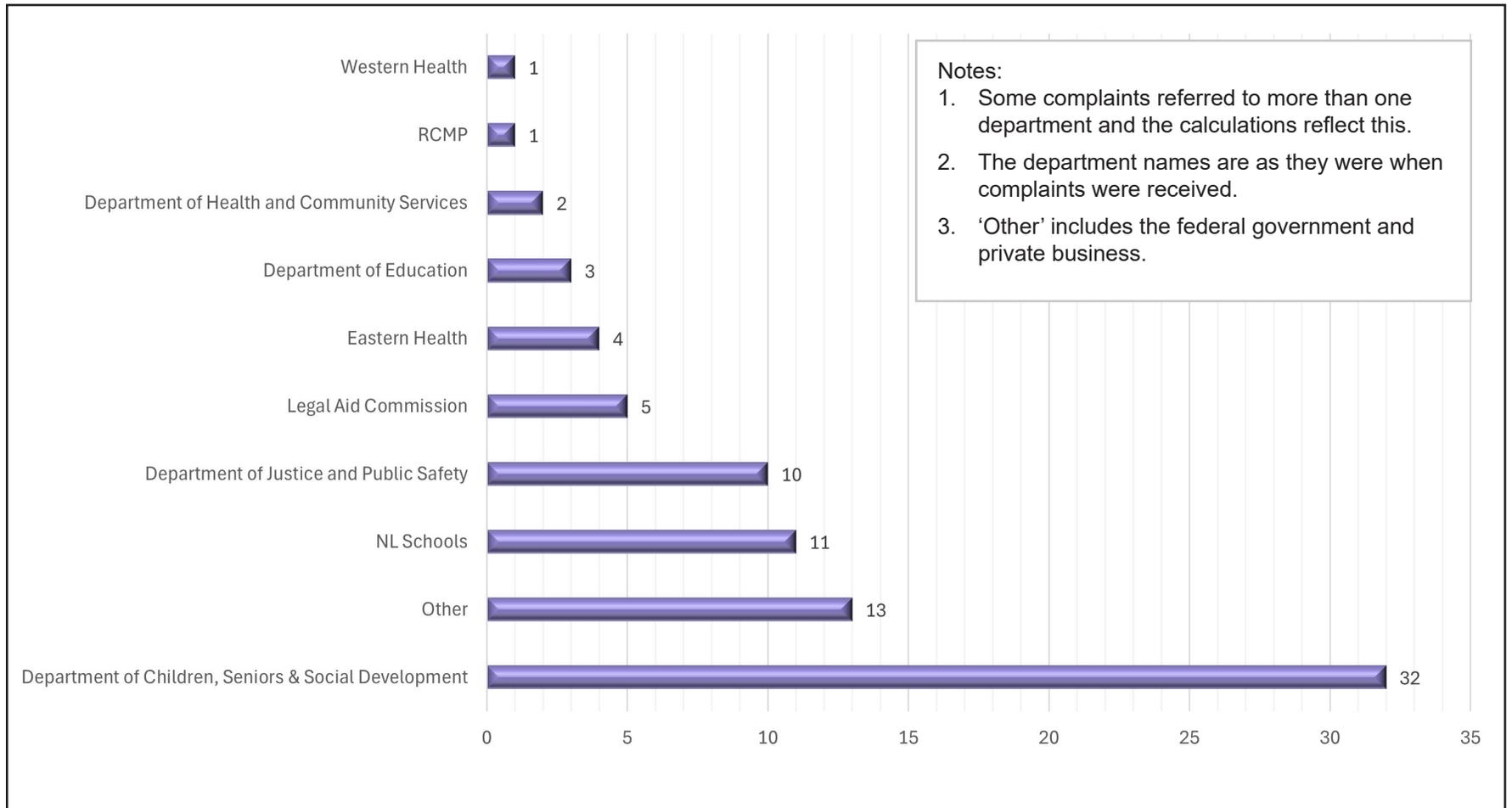
Requests for Advocacy Assistance by Department or Agency Involved

The graph below represents the department or agency which was the focus of a concern or complaint and where formal advocacy services were provided in 2024-25. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development continues to be the highest department or agency of focus.



Requests for Short-Term Advocacy Assistance by Department or Agency Involved

This graph below represents the department or agency which was the focus of the 82 shorter-term requests for information, as well as assistance with navigating various systems of government and its agencies in 2024-25. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development is the highest department or agency of focus.



Mandatory Reporting of Deaths and Critical Injuries

The **Child and Youth Advocate Act** requires the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and the Department of Justice and Public Safety to report child and youth deaths and critical injuries to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate where the young person received a designated service.

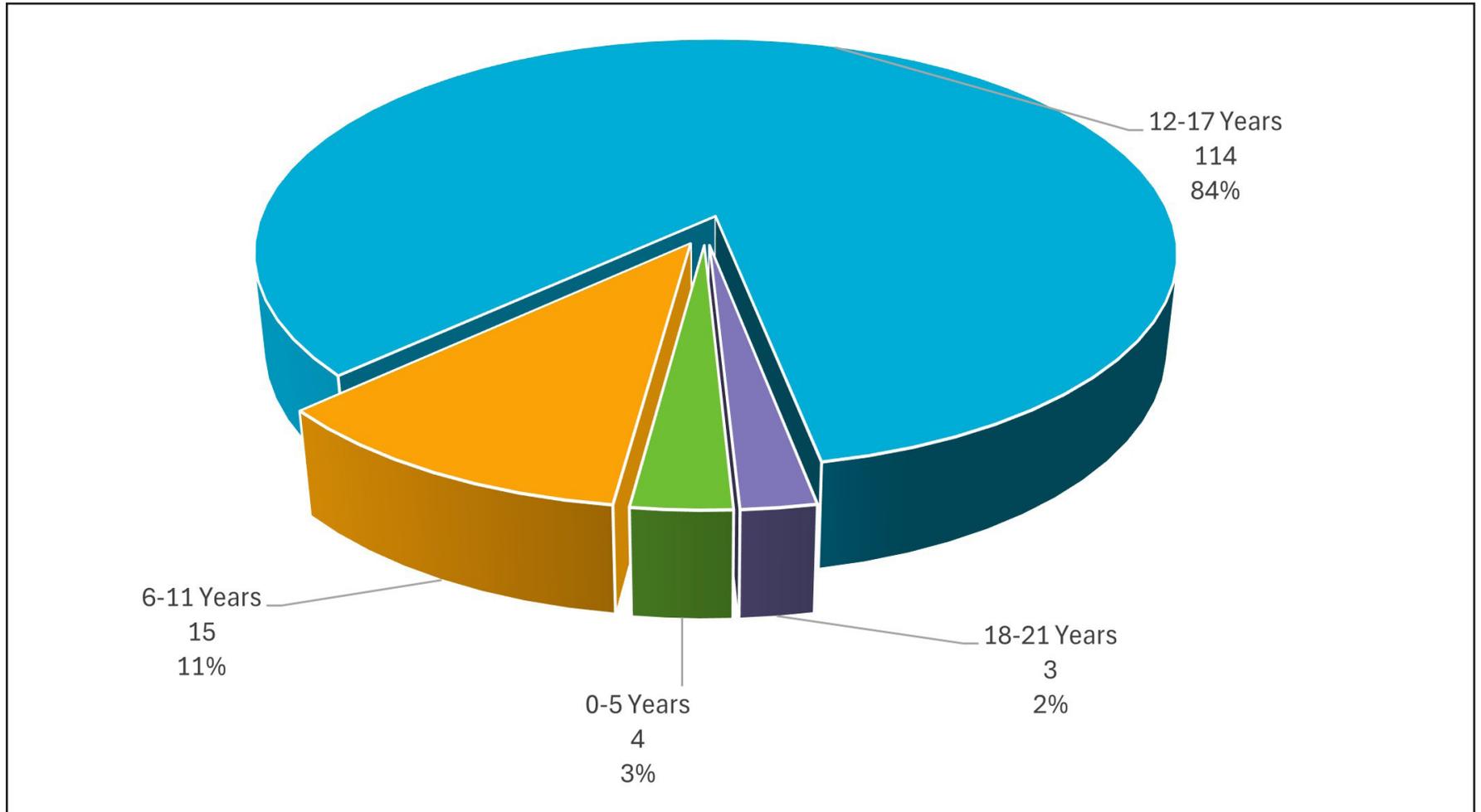
Section 16.1 in the legislation defines critical injury as “an injury, including physical or psychological injury, which may result in the death of a child or youth or may cause serious or long-term impairment of the health of a child or youth”. These departments are also required to report a death or critical injury within 12 months of the young person receiving a designated service, if the young person is no longer a client.

From April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025, the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development reported 136 critical injuries and 4 deaths. The nature of death for these 4 young people included medical issues and suicide. The Department of Justice and Public Safety reported no deaths or critical injuries.



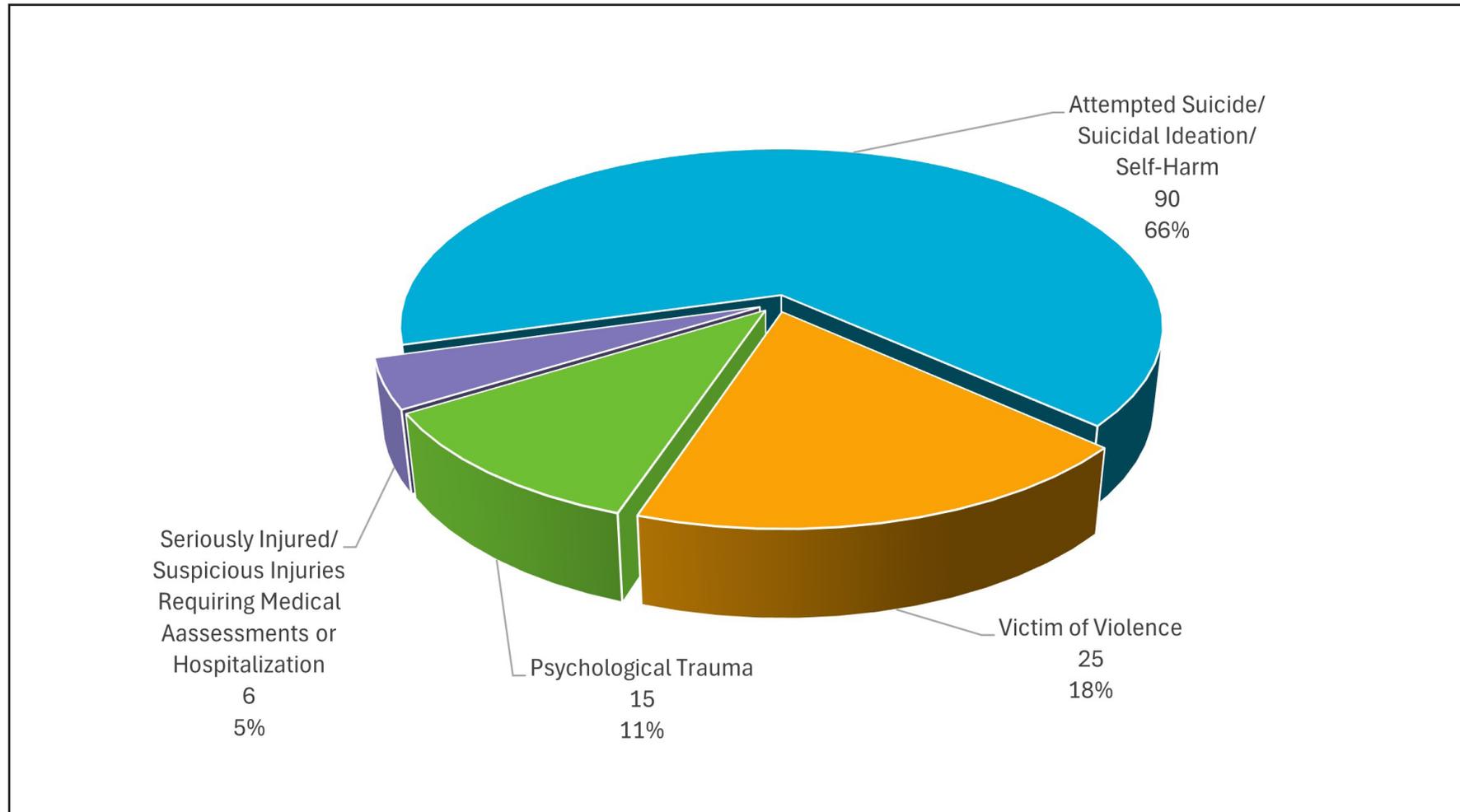
Critical Injury by Age Group

Consistent with previous years the 12-17 age group is the highest subject of mandatory reporting of critical injuries at 84%.



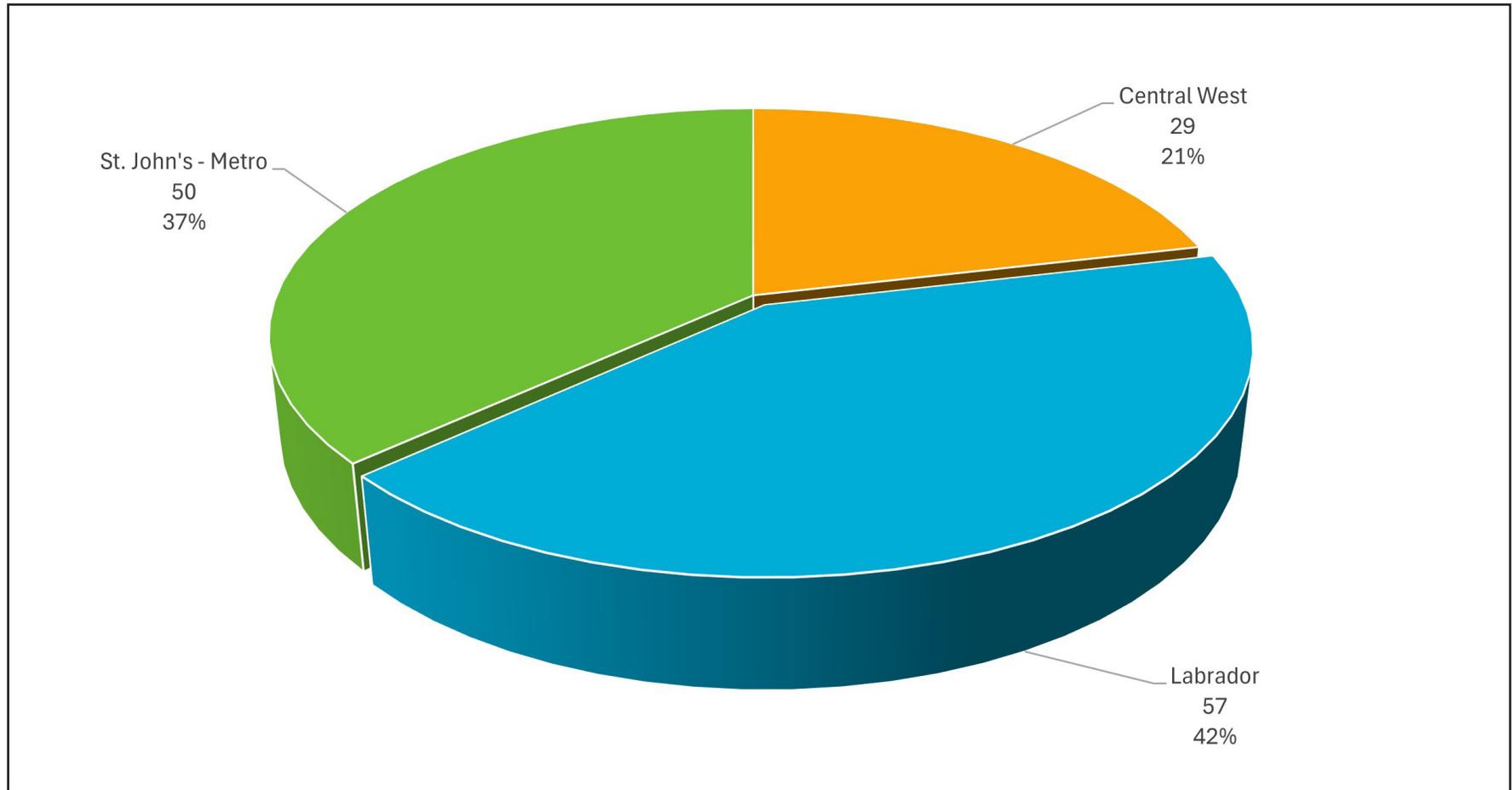
Critical Injury by Type

Consistent with last year, mental health related issues (attempted suicide, suicidal ideation, and self harm) are the highest type of critical injuries reported.



Critical Injury by Region

Each year, data regarding critical injuries is based on the information reported by the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and the Department of Justice and Public Safety. The Department of Justice and Public Safety did not report any critical injuries during the fiscal year. The following table reflects the data as provided by the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.



Report on Performance

Issue 1: Listening and Learning

We believe in the importance of actively listening to and learning directly from the voices of young people and the individuals and organizations who support them. The voices, input and perspectives of young people are integral to the work we do. We will continue to strategically engage young people from diverse backgrounds in conversations about the issues important to them and the rights afforded to them through the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, as well as other federal and provincial legislation and policies. We will also engage individuals and organizations who work with and support young people.

We will continue to seek diverse perspectives, which we see as particularly important in the context of Indigenous populations and our commitment to doing our part towards true reconciliation.

A report of what we heard will be prepared and released publicly. This will include recommendations to government departments and agencies, if they emerge.

Goal 1: By March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have engaged diverse young people and the individuals and organizations who support them.

Indicators:

- ▶ Engagement opportunities planned
- ▶ Engagement opportunities implemented
- ▶ Report of what was heard prepared



Objective 1.2: By March 31, 2025, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have continued engagement sessions with young people and the individuals and organizations who serve them.

Indicator	Results
