



CHILDREN YOUTH

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

# **Office of the Child and Youth Advocate**

Business Plan

2017 - 2020

## *Message from the Child and Youth Advocate*

I am pleased to present the Business Plan for April 1, 2017 – March 31, 2020 for the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The Office has been designated a Category 2 entity as per the *Transparency and Accountability Act*. This requires the preparation of a business plan that includes goals and objectives for this period and which takes into account our mandate and resources. I am accountable for the preparation of this plan and for the achievement of the identified goals and objectives.



The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has a very important mandate to ensure the rights and interests of children and youth are protected and advanced. Part of our work means elevating the voice of young people. Our work serves as a catalyst for change to improve services and responses for young people and enhance respect for their rights. As the Child and Youth Advocate for Newfoundland and Labrador, I am committing to engaging young people and their communities in our advocacy work because their perspectives are critical in developing the best possible understanding, plans and solutions. I will focus on the importance of diversity and cultural sensitivity in serving young people well. I will advance initiatives that promote enhanced education and awareness about the rights of children and youth.

While our mandate is clear, we fully recognize that our responsibilities, commitment and interest in young people is shared. This is vitally important in ensuring meaningful change. We look forward to the work ahead of us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jacqueline Lake Kavanagh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "J".

**Jacqueline Lake Kavanagh**  
**Child and Youth Advocate**

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## Our Vision

***The rights and interests of every child and youth are protected and respected, and each child and youth has access to the government services they require in Newfoundland and Labrador.***

## 1.0 OVERVIEW

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to protect and advance the rights and interests of children and youth. Because child and youth serving systems can be complex, difficult to understand and hard to navigate, young people and their families may need help to access services they are entitled to. We advocate to ensure children and youth have access to services, and that their complaints receive appropriate attention. The governing legislation is the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, which was proclaimed on May 12, 2002. This is among the strongest of such legislation in the country.

In carrying out our mandate, we provide individual and systemic advocacy services, and also offer education and outreach activities. We conduct reviews and investigations into specific issues and cases. We provide advocacy services with and on behalf of children and youth through the provincial office in St. John's and with outreach throughout the province. We receive approximately 600 requests annually for individual advocacy.

Our Office operates from a rights-based perspective and applies the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* as the basis for all advocacy work. Canada has ratified the Convention and as a result, legislation, policies and procedures that govern services and programs for children and youth should be reflective of those rights.

The Child and Youth Advocate is a Statutory Officer of the House of Assembly, and reports directly to the Legislature through the Speaker of the House. The Office employs a total of 13 staff and all are members of the public service of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Office operates on a budget of approximately \$1.4 million (2017-18).

Budget Approved for 2017-2018 Fiscal Year	
Salaries	\$1,150,100.00
Employee Benefits	\$3,500.00
Travel & Communication	\$55,400.00
Supplies	\$6,000.00
Professional Services	\$19,000.00
Purchased Services	\$160,900.00
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$1,398,900.00</b>

## 2.0 MANDATE

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to protect and advance the rights and interests of children and youth by providing advocacy services.

In our advocacy work, we strive to ensure that children and youth have access to services, and that their complaints receive appropriate attention. We inform the public, government and various agencies about the needs and rights of children and youth, and make recommendations about the availability, effectiveness, responsiveness and relevance of services for young people. We provide recommendations to the provincial government on policies, programs, services, and legislation which is designed to meet the needs of young people.

A number of activities help us meet our mandate. These can include:

- Conducting reviews and investigations on matters related to individual or groups of children and youth
- Providing and advocating for opportunities for young people contribute to discussions and decisions related to them
- Using alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve issues
- Initiating or participating in case conferences or administrative reviews
- Providing public education about young people's rights
- Recommending changes to legislation, policies and practices for government and its agencies, or to communities about services and rights of children and youth
- Publishing reports related to reviews and investigations

