

Business Plan 2023-26

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate





Message from the Child and Youth Advocate

I am pleased to present the 2023-26 Business Plan for the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. The Office has been designated as a Category 2 entity as per the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. I am accountable for the preparation of this plan and for the achievement of the identified goals and objectives.



Business Plans are intended to identify core issues an organization will focus on over a three year timeframe. They are not meant to identify all the work the office carries out on a daily basis. In this context, over the next three years, we will engage in conversations with young people and invite them to share their voices with us. We will continue to share information with them regarding their rights under the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

We will also focus on learning more about the systemic issues impacting young people in the province. We hear about these issues daily and advocate for positive change to address them.

As the Child and Youth Advocate, I am privileged to serve the children and youth of this province and will continue to advocate for systems that respect and uphold their rights.

Sincerely,

Linda Clemens-Spurrell
Child and Youth Advocate





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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 work independent of operational direction from any government department in fulfilling our mandate. The governing legislation is the Child and Youth Advocate Act and our advocacy work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other policies and laws.

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to protect and advance the rights of children and youth. We represent the interests and viewpoints of children and youth under the age of 19 years in Newfoundland and Labrador. If a young person has been in care or custody the age of service is extended to their 21st birthday.

We help young people speak up for themselves, we speak up with them, or we speak up for them. We do this through individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, investigations and reviews, as well as public education about the rights of children and youth.

We advocate for changes and accountability that promote the interests and well-being of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. The office advocates 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.

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.

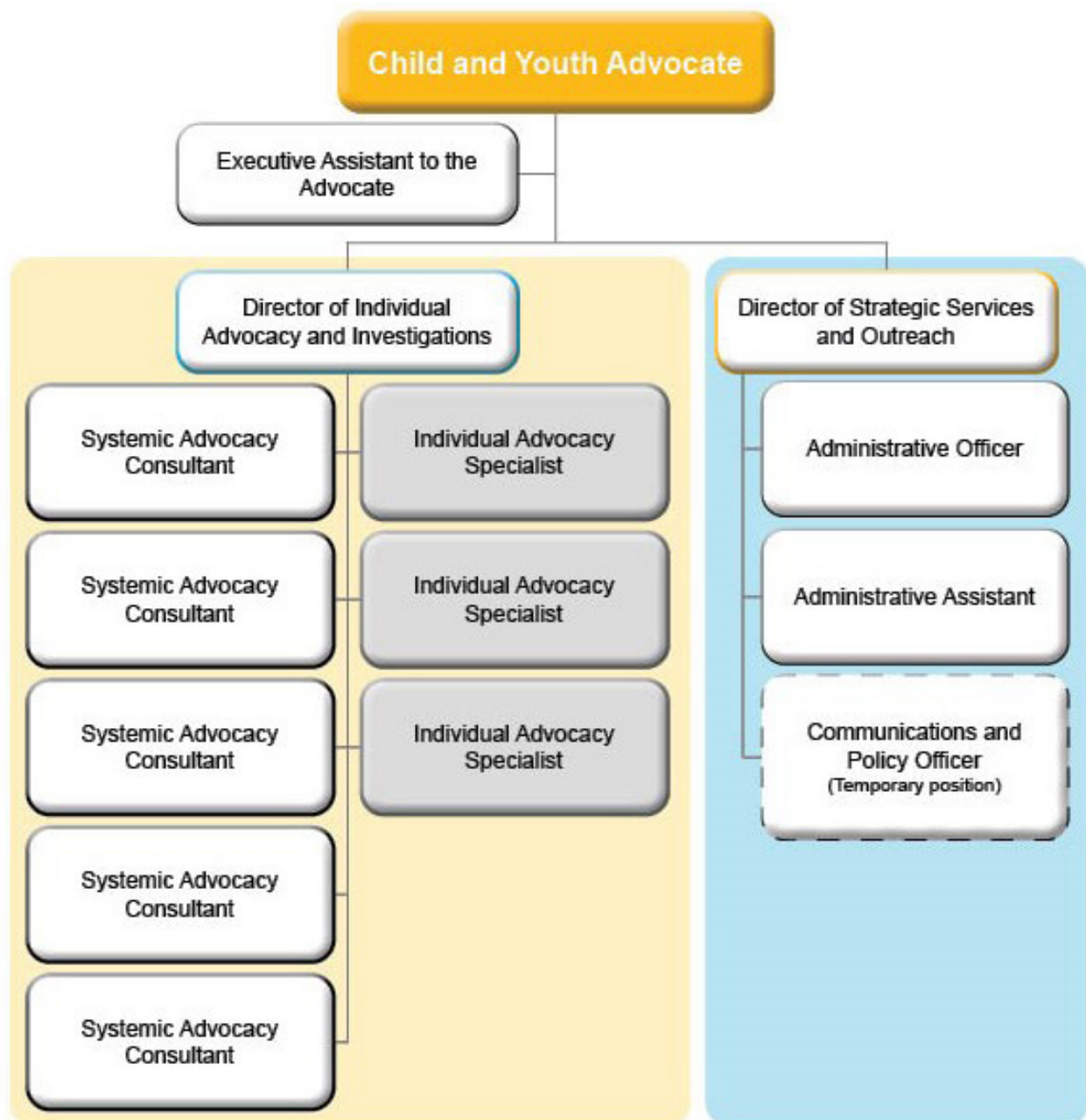


Staff

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, nursing, education, law 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.

Team members have worked in a variety of practice settings including public service, community organizations, and private practice.

Organizational Chart



Lines of Business

Individual Advocacy:

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 being respected, 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. 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.



Financial Information

| Budget Approved for 2023-24 Fiscal Year | |
|---|--------------------|
| Salaries | \$1,244,900 |
| Employee Benefits | \$3,500 |
| Transportation & Communication | \$55,400 |
| Supplies | \$6,000 |
| Professional Services | \$19,000 |
| Purchased Services | \$160,900 |
| Property, Furnishings & Equipment | \$4,000 |
| Total: | \$1,493,700 |



Vision

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

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. |

Who We Serve

We advocate for the rights, interests and well-being of all children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. When a young person's rights are not being well-served, we are available with assistance for any concerns or complaints.

Our primary clients are children and youth under the age of 19. If a young person is in extended care or custody, they are eligible until the age of 21. Young people may contact us directly. We also work closely with family members, professionals, other supporters, and champions working on behalf of children and youth.



Issues

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. Over the next three years, we will 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 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 1.1: By March 31, 2024, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have planned engagement opportunities to seek the diverse perspectives of young people and the individuals and organizations who serve them.

Indicators:

- ▶ Engagement sessions planned
- ▶ Engagement sessions held
- ▶ Various modes for young people to provide their input identified
- ▶ Various modes for young people to provide their input communicated

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.

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.



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 2.1: By March 31, 2024, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will have begun an environmental scan focusing on issues affecting young people in the province.

Indicators:

- ▶ Jurisdictional scan initiated
- ▶ All information gathered analyzed
- ▶ Comprehensive information about current services compiled

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.

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.



Conclusion

It is an honour and a privilege to advocate for the rights of children and youth here in Newfoundland and Labrador. These rights must be respected and protected for all children. We regularly complete outreach to inform both young people and adults about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We receive calls daily regarding concerns about young people being denied these rights by systems mandated to serve them. We will continue to work with and for young people to ensure they experience their rights and have their voices heard. We are committed to this work and look forward to focusing on the activities presented in our Business Plan for 2023-26.





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Child and Youth Advocate**

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CHILDREN YOUTH
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