

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A VOICE



2010-2015

Photo: C. Archibould

Looking back ~ looking forward

A baby cries, a toddler hits, a preschooler draws, a teenager runs away. The behaviour of children and youth is often their language. When young people are feeling vulnerable, they often cannot express their thoughts, feelings, preferences and views. They need adults to assist them in having their views interpreted and heard. Throughout my career I have been intrigued with the various ways children and youth express themselves and I have taken pride in the times that I have been able to understand them and help young people get their needs met. Imagine a world where all children felt heard, and are able to meet their goals.

When Andy Nieman started in the role as the first Child and Youth Advocate for Yukon, he said it was "a privilege and honour" to be able to speak for the children. Andy brought his own inspiring story to the position and did many things to get the Child and Youth Advocate office up and running. I'd like to thank Andy, along with the staff that assisted in the beginning years: Lisa Ivens, Jody Studney along with Tina Dickson and Bengie Clethero, who are still with the office, and have been instrumental in supporting my transition into the office.

I bring to this position my experience working in the social work field, primarily within Yukon government systems, my knowledge of child and adolescent development and my passion for tackling the most challenging situations. I believe that no matter how hard we work and no matter how many successes we have, we can always do better; it is the nature of the work; there is always more to do. I expect that most people who work with children and youth truly value young people and I believe that legislations are generally written with the best interests of the child in mind. However, sometimes, the voices of the young people get lost when other competing priorities surface. Political platforms, budgets, mandates and expressed needs of adults can all take priority over the views and preferences of a vulnerable child. I too am honoured to be working for an office where children's rights are the guiding force for my work!

As part of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the advocate is responsible for preparing an annual report for the Members Services Board. The report will reflect the operations of the office and will discuss achievements, challenges and goals in the areas of individual advocacy, systemic advocacy and public education. This 2015 report is a summary of the first five years of Yukon's Child and Youth Advocate Office (YCAO).

Individual advocacy has been the primary focus for the first five years of the office. The advocate is responsible to support, assist, inform and advise children and youth respecting designated services in the Yukon government.

A review of the individual cases shows several trends that require systemic attention. These include: aboriginal child welfare, youth transitioning out of care, and assessment and treatment for young people experiencing mental health and behavioural issues. YCAO will continue to develop our connection with the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates.

I will look at issues of interest nationally, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report, and add a Yukon lens.

Section 3.1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institution, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration."

Many young people and service providers do not understand the role of the child advocate or how to access us. I intend to do outreach to young people receiving services and adults who work with children and youth or who are interested in the services children and youth receive from the Yukon government. I will also make travel to rural Yukon a priority.

YCAO will work with Duu Chuu Management to update the Child Rights workshop and travel to communities to deliver it. The objective of the workshop is to promote the role of the Child Advocate and to help community service providers understand their role in referring children, collaborating with their First Nation and Yukon government, and providing community support to children and youth.

I look forward to working collaboratively with government departments to address these systemic issues as well as others that emerge. Building relationships to find creative solutions to complex problems can make the difference in the lives of children. Young people won't only have a voice, it will be heard.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annette King".

- Annette King



Photo: C. Archibould

Issues and Trends

April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2015

Information and Referral

More than half the files opened in the first five years were recorded as Information and Referral files. Parents, caregivers and service providers concerned about a child contacted YCAO wanting to explore options and figure out how to help the child have their views heard and needs met. Many calls made were related to child custody and access. Mothers and fathers contacted YCAO to seek assistance in ensuring their child's perspective was considered throughout family court. Frequently, parents looked for options in changing living arrangements and custody orders. As these situations do not fit the mandate of YCAO, many were referred to the LawLine. Other calls for information and referrals were from service providers clarifying the role of the office and caregivers looking for resources for children.

Family and Children's Services

Over the first five years, 64% of advocacy files came from Family and Children's Services. Three significant themes have been consistent: supports for young people becoming adults, fears of youth in or from care that their infants will be removed from their care, supports for extended families caring for children. The gap for youth transitioning out of care was recognized in the 2014 report by the Office of the Auditor General. There needs to be a strategic process that plans for success and reintegrates young people with their families and communities long before their 19th birthday. Teen parents and families providing kinship care need assistance in accessing practical supports and referrals, funding for programs and respite care.

Example:

A father called concerned about his 17-year-old youth, Riley, who was supposed to be living at a group home but had been spending time on the streets and not coming home at night. He was concerned that the youth was not taking his medications and was not developing the skills necessary to live independently. The advocate contacted the group home and the service providers involved with Riley. They provided information that they were having weekly case conferences to coordinate supports for Riley.

Education

15% of advocacy files have been related to education. Parents have expressed their concerns that the schools are not effectively responding to learning challenges, mental health problems and behavioural issues. Educational assessments have not been completed for many of the files. Often the family requested that the child switch schools; therefore, the conflicts were not effectively resolved. Children and youth have the right to attend school safely, with the specialized programs they need. Assessment and intervention within the Department of Education can be strengthened with collaboration with other mental health and behavioural specialists.

Example:

A mother of a child in Grade 7, Alex, contacted the advocate requesting support to get educational resources in the classroom. Alex has had academic and behavioural special needs throughout elementary school. Alex was previously assessed by a psychologist out of territory and more recently by the Department of Education. Both recognized Alex's need for individualized learning and an educational assistant was provided for two years in elementary school. The advocate supported the mother in attending a mediation meeting and the Department of Education committed to providing an educational assistant for the youth. The mother better understood the process for accessing educational supports when transitioning to high school.

Youth Justice

5% of advocacy files have had Youth Justice as the primary system the youth was involved in. A general theme with the young people in the youth justice system who have accessed YCAO was that they generally did not understand their rights. The advocate spoke to them in private and helped them navigate the systems that they were involved in. These youth often have comprehensive needs that are not effectively addressed before they are charged with a crime under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.

YCAO will do outreach to all youth in care and custody so that they can be aware of their rights to have their perspective heard.

Example:

A 17-year-old youth, Sam, met with the advocate about concerns with treatment at the Young Offenders Facility by staff and medical professionals, including being locked down, losing privileges and wanting access to medication. The advocate discussed the concerns with the supervisor of the facility who helped the youth better understand the system for making a formal complaint and agreed to have staff consult with the counsellor from the Youth High Risk Treatment Program to help staff engage with the youth.

Mental Health

7% of advocacy files were related to youth with mental health and addictions issues although mental health was a common theme throughout the other areas as well. In the first five years, YCAO heard concerns about mental health assessment and treatment in the Education system, in Family and Children's Services and in Youth Justice as well as with Mental Health Services. Children with mental health problems need to be able to access assessment and treatment as early as possible and in a respectful way that reduces barriers to recovery and promotes collaboration. Families and caregivers need assistance in knowing how to support young people with mental health problems.

Example:

A mother of 7-year-old Jayden called YCAO frustrated that Jayden has been on the waitlist at Mental Health Services for two years. YCAO contacted the manager and clarified when the child would receive assessment. In addition, YCAO connected with the Department of Education to coordinate services and supports.

**names and genders may be changed to ensure confidentiality*



Case types

Basic Advocacy – Advocate ensures child or youth’s voices are heard and in instances where they have no voice or require support, speak for them

Comprehensive Advocacy – involving two or more issues and/or multiple government agencies

Self Advocacy – Advocate provides support but does not participate in agency discussions

Systemic Advocacy – comprehensive issues arising about the availability, effectiveness, responsiveness and relevance of designated government services

Information and Referrals – requests for and assistance providing information about services and programs for children and youth

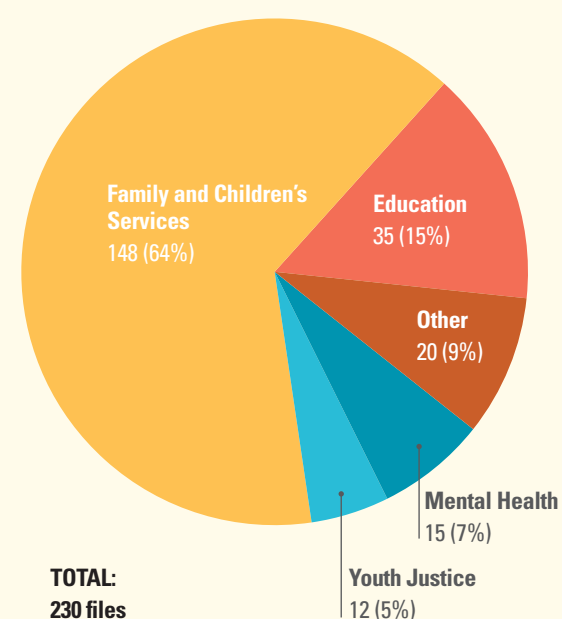
April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2015 Clients served each year by category

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	TOTAL
Basic	20	40	30	34	35	159
Comprehensive	21	13	7	3	5	49
Systemic	4	0	0	2	0	6
Self	15	0	0	0	1	16
TOTAL ADVOCACY FILES BY YEAR	60	53	37	39	41	230
Info & Referrals	70	43	64	63	15	255
TOTAL	130	96	101	102	56	485

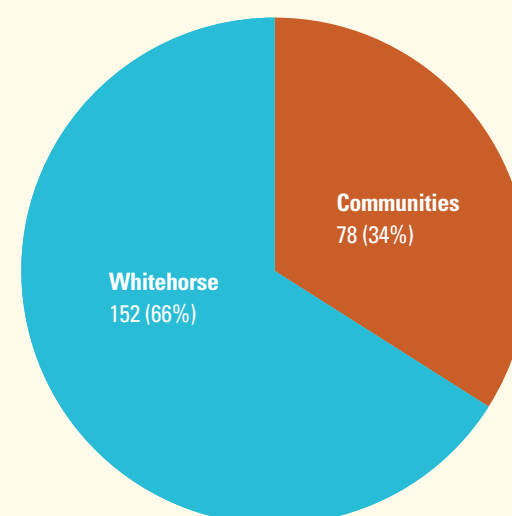
2010–2015 Budget expenditures

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	TOTAL
Personnel	\$ 271,312	\$ 287,249	\$ 290,351	\$ 312,021	\$ 311,016	\$ 1,471,949
O & M	160,540	162,338	119,307	128,139	89,987	660,311
Capital	1,149	0	0	0	0	1,149
TOTAL	\$ 433,001	\$ 449,587	\$ 409,658	\$ 440,160	\$ 401,003	\$ 2,133,409

2010–2015 Five year summary of advocacy files by agency



2010–2015 Breakdown by region



Please join us for 2015 National Child Day Open House and Events

Friday, November 20, 2:30–4:30 pm

at YCAO Office,
2070 2nd Avenue,
Unit 19

Who we are

Yukon Child and Youth Advocate
Annette King

Deputy Child and Youth Advocate
Bengie Clethero

Office Administrator
Tina Dickson

(See complete bios at www.ycao.ca)

What we do

The Advocate Office will support, assist, inform and advise children and youth with respect to government services including:

- > Provide information and advice related to how to effectively access government services and any process for review of decisions respecting the service.
- > Work with the child or youth to ensure that their views and preferences are heard and considered.
- > Promote the rights and interests of the child or youth to be safe, healthy, educated and heard.

How we do it

Based on the Advocate's initial assessment their role may include providing advice, coaching on effective self-advocacy, requesting and/or attending planning meetings and if required, advocating directly on behalf of the child or youth.

Anyone can contact the Advocate Office on behalf of a child or youth.

Children and youth are encouraged to contact the Advocate Office (when possible) on their own or with someone's assistance.

What the Advocate's Office does not do:

- > Influence or override decisions.
- > Provide child protection services, financial assistance or counselling.
- > Speak for children and youth in a court of law.
- > Take actions that interfere with a tribunal or court process.
- > Represent children and youth in custody matters.
- > Change custody and access arrangements.

Confidentiality

All Child and Youth Advocate staff must maintain confidentiality in respect of all matters that come to their knowledge in the exercise of powers and the performance of functions and duties under the Act. This means that the Advocate and all other staff must not divulge to anyone information on confidential matters regarding their responsibilities related to their legislatively mandated duties and functions. The Advocate must ensure that all information in their control and custody is secure and appropriately protected.

Key events & milestones

2009

- May 14 > Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Act assented to
- December > Andy Niemen started as Yukon's first Child and Youth Advocate

2010

- March > Tina Dickson begins position as Office Manager
- > Lisa Ivens begins position of Deputy Advocate
- > Hosted Children's and Youth Rights workshop in Whitehorse for youth from all over Yukon – facilitated by Andrew Robinson from the office of the BC Representative for Children and Youth

- April 1 > Official opening of Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office (YCAO)

- May > Website launched
- > Lisa Ivens leaves position of Deputy Advocate

- June > Yukon joined the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

- July > Jody Studney begins position of Deputy Advocate

2011

- April > Launched "Young People Have a Voice" campaign with promotional materials

- August > Jody Studney left position of Deputy Advocate

- October > Bengie Clethero begins position of Deputy Advocate

2012

- February > Development of Beyond Talking, a working group to address gaps in the Education system

- May > YCAO hosted Child Rights Impact Assessment Training for service providers and policy analysts – facilitated by Unicef

2013

- July > Protocol agreement signed with Department of Health and Social Services

- October > Child Rights workshop for service providers – facilitated by Duu Chuu Management

- November 20 > First annual open house to recognize National Child Day (and each November 20 after)

2014

- July > Website updated

- October > Family Week swim hosted by YCAO

- December > Protocol agreement signed with Department of Education

2015

- February > Andy Nieman finishes role as Child and Youth Advocate

- April 20 > Legislative Assembly appoints Annette King as next Child and Youth Advocate (sworn in to five-year term on May 1, 2015)

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