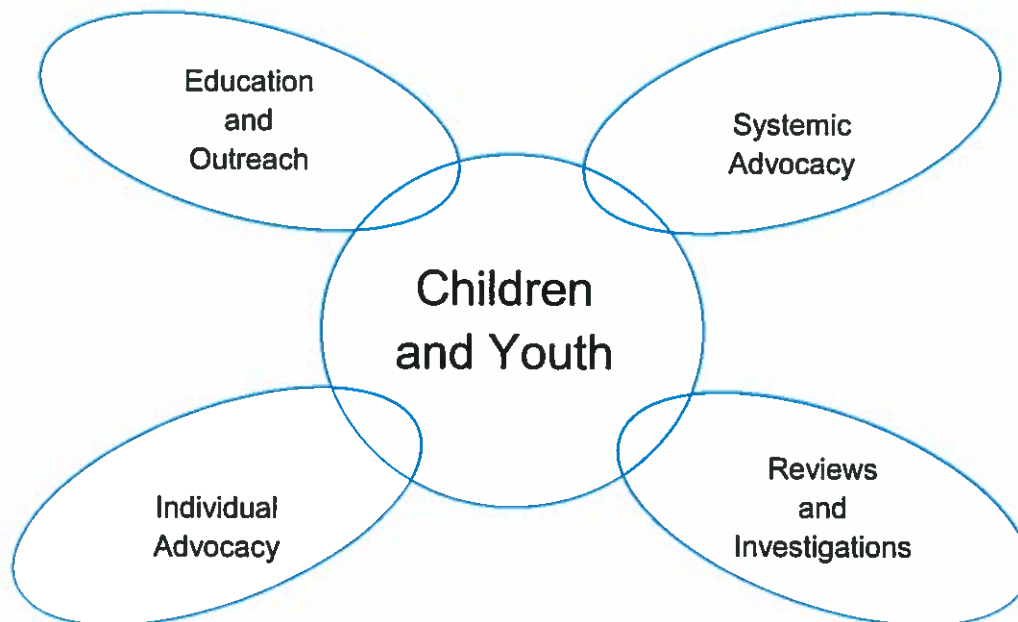
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**Principles:**

We are clear that our focus and primary clients are children and youth and that all involvement with young people must demonstrate respect, understanding and compassion. We believe that young people must be treated with respect and dignity and that they have a right to privacy in our advocacy work together. We seek opportunities in age-appropriate ways to enable young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions affecting them. We believe their active involvement helps them to understand their rights, and the importance of standing up for their rights. While young people, or adults acting on behalf of young people, may seek our advocacy services, we believe that the first and natural advocates are parents, extended family and significant others. We support and guide their efforts wherever possible. We believe that cultural diversity provides true richness in our families and communities, and we are unwavering that this richness must be embraced, respected, and celebrated. And we advocate for working collaboratively to foster the necessary system changes to better serve young people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## 3.0 LINES OF BUSINESS

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate provides advocacy services to children and youth in four main capacities:



### **Individual Advocacy**

Children and youth have rights and are entitled to specific government services. When we become aware of barriers which individual young people experience related to these rights and services, we can become involved on an individual level. We may provide information and support to help the young person access services, we can offer youth coaching on how to navigate government services and we can work with them to have their voices heard and their perspectives considered. This enables them to participate in decisions affecting them. We can attend meetings, contact professionals on behalf of the young person, meet with service providers, and attend case conferences.

### **Systemic Advocacy**

Systemic issues affect larger groups of young people. We identify systemic issues by the requests for services we receive, research we conduct, media reports, and concerns which professional associations and community groups raise. These systemic issues may involve gaps, changes, or reductions in services, policies or legislation. When we see broad issues that impact the quality of life for young people, we advocate for the broad group of young people involved, regardless if they have made a complaint or request to our office. We provide recommendations to government regarding the required changes.

### **Education and Outreach**

Education and outreach works in two ways. We teach and we learn. While we are able to share information about our mandate and services, and educate about children's rights, we are also able to learn about issues from communities and organizations, listen directly to youth about their lived experience and perspectives, and connect with agencies in their efforts to serve young people better. We develop relationships and work hard to connect people and information. We visit regions of the province to listen to the direct voices of young people, seek out those who work with youth, and create opportunities for learning about the issues impacting young people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## Reviews/Investigations

Under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, we may conduct reviews and investigations. We may review or investigate a matter on behalf of a child or youth, or a group of children and youth. The process for reviews and investigations is based on a comprehensive framework that includes document review, examination under oath or affirmation, other interviews with individuals, analysis of facts, determination of findings and release of recommendations to government and agencies. Our Office monitors all recommendations until they are implemented and provides a public report annually on the status of recommendations. In conducting investigations, our intent is to clearly identify the issues, recommend changes in programs, services, policies or legislation to improve responses/services to young people, and promote greater public accountability.

## 4.0 VALUES

Our values guide our behaviours and actions internally, and also provide our philosophy for working with young people.

Value	Action Statement
Respect	Each employee performs his or her duties in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of young people we serve, other employees, and the public.
Integrity	Each employee performs his or her duties honestly, ethically, and with the needs of young people as the primary consideration.
Diversity	Each employee embraces the differences in experience and expression that young people bring, in order to build an open, accepting and dynamic service.
Empowerment	Each employee provides services in a manner that supports and provides opportunities for young people to have their voices heard, to gain a sense of self-confidence, and to participate in decisions affecting them.



