

# Office of the Child and Youth Advocate 2012-2013 Annual Report

*Taking Children's Rights Seriously in  
New Brunswick:  
In policy and practice*



June, 2014

Mr. Donald J. Forrestell  
Clerk  
Legislative Assembly  
Province of New Brunswick  
Fredericton, NB

Sir:

Pursuant to Subsection 25(1) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act, I have the honour to present the fourth Annual Report of the Child and Youth Advocate for the period of April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norman J. Bossé". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Norman J. Bossé, Q.C.  
New Brunswick Child and Youth Advocate

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## Message from the Advocate

On June 14, 2013 the Legislature of the Province of New Brunswick passed a resolution naming me the Child and Youth Advocate pursuant to the Child and Youth Advocate Act of New Brunswick. I officially took office on August 1, 2013.

My predecessor, Bernard Richard, resigned as the Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate in 2011. Christian Whalen assumed the role of Acting Advocate from that point and during the term covered by this annual report. I want to personally thank Christian and the entire staff of the Advocate's office for carefully and judiciously managing the office in the interim.

In the short period of time that I have been the Advocate, I have learned that the support staff of this office is second to none. Specifically, the delegates who take the calls and solve the problems, while acting as advocates for the children and youth in New Brunswick, are in fact the backbone of the operation of this office. These individuals include Annette Bourque, the Clinical Director, and Robert Lafrenière, Melanie LeBlanc and Wendy Cartwright the delegates and individual caseworkers who are an essential component required to carry out the mandate and obligations of the Advocate. Christian Whalen, Deputy Advocate and Chief Legal Counsel, Gavin Kotze, Director of Systemic Advocacy, Matt DeCoursey, Director of Communications, Education and Outreach programs and Jessica Melanson our articling student, who will be admitted to the New Brunswick Law Society in June 2014, compose the other essential personnel necessary to carry out the Advocate's functions and provide advice to government concerning the rights of children and youth in New Brunswick. Finally our Office Coordinator and Administrator, Juliette Babineau Moore, is the bond in the Advocate's office that keeps everything together and working efficiently.



This annual report is clearly indicative of the many initiatives undertaken by this office which attempt to better the lives of children and youth in New Brunswick. For example, the UNICEF Rights Respecting School initiative, the child rights impact assessment (CRIA) tool used by government departments are but a few examples of the work that is being done by the Advocate's office in co-operation with government departments and educational institutions in New Brunswick. This report also contains numerous examples of the individual advocacy undertaken by the staff of this office over the past year. All of this work is being done at a time when budgets are severely restricted and staff is working above and beyond what is normally expected of personnel in similar positions. Despite the many budgetary restrictions and demands put on the staff by the numerous calls and systemic reviews and investigations, the work and effort required to complete the tasks necessary are undertaken in a professional manner given the exigencies of the situation.

I assume the role of the Advocate with pride and humility and wish to mention the unconditional support given to me by the staff of this office as well as that of my family including my wife Moira, my four daughters, Genevieve, Rebecca, Juliette, Emily and our 10 grandchildren. I will rely on my career

and life experiences in order to fulfill the duties and obligations of my Office in the coming years and will endeavour to emulate the high standards set by my predecessor in office. The work of the Advocate's office is without a doubt a necessary adjunct to all of the work and programs offered to our children and youth by the Government of New Brunswick.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norman J. Bossé". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'N' and 'B'.

Norman J. Bossé, Q.C.  
Child and Youth Advocate

# 2012-2013 Annual Report

## *Taking Children's Rights seriously in New Brunswick: in policy and practice*

### Our Vision

All children and youth have a right to reach their full potential as productive citizens. The Child and Youth Advocate for New Brunswick believes that our province can be a place where children come first, and where their rights and best interests are defended and promoted. In short, we believe that New Brunswick can be a leader in upholding the rights of our young people, and in improving the lives and well-being of all children and youth.

### Our Mission

The Child and Youth Advocate listens to individual children and youth, engages with families, community organizations and government partners, defends the rights of children and youth, and advocates on their behalf to ensure that their voices are heard and that their best interests are considered in all decisions affecting them.

### Our Mandate

#### ***The Child and Youth Advocate:***

- Ensures that the rights and interests of children and youth are protected;
- Ensures that the views of children and youth are heard and considered where those views might not otherwise be advanced;
- Ensures that children and youth have access to approved services and that complaints about these services receive appropriate attention;
- Provides information and advice to government, government agencies and communities about the availability, effectiveness, responsiveness and relevance of services to children and youth; and
- Acts as an advocate for the rights and interests of children and youth in general.

#### **Mailing Address:**

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548 York Street

Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1

**Toll-Free:** 1-888-465-1100 **Phone:** (506) 453-2789 **Fax:** (506) 453-5599

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## Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

### Our team

Tess Allen†*	Communication Intern
Juliette Babineau Moore	Administrative Assistant
Andrea Barcenast*	Communication Intern
Erin Barton*	Receptionist
Annette Bourque	Clinical Director
Wendy Cartwright†	Delegate
Mathieu Couturier	Delegate
Hannah Davies†*	Education and Outreach Intern
Matt DeCoursey	Communications, Education and Outreach Coordinator
Gavin Kotze	Coordinator of Systemic Advocacy
Robert Lafrenière	Delegate
Melanie Leblanc	Delegate
Jessica Melanson*	Law Student
Denise Viel†*	Receptionist
Christian Whalen	Acting Child and Youth Advocate
Marcelle Woodst	Delegate



† Part of the year

\* Part-time

### Office Financial Information

The 2012-2013 financial information of the Office of the child and Youth Advocate is as follows:

	Budget (\$)	Actual (\$)
<b>Personal Services</b>	<b>639,100.00</b>	<b>664,186.40</b>
<b>Other Services</b>	<b>174,600.00</b>	<b>146,807.82</b>
<b>Materials and Supplies</b>	<b>15,250.00</b>	<b>6,697.49</b>
<b>Property and Equipment</b>	<b>13,050.00</b>	<b>13,742.67</b>
<b>Contributions and Grants</b>	-	<b>17,000.00</b>
<b>Debt and Other Charges</b>	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>842,000.00</b>	<b>814,434.38</b>

## Individual Case Advocacy: A Year in Review

### Requests for Individual Children's Rights Advocacy

As youth, parents, professionals, and staff of agencies working with children and youth become more familiar with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, requests to our office for children's rights advocacy are on the increase.

