



Press Statement: Advocate for Children and Youth Releases Three Outstanding Investigative Reports

March 4, 2013

Good Morning:

I will be giving a prepared statement, after which I will be happy to take questions; however I will not provide information which violates confidentiality.

I was appointed Child and Youth Advocate of Newfoundland and Labrador on September 27, 2010. At that time I committed to completing three outstanding investigations that had been called prior to my assuming this role. These investigations are now complete and today I am publicly releasing three reports, *The Child Upstairs... "Joey's" Story*, *Turning a Blind Eye* and *Out of Focus*.

- *The Child Upstairs... "Joey's" Story*– the story of neglect of four children with one ultimately being permanently developmentally delayed.
- *Turning a Blind Eye* – the story of several children who suffered abuse at the hands of their mother over a span of thirteen years.
- *Out of Focus* – the story of two families with children who suffered neglect over a period of thirteen years with a tragic result of two dying and one being injured in a fatal fire that also killed three adults.

The decision to release these reports was not made lightly. However after much thought and deliberation I concluded that these children's stories, and the valuable lessons that lie within, are too important not to share. I call them stories because that is the way they are written, done so that everyone can read them and understand them. With each of these investigations, this Office has taken each of the stories, owned them and is now seeing them through to ensure that the necessary changes occur.

The purpose of telling these stories is four-fold:

- (1) To tell each child's story of how the system has failed him or her;
- (2) To understand what went wrong within the government system in order to prevent it from happening again to some other child or children;
- (3) To help professionals understand the impact when standards such as communication, consultation, collaboration, documentation, assessment and adherence to policies are not followed; and
- (4) To help the public know these things happened, and continue to happen, and that each one of us has a role and a duty to report when a child is in need.

A central theme is evident in all these stories: lack of documentation, communication, assessment and collaboration. As well, these same issues were present in other reports completed prior to these investigations being called. While two of these investigations were called prior to the formation of the current Department of Child Youth and Family Services (CYFS), and the other just months after, we continue to see these same issues present in our current advocacy work. I understand that change takes time and that no system is perfect. However, it is vital that the issues we have identified in these investigations, and continue to identify, are given immediate attention! There are thirty-four (34) recommendations in these three (3) reports. Twenty-eight (28) of these recommendations appear in more than one (1) report. Six (6) appear in all three (3). I will ensure that the recommendations in these reports are followed up on with the applicable Departments until all have been addressed.

Prior to releasing these reports I deliberated on the ethical, professional, legislative and personal implications of such a decision. I am fully aware of the impact that these reports may have. In light of this, the stories are written anonymously through the use of pseudonyms and omission of birthdates and community names.

Furthermore, in preparation for the release of these reports we provided in-person notification of the upcoming release to all the children and ensured that supportive services were available to them as needed.

I strongly ask that the public and the media not focus on identifying the specific location of each case or the identity of the people involved. In the event that people in the applicable communities do know their identity, please be a support to them. These children were victimized once and today I am asking everyone to not victimize them again.

With the public release of these reports, my hope is that people will take the time to read them fully and see for themselves just what went wrong. I hope it will also help people understand the important responsibility we all have to ensure that our most vulnerable, our children and youth, are protected and receive the services they deserve.

I want to take this opportunity to commend all of my staff for their never ending dedication and commitment to ensuring that the voices of children and youth are heard and their rights upheld.

Thank you for your time today and I welcome any general questions.