## 5.0 PRIMARY CLIENTS

Our primary clients are children and youth under the age of 19. If a young person is in extended care or custody, the eligibility age is under 21. We also actively work with those supporters and champions advocating on behalf of children and youth.

## 6.0 ISSUES

The challenges of providing advocacy to children and youth are ever changing and it is important to remain focused on the best interests of young persons. Many people may approach us with advice, requests or demands; however we remain independent in determining the best interests of the young person(s) and what is required to best meet their needs. Ultimately, we have identified three key areas that require our dedicated attention.

### **Issue 1: Community Outreach and Engagement**

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate must be well informed and connected to young people, their communities and service-providers to advocate and educate effectively. We will renew and expand our relationship with young people and identified stakeholders through increased outreach and engagement initiatives. Strengthened connections with young people, their communities and service-providers will increase access to and awareness of children's rights. We will engage stakeholders in safeguarding the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

#### **Goal:**

By March 31, 2020 the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have increased community outreach and engagement.

**Indicators:**

- Develop, implement and assess youth engagement initiatives
- Implement outreach activities to identify issues specific to Indigenous children and youth
- Implement education initiatives that support a continuous learning environment
- Establish collaborative project initiatives with identified stakeholders

**Objective 1:**

By March 31, 2018 the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have developed, implemented and reported on youth engagement initiatives.

**Indicators:**

- Complete youth engagement tour and report of findings prepared
- Consult with established youth networks and service providers completed
- Implement applicable child/youth engagement initiatives
- Develop and promote resource materials in collaboration with youth

**Objective 2:**

By March 31, 2019, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have researched and implemented education initiatives that support a continuous learning environment related to child and youth rights, and issues impacting young persons.

**Objective 3:**

By March 31, 2020 the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have participated in collaborative project initiatives with identified stakeholders.

**Issue 2: Enhanced Inclusion and Diversity Awareness**

Newfoundland and Labrador has an increasingly diverse population including strong Indigenous communities on the island and in Labrador. The population of Newfoundland and Labrador is expected to become more diverse in the future. In responding to the needs of children and youth from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, it is important ensure that services are inclusive and culturally responsive. Over the next three years, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate commits to developing and implementing

initiatives that will focus on enhancing awareness of inclusion and diversity, and build culturally strong connections.

**Goal:**

By March 31, 2020 the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have promoted and enhanced awareness of social and cultural inclusion, and diversity for children and youth.

**Indicators**

- Develop and implement education initiatives that promote heightened awareness of diversity and inclusion issues related to young people's rights
- Develop and implement an outreach plan that targets diverse and minority groups of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador
- Develop and promote educational and awareness resources and communication tools which promote young people's rights with respect to inclusion and diversity

**Objective 1:**

By March 31, 2018, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have enhanced awareness and education related to the need for cultural diversity and inclusion approaches in services to children and youth.

**Indicators:**

- Complete in-house cultural diversity and inclusion training
- Identify gaps in existing services and responses related to cultural diversity and inclusion
- Complete focus groups with stakeholder groups to identify gaps and inclusion issues impacting children and youth in our province

**Objective 2:**

By March 31, 2019, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have developed and implemented a diversity outreach plan that targets diverse and minority groups of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Objective 3:**

By March 31, 2020, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have researched, evaluated and implemented education and communication tools, including promotional materials, which promote and respect inclusion and diversity in areas including language, culture, sexual orientation and gender identity.

## **9.0 CONCLUSION**

Children and youth do not have economic, legal, political or social power and influence. This reality clearly leaves them vulnerable. In the current economic environment, it is important to ensure a strong monitoring and advocacy role so that services and supports for our province's vulnerable children and youth are maintained or strengthened. We need to ensure young people can rise out of poverty, access appropriate educational supports, engage appropriate mental health services, and receive critical protection services. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is honoured to have the mandate to advocate for children and youth rights and best interests. With a focus on engagement and inclusion, the next three years will be both challenging and exciting for all members of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Through strong commitment and collaboration we will successfully meet the goals and objectives as outlined in this Business Plan for 2017-2020.



193 LeMarchant Road  
St. John's, NL  
A1C 2H5

T: (709) 753-3888  
TF: 1-877-753-3888  
E: [office@ocya.nl.ca](mailto:office@ocya.nl.ca)  
W: [childandyouthadvocate.nl.ca](http://childandyouthadvocate.nl.ca)