The year 2012-2013 was of particular significance for the team looking after individual requests to the Office. The increasing number of requests brought to the Office's attention over the past few years, the lack of human resources to meet the demand, the interim position of the Child and Youth Advocate, and the complexity of the cases, which require increasing investments of time and resources in

order to resolve, were all the source of major challenges for delegates.

During 2012-2013, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate received **554 children's rights advocacy requests**, compared with 497 the previous year, an 11% increase. The delegates assigned to individual cases responded to 98 requests for information from clients and conducted 456 case reviews. Of that number, 109 cases were still active as of March 31, 2013. We also note that 41 requests were deemed outside the jurisdiction of the Child and Youth Advocate and were referred to the appropriate offices.

### Requests for Advocacy by Government Department or Agency

As in preceding years, the largest number of child and youth advocacy requests received by the Office concerned the Department of Social Development (213 of the total number of complaints received). That figure represents a very slight reduction compared with 2011-2012 (220 cases), but can be explained by the transfer of early childhood programs to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The majority of requests for advocacy were associated with matters of child protection. Other requests for advocacy that fell under Social Development' mandate, although received less frequently, dealt with disagreement with administrative decisions, and benefits that were refused or under investigation. With respect to First Nations, 19 of the 23 requests sent to our Office also dealt with child protection.

The Office received 94 requests for advocacy from youth, parents, and adult allies who were dissatisfied with services delivered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This slight increase could be attributed to the fact that early childhood programs and services were transferred from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Most of the requests for advocacy concerning this department had to do with programs and services for children with special needs, incidents of bullying, school placement, expulsion from school, requests for home schooling, and complaints against staff.

A decrease was noted this year in the number of requests for advocacy concerning the



Department of Public Safety (51 requests compared with 83 the previous year). That lower figure may be explained by fewer visits by the Office's delegates to the Youth Centre (11 visits compared with 19 in 2011-2012) due to lack of human resources on the CYA team and the decision to go to different settings as well. One third of the requests for advocacy were related to court decisions and proceedings, mental health services in correctional settings, complaints against staff, and administrative procedures. Food, discipline, obtaining privileges, medical care, and programs related to reintegration accounted for another third. Lastly, 33% of complaints attached to this department fell into the "other" category. We will need to review our categories in order to better characterize the requests for service sent to our office.

With respect to matter concerning the Department of Health, we note the same number of requests for advocacy as last year. The Child and Youth Advocate continues to monitor the situation of each young person

admitted to the forensic unit of the Restigouche Hospital Centre. We ensure that a community reintegration plan is initiated as soon as possible to enable the youth to return to the community as soon as the Mental Health Review Board determines that he or she no longer poses a danger to the public and has received the necessary treatment in order to reduce the chances of a relapse or risk to society. Of the 52 advocacy requests related to the Department of Health, 25 cases involved young people admitted for forensic assessments or readmitted to the Restigouche Hospital Centre or the Pierre Caissie Centre. The other requests were related to the problems experienced by children and teenagers in obtaining mental health services, medical treatments in the health network, and services that fall under the program for children with special needs within this department.

The Office also received 11 requests related to the Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs and four requests for advocacy that had to do with municipalities.

## Meeting Youth where they are: Amplifying the Voices of Young People

In order to reach a greater number of vulnerable youth who may need help advocating for their rights, the clinical director and the delegates assigned to individual cases are trying to meet increasing numbers of youth in the province's institutions and residential centres. In 2012-2013, 11 visits were made to the New Brunswick Youth Centre, five visits were made to the Restigouche Hospital Centre (each visit lasting two days), three visits were made to the Pierre Caissie Centre, five visits were made to young people in hospital, and 10 visits were made to group homes. The young people welcome the visits from the Advocate's representatives, and are quite open to opportunities for discussion. We have noticed that it is easier for them to communicate with our office following these meetings. We hope to continue this practice and would like to extend

it to other settings as soon as our human resources allow.

Just as we approached this new fiscal year all staff members in our Office participated in two days of training by UNICEF Canada on how to use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in our day to day advocacy. Many of the cases we handle every day raise important child rights issues. Whereas before our focus and those of child serving departments was always needs analysis and responding to a child's vulnerability, today we are working with government to address service requests as a claim by a child, or on behalf of a child, for respect for their equal human dignity as a rights holder. We are moving from needs based interventions to rights based approaches. This begins by empowering children with the

knowledge of their equal human dignity and their right to be heard and supported in affirming their rights and engaging in responsible self-advocacy. The following are

some examples of the requests that children and youth submitted themselves to the Child and Youth Advocate in 2012-2013:

***Standing Up for my Rights as a Child:*** A 14 year old contacted our office to request advocacy for herself and her younger siblings due to issues of abuse in their parental home. Our office prepared this young person with the necessary information to request services from the Department of Social Development. After the youth contacted social development herself, the delegate involved, followed-up to ensure the situation was given immediate attention. Social development investigated the issue, and provided appropriate services for the youth and her siblings. The youth felt empowered by the support and coaching provided by our office.

***My Right to a Place of my Own:*** A 17 year old who had been granted an absolute discharge from the Mental Health Review Board wanted to live in his former community. He requested the help of our office to get out of the acute adult facility and back in the community as soon as possible. The youth did not have family that could support him. With no place to go, he agreed to live in a hospital setting approved by the Department of Social Development. A delegate met with the youth at the hospital numerous times over the year, and shared the youth's "voice" in every conversation with Social Development and the Department of Health. The delegate continued to advocate for the youth's right to live in the community given that he no longer needed treatment in a hospital setting. The delegate advocated on behalf of the youth to have him reconnect to school, maintain contact with family, and have a part-time job. After months of meetings, a placement was found. The youth returned to the community, and with the involvement of our office, he was reintegrated into his former educational program, and now maintains contact with his family members on a regular basis.

***My Right to Protection Services and Human Dignity:*** While living in a youth shelter, a teenager was told that he was being evicted within 24 hours. The youth had no place to go. Advocacy from our office afforded the youth more time at the shelter and connected him with the Department of Social Development to request child protection services.

**My Right to Education:** School transportation costs prevented one youth from attending the alternative centre he was assigned to, as his parents could not afford to pay for his return trips. A delegate assigned to the case met with the youth and the parent and school district representatives in order to find a solution. The school district agreed to cover the transportation costs. The youth was able to finish his school year and go on to high school.

In their children's rights advocacy work, delegates often participate in case conferences in which the youth, the parents or guardians, and government or community agencies working with the young person and the family are present in order to discuss and try to find solutions to disputes while respecting the principle of the best interest of the young person. During 2012-2013, delegates took part in over **130 of these meetings**. The delegates

also attended **15 Mental Health Review Board meetings** for young people with mental health issues that would absolve them of criminal responsibility at the time of committing an act or omission with which they are charged.

Following are two examples of situations in which assigned delegates participated in case conferences with the young person and his or her parent or legal guardian present:

**Fair Sentencing and my Right to Education:** A 17 year old and his parent were having difficulty with the youth's return to school even though the judge granted him permission to attend school while on house arrest. In order to resolve this situation, a delegate met with the youth and his parent, contacted and discussed the youth's request and his right to education with the school and district officials. Our office requested and attended a case conference to advocate for the youth's right to education. Concrete ways to support the parent and the youth in his pursuit of graduation were discussed. As a result, greater academic and relational support was provided to the youth. Transportation issues were resolved, and communication between parent and school were strengthened. In this new environment, the level of stress on the youth and on the parent decreased immediately. In the weeks following the meeting, the youth flourished, completed all the requirements for the previous semester and was able to complete his schooling and graduate.

**At 15, Living with Anxiety, who Determines my Best Interests?** A 15 year old had been residing in a group home for over a year. He was not in school due to inappropriate behaviors in the past, but was receiving tutoring in the group home. Diagnosed with a developmental disorder, he struggled with anxiety and ADHD. Our office was approached by the youth's family to help get him back home, with supports, as his mother worked during the day and was not available to be at home with him. A delegate discussed the matter with the youth, who had mixed feelings about returning home. It was what he was used to and comfortable with, but he did not always see eye-to-eye with his mother and he would often return angry from weekend visits. It was a real challenge for the youth to manage his anger and his anxiety. The delegate encouraged the youth to discuss the matter with his social worker, psychologist and psychiatrist in order to make a decision in his best interest. The youth also wanted to go to school and get on with his life. The delegate discussed the matter with school and district staff, participated in meetings with the youth to plan his return to school, which opened the door for the youth's reintegration in the school environment. Even though he turned 16, the youth decided to stay in care for a while longer and benefit from the support provided to him by the Department of Social Development. He had the support of his parents and all the professionals that worked with him in this decision. The youth now resides at the group home, goes to school and accesses services.

In order to look at the individual departmental policies and procedures or to discuss possible options, delegates will often request meetings with the managers or directors of government agencies. Although many of these discussions take place over the telephone, it is sometimes

necessary to request a face-to-face meeting. An example of the many difficult cases addressed through **face-to-face meetings with managers or directors of public agencies would be as follows.**

***My Right to a Family and Rules that Make Sense:*** A 16 year old was completing an open custody sentence and, once released, did not have a place to live. Transitional housing was contemplated for the youth since an unwritten internal policy did not allow officials involved with the youth to apply for protection services until one or two weeks prior to his discharge from open custody. Transitional housing may not have offered him the structure and support he needed since he was diagnosed within the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It was feared that the youth may get involved in criminal activities and come into contact with the judicial system once again. Meetings with the youth revealed that he would prefer to live in a family setting, with fewer people, and that he was willing to receive child protection services. Advocacy from our office resulted in the youth's placement in foster care rather than in transitional housing. Our advocacy also addressed the unwritten internal policy with officials at the Department of Social Development. New directives were given to the access and assessment unit, as well as the resource unit to allow requests for placement of youth in open custody to be processed as soon as it becomes evident that a residential placement will be required.

In view of the number of requests that the small team of delegates assigned to individual cases must process, they cannot meet personally with each youth and his or her parents or guardians who approach our Office for help in defending their rights. However, when circumstances require and when the schedule permits, the delegates really appreciate going out and meeting with youth alone or accompanied by their parents or guardians, depending on their age. This year, 23 meetings were held with young people in addition to the case-

conferences and meetings mentioned above, in order to help the delegates better understand their situation and how to guide them in their quest and in defending their rights. The Child and Youth Advocate understands that in order to properly advocate on behalf of children and youth and to affirm their right to be heard, these individual meetings need to be much more frequent and routinely the case. This would however require additional staff and resources and an on-the-ground presence by our delegates in all regions in the province.

***Accommodating Anxiety and my Right to a Positive Learning Environment:*** A 17 year old struggled with anxiety and could not manage the stress of social situations. She could not attend school because her anxiety levels were too high. She was a good student academically. She was in her last year of high school but had missed a lot of time at school because of her anxiety levels. She was worried that she would not be able to graduate. A delegate met with the youth and listened to how she felt and how difficult the situation was for her. The delegate then explored options with the school that could be made available to her so that she could complete her work for graduation. The delegate followed up with a letter to school officials that focused on the youth's level of emotional turmoil while at school. The school appreciated the youth's circumstances and accepted that she needed a new arrangement. The youth was able to complete her work at home and graduated from high school.

*A 17 year old was couch-surfing. A parent of one of his friends called our office to request advocacy on his behalf. The youth was estranged from his family, on probation, not enrolled in school, and unable to receive social assistance as he had no fixed address. He ate and showered sporadically and used drugs. Our office contacted all government departments who had been involved with this youth. Conditions on his probation order specified that the youth was required to live in a residence sanctioned by public safety and attend school. He was going through grief issues and had refused protection services. His file had been closed with social development. Given his precarious situation, our office spoke with officials at public safety and social development about who would be best placed to reach out to this youth and help get him off the street and on a more successful path. The Department of Public Safety took the lead and the Department of Social Development agreed to again offer services to this youth. A case conference was held with the youth, his estranged parent, and officials with public safety and social development. The youth situation's was reviewed with him and he was offered choices. The youth agreed to social development's foster home placement, is was able to move off the street and complete his community service hours, and enroll in school*

From the requests directed to our Office, each year the delegates are able to identify problems of concern that the Office will need to continue

to look into. Some of the more systemic issues which continue to be of concern to our individual case delegates include the following:

- Approximately 300 16- to 18-year-olds live in at-risk situations (social assistance), even though the province revised the *Family Services Act* in order to serve this group of adolescents;
- An increase in the number of young people expelled from school for undetermined periods (youth with problem behaviours in the schools and youth with a criminal record);
- Many young people who are enrolled in school but are only there a few hours, a few half days, a day, or a few days a week (behaviour problems, lack of resources to accommodate them, and young people with a criminal record);
- Insufficient and inadequate services offered to youth aged 8 to 19 with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder outside the school setting;
- The length of waiting lists in some community mental health centres;
- The length of the waiting list at the Stan Cassidy Centre;
- The increasing demand for the establishment of a centre of excellence for children with complex needs;
- The need for therapeutic foster families to serve youth with complex needs.



