



Statement

March 27, 2020
For Immediate Release

In these difficult and extraordinary times, I want to let all British Columbians know about our commitment and intentions at the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

First and foremost, we are continuing to offer our advocacy services to children, youth and young adults and the people who care about and for them. Although the nature of those services have, by necessity, changed in some regards – in-person meetings, for example, are no longer viable for the time being – our Advocates remain committed to helping those who need it through other means. If you need our help, or are aware of somebody who does, please call us at 1-800-476-3933 or visit our website for other ways to connect with us at www.rcybc.ca

Second, RCY's independent oversight of B.C.'s child-, youth- and young adult-serving systems continues despite COVID-19. Our physical office spaces are closed to the public, but our staff have transitioned to working remotely on day-to-day tasks as well as ongoing major projects. Most notably, we continue to review 'reportables' of critical injuries and deaths of children and youth who are in care or receiving designated services from government. Trends and issues that we detect through these reportables, as well as through our ongoing advocacy work and other means, are being relayed to government ministries and service providers to support their planning and decision-making.

We are particularly concerned for youth who are turning 19 in the upcoming months and either aging out of care, coming to the end of their Youth Agreements or otherwise losing the resources and supports they have counted on during this uncertain time. We have been in discussions with government representatives about this pressing issue, advocating for changes to ensure that no young person in B.C. is left without sufficient supports during what is an incredibly difficult period for even the most well-supported among us.

We will not be publishing reports with recommendations to government during this time. Obviously, government's first and foremost responsibility and attention must be on the containment of COVID-19, maintaining services to people, and the well-being of citizens during and following this crisis. At RCY, we remain vigilant in our role as an independent oversight body, but we do not wish to distract government from the

huge challenge that it currently faces. This is a time for us to work with and support government and service providers to ensure that children and youth are best served.

We will be releasing a select few reports that we have determined – in consultation with government and service providers – are helpful and timely for service delivery systems’ responsiveness to pressing social and service issues. An example of this is the report we released this week, *Youth Substance Use Services in B.C. – An Update*. You can find that report here: <https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/reports/monitoring-reports/youth-substance-use-services-in-b-c-an-update/>

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the staff of the government ministries, authorities and community-based organizations with whom we work closely. Over the past two weeks, we have received briefings and engaged in many discussions focused on how best to serve and support children, youth, families and young adults who are particularly vulnerable at this time. From the front lines to senior leadership within the social services sector, it is clear to me that there is a deep commitment to finding a way forward and acting quickly and creatively to support the young people we all care about in this time of great uncertainty.

Please remember, at the RCY we remain available and ready to help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J Charlesworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth