
THE LAUNCH OF **NUNAVUT'S** CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY OFFICE

Representative for Children and Youth
2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT



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NUTAQQANUT INULRAMIRNULLU
UQAQTIKHAANIK
REPRÉSENTANT DE
L'ENFANCE ET DE LA JEUNESSE
REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Photography:

This annual report uses stock photos and photos by RCY staff and other professional and amateur photographers. Original photos by professional and amateur photographers are noted with photo credit.



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UQAQTIKHAANIK

REPRÉSENTANT DE
L'ENFANCE ET DE LA JEUNESSE

REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

May 24, 2017

The Honourable George Qulaut
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
PO Box 1200
Iqaluit, NU, X0A 0H0

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is my pleasure to present the *2015-2016 Annual Report of the Representative for Children and Youth* to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. This document reports on the period April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016. This report has been prepared in accordance with section 35(1) of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

Respectfully,

Sherry McNeil-Mulak
Representative for Children and Youth
Territory of Nunavut

Our Mission:

We are an independent

child and youth

advocacy office

that ensures the Government of Nunavut

supports and protects

the rights and interests of young Nunavummiut.





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I wish to express my steadfast commitment to use my term to establish a highly functioning, supportive office for young Nunavummiut; one that will work diligently to

change the child rights landscape

in the territory and ensure the interests of young people are respected and their

rights upheld.

Sherry McNeil-Mulak

Representative for Children and Youth



MESSAGE FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE



The 2015-2016 fiscal year was a historic one for Nunavut's Representative for Children and Youth's (RCY) office. On September 30, 2015, exactly mid-way through the fiscal year, the majority of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* came into force and, after months of development, our office officially opened to begin working with Nunavut's children, youth and their families. I can still clearly remember the anticipation and enormous sense of responsibility our entire team shared on that day!

The foundation we had built during office development was immediately tested on opening day when we received our very first client contacts for individual advocacy support. Developing our individual advocacy program had been a key priority for our team and we were pleased to know that, on the day we opened our office, we had a robust program in place.

Our office went on to open 41 individual advocacy files over the short six-month period between our opening and March 31, 2016. Through our work on these files, we have already seen some common themes begin to emerge and we have begun to learn some hard truths about Government of Nunavut (GN) services and programs for children and youth. Time and again, our initial advocacy work has reinforced that many of the issues Inuit children, youth and their families face today have deep roots in the past, namely the federal government's policy of assimilation – the establishment and operation of residential schools being a central element of such policy¹. We have also learned young people's lives can be complicated. In fact, too complicated at times, given their young age. Because of this, young people often need assistance from more than one government department and this assistance must be well-coordinated to effectively address a young person's intersecting needs and create a good path forward. Unfortunately, we have also learned that all too often this level of coordination does not exist within the GN. We have also learned that there are simply not enough services available in Nunavut to support the well-being and rights of young people and their families.

Moving into 2016-2017, we carry all of this knowledge forward. It will inform and shape our work as our office continues to grow and evolve. We also remain committed to raising awareness of our office and child rights. One of the most powerful ways our office can make a difference is through sharing information with young people and their families about their rights and coaching them in self-advocacy. I believe there is nothing more empowering than when a young person understands their rights and harnesses that knowledge to advocate for themselves.

With that in mind, I wish to express my steadfast commitment to use my term to establish a highly functioning, supportive office for young Nunavummiut; one that will work diligently to change the child rights landscape in the territory and ensure the interests of young people are respected and their rights upheld.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sherry McNeil-Mulak". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sherry" being more prominent.

Sherry McNeil-Mulak
Representative for Children and Youth

¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). *Honoring the Truth Recognizing the Future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.*

ABOUT OUR OFFICE

The Representative for Children and Youth's office is still a relatively new organization in Nunavut. The law that established the RCY's office, the *Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) Act*, was passed in September 2013; Nunavut's first Representative, Sherry McNeil-Mulak, was appointed in June 2014; and the office officially opened in September 2015, after a 15-month development period.

Because the office is still in its infancy, and the concept of child rights and formal child advocacy are also new to Nunavut, many Nunavummiut have questions about what our office does, and how we can help our territory's young people. In this section, we provide some basic information about our office in the hope that it clarifies our office's role and the many ways we can support children and youth.

Briefly stated, the RCY's office is an independent office of Nunavut's Legislative Assembly that is devoted to ensuring the rights of young Nunavummiut are respected. We have a legal mandate to advocate for their interests and rights and to assist the Legislative Assembly in ensuring their needs are met. Typically, we work on behalf of children and youth who are 18 years old and younger. However, the *RCY Act* allows us to work with young people up to 25 years of age in specific situations.

OUR MANDATE

Our mandate includes the following specific duties outlined in the *RCY Act*.

- * Ensure children and youth's rights and interests (individually and collectively) are protected and advanced and that government departments and designated authorities² hear and consider the views of children and youth on matters that affect them.

² A designated authority is an agency, board, commission, corporation, office or other body named or described in the *RCY Act*. For simplicity, only the words "government department" appear throughout this annual report to represent both terms.

OUR MISSION

We are an independent child and youth advocacy office that ensures the Government of Nunavut supports and protects the rights and interests of young Nunavummiut.



OUR VISION

All children and youth in Nunavut know their potential, value their identity and feel supported and empowered to express their views in matters that affect them.

- * Ensure children and youth can access government services and that government considers their concerns about those services.
- * Help children, youth and their families communicate with government service providers to improve understanding between them.
- * Inform the public about the rights and interests of children and youth and the role of the office.
- * Give advice and recommendations to government on how to make its programs, services, laws and policies better for children and youth.

WHO WE ARE

The Representative for Children and Youth leads the RCY's office, guiding a team of eight staff in their work. Each member of our team brings a unique personal and professional background to the office, while sharing a passion for child rights and advocacy.

Except for the Representative, our staff are members of the public service as defined in the *Public Service Act*. Figure 1 shows the office's positions and organizational structure. As of March 31, 2016, the RCY's office had staffed all positions, except that of critical injury and death investigator. You can find more information on staffing initiatives in 2015-2016 in this report's Focus on Our Foundation section.



Representative for Children and Youth staff in Iqaluit.

RCY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

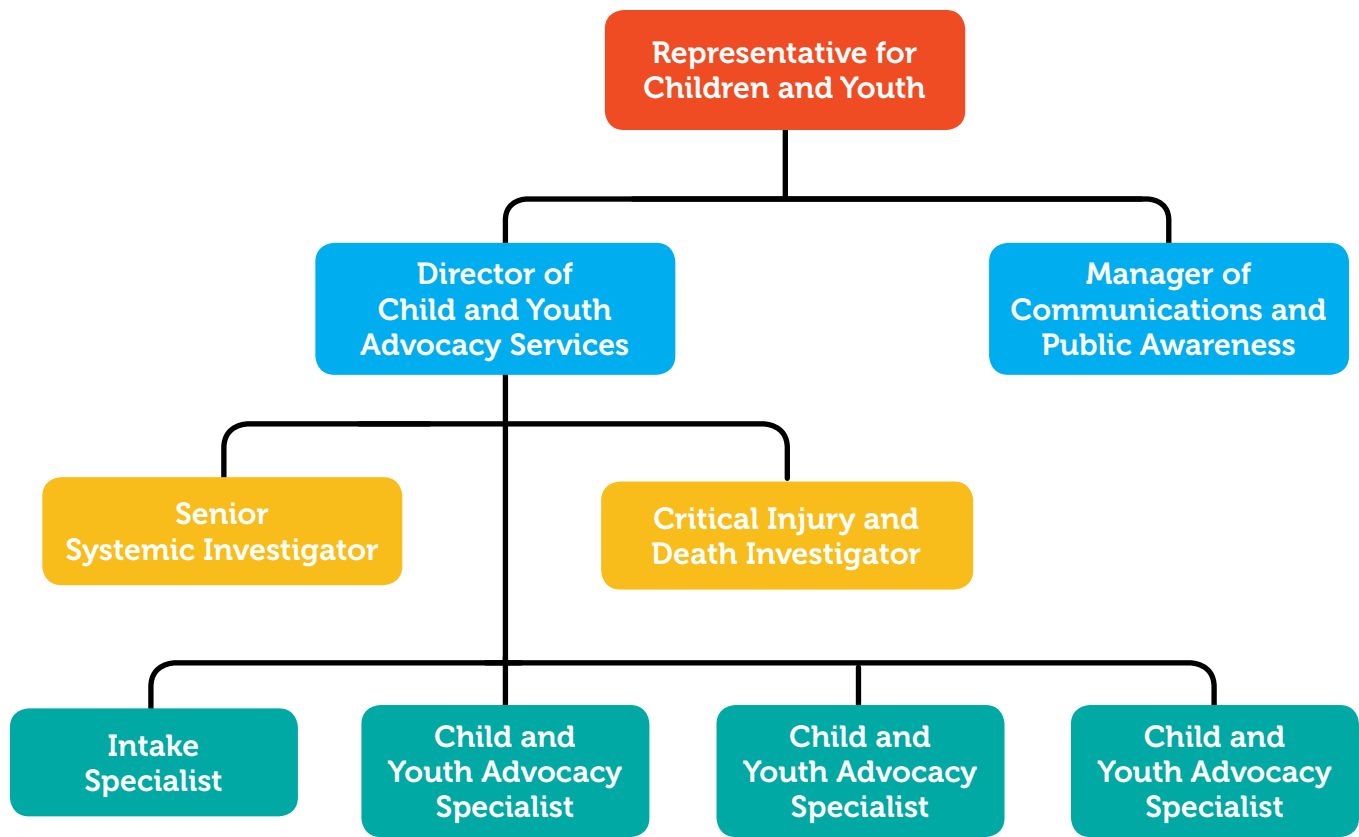


FIGURE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

WHAT GUIDES US

Key documents and concepts guide our staff in their advocacy work. These include the *RCY Act*, the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, Inuit societal values, the voice of the child and national advocacy standards.

THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH (RCY) ACT

Nunavut's *RCY Act* is the law that identifies the office's duties, responsibilities and overall mandate. It also describes key principles that guide RCY staff in their work. It was passed in 2013 and all its sections are now in force – except section 4(1)b³, which will come into force at a later date.

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC)

The *CRC* is an international agreement that identifies child rights recognized by countries around the world, as well as the roles and responsibilities governments and adults have to support these rights. Child rights are the essential things all children are entitled to because they can help children live a life of dignity and thrive. Canada signed the agreement in 1991.

INUIT SOCIETAL VALUES

The *RCY Act* clearly states the Representative must apply Inuit societal values in carrying out the office's work. The RCY's office follows the same eight guiding values that the GN has adopted. Please see the Inuit Societal Values and Our Work section of this report for more information.

³ This section of the *RCY Act* pertains to the reviews of critical injuries and deaths.

THE VOICE OF THE CHILD

A fundamental right in the *CRC* is children's right to express themselves in matters that affect them. This is what our office calls the voice of the child. The *CRC* also states that governments must consider a child's opinion, according to the child's age and maturity. The voice of the child guides our staff's work on a daily basis.

NATIONAL ADVOCACY STANDARDS

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) has set national advocacy standards for child advocates to follow in their work. These standards cover such things as confidentiality, accessibility and accountability. They help hold advocates accountable to a minimum level of service and provide a way to evaluate our office's advocacy services.



Christa Kunuk meeting with young students in Cape Dorset.



One of the most powerful ways
our office can make a difference is through sharing
information with young people and their families about their
rights and coaching them in self-advocacy. I believe there is
nothing more empowering
than when a young person understands their rights and
harnesses that knowledge to advocate for
themselves.

Sherry McNeil-Mulak
Representative for Children and Youth

WHAT WE DO

Our office works in four areas: individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, reviews of critical injuries and deaths and communications and public awareness. Given this broad mandate, in 2015-2016 we continued to use a phased-in approach to roll out our core services – with our initial focus on developing and launching the office’s individual advocacy and public awareness work. The following gives a brief overview of the services we offer.

INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY

The GN provides many programs and services to support children and youth. However, despite best intentions, problems can occur. A child, youth or family member may not know who to contact about a program or they may feel uncomfortable raising questions with service providers. Maybe a service provider hasn’t returned a parent’s repeated calls or followed-up, as promised. Perhaps a youth in care doesn’t understand why he or she can’t visit a family member. In these types of situations, our office can offer individual advocacy support by providing information, coaching in self-advocacy, or advocacy intervention.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

Nunavummiut can always contact our office for information on child rights and/or government services and programs that support children and youth. Even if we receive a request that falls outside of our mandate, we always help connect the client to the person or resource that can provide the necessary information.

SELF-ADVOCACY SUPPORT

It is not always easy for a young person or a concerned parent or guardian to express his or her views to government service providers. At any point in the advocacy process, our staff can coach an individual in self-advocacy, so that that he or she feels more empowered to express his or her views.

ADVOCACY INTERVENTION

Most of the cases that come to our office involve advocacy intervention. This is when one of our child and youth advocacy specialists works directly with a young person and with a government service provider(s) to resolve an issue. A government service provider could be a teacher, nurse, a mental health worker, a social worker, or a probation officer – any individual who works for the GN and provides a government service or program to children or youth.

We are able to resolve some issues in a matter of days or weeks, while others may take several months and involve multiple service providers from many departments. Typically, advocacy intervention includes direct work with service providers, meetings with the child or youth and their parent or caregiver and case conferences. Whenever possible, the voice of the child leads the advocacy intervention. .

Every individual case that is brought to our office’s attention is unique and we tailor our response to meet each case’s circumstances. That said, the overall individual advocacy process generally involves three sequential phases: intake and assignment, investigation and problem solving, and resolution and follow-up (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2:
THE INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY PROCESS

Intake and Assignment

- * A youth, parent, guardian, service provider or community member reaches out to us for support.
- * We determine if the issue falls within our scope.
- * If it does, we assign a child and youth advocacy specialist to the case.

Investigation and Problem Solving

The advocacy specialist:

- * Learns about the child or youth's issue and what rights are being breached.
- * Interviews the people involved and reviews relevant documents to determine the facts.
- * Works with the child or youth, family members and service providers to develop an advocacy plan to guide the process toward resolution.

Resolution and Follow-up

- * The advocate follows up to make sure the solution is implemented and the child's rights are supported.
- * When appropriate, the advocate notifies the systemic researcher/investigator that there is a potential systemic issue.

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Sometimes many young people encounter the same issue. When this happens, we call the issue “systemic.” Typically, systemic issues affect many children or youth, happen when government policies or services aren’t working as intended, have a good chance of reoccurring if not addressed and may require government to change its policies, practices or laws.

Systemic issues can come to our office’s attention in many ways. Our staff might see the same issue present repeatedly in different individual cases and then flag this for further investigation. MLAs or youth parliamentarians might raise an issue in Nunavut’s legislature. A media outlet could bring an issue to the public’s attention. Young people and adults can also contact our office directly with a systemic issue they would like to raise to our attention.

When our office becomes aware of a systemic issue, we can then choose to investigate it. We can do this informally or formally. Informal systemic advocacy mainly uses discussion and collaboration to bring about change. Formal systemic work tends to be more in-depth and typically results in written reports to government departments. Our office can then choose to release these reports publicly.