<p>▶ Engagement sessions with young people continued</p>	<p>Engagement sessions continued with young people throughout the fiscal year. Staff met with over 90 young people throughout the province in schools and throughout community as part of the Mental Health Review. We also engaged with over 1,800 young people through schools and community groups including: NL Schools GSA, Association for New Canadians, Multicultural Women’s Organization, Choices for Youth Advisory Council, Sharing Our Cultures, Teen Healthy Relationships group at Planned Parenthood - NL Sexual Health Centre, Community Youth Network in Harbour Grace, Rabbittown Community Centre, and Buckmasters Circle Community Centre.</p>
<p>▶ Engagement sessions with individuals and organizations who serve them continued</p>	<p>Engagement sessions continued with individuals and organizations who serve young people. As part of the Mental Health Review, staff met with over 620 adults throughout the province representing parents, teachers, medical professionals, social workers, and other professionals. Staff also met with over 560 parents, caregivers, and professionals as part of ongoing outreach activities.</p>
<p>▶ Various modes to contact us promoted</p>	<p>Various modes to contact us were promoted by distributing posters and email distributions. We promoted our website, telephone and toll free numbers, email address, and added a text option. We also created an online form that could be used to contact us regarding the mental health services provided for young people in the province. We held over 145 meetings, including 10 virtual meetings, throughout almost 40 communities across the island and in Labrador. We received over 20 phone calls, and 173 online form submissions.</p>

Objective 1.3: By March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have compiled a report of what was heard from engagement opportunities.

Indicators:

- ▶ Information gathered at engagement sessions analyzed
- ▶ Report of findings prepared
- ▶ Report on findings released



Issue 2: Systemic Issue Analysis

Systemic issues are issues that affect large groups of people. We know there are systemic issues affecting young people in Newfoundland and Labrador. We hear these issues in the individual advocacy calls our office receives daily, through investigations completed by our office, from the issues reported by news organizations, as well as from other sources. Currently, there are a number of issues of concern to our office, however, two issues of particular concern are young peoples' access to mental health services and service provision for children with exceptionalities.

We will complete an environmental scan to better understand these, and other issues identified from young peoples' perspectives. This will include conducting a jurisdictional scan, analyzing issues identified in the youth engagement opportunities facilitated by our office, and inviting various service providers to meet with us to discuss available services in detail.

We will prepare and release a report of our findings.

Goal 2: By March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have identified systemic issues affecting young people in the province.

Indicators:

- ▶ Environmental scan completed
- ▶ All gathered information analyzed
- ▶ Report prepared and released



Objective 2.2: By March 31, 2025, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have continued an environmental scan focusing on issues affecting young people in the province.

Indicator	Results
▶ Jurisdictional scan completed	A jurisdictional scan was ongoing throughout the fiscal year, particularly focusing on the systemic issue of mental health services provided for young people. Relevant resources such as national and provincial reports, government policies, and media articles were compiled. There is a considerable volume of materials collected, and there continues to be research regarding specific systemic issues.
▶ All information gathered analyzed	The information gathered during the fiscal year was analyzed and general themes have been identified regarding systemic issues impacting young people. This analysis will continue into the next fiscal year.
▶ Comprehensive information about current services continued to be compiled	Information about current services in place for children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador continued to be compiled. Staff met with young people, parents, professionals, and other stakeholders to compile information regarding the services currently available for young people.

Objective 2.3: By March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have prepared a report of systemic issues affecting young people in the province.

Indicators:

- ▶ Systemic issues affecting young people in the province identified
- ▶ Recommendations formulated for government entities
- ▶ Appropriate steps taken to communicate these recommendations to the responsible entities



Opportunities and Challenges

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is committed to advancing and championing the rights of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Office has been doing this work for over 23 years. Progress has been made, however, we continue to see needs and gaps in child and youth serving systems.

When needs and gaps in services arise, they often bring opportunities for positive change. Every review and investigation conducted by this office provides opportunities to bring issues to the attention of government and the public so that improvements can be made to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and youth in this province.

The nature of many investigations conducted by this Office involve circumstances where young people have experienced significant challenges, harm, and, on occasion, the loss of life. Investigating the details of these incidents can be difficult for staff, however, they continue to ensure these cases are reviewed in detail and that recommendations are made to bring about positive change in the lives of young people and in the systems that serve them.

The Mental Health Review completed by this Office during the fiscal year took tremendous effort by staff. This review was completed by existing staff, and was in addition to their ongoing workloads. For this review, staff held over 145 meetings, including 10 virtual meetings, travelled to almost 40 communities across the island and in Labrador, received over 20 phone calls, and reviewed 173 online form submissions. There was significant interest and participation by young people, their family members, as well as the professionals who serve them. The discussions were meaningful and informative. The Office is sincerely grateful to all those who shared their experiences, but especially to those who shared very personal, and often painful, lived experiences.

As the Office enters its final year of the current planning cycle, it is important to acknowledge the engagement and interest from so many stakeholders who have an impact on the lives of young people. Children and youth need stakeholders to support and advocate with them. They are the rights holders and adults are the duty bearers. All efforts to create change are incredibly important for young people in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is through these efforts that real opportunities arise and improvements are made in their lives, and in the protection of their rights.





Financial Statements

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are based on information provided in the **Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for Fiscal Year Ended 31 March 2025**.

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate	Estimates		
	Actual	Amended	Original
	\$	\$	\$
01. Salaries	1,496,412	1,499,500	1,281,500
Operating Accounts			
Employee Benefits	1,919	3,500	3,500
Transportation and Communications	40,021	55,400	55,400
Supplies	7,943	8,100	6,000
Professional Services	8,065	19,000	19,000
Purchased Services	142,554	153,900	160,900
Property, Furnishings and Equipment	8,734	8,900	4,000
02. Operating Accounts	209,236	248,800	248,800
Total: Office of the Child and Youth Advocate	1,705,648	1,748,300	1,530,300



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