## Communications, Education and Outreach

In 2012-2013, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate continued to increase its public outreach and education efforts, and establish strong collaborations with government departments and community organizations. Our office worked to ensure that the full breadth and depth of our mandate was utilized to the benefit of all New Brunswick children and youth.

Among our various activities over the year, here are some of the most significant:

### More Young Leaders in New Brunswick

On April 30th, 2012, three Fredericton-area elementary schools celebrated their “Young Leaders” by launching a pilot of the initiative that bears the same name.

After a successful introduction of “Young Leaders” at Park Street Elementary School in 2011, educators from Connaught Street Elementary School, Barker’s Point Elementary School, and Wulastukw Elementary School on the Kingsclear First Nation all hosted the Advocate, Lieutenant Governor Graydon Nicholas, and Young Leaders founder, Jon Crossland, at their respective schools.

The Young Leaders initiative challenges students from kindergarten to grade five to take on personal development and leadership initiatives that enhance their quality of life and the wellbeing of their family, friends and members of their community. The program focuses on five areas of development: Community Service; Physical Activity and Recreation; Skill Development; School Participation; and, Leadership Development.

In celebration of International Children’s Day on June 1st, Young Leaders in grades three to five from the four schools enjoyed a day of leisure and personal growth in



the outdoors with staff at Mactaquac Provincial Park. Young Leaders in Kindergarten through grade two assembled at O’Dell Park on June 6th for a morning of fun activities



together. Both activities held during, and just after, Disability Awareness Week in New Brunswick provided educators, family and the community with a reminder that all students have the right to fully enjoy the natural beauty of the region while participating in play and recreation.

As a culmination to the school year, all Young Leaders from the four schools were hosted by the Lieutenant Governor at a special recognition ceremony at Old Government House, with the Advocate on-hand to congratulate the several hundred Young Leaders receiving their certificates.

The Advocate was delighted to see that this initiative continued to be offered at Connaught Street and Park Street School when the new school year began in September. Educators around the region and throughout New Brunswick continue to foster the leadership capabilities of our young people.



*"Even our kindergarten students can demonstrate compassion and empathy for others, which in its own way is a leadership quality that should be celebrated." –Young Leaders Founder, Jon Crossland*

## Bringing UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools to New Brunswick

On May 1st and 2nd, 2012, staff from the Advocate's Office and educators from Fredericton and Moncton partook in a two-day training workshop to become certified trainers and facilitators for UNICEF Canada's Rights Respecting Schools initiative.

The Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) initiative uses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis for building an inclusive and respectful school culture. Students, staff, and parents learn about children's rights as the foundation for a common set of values that create a sense of community within the school, and that become the lens through which students, teachers, school administrators and parents make decisions, choose behaviour, and participate at their school.

During the afternoon of the second day of the training workshop, UNICEF representative, H el ene Mo ise, delivered an introductory presentation to the entire staff of Park Street Elementary School in Fredericton. In previous conversations with the Advocate, Park



Street administration expressed a desire to embark upon the initiative. The presentation was the beginning of Park Street’s journey to become Atlantic Canada’s first Rights Respecting School.

Beginning in September 2013, the Communications, Education and Outreach Coordinator with the Advocate’s Office, in collaboration with a retired Fredericton-area educator, began the process of formation with Park Street students, parents and staff. They delivered workshops based on the four building-blocks of the RRS initiative: Human Rights and Children’s Rights; Teaching and Learning; Student Participation and Youth Engagement; and, Leadership and Rights Respecting School Governance. By March 2013, Park Street staff had received the necessary workshops, and students had participated in various focus groups and workshops to engage them in the transformation of becoming a Rights Respecting School.

Looking to the end of the 2013 school year and into the fall, the Advocate’s Office will continue to work with the RRS Leadership team at Park Street to develop and implement an Action Plan, and prepare to celebrate the official launch of the RRS initiative in conjunction with International Day of Peace on September 21st.



The Advocate was busy engaging many other educational champions in the promotion of Rights Respecting Schools throughout the 2012-13 year. In February, UNICEF representative, Paula Gallo, and the Advocate, hosted over 30 educators from the Anglophone Southeast school district in a two-day training exercise in Moncton. The Advocate also assembled leaders in the Francophone districts and the Francophone sector of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for a two-day training workshop on the initiative.

The Advocate anticipates that by the end of the next fiscal year, New Brunswick will have multiple Rights Respecting Schools in both Anglophone and Francophone communities.

*When the principles and values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are consistently applied across school culture and learning, children and the wider school community, benefit. – UNICEF Canada*

#### Impact of Rights Respecting Education

*Research conducted in schools that have incorporated a rights respecting framework show consistent results:*

- *Improved self-esteem and well-being*
- *Enhanced moral understanding*
- *Improved relationships and behaviour (reductions in bullying and disruptive behaviours)*
- *Increased student participation in decision-making*
- *Improved conflict-resolution skills*
- *Increased support for global justice*

[www.rightsrespectingschools.ca](http://www.rightsrespectingschools.ca)



## The second annual Children’s Rights Awareness Week campaign

From flash mobs and dress-up days, to film screenings and talent shows, the second annual Children’s Rights Awareness Week in New Brunswick—the inaugural nation-wide campaign—engaged government, community organizations, children and families in the celebration of children’s rights.

In addition to the release of the State of Child report, and building upon the success of the inaugural campaign in 2011, the Advocate partnered with child and youth advocates across Canada, and with leading youth-serving organizations such as Equitas, Right To Play, YMCA Canada and UNICEF Canada in a national campaign which adopted the theme “Children helping Children”, based on the interplay between article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to play, and article 19, the right to be safe from harm.

The Showcase activity for Children’s Rights Awareness Week in New Brunswick was the Battle of the Arts (BOTA) semi-final and finale, which took place in Fredericton on November 17th and 23rd. BOTA organizers encouraged young people from across New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to express themselves artistically while raising awareness about children’s rights. Out of 20 participants vying for the top prize in the semi-finale, the 10 most outstanding competitors were given the opportunity to perform at the Finale, which took place at the Playhouse Fredericton. In front of several hundred spectators, Myriam Arseneau of Bathurst took home the top prize of the night for her stunning musical artistry.