RCY staff at the office's first staff retreat.

REVIEWS OF CRITICAL INJURIES AND DEATHS

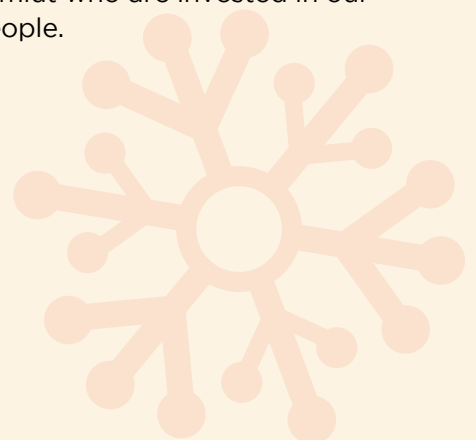
Our office can also review when a child or youth receiving government services dies or experiences a serious injury. These reviews provide meaningful opportunities to learn from mistakes. They are not about placing blame. Rather, they are opportunities to understand what went wrong and to initiate changes to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

We recognize these reviews are highly sensitive. They require the proper knowledge and capacity to conduct thoroughly. As a result, we are currently developing this program with particular attention and care and the section of the *RCY Act* related to reviews of critical injuries and deaths is not yet in force.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

The RCY’s office has a legal duty to raise Nunavummiut’s awareness of child rights and the office’s mandate. But equally important are the opportunities this area of our work creates to listen to Nunavummiut and learn directly from them about issues affecting young people.

Our public awareness work takes many forms: presentations, information sessions, community outreach, contests, developing information material, attending public events and maintaining the office’s website (www.rcynu.ca). All these activities share one goal: to build and strengthen relationships with children, youth, families and the many Nunavummiut who are invested in our territory’s young people.



When Someone Contacts Our Office

Jeff Kheraj

Intake Specialist

I firmly believe in helping people, it's a very important value to me, both at home and at work. For me, one of the most important things when working with people, in person, over the phone, or through email, is to make sure that they feel comfortable and safe. So when someone first contacts our office, I am always courteous and respectful. I also let them know that I am here to support them and to work with them towards a shared goal of ensuring that a child or youth's rights are respected.

There are a few things that I immediately look for when someone first reaches out to us. First and foremost is whether they require urgent help from an emergency service such as the RCMP, a doctor or nurse, or child protection services.

I also always gather some basic information by asking simple questions. Who are they? Where are they? How best to contact them? What is the reason they reached out to us? Asking these questions helps me determine some of the facts and whether the case falls within our mandate. It also supports our child and youth advocacy specialists when they take over the case.

Whether a case falls within our mandate or not, I always take the time to listen and provide the support I can. It is always my hope that people leave here feeling safe and heard.



COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where are you located?

We are located on the third floor of the First Nations Bank building at “Four Corners” in Iqaluit. If you are in Iqaluit, drop by for tea!

Which government department are you with? Who is your minister?

The RCY’s office is independent of government so we don’t report to a minister. Instead, we report to all members of the Legislative Assembly.

Do I need a parent’s consent to refer a child to you?

Our preference is to include family in the advocacy process whenever possible but a parent’s consent is not needed to make a referral to our office. However, if a child is under the age of 12 we might need to notify the child’s parent or guardian. We only do this if we are certain it won’t harm the child.

Does the fact that my child has rights mean they can do anything they want?

Absolutely not. The CRC fully recognizes the important role parents have in raising and guiding their children towards adulthood. But a key right is that children and youth can share what they think about decisions that affect them. This does not mean the child or youth will get what they want.

Are you going to open an office in my community?

Our office is in Iqaluit but we can help anyone in Nunavut by phone or email. We will work in the evenings in Iqaluit to talk with people across Nunavut. We are a very new office so we currently don’t have plans to open new locations.

How old do you have to be to come see you?

No one is too young to seek our support. We generally work with children up to 18 years of age but can work with young people up to 25 under specific circumstances. If you need advocacy support or know someone who might but aren’t sure if they are too old, we encourage you to contact our office.

Who can refer to you?

Anyone who has a concern about a child or youth not receiving adequate services from the GN can make a referral to us. This means a parent, an aunt or uncle, grandparents, any family member really, including foster family. Service providers such as teachers, nurses, social workers, doctors, and lawyers can refer to us as well. And, of course, we always encourage children and youth to contact our office directly if they would like our support.

Are there limits on the type of help your office can provide? In other words, what can’t you do?

There are a few things our office can’t help with. Under the law, we can’t act as your lawyer, get involved in custody arrangements, or get involved in a private disagreement with a business or private organization. But if there’s something you want help with, contact us anyway. If we can’t support you, we will find someone who can.

Can your office help Nunavut children living outside of the territory?

We suggest you contact us if you are a Nunavut resident but in government care or receiving government services outside of the territory. There are a few different ways we can help!

AN ADVOCATE VISITS – THE COMIC STRIP



INUIT SOCIETAL VALUES AND OUR WORK

The *RCY Act* emphasizes that respect for Inuit societal values can support the development of healthy young people and families. The Act further states the RCY's office must apply these values when carrying out its duties and exercising its powers.

Inuit societal values are an integral part of what we do and how we conduct our business and we remain committed to continuous learning and growth in this area.

Throughout 2015-2016, our office engaged in specific activities that supported greater understanding of these values in the workplace. These included:

- * Training in Inuit societal values and Inuit history.
- * Incorporating Inuit societal values in the office's policy and procedure manual.
- * Development of the office's Elder advisor program.
- * Setting Inuit societal values as a standing agenda item at team meetings.
- * Meeting with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Katimajit (IQK).
- * Participating in Uqausirmut Quviasuutiqarniq, Nunavut's annual Inuktitut and Inuit culture celebration.

STAFF TRAINING

We recognize that ongoing training in Inuit societal values is an essential part of our office's development. It is also integral to our staff carrying out their work in a way that honours not only the *RCY Act's* principles but our territory's culture and history.

In 2015-2016, our team participated in two training sessions delivered by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. The first focused on Inuit societal values, the second on Inuit history. Specific topics covered included the Inuit language, traditional culture, exploring Inuit societal values,

the intergenerational effects of colonization and residential schools. This training deepened our staff's understanding of how these values helped Inuit survive, the ongoing impacts of residential schools and colonization on parents, children and youth, and the ways Inuit societal values can foster healing today. In addition, members of our team also participated in a course on Inuit ways of counselling offered by the GN's Department of Culture and Heritage.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

One of the office's most important tasks before opening was to develop a policy and procedure manual. An essential part of this work was to meaningfully incorporate Inuit societal values into the manual to ensure they guide our staff's daily work. The completed policy and procedure manual links various office procedures to specific values. Some examples of this in the manual include:

- * Noting that the office's intake process is an opportunity to practice *tunnganarniq* by being welcoming to all clients.
- * Reminding advocacy staff to follow the value of *piliraqatigiinni* – working together for a common cause – when working with government service providers on individual advocacy cases.
- * Identifying that systemic reviews are an opportunity for staff to practice *qanuqtuurniq*, being innovative and resourceful, when making recommendations.



ELDER ADVISORS

Under the *RCY Act*, the office can seek the expertise of Elders on matters related to dispute resolution, Inuit culture and Inuit societal values. Our team firmly believes that Elders' counsel in these three areas can help us better support children, youth and their families.

In 2015-2016, we completed a public nomination process to select Elder advisors for our office. We began the process in May 2015 with a call for nominations seeking Elders from across Nunavut with prior experience promoting Inuit culture and societal values. By the end of 2015, the office had chosen five elders to serve as its first Elder advisors: Bessie Sitatak of Kugluktuk, Regilee Ootook of Pond Inlet, Lucy Makkigak and Helen Iguptak of Rankin Inlet, and Meeka Arnakaq of Pangnirtung.



The Representative and Qikiqtani Inuit Association President PJ Akeegagok meeting in Iqaluit.

TEAM MEETINGS

We began including Inuit societal values as a standing agenda item at our monthly staff meetings in 2015-2016. This decision has led our team to have meaningful discussions on such items as training in Inuit societal values and Inuit ways of counselling, the Inuit language, Elder advisors and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work. Our staff have also had the opportunity to consider how to best apply Inuit societal values in specific work situations. Keeping Inuit societal values as a standing agenda item at these meetings has helped foster an office environment where these values play a significant role in guiding our work.

INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGIT KATIMAJIIT

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Katimajiit (IQK) is a valuable resource for our office as the group has extensive experience advising the GN on Inuit traditional knowledge. In October 2015, RCY staff and IQK met during their fall meeting in Iqaluit. This was an opportunity for our staff to share information about our office and to hear directly from IQK members on such topics as:

- * The impact of residential schools on Inuit traditional parenting practices.
- * The need for more parenting supports and classes.
- * The need for the ongoing presence of Elders in Nunavut schools, as well as teaching of traditional values and skills in schools.

UQAUSIRMUT QUVIASUUTIQARNIQ

RCY staff participated in Nunavut's month-long celebration of the Inuktitut language and Inuit culture in February 2016. Our participation was a small way to encourage the speaking of Inuktitut in the office and appreciation for Inuit culture. Activities included non-Inuktitut speaking staff working with Inuktitut-speaking staff on basic phrases. These phrases were connected to the 2016 theme of Inuit Annuraqausingit, or Inuit clothing.

A young child is standing in a snowy field, wearing a blue and black snow suit with a hood. The child is looking towards the camera. The background is a bright, clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image, with a yellow horizontal line above and below it.

It is not always easy
for a young person or a concerned
parent or guardian to express his or her
views to government service providers.
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our staff can coach an individual in
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2015-2016: THE LAUNCH OF NUNAVUT'S CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY OFFICE

All the activities that the RCY's office carried out in 2015-2016 were in some way linked to the launch of the office's advocacy services on September 30, 2015. They also loosely fall into one of three general themes:

- * focus on our foundation
- * focus on building relationships
- * focus on advocacy

The theme of focus on our foundation includes the essential office development work that took place over the first six months of 2015-2016 – a continuation of the work that we initially began in June 2014. The focus on building relationships theme includes our communication and public awareness efforts that spanned the entire 2015-2016 fiscal year and the focus on advocacy theme includes both what we did and what we learned over our first six months of offering advocacy services.



RCY staff marking the office's September 30 opening with an open house in Iqaluit.

FOCUS ON OUR FOUNDATION

No new office can offer effective services that meet clients' needs without first ensuring its foundation is in place. Such basic tasks as staffing, training, infrastructure development, as well as policies and procedures are essential to a new organization's success.

Planning for the office's opening began soon after Nunavut's Representative was appointed in June 2014. Over the office's first fiscal year (2014-2015) staff worked on more than 200 development tasks. We then continued this work over the 2015-2016 year, emphasizing staffing and training, further development of our case management system and the office's policy and procedure manual, as well as acquiring legal counsel for the office.

STAFFING

Having a full staff complement in place before office opening was a key priority for our office. We recognized we would need a full team to offer quality and timely advocacy services and to effectively develop all our program areas. By March 31, 2016, eight of the office's nine allocated positions had been filled (Table 1). We had also begun the job competition process for our last unfilled position - critical injury and death investigator.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF FILLED STAFF POSITIONS

POSITION	START DATE
2014-2015 Staff Hiring	
Director of Child and Youth Advocacy Services	November 24, 2014
Manager of Communications and Public Awareness	January 23, 2015
Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist	March 9, 2015
2015-2016 Staff Hiring	
Senior Systemic Investigator/Researcher	April 7, 2015
Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist	June 8, 2015
Intake Specialist	July 13, 2015
Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist	October 19, 2015 (three-year term position)

STAFF REFLECTION

The Need for Building a Sound Foundation

Lynn Matte

Director of Child and Youth
Advocacy Services

Our office recognized early on that we would need a strong foundation to ensure that each person who contacts us receives consistent, professional support. To achieve this, we provided our entire team the same essential training opportunities. We also worked to develop a comprehensive policy and procedure manual to guide staff in their work. Ensuring these items were in place before we opened has empowered our staff to provide excellent and consistent services. Staff can clearly share with people who reach out to our office what we can and cannot do. Clients also have confidence in the advocacy process as our staff have clear follow-up and response guidelines.

In addition, when new members join our office we provide them with the necessary orientation and training before they take on the responsibility of serving the public. When the entire team is on the same page, the organization can move forward together with confidence and purpose.



SIVULIQTIKSAT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Sivuliqtiksat Internship Program offers Inuit beneficiaries on-the-job training in specialized and management positions, with an end goal of increasing Inuit beneficiary representation in such positions. Interns spend one to three years following a specific training plan under the guidance of a designated trainer.

Our office applied to participate in the program and was notified in December 2015 that its application was approved. The office's short-term goal is to have an intern selected in the 2016-2017 fiscal year. The long-term goal is to train the intern into the third child and youth advocacy specialist position, which is currently filled on a term basis to align with the internship timelines.

INVESTING IN STAFF

The RCY's office is the only organization in Nunavut that specializes in advocating government for children's rights and interests. Given this specialty, we continuously seek out staff training and development opportunities to strengthen internal capacity. Table 2 summarizes the training and development initiatives RCY staff participated in this fiscal year.



TABLE 2. STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT 2015-2016

TRAINING	DATE COMPLETED
Inuit Societal Values	April 2015
RCY Staff Retreat	May 2015
Compassion Fatigue	May 2015
Joint Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse	May 2015
Inuit History	June 2015
Client Service	June 2015 and December 2015
Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)	June 2015
RCY Policy and Procedure Manual	July 2015 and October 2015
Case Management System	August 2015
RCY Act Training	March 2015 and August 2015
Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST)	September 2015
CCCYA Biennial Conference	September 2015
Inuit Way of Counselling	November 2015
Media Training	November 2015
Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout and Self-Care	February 2016
Child and Human Rights Extension Certificate	Begun November 2015 (two modules complete by March 2016)

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

STAFF RETREAT

The RCY's office held its first staff retreat in May of 2015. This was an opportunity for our new team to learn about each other and the office's work. Time was also given to explore Inuit societal values in relation to our work and to develop the office's mission and vision statements. Including the initial team in the development of these guiding statements resulted in mission and vision statements that staff are firmly invested in.

CCCYA BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Every two years, a member of the CCCYA hosts a conference focused on advocacy issues and advocate development. Newfoundland's Provincial Child and Youth Advocate hosted this conference in 2015 in St. John's. The RCY's office sent the director of child and youth advocacy services and one of our child and youth advocacy specialists to the conference. It provided networking opportunities with advocacy staff from other jurisdictions in Canada, as well as informative sessions on topics such as youth engagement and aboriginal children and youth in child welfare.

Representative for Children and Youth staff taking Child Rights Impact Assessment training in June 2015.

RCY ACT TRAINING

In 2015-2016, the office prioritized training staff on the *RCY Act*, which defines the office's guiding principles, mandate, duties and powers. Staff needed a sound understanding of the Act to ensure they could work effectively with children and youth, as well as government departments and service providers. The customized training sessions focused on a detailed review of the Act as well as the presentation of hypothetical case scenarios. All RCY staff are required to complete this training prior to receiving their designation of authority from the Representative.

CHILD RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT (CRIA) TRAINING

Many organizations around the world use the CRIA tool. It is a systematic process that helps organizations gauge how their actions may impact children and their rights. Using CRIA can help organizations develop programs and services that better promote child rights and support government in developing legislation and policies that meets their obligations under the *CRC*. It can also support child advocates in applying a child rights lens to assessing and evaluating specific cases and systemic issues. In 2015-2016, our office approached UNICEF Canada to deliver CRIA training. UNICEF delivered this remotely to our staff in Iqaluit via WebEx. The training included a review of child rights, an introduction to CRIA and opportunities to apply CRIA to hypothetical case scenarios.



OTHER DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to extensive staff training and development, our office completed many other key projects in 2015-2016 to support the launch of our advocacy services – including the implementation of our case management system, securing legal counsel and completion of our policy and procedure manual.

By the end of 2014-2015, the office had purchased a case management software program and had a contract in place for training and support. In 2015-2016, our staff, with support from the software program's developers, focused on customizing the system. After completing this customization, we then tested the system and provided staff with training. The case management system serves as the information backbone of the office's individual advocacy work. Future work is planned to further refine the system to meet the office's systemic advocacy information management needs.

In 2015-2016 the office also secured independent legal counsel. Such counsel is needed, at times, to help our staff interpret government's legal obligations to children and youth. In November 2015, our office signed a contract with Olthuis Kleer Townshend.

Finally, we also completed the office's operational policy and procedure manual in 2015-2016. Such a manual is vital to a well-functioning and effective organization. The development of the RCY office's manual was informed by practices and procedures from other child and youth advocacy offices as well as the *RCY Act*. The manual was also influenced by our distinct work environment and shaped by Inuit societal values.

All these projects were completed before office opening, ensuring the office had the administrative systems and workflow processes in place to support timely and effective advocacy services for young Nunavummiut and their families.

STAFF REFLECTION

The Value of CRIA Training

Nancy Pellerin

Senior Systemic Investigator

In 2015-2016, I attended a workshop facilitated by UNICEF Canada on how to use CRIA. Participating in the workshop helped me more fully understand how government actions can affect young people's rights. I also learned how to use the tool to evaluate how decisions adults make can impact children's rights.

This training has empowered me to look at systemic issues now in a new way – a way that is focused on the rights of the child. It has also left me more determined to use systemic advocacy to drive positive changes for children and youth in Nunavut.



FOCUS ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Another theme of our work in 2015-2016 was building relationships with our key stakeholders: children and youth, Government of Nunavut departments and service providers, families and the public, and partner organizations such as the CCCYA. We believe that effective communication can best occur when all parties involved have opportunities to speak and to listen. Therefore, our work in this area consisted of activities designed to both share information about our office and create opportunities to hear and learn from our many stakeholders. For a complete list of our key meetings, presentations and community visits, please see page 37 of this report.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Our office is committed to involving children and youth in our work. We want to ensure that children and youth – our most important stakeholders – have ongoing opportunities to contribute to what we do and how we do it. In 2015-2016, we involved youth in our office in several ways.

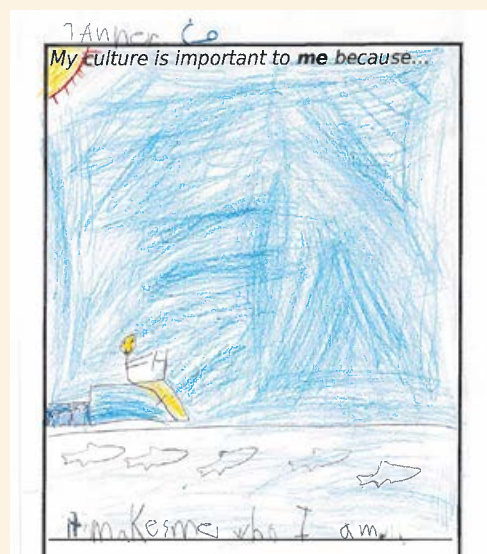
YOUR STORY YOUR VOICE CONTEST

In 2015, we launched our inaugural Your Story, Your Voice Contest to mark National Child Day. Countries around the world celebrate this day every year to recognize the signing of the CRC. We developed this contest as one small way to raise awareness among young Nunavummiut of child rights and our office.

The contest theme for 2015 was a child's right to culture. The office publicized the contest through PSAs on local radio, faxes to schools, the RCY website and a news release. We received 70 entries from across Nunavut, with some entire school classes submitting entries. A panel consisting of RCY staff members then reviewed all the entries and selected the following winners:

Tanner Kalluk – Resolute Bay

“My culture is important to me because it makes me who I am.”



Byron Rudolph – Gjoa Haven

“I have the right to my culture because we could go hunting or go seal hunting in the spring and if we catch a caribou or seal in the spring we can cook the meat. When I go hunting I always shoot an Elder's gun and if I catch a caribou or if we catch a caribou, our Elders always teach us how to skin the caribou.”



Sarah Sagiaturuk – Kimmirut

“Being an Inuk means so much to me. There are over seven billion people in the world and I am Inuk, and that makes me feel so lucky and thankful. In our culture we throat sing, seal hunt, go camping, boating during the summer and travel around the ice during the winter by dog teams. We travel to Iqaluit by snowmobile. We also go berry picking, ptarmigan hunting and have feast gatherings with everyone welcomed. We make homemade boots, coats, pants and even mitts made of seal skin, fox fur, rabbit fur and other wild animals. In our culture everyone we know is welcomed in our homes. Going out on the land makes me feel so Inuk. Honestly, I just love being Inuk. In addition, the youth in Kimmirut have the opportunity to go out on the land every Saturday for the next ten weeks with guides to hunt, fish, catch ptarmigan and learn how to build an igloo. This will be very exciting and will expand my knowledge of my Inuit culture.”



Class Participation Prize - Netsilik School's High School Class -Taloyoak



NATIONAL INUIT YOUTH SUMMIT

In August 2015, the RCY's office helped sponsor the 10th Biennial National Inuit Youth Summit (NIYS) in Iqaluit, Nunavut. The summit was an opportunity for approximately 100 Inuit youth from 53 communities across Inuit Nunangat to reflect on accomplishments and identify joint priorities. The summit offered delegates an opportunity to gain leadership skills and strengthen cultural connections.

A variety of training workshops and facilitated discussions took place on several topics, including education, economic development, employment and training, mental wellness and suicide prevention, Inuit language and culture and youth engagement. The RCY team highly values opportunities for youth to come together to discuss these important topics and exchange ideas. Our presence at the summit allowed us to hear youth's views on these important issues and to learn from them. As a child rights advocacy office, the voice of young people serves as an essential guide for our work.

SUMMER STUDENT

As part of our efforts to involve youth in our work, we hired a summer student in 2015-2016. Megan Blair, a long-time northerner working towards her Bachelor of Arts in Human Rights and Social Justice at Carleton University, assisted with office development tasks and researched how other advocacy offices engage youth in their work. Having a student on staff proved a true asset to our office, bringing a unique and valuable perspective to our development work.

GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT (GN)

While all our stakeholders are important, we identified early on that building relationships with the GN should be a priority for our office. We recognized that strong relationships with the GN would help reinforce our common goal of supporting young Nunavummiut. We also knew that GN departments and staff would have new legal obligations under the *RCY Act* once it came into force. Therefore, it was essential that we provide information related to our office's legal powers and duties, as well as the GN's legal obligations under the Act, before September 30, 2015.

Recognizing this, in 2015-2016 we rolled out a targeted information campaign that we had started planning for in the previous fiscal year. Key activities included:

- * Holding introductory meetings with the senior management teams of the departments of Family Services, Health, Education and Justice.
- * Calling front-line service providers and managers of government child and youth-serving facilities in all Nunavut communities to introduce our office.
- * Mailing out information packages to government leaders, department heads and service providers about the office's work and the legal obligations of the *RCY Act*.
- * Working with the Department of Family Services to distribute information about the office to Nunavut foster parents.
- * Following up with front-line service providers to measure the effectiveness of the campaign.

STAFF REFLECTION

What I've Heard from Youth

Christa Kunuk

Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist

Since starting with the RCY's office, I've had the opportunity to speak with many children and youth. Wherever I go, I get questions about who I am and what I can offer young people. Sometimes youth are quiet and cautious when I first meet them, but they are always listening. When I explain that the focus of our office is to help children and youth, I can see their interest grow because they hear there are supports we can offer them.

One thing I've heard many times from youth is that they feel it is very hard to talk to adults, especially adults who provide services to them or are in roles of authority. It is often difficult for youth to say what they are thinking because they are concerned they will be criticized or not believed. That is when my work is most rewarding: when I can talk with youth, get a good understanding of what they need, and either coach them to feel comfortable using their own voice or advocate with them to ensure their rights are met.



FAMILIES AND THE PUBLIC

For our office to fulfill its mission and vision, we also need to build strong relationships with Nunavummiut across the territory – particularly families. We want everyone across the territory to know what we do and feel comfortable accessing our services. We also want all Nunavummiut to feel invested in our office, to know that we are here to learn from them and support them.

However, reaching parents, families and community members in all of Nunavut's 25 communities has its challenges: an Iqaluit-based office, remote communities, poor or limited Internet access, the high cost of travel and shipping, working across three time zones, etc. To overcome these challenges, we have undertaken a variety of communication initiatives to build our relationships with Nunavummiut.

WEBSITE

The RCY's office identified creating a website as a key communications priority. A primary consideration became developing a website that would prove useful to the office's three primary audiences: children and youth, parents and families, and the general public. As a result, the website is divided into two sections or streams: one for families and the public, the other specifically for children and youth. While there is some overlapping information in both, the families and the public stream contains more technical and in-depth information, while the section for children and youth offers information on our office presented in a more youth-friendly manner.

The office launched its website on November 20, 2015, in conjunction with National Child Day. Between November 20, 2015 and March 31, 2016, 877 users visited the website for a total of 1851 visits. Of those total visits, 57% were from Nunavut.

OFFICE OPENING CELEBRATION

On September 30, 2015, our team marked the *RCY Act* coming into force and the office opening with a news conference, an open house and an interview on QulliQ, CBC North's pan-territorial morning

show. These events garnered some publicity and recognition for our opening but still allowed our team to focus on delivering advocacy services as soon as we opened.

Then, on October 23, 2015, we hosted a larger community celebration in Iqaluit. This event was another opportunity to raise public awareness about the RCY's office. An information table staffed by RCY team members as well as a rights-themed photo booth for families and children provided opportunities for guests to learn about children's rights and the role of the office. One of the highlights of the evening was the entertainment provided by a local youth band, the Daniel Kolola Band. More than two hundred people attended, including Minister Keith Peterson and Maatali Okalik, President of the National Inuit Youth Council, who both spoke at the event.



Maatali Okalik, President of the National Inuit Youth Council, speaking at the opening celebration for the RCY's office in October 2015.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges our office faces is that it is an Iqaluit-based organization designed to serve 25 communities across the entire territory. Though having one location in Nunavut's capital has some benefits, it also makes it more difficult to build relationships with children, youth, families and service providers in communities.

To overcome this, we have assigned each of our three advocacy specialists a region in Nunavut that they are responsible for building relationships with. They then conduct regular outreach in their regions through community visits – creating opportunities to hear and learn directly from Nunavummiut and share information about supports offered by the office.

During these visits, staff make presentations to children and youth at schools and through local youth organizations. They also meet with government service providers (such as teachers, nurses, community health representatives, social workers, probation officers etc.), hamlet officials, Elders and other community organizations and leaders. Staff also make themselves available to the public by setting up information tables at local stores.

In the first six months since opening, our team visited Hall Beach, Igloolik, Cape Dorset, Kugaaruk, Gjoa Haven. The office plans to visit all remaining communities in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

STAFF REFLECTION

Value of Community Visits

Colby O'Donnell

Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist

When we visit communities, we always give presentations to children, youth and service providers. But it's also an opportunity for me to learn directly from community members, especially children and youth. Each community in Nunavut is unique, each with its own energy. While in communities, we spend a lot of time with youth and we have discussions with MLAs, GN service providers and hamlet leaders. We also make ourselves available to the public at local stores.

In-person visits are really the most effective way for me to build relationships with communities. It is not enough to just gather information over the phone. I need to see the physical environment that children and youth are living in. For example, if someone explains to me that there is a lack of programming for youth in the community, I need to then have a visualization of what the community looks like. Is there available space that may work for youth programming? What other services are being provided to youth and where? As an Iqaluit-based office, travelling to communities is essential to our relationship-building and public awareness work.



CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATES (CCCYA)

In September 2014, the RCY's office officially obtained a membership seat on the CCCYA. The CCCYA is an alliance of provincial and territorial advocates that have legal mandates to support child rights. In 2014-15, our relationship with the CCCYA was invaluable, and we benefitted greatly from members' support and knowledge as we set out to establish our office. Our membership also allowed us to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with other member organizations in March 2015. This MOU provides for the seamless and timely accessibility of advocacy services for children and families moving between provinces and territories.

In 2015-2016, we continued to enjoy the support of the CCCYA while more actively contributing to CCCYA initiatives, including:

- ✱ Participating in the CCCYA working group that developed national child and youth advocacy standards, which the Council approved in September, 2015.

- ✱ Attending the biennial CCCYA conference from September 16-17, 2015 in St. John's, NL.
- ✱ The Representative, as a member of CCCYA, attending the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's events in Ottawa in June 2015.
- ✱ The Representative, in January 2016, becoming the lead on the CCCYA's working group on youth participation.
- ✱ Contributing to the creation of the following CCCYA statements
 - Statement on Child and Youth Mental Health, May 2015
 - Declaration of Reconciliation at the closing events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, June 2015
 - Media Statement about National Child Day - Call to Reduce Number of Indigenous Children in Care, November 2015

FOCUS ON ADVOCACY

The final focus of our work in 2015-2016 were activities related to providing advocacy services. In this fiscal year, we maintained our phased-in approach, prioritizing the development and launch of our individual advocacy program on September 30, 2015. At the same time, in 2015-2016 we continued to develop our systemic advocacy program.

Over our first six months since opening, we began to see common themes emerge from our individual advocacy cases and these themes have flagged potential areas for further exploration once we launch our systemic advocacy program. This section of our annual report shares statistics our office gathered from our individual advocacy files, as well as emerging themes we have noted.

INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY – A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT OF OUR FIRST SIX MONTHS

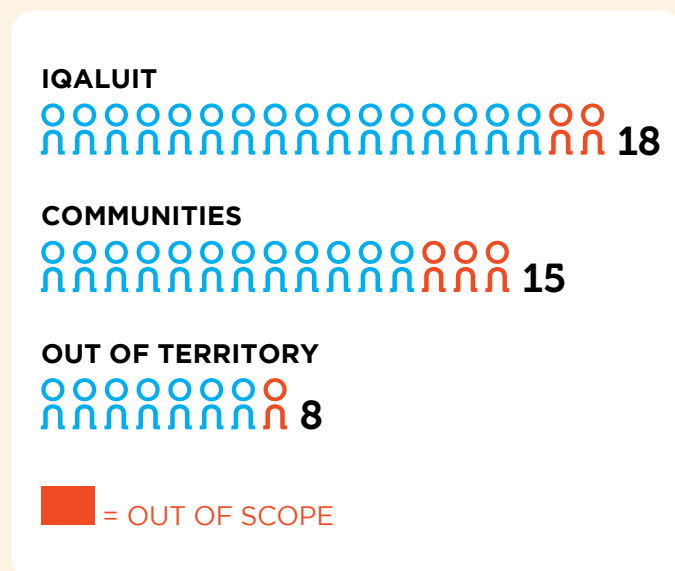
OVERVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY FILES

Our office opened 41 individual advocacy files between September 30, 2015 and March 31, 2016. Of these, 24 (58%) involved males and 17 (42%) involved females. Eighteen of the files (44%) were based in Iqaluit, 15 (36%) in other Nunavut communities and 8 (20%) involved young Nunavummiut who were outside the territory.

It is important to note that of these 41 files, our staff determined that six fell outside the scope of the Representative's authority. When a request for support first comes into our office, staff must always make an initial determination if we have the authority to intervene under the *RCY Act*. They do this by carefully assessing each file against key provisions outlined in the Act. Reasons that a file may fall outside of the office's scope include, but are not limited to, the age of a client or whether the

situation involves a private family matter with no government involvement.

FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY FILES



REFERRAL SOURCES

Our office welcomes anyone concerned about a child or youth receiving, or who should be receiving, GN services to contact our office. Referrals can come directly from children and youth, but also from family members, foster parents, GN service providers and concerned citizens.

In 2015-2016 government service providers made the most referrals to our office – accounting for more than a third of all referrals (39%). Based on our work to date, we have learned that service providers (i.e. nurses, doctors, school principals, teachers, social workers, mental health workers) often feel under-supported in their roles. In fact, we noted that many encountered barriers themselves when trying to navigate the system of supports available to young clients. Such barriers included challenges when making referrals or difficulties when trying to access services from another GN department. This ultimately led service providers to

express concerns about the quality of care young Nunavummiut are receiving.

Our office encourages service providers to continue to raise matters affecting children and youth to our attention. We acknowledge and value the unique view they have into the lives of children and youth and we recognize the struggles they themselves often face in carrying out their duties.

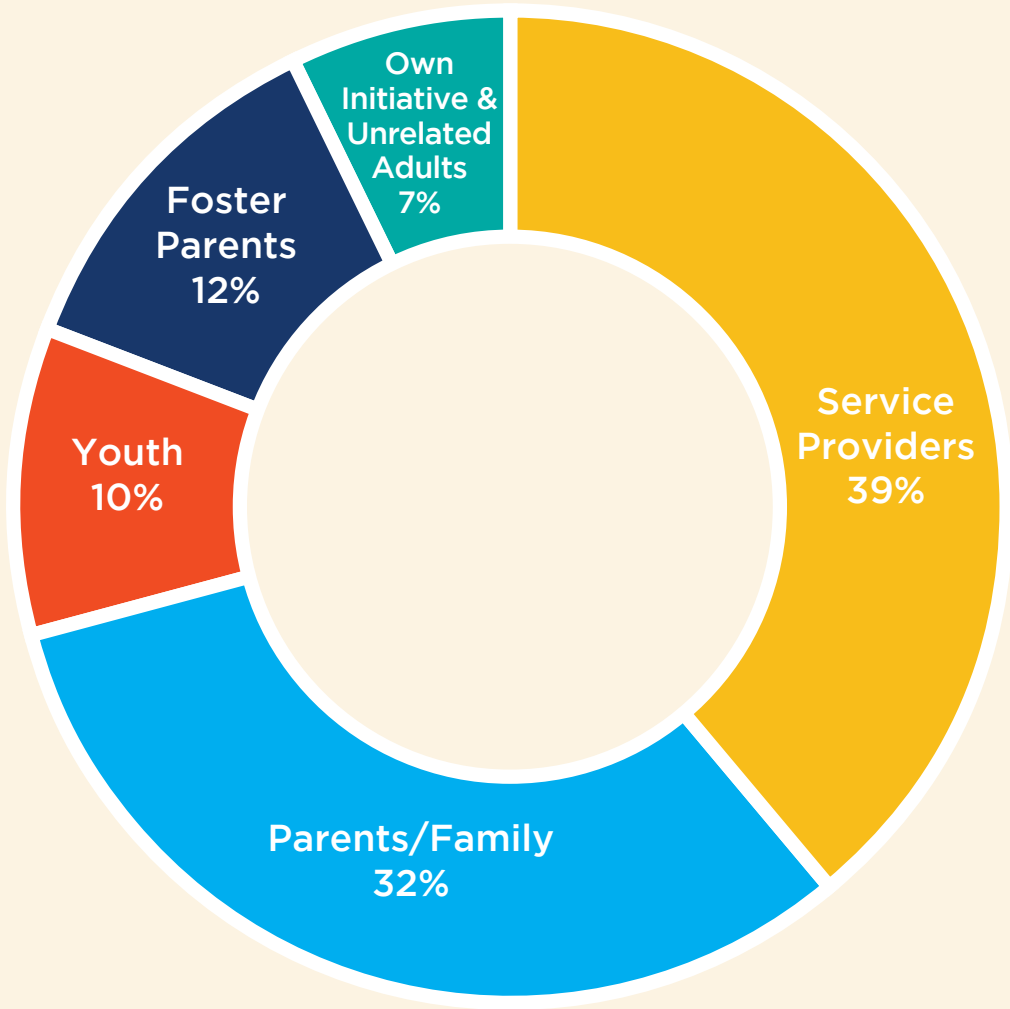
Our second-largest source of referrals in 2015-2016 was families (32%). Mothers, fathers, grandparents and other family members all worked with our office to resolve concerns with government services. Many were frustrated with unresponsive government systems and reached out to our office after their own attempts to access necessary services were unsuccessful. Many also contacted us concerned

about a lack of communication and follow-up, which often left families waiting for information or appointments that never materialized.

Only 10% of our referrals came directly from children and youth. Not surprisingly, referrals from young people typically occurred after one of our advocacy specialists held a youth specific presentation or visited a community.

Current or former foster parents and adults unrelated to the child or youth (including the Representative) were the last two referral groups we noted in 2015-2016 — respectively making up 12% and 7% of the office’s total referrals.

FIGURE 4: REFERRALS BY SOURCE



CASES BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT AND SERVICE TYPE

Many GN departments provide programs and services for children and youth. However, the departments of Health, Education, Family Services and Justice deliver the bulk of such government services in Nunavut. Of the 35 cases⁴ we investigated in 2015-2016, 22 cases, (63%), related to an issue that only involved a single government department. From this, the Department of Family Services was the sole department involved in 15 cases and all of these cases were related to child protection issues. The Department of Health was involved solely in four cases and the majority concerned mental health services. The Department of Education was solely involved in two cases and both were related to student support. The Department of Justice was solely involved in one case.

The other 13 cases (37%) we investigated in 2015-2016 involved children and/or youth with more complex needs and, as a result, involved multiple departments. Among the 13 multi-department cases investigated, one involved the Departments of Health and Education, one involved the Department of Family Services and the Nunavut Housing Corporation, another included the Departments of Education and Community and Government Services, six involved both the Department of Family Services and the Department of Health and the remaining four involved Health, Education, Family Services and Justice.

FIGURE 5: CASES INVOLVING SINGLE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS



⁴ The six out of scope files have been removed when examining cases by department and cases by type of government service.

OUR FIRST SIX MONTHS – EMERGING THEMES FROM INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY CASES

Though our office had not yet launched our systemic advocacy program in 2015-2016, we began to track common themes from our individual advocacy cases. Tracking these themes will help inform and guide our office's future systemic work. Looking back over our first six months of providing individual advocacy support, we can see three clear themes emerging.

The first theme we noted from our cases in 2015-2016 was that GN programming and services were not adequately supporting families, which, in turn, made it difficult for families to support their children. The second theme was that government service providers often failed to consult children and youth about decisions that affect them. Thirdly, all too often government service providers and/or departments worked in silos, and did not adequately coordinate their services.

EMERGING THEME: LACK OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

Our office is mandated to ensure the GN supports and protects the rights and interest of children and youth. What many people may not realize is that both the *RCY Act* and the *CRC* recognize that to support child rights, governments must also support families.

The *RCY Act* states that the Representative has a duty to hold the government accountable for providing necessary support and services to children and youth. However, the office must carry out this duty while respecting two of the Act's key principles: 1) families are the primary source of care and guidance for children and youth and 2) wherever possible, the office should exercise its duties in a manner that supports and strengthens family relationships. The *CRC* further emphasizes the responsibility governments have towards

families, parents and guardians. Article 18 and 27 of the *CRC* state that governments must do what they can to support parents and families in meeting their responsibilities for children's safety, growth and development. Furthermore, it specifically identifies that this includes a commitment to provide programs and services to adults responsible for children.

One of the most striking themes we observed from our initial individual advocacy cases in 2015-2016 was the lack of – and need for – programs and services to better support families. Members of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Katimajit also highlighted the need for more parenting resources and family supports when we met with them in October 2015.

Many families in Nunavut face persistent challenges because of the intergenerational impacts of colonization. The effects of displacement, disempowerment, coerced settlement into communities, residential schooling, and the erosion and undermining of traditional forms of socialization, justice and education continue to be felt today.⁵ As a result, there is a strong need in Nunavut to invest in family-focused resources, recognizing that supporting family well-being is key to supporting the well-being of children and youth.

While there are certainly some good programs and services to support families in Nunavut, the provision of these services is not robust or consistent in all communities.

Adequate family supports, such as parenting and healthy lifestyle programs, mental health and social supports, addiction treatment and family-friendly activities are all needed. Moreover, a lack of follow-up support from service providers who connect families with such resources often compounds the problem. When these supports are inconsistent or non-existent there are very clear barriers to success for affected families. Family support issues pertaining to availability and access of programs and services are all systemic issues that the *RCY* office has noted and will be tracking.

⁵ NTI. *The Status of Inuit Children and Youth in Nunavut: 2010-2011 Annual Report on the State of Inuit Culture and Society*. pp 5-6.



CASE SAMPLE

Lack of Programs and Services to Support Families

A concerned individual brought a matter to the office's attention because they were worried for a child's health and safety. The individual had observed signs of parental neglect and abuse as a result of substance abuse. The case was forwarded to one of our child and youth advocacy specialists to investigate.

The advocacy specialist made inquiries and learned that relevant government service providers were working with the family. Both parents were undergoing counselling to deal with addiction issues. Unfortunately, however, this support was not enough to help the parents overcome the underlying issues leading to their addictions. Service provider follow-up with the family had also been insufficient. These untreated addictions created neglectful conditions for the child. As a result of the ongoing instability in the home, the child was engaging in escalating harmful behaviour.

The parents were offered strategies to address the child's behavioral issues but again follow-up and monitoring of the family's progress was insufficient. As a result, the child's behavior reached a point of crisis. The advocacy specialist involved urged the child's care team to arrange an assessment for the child. The assessment determined that the child should be enrolled in a treatment program outside of the territory. With the consent of the parents, the child was placed in an appropriate foster home, enrolled in the treatment program and has since stabilized.

With more robust family supports, follow-up and monitoring, the need for out-of-territory treatment and foster home placement might have been avoided. Investing in stronger supports for families could reduce the number of crisis situations that occur by addressing issues early and at the root cause.

EMERGING THEME: HEARING AND CONSIDERING YOUNG PEOPLE'S OPINIONS

Another emerging theme we observed in our cases from 2015-2016 was that government departments and service providers are not adequately seeking out and considering the views of the children and youth they serve.

Under the *CRC*, governments have agreed that, when adults are making decisions that affect children and youth, young people have the right to say what they think and that adults must consider their opinions. This does not mean that adults must agree or follow a child's opinion. Instead, adults and governments have responsibilities to consider a child's opinion together with all the other relevant circumstances. This obligation to respect the views of the child is found in Article 12 of the *CRC*.

Unfortunately, in the cases we have worked on thus far, GN departments and service providers too often fail to protect and promote this right. Sometimes service providers may simply not be aware of this right and their responsibilities to uphold it. Other times, service providers may mistakenly assume a child is too young to ask him or her for an opinion. Alternatively, service providers with heavy caseloads may believe that they know the most appropriate course of action, and, to save time, proceed without consulting the child.

Regardless of the reason, disregarding this key right can lead adults to not recognize the unique circumstances of each child. It also violates each young person's right to participate in decisions that affect them. Furthermore, if adults make decisions about a young person without seeking that person's input, the unintentional message is one of disempowerment.

Our office stresses that the right to be heard is not based on a child's age. Skillful questioning can bring out insightful opinions from even very young children because they are sensitive to their surroundings and the people and routines in their lives. Additionally, all children gain the capacity to share their views at different rates, depending on many factors such as parental guidance, culture, and life experience.

At the RCY's office, we support and promote the evolving capacity of each child and youth that we work with. Research has shown that allowing young people to participate in decision making can lead to better, more appropriate decisions and can further the development of active, responsible citizens. When government service providers seek input from children and youth they are respecting the rights of the child, supporting the growth and development of young Nunavummiut, and helping to build a stronger society.



CASE SAMPLE

Hearing and Considering Young People's Opinions

Our office received information that the Department of Family Services needed to make alternative foster care arrangements for a youth who was already in the care of the Director. Without involving the youth, the department had decided to relocate the youth to another community.

A child and youth advocacy specialist spoke with the youth about the situation and learned the youth had valid concerns about the proposed move. The advocacy specialist arranged a meeting with both the youth and department officials at which the youth presented opinions on the proposed plan and suggested an alternative. After some discussion, all parties agreed to the youth's alternative plan.

As a result of the advocacy intervention, this youth's right to be heard was supported and an inappropriate and unsafe placement was avoided.

EMERGING THEME: INADEQUATE COORDINATION OF CARE

Young Nunavummiut have many rights, including the right to an education, to health care, to safety and to an adequate standard of living. These rights have to be supported in a holistic way to allow the young person to develop and thrive. Too often in our individual advocacy work in 2015-2016, our staff observed that professionals from various government departments were making decisions without coordinating their efforts. Without active coordination, government support is incomplete, not timely, and, sometimes, inappropriate because vital information is not shared.

Through our individual advocacy work, we have seen poor coordination among service providers who work within the same department lead to missed referrals, delays, and sometimes services denied to children in need. Likewise, poor coordination among service providers from different departments often results in gaps in service and delays and, ultimately, negative outcomes for children and youth.

We have noted that poor care coordination often starts with a lack of communication among service providers who are responsible for supporting a child or youth. Through our individual cases, we often observed that service providers do not keep the parents informed, and they do not keep each other informed about the child's needs and potential solutions. Often, the focus is on an immediate need, without much thought given to planning for the next steps and the future of the child or youth. Moreover, concerns about keeping information about a child or youth private and confidential can create barriers to service providers talking with each other about a child or youth for whom they have shared responsibility.

Without proper care coordination, the GN is not supporting the rights of young Nunavummiut, considering their best interests, or achieving the best outcomes for our youth.

CASE SAMPLE

Inadequate Coordination of Care within a Department

