

# Representative for Children and Youth



## Children and youth in care

- More than 50 per cent of children and youth in care are Aboriginal, compared to 8 per cent in the general population
- Forty-three per cent of youth in custody are Aboriginal
- Diagnoses of mental disorders are four times more prevalent
- Boys are 8.5 times more likely to be prescribed cerebral stimulants such as Ritalin
- Girls are four times more likely to become pregnant
- More than 50 per cent of children and youth in care are not deemed school-ready on the Early Development Indicator
- Sixty-one per cent are identified as having special educational needs by age 16
- Children and youth in care are 17 times more likely to have intensive behavioural issues and/or a serious mental illness
- Fewer than one in four graduate from high school, compared to three in four youth from the general population

*Children and youth in care are vulnerable in a number of key areas, and need the protection and support of the Province to help them overcome challenges and thrive.*

## Who are the children and youth in care?

The Representative for Children and Youth is responsible for children and youth across B.C. between the ages of birth and 18 who are in government care.

As of January, 2007, there were 9,269 children in care.

These children face greater challenges in terms of health outcomes, education outcomes and special needs.

Overall, children in care have higher rates of illness, injury and death by all causes, including suicide. They have a slower rate of academic progress and lower rate of high school graduation. They have higher rates of incarceration and eventual dependence on income assistance.

## How was the Representative for Children and Youth appointed?

In April, 2006, the Honorable Ted Hughes released an independent review of B.C.'s child protection system that called for sweeping changes to the child welfare system. As a consequence of the report, the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* was passed.

In November, 2006, the Special Committee to Appoint a Representative for Children and Youth recommended the appointment of Judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond for a five-year term, an appointment that was unanimously approved.

Judge Turpel-Lafond was sworn in as an officer of the Legislature on December 5, 2006.

## How is the Representative for Children and Youth different?

The Representative for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislature and does not report through a Provincial ministry.

## What is the Representative's vision for the future?

Implementation of the Hughes Report, and transforming the system for the protection and support for children and youth, particularly those who are most vulnerable, is fundamental to the vision of the Representative for Children and Youth.

Additionally, the Representative will:

- Respect the human rights of children and youth, and work to enhance and protect those rights according to Canadian and international standards
- Focus on Aboriginal children and nurture their spirit by connecting them to a sense of place, family and community
- Support touchstones for change and policy renewal that foster dignity and respect for B.C. children and youth
- Identify and monitor clear outcomes for children and youth, especially those receiving government services
- Profile and recognize best practices in B.C.

## What is the mandate of the Representative?

- Provide better and expanded individual and systemic advocacy for children and youth, and their families.
- Provide for the independent review and investigation of deaths and critical injuries, with emphasis on prevention.
- Provide for a strong system of accountability to the public through independent auditing, monitoring and reviewing of government services.

## How will the Representative investigate and report?

The Representative is empowered by the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* to conduct a full review of children's injuries and deaths for the purpose of identifying trends and improving reviewable services, or addressing broader public policy initiatives. The Representative will make public reports available at the end of the review or inquest. The Representative is also empowered by the *Act* to investigate a child's critical injury or death under certain circumstances.

## What are the Representative's key strategies?

Key strategies include reaching consensus on outcomes and achieving collaboration and community partnerships, including Aboriginal community engagement, to deliver outreach and advocacy. The Representative will also engage to review, monitor and audit programs and services.

## What are the next steps?

The Representative will:

- Establish the Office and open for business April 1, 2007 in Prince George, Victoria and the Lower Mainland
- Monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Hughes Report
- Identify and create consensus on key goals, objectives and outcomes for children and youth in B.C.
- Assist those in the child-serving system through advocacy and strategic research findings