Other Children’s Rights Awareness Week activities in New Brunswick included a presentation from the Office to Moncton’s Youth Quest Central; a special flash mob of 30 George Street Middle School students at Fredericton’s Regent Mall; a screening of the film “Rebelle” at Dieppe’s Empire Theatres; and a lecture delivered by the Advocate’s Office at the University of New Brunswick Law School.



On November 21st, the Advocate hosted a one-day retreat in Saint John with 30 youth-serving agencies to discuss the formation of a collaborative association of organizations dedicated to the advancement of children’s rights in the province. The result of the retreat was agreement

that there is a pressing need in New Brunswick for an umbrella network of Champions for Children to link the work of various organizations and individuals.

On November 22nd a workshop hosted by the New Brunswick Children's Environmental Health Collaborative took place in New Maryland. Members of the community joined the NB Children's Environmental Health Collaborative to learn, network and explore solutions to the complex issue of children's environmental health. Also on November 22nd Children's Rights Awareness Week participants joined in the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the New Brunswick Adoption Foundation at a fundraising event in Dieppe.

Students at Moncton High School showed their enthusiasm for Children's Rights Awareness Week on November 30th by hosting a dress-up day and fundraiser for Project Purpose. Student Council urged students to support the safety of children in Africa and in our own communities. Students donated \$2 to each participant.

Throughout the week, families were invited to participate in a number of free skates and swims throughout New Brunswick. The public was invited to create and submit postcards based on the theme of "children helping children." Participants were urged to be as creative as possible in the process of making their postcards, and were encouraged to display their creations in schools, community centres, neighborhoods or online.

*The "Children helping Children" campaign aims to engage all Canadians in the protection of children's rights and to seek for their best interests by providing a voice to children, as well as emphasize the fundamental role that youth play as future ambassadors of Canada across the world. – Office of the Child and Youth Advocate*

### A showcase to share about Children's Rights

On May 3rd, 2012 at St. Thomas University's Forest Hill Conference Centre, the Child and Youth Advocate, in collaboration with the New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network (NBSPRN), hosted a Showcase and Sharing Dialogue entitled Research on Children's Rights and Wellbeing. The day-long activity brought together over 70 researchers, government officials, non-governmental officials and youth to discuss ways to better link research and knowledge to rights-respecting policy decisions beneficial to children and youth in New Brunswick.

Using the 4th annual State of the Child report and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Framework for New Brunswick, as the basis to launch the day's discussion, the goal of the day was to identify where collaboration could occur among all sectors: to support work on children's rights research projects, including a strengthened Children's Rights and Wellbeing Framework for New Brunswick; to support the



development of UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools in New Brunswick; to share research and/or best practices that support strategic use of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to inform public policy; and, to become familiar with each other's research priorities, areas of expertise and research interest as they relate to children's rights and wellbeing.

The Advocate was particularly interested in pursuing the discussion questions with a particular focus on their relation to Article 31 of the Convention, the right to rest, leisure, play, recreation, arts and culture, Articles 8 & 30, which enshrine the right to preservation of identity, minority and Indigenous culture, religion and language, and Article 19, the right to protection from violence, injury, abuse, neglect and negligent treatment and maltreatment.

The Advocate is optimistic that the day's interactions will serve to strengthen the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Framework as a measurement tool, and to enhance collaborative efforts to deliver a roadmap to the progressive implementation of the Convention that is relevant, comprehensive and accessible to all actors involved in the promotion and protection of children's rights in New Brunswick

*Throughout New Brunswick, professional and community leaders in various roles work diligently, on a daily basis, to deliver services and programs that meet the needs of our children and youth. The purpose of this event is to facilitate a discussion about how to move from our current need-based approach to child welfare to a rights-based approach that examines and takes into account the underlying causes that lead to the need for responsive service delivery. Children need to be empowered as rights-holders in an inclusive society that takes their wellbeing to heart, and that takes their rights seriously. – Office of the Child and Youth Advocate*

### First annual International Summer Course on the Rights of the Child

The first international summer course on the rights of the child, organized by the CYA, the Working Group on the Rights of the Child within the Francophonie, the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, and the Université de Moncton, and supported by the Province of New Brunswick and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), was held from August 8 to 18, 2012.

More than 100 participants from around the globe gathered at the Université de Moncton for the event. A number of guest speakers, including Bernard Richard, Claire Brisset, Philip Jaffé, Catalina Ferrer, and Najat M'jid, covered topics such as the rights of First Nation children in a minority setting; respect for children: a universal ethic; opportunities and careers in child rights advocacy; and playing in complete safety. The summer course in Moncton offered thematic training on the rights of the child as guaranteed under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.



#### **Success of the program**

The summer course provided an effective platform to discuss the current rights of children within the



Francophonie and elsewhere. Participants from over 15 countries took part in the program that summer and were grouped as learners in French and English sections.

According to the participants, it was an unforgettable opportunity for networking and an opportunity to connect with people with similar visions. They also said that the summer school motivated them to invest more in the cause of children and that the experience was positive and rewarding.

### ***Theme and academic accreditation***



The popular central theme of the event was Article 31 of the *Convention*: The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. The right to play, that forgotten right, is quite specific to childhood and was a unifying theme that lent itself to launching dialogue and collaboration between the institutional stakeholders, researchers, and representatives of civil society who were present.

The Université de Moncton also introduced the possibility of academic accreditation by offering the course TSOC-2163 (Professional Seminar on the Rights of the Child) within the framework of the summer course. External funding from the OIF and the Province of New Brunswick made it possible to grant several participation bursaries, which covered a portion of the registration and travel expenses.

### ***Networking within the Francophonie***

The course also provided an opportunity for two of its sponsors to meet, i.e., the Working Group on the Rights of the Child within the Francophonie and the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates. The Working Group met on August 8 ahead of the summer course and took advantage of the meeting that same day of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates to allow for a half-day of dialogue between researchers and institutional stakeholders in Canada and elsewhere who are concerned with the rights of the child.

The meeting in Moncton also allowed the Working Group to consolidate its approach, expand its membership, and discuss a partnership project to formalize the desire for collaboration stemming from the course and related meetings.

### ***Sustainability of the course***

Based on participant feedback, both formal and informal, we can see the success of this initiative and the desperate need for training that exists across the Francophonie and beyond in terms of children's rights. Thanks to this initial success, training will resume in 2013 and mechanisms will be explored to ensure the continuity of the course on an annual basis. A summer course Honour Committee composed of Claire Brisset, Bernard Richard, Bernard Lord, and Noel Kinsella was established to ensure long-term



funding for this project. The second edition of the summer course will be held from July 12 to 19, 2013, on the theme of violence committed against children and the guarantees of Article 19 of the Convention. Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that: “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse...”

### **Police and RCMP Training in relation to Children’s Rights and the YCJA**

The Advocate continued throughout this fiscal year to heavily promote the need for alternative approaches to youth incarceration, particularly for youth with complex needs with known mental health conditions and young people known to child protection services. Frontline police officer training was offered in Moncton, Campbellton, Oromocto, Eel River Bar and online webinars and continuing legal education sessions were offered to lawyers from across the province. Community information sessions on this topic were also held in Miramichi and Fredericton. The Advocate’s Office spoke out publicly in numerous media interviews in relation to the troubling statistics in the Children’s Rights and well-being Framework regarding the continuingly high rate of youth incarceration at NBYC in relation to other Atlantic Provinces and other parts of the country. This public and systemic advocacy continued in support of individual case advocacy, as for instance in the case summary below:

*A 12-year-old high-functioning autistic youth was charged with assault on staff at the group home. When reviewed by our office, the delegate found that social worker turnover and lack of parental involvement in the treatment plan to be key-issues that needed to be addressed. In light of the youth’s vulnerability and circumstances, the Crown decided to drop the charges, recognizing the futility and unfairness of criminalizing a 12 year old youth who suffered from autism, and who was also a victim abuse. The delegate in our office discussed the need for one social worker to be assigned and remain involved throughout the process and the department agreed. No further staff changes took place. The youth and parent participated more readily in services and engaged in the process. The next step was to encourage frontline workers to take the lead and work on a plan that would achieve important outcomes for the youth. Once momentum was gained, the youth was able to make progress, as well as the parent. The youth’s behaviors became more manageable and there were no more incidents in the group home. As the home situation also improved, the youth was able to spend more time at home. It became increasingly evident that, rather than giving up and criminalizing the youth’s conduct, the investment of time and collaboration between agencies, with the youth at the center of all efforts, worked successfully in advancing his best interests.*



## International Day of Peace

In honour of International Day of Peace, which was celebrated in Fredericton at an evening gathering in Officer's Square, hosted by the East and Central African Association for Indigenous Rights (ECAAIR), the Advocate spoke at the celebration activities and submitted public commentary to New Brunswick media which is excerpted below:

### **Children and Peace**

*By: Christian Whalen, Acting Child and Youth Advocate for New Brunswick*

*The International Day of Peace was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981 and first proclaimed thirty years ago on September 21, 1982. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has called peace "one of humanity's most pressing needs" and "the United Nation's highest calling".*

*In the global program for childhood, A World Fit for Children, all nations on earth, Canada among them, committed themselves ten years ago to a ten-point plan. Protecting children from the horrors of war figured prominently in that plan. Unfortunately, the need for that emphasis has not abated.*

*From Syria to Somalia, from Afghanistan to the Congo, children continue to be counted among the fallen victims of armed conflicts and among those left behind and traumatized by man's inhumanity to man.*

*All children deserve peace: peace in their homes and peace in their world. Over the past year, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has endeavored to make children's rights matter in New Brunswick. We have placed great emphasis on respecting youth voice and on respecting the fundamental rights of children as proclaimed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular we have focused this year on the child's right to play, rest and recreation.*

*A child's right to play, this "forgotten right", is fundamental for children, just as work is fundamental to adults, because we define ourselves and sustain ourselves through our work. So too, play is fundamental for children. Through play the child gains a sense of self-worth, identity and equal human dignity. It is through play that children explore, learn and define their world and their place in it. Unfortunately, children who are not at peace do not play.*

*While this clinical observation is true of children in general, it is particularly true of children experiencing the kind of trauma that war brings. The role of play, rest, leisure, recreation and creative expression in overcoming the trauma of war is also critical and well-documented. So, like all children's rights, the right to play and the right to be protected from armed conflict are intricately connected.*

*Some may say that since Canadian soil has not seen war in over two hundred years that such matters are not our concern, and certainly no concern for provincial Child and Youth Advocates. But this, I think, is a mistaken view. In the first place it belittles and belies the sacrifice of our parents and loved ones who fought and died and continue to fight in the defence of these ideals the world over.*

*It also fails to appreciate how interconnected these rights and our world have become. We continue to see in our province, in our schools and communities children who have fled war-torn countries and whose needs in relation to this experience of trauma are often overlooked or misdiagnosed. To do better, we must learn, like St-Exupéry's Little Prince, to see with the eyes of the heart.*

## Other examples of Education and Outreach activities

In addition to the education and outreach activities highlighted above the Advocate's staff was pleased in the fall of 2012 to welcome the visit of Marta Mauras Perez, a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who launched her five day Canadian tour to meet Canada's children and present the Committee's concluding observations to Canada here in New Brunswick. Ms. Perez met with senior government officials and with university researchers in Moncton New Brunswick before proceeding to a half day visit with New Brunswick youth from across the province hosted in Mi'kmaq territory at Elsipogtog First Nation.

During the 2012-13 fiscal year, Acting Child and Youth Advocate, Christian Whalen continued his efforts to mobilize members of the legal profession in Canada to take a more active role in defending children's rights in Canada. As Chair of the Canadian Bar Association's New Brunswick Branch Children's Law section he moved the establishment of a National children's law committee within the CBA's national sections council and such a committee was formally established at the CBA's annual meeting in Vancouver in August 2012 with Whalen as its founding Chair and drawing upon child rights and children's law experts from every section of the bar and across Canada.

Numerous other presentations and outreach activities rounded out the Office's education and communications calendar including presentations to schools, community service organizations, speaking engagements before Mental Health associations, Privacy rights conferences, visits to youth centres, parish offices, group home operators, professional associations, law faculties, nursing faculties, educational faculties, etc.

## Systemic Advocacy and Advice to Government

### Play On! Children Helping Children: The 2012 State of the Child Report



On November 20th, 2012 as part of the second annual Children's Rights Awareness Week in New Brunswick, and the first national Children's Rights Awareness Week campaign, the Office released its fifth annual State of the Child Report in collaboration with the New Brunswick Health Council.

The report, entitled "Play On! Children Helping Children", was a companion piece to the 2011 report, *Play Matters!*. Again, the report focused on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to rest, leisure, play, recreation, arts and culture. The report also highlighted how New Brunswick

children and youth help build stronger and safer communities in which to develop and grow.

Launched in collaboration with a youth panel at a luncheon in Fredericton, the report was accompanied by the second edition of a Children's Rights and Well-being Framework for New Brunswick, which reported on 258 indicators of children's rights and well-being. Over 160 indicators in the 2012 Framework presented new or updated information, giving New Brunswick an effective working model

for straightforward year-over-year comparisons of comprehensive standardized indicators of child rights implementation. Going forward, the Framework will offer decision-makers a comprehensive starting point for evidence-based decision-making.

The report also presented a nine-point action plan to enhance the well-being of children and youth that focused on better enforcement of their Article 31 rights. The action plan focused on increasing opportunities for physical activity and healthy living for all children and youth.

*“We have to continue to work tirelessly for our children and youth. We have to allow them to live lives of dignity and fulfillment, respecting their rights and teaching them to respect the rights of others. And we must let them play.” – Acting Child and Youth Advocate, Christian Whalen*

### Senate Hearing on Cyber-bullying

On June 4, 2012, Acting Child and Youth Advocate, Christian Whalen, presented to the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights as they explored solutions to the issue of Cyber bullying in Canada.

The Advocate’s submission and subsequent testimony spoke about addressing cyber bullying from a position of respect for the rights of the child. The Advocate’s submission covered the need to: build respectful and responsible relationships between children and youth; honour the child as an equal human being; nurture a culture of children’s rights in Canada; address issues of privacy in the age of social media; better understand problems with corporal punishment and a culture of violence towards children; support parents and early childhood development; and, address issues of good laws and good governance including the need for a Children’s Commissioner for Canada, ratification of the 3rd protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the role of Child and Youth Advocates as Legislative Officers, Child Rights Impact Assessments, and regulating children’s online play environments and social media. The Advocate’s submission proposed 10 recommendations for the committee’s consideration:

*1 - To pause and reflect on our fundamental vision of Canada and to refocus our collective strategies and priorities as a nation as one which is committed above all else to securing the best interests of every child in our communities.*

*2 - To pay particular attention to models and programs that are aimed at building a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity and human dignity in school communities, such as UNICEF’s Rights Respecting Schools.*

*3 - To take timely measures to better protect children’s privacy, by pursuing the long standing recommendations to entrench privacy rights within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and by incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Canadian law.*

*4 - To repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code and commit Canada to a firm policy of non-violence in child-rearing, consistent with the emerging consensus of State policy within the community of nations.*

*5 - To support parents of very young children in order to maximize opportunities for the optimal health and development of every child.*

*6 – To establish a National Children’s Commissioner for Canada and that this officer be given a general*



*mandate to promote and enforce the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada and a specific mandate in relation to certain aspects of children's rights which are most amenable to federal oversight, such as cyber-bullying.*

*7 – To ratify the 3rd protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child allowing Canadian children to file communications with the Committee on the Rights of the Child.*

*8 – To consider which Federal-Provincial-Territorial processes, such as the Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights working jointly with the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates could best explore the role provincial and territorial Child and Youth Advocates could play in promoting and enforcing children's rights on a broader scale and advocating in particular around mainstream issues of children's rights such as children's on-line privacy, bullying and cyber-bullying.*

*9 - To commit to a rigorous process of Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) for any legislative, sub-regulatory or policy decision at the federal level which may have a substantial impact on children, and specifically that any legislative proposals emanating from the Committee's review of cyber-bullying be subject to such a CRIA process and one which involves meaningful youth engagement in the impact assessment process.*

*10 - To regulate children's on-line play spaces, to avoid inappropriate behavioural marketing, data-mining or other forms of commercial exploitation of children on-line.*

In December 2012, the committee released its report with recommendations to government on how to proceed with tackling issues of cyber bullying and creating a healthy and happier Canada for children and youth. The committee largely endorsed the submission of the Child and Youth Advocate by recommending preventative and educational approaches as strategic ways to reduce incidents of cyberbullying.

*Our office does not advocate on behalf of children and youth solely to government. Regularly, we find a need to educate and empower parents and caregivers, who are themselves responsible for ensuring the best outcomes for their children. And, from time to time, they need guidance in doing so. We received a request for advocacy for a youth who was about to change schools for the fourth time in just a few years. Her parent had difficulty understanding why the daughter found it too challenging to attend school on a full-time basis. She wanted the daughter to be in class for full days at her new school. Our office advocated for this new school to facilitate the youth's transition and offer additional support to maximize her success there. She quickly made new friends and her behavior problems dissipated. Our office also took this opportunity to educate the parent on the importance of offering stability to her child. The youth had the right to develop a sense of belonging to her school and benefit from lasting relationships that she would make with her peers.*

*\* \* \**

*A seven year old was suspended from his school because of altercations with another student. His parents felt that he was being suspended frequently for what were minor incidents not worthy of suspension. The child wished to return to school. He felt labeled and was angry. A delegate was actively involved in a number of conversations and meetings with his parents, the school and the school district. Communication between the parents and the school improved. The child was referred to the Integrated Service Delivery team, and with input from the child's physician, the child returned to school with appropriate supports. No further incidents were reported.*

## Youth in Care Hearings

This year, the Child and Youth Advocate was invited to participate in the first Youth in Care Hearings by the Department of Social Development and the New Brunswick Youth in Care Network. The Advocate and the clinical director not only witnessed the courage, resilience, and determination of these young people, this activity showed the importance of letting young people speak like no other during the year. Their remarks convinced a room of senior public servants, Minister's, MLAs and the Premier of the need to do better for youth in care. We are anxious to read and support their recommendations to the Minister of Social Development in 2013. The Advocate made efforts to amplify the voice of youth in care through the year by supporting and echoing the testimonials of youth and former youth in care in our media commentary and by inviting the youth to speak at the launch of the Advocate's annual state of the child report and the International Summer Course on the Rights of the Child. The Advocate wishes to salute the work of the provincial Youth in Care Network and its host agency Partner's for Youth for their exemplary work in amplifying youth voice in New Brunswick. Our office continues to be inspired by the work of the Ontario advocate's Office in this field and will make sustained efforts to improve opportunities for all New Brunswick Children and Youth to have their say in matters which affect them and the communities in which they live.

## A Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) Process for New Brunswick

Early in 2012, the Advocate's Office and representatives from Executive Council Office (ECO) entered into discussions about the potential for the adoption in New Brunswick of Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) methodologies in our legislative and policy-making functions. Following initial discussions, a meeting occurred on April 25, 2012 that involved representatives from key child focused departments to scope out how this could be accomplished.

The meeting laid the groundwork for a 10-month conversation between the Advocate's Office and key government officials based on the notion that having a CRIA tool/process is something that Government would pursue as the first jurisdiction in Canada to formally put a "child first" lens on their legislation, regulation, and policy development.

A "CRIA working group", co-chaired by ECO and the Advocate's Office, was formed with participants from the Departments of Social Development, Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Health, Public Safety, Education and Early Childhood Development, Culture, Tourism and Healthy Living, Justice and Attorney General. The working group's mandate would be to: develop a customized NB approach for CRIA implementation; develop a training program for deputy ministers and employees involved in the development of policy and legislation; and, develop an accountability framework that would include measurability and monitoring of the impact of implementing the CRIA tool.



In February 2013, after careful deliberation and collaboration amongst the Advocate's Office, government departments and UNICEF Canada (who provided subject-matter support in the development of an NB-specific CRIA model, adopted from models in existence throughout the world), a training workshop was held to prepare all of government for the implementation of the CRIA process. Deputy Ministers, department directors, and senior policy analysts and advisors received training over the course of the week, which included introductory sessions on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, child-friendly policies and approaches to decision-making and meaningful youth consultation/engagement; as well as case study sessions on how the NB CRIA tool would be applied.

Following the week-long workshop, ECO officially implemented the CRIA process within government, making New Brunswick the first Canadian jurisdiction to filter its decision making at the highest level through a child-rights lens. The Advocate's Office viewed the implementation of CRIA as one of the key activities that demonstrate government's leadership in ensuring that New Brunswick wholly supports the growth and development of happy and healthy children and youth.

## Autism consultation day

*The parents of an autistic four year old knew that their daughter would have difficulty adapting to a large group setting at kindergarten. They therefore decided to introduce her to a group dynamic gradually by moving her from a small, home-based, private daycare to a bigger daycare. It was not long before the girl's behavior demonstrated that she was truly overwhelmed in group settings. Unable to communicate with language, she displayed her distress through kicking, biting, and throwing things. Her parents and day care staff knew that if someone was able to spend more one-on-one time with her, while in the group setting, these behaviors would decrease. Her parents applied for extra funding to complement the one-on-one therapy delivered to autistic children and the Integrated Daycare Service already funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Their application was denied. Our office gathered information and sought clarification on the different programs, their funding criteria, and why the application had been denied. A meeting was held between government officials, the parents and the day care staff. Our office advocated for exceptional, extra support for the youth. Although our office was pleased to see this matter resolved, we were surprised to hear that there were 15 other preschool children and eight school-aged children awaiting the enhanced support worker service, and that the deadline for application was in June with a budget that was usually exhausted by the fall. Officials with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development told us a review of all support services to working parents and day cares was underway and that changes to the early childhood and education programs and services would soon be made.*

Having seen the problems experienced by parents who have children and youth with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, as in the case summary above, and their request for services in a family setting in order to keep their child or youth at home, and aware of the gulf in government services offered to this group of young people, our office initiated a day of discussion with representatives of government agencies and some experts to discuss the issue and to identify means of working together. Fifteen people attended this meeting on February 26, 2013. The meeting offered an opportunity for departments to inform each other and raise awareness around the need for improved services and a plan to reduce wait-times and make school based autism services more comprehensive and accessible. The Advocate's Office undertook to keep the matter under advisement, to reconvene the round-table in 2014 and issued a public call for a provincial autism plan:

*...Families calling the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate are frustrated, worried, tired, and overwhelmed. They fear that they may have to give up their children to the care of the government. Everyone agrees that parents need the support to be able to raise their children.*

*These families face great challenges – they are confused about how to navigate the system and find out what services exist outside of the education system. We need a service map to direct families to services. And we unquestionably also need more services. We need to address the persistent lack of access to diagnosis and treatment. We need to provide support for the many children and adolescents with autism who are not in schools and cannot access services and supports. We need to provide for family training and support. We need to bolster the successes we see at Community Autism*

*Centres. We need crisis support. And we need to acknowledge that autism doesn't end with adulthood – we need lifelong supports.*

*Families and service providers alike are calling for a provincial plan to address the challenges of autism, to provide continuity of services and programs and to develop a process to allow streamlined access to clinical supports. Many initiatives are currently underway but of course more government departments need to be brought into this conversation, and a lead coordinating agency should be designated. Considerable knowledge and expertise already exists in the Province – it needs to be harnessed and organized into a cohesive system.*

### Other examples of Systemic Advocacy

In addition to the Advice to government initiatives highlighted above the Child and Youth Advocate Office participated in 2012-13 with a submission to the Cultural Policy renewal process emphasizing the importance of Article 31 Rights of children to rest, play, recreation and to participate in the arts and cultural life of their communities. We responded to requests for advice from the Department of Health in relation to the dangers of tanning beds and the proposed regulations in that area. We presented to the Premier's Council on the status of disabled persons in relation to the revised Disability Action Plan Strategy. We urged government to maintain its commitment to sustainable transitional youth housing across the province to forestall the closing of Miramichi Youth House. Finally we also collaborated with other Child and Youth Advocates in the submission of a shadow report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child focusing on the gross imbalance in equality and rights implementation for Canada's First Nations Children.

### Conclusion

Following in the path of our 2011-12 Annual Report entitled, *Raising the Bar on Children's Rights*, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has continued in the 2012-13 fiscal year to make significant strides in changing the culture of our government and our Province in our outlook towards children and the protection of their rights, as human beings equal in human dignity and worth to all the adult members of our community. This transformation is an important one and is part of a global march towards equality and rights implementation for children everywhere. New Brunswick's leadership now reaches well beyond the confines of this small legislative office. It is reflected in the leadership of our Executive Council Office and our policy –making functions across government; it is increasingly evident in our schools and in the aims of our educational system; it is most tangibly felt when children and young people come forward in defence of their own rights and of their peers. Children and child rights specialists in other parts of Canada and the world are now taking note of these developments. We are encouraged by all of this and will continue to reach out to New Brunswickers in every walk of life and of every age to act always in the best interests of children as rights-holders and equal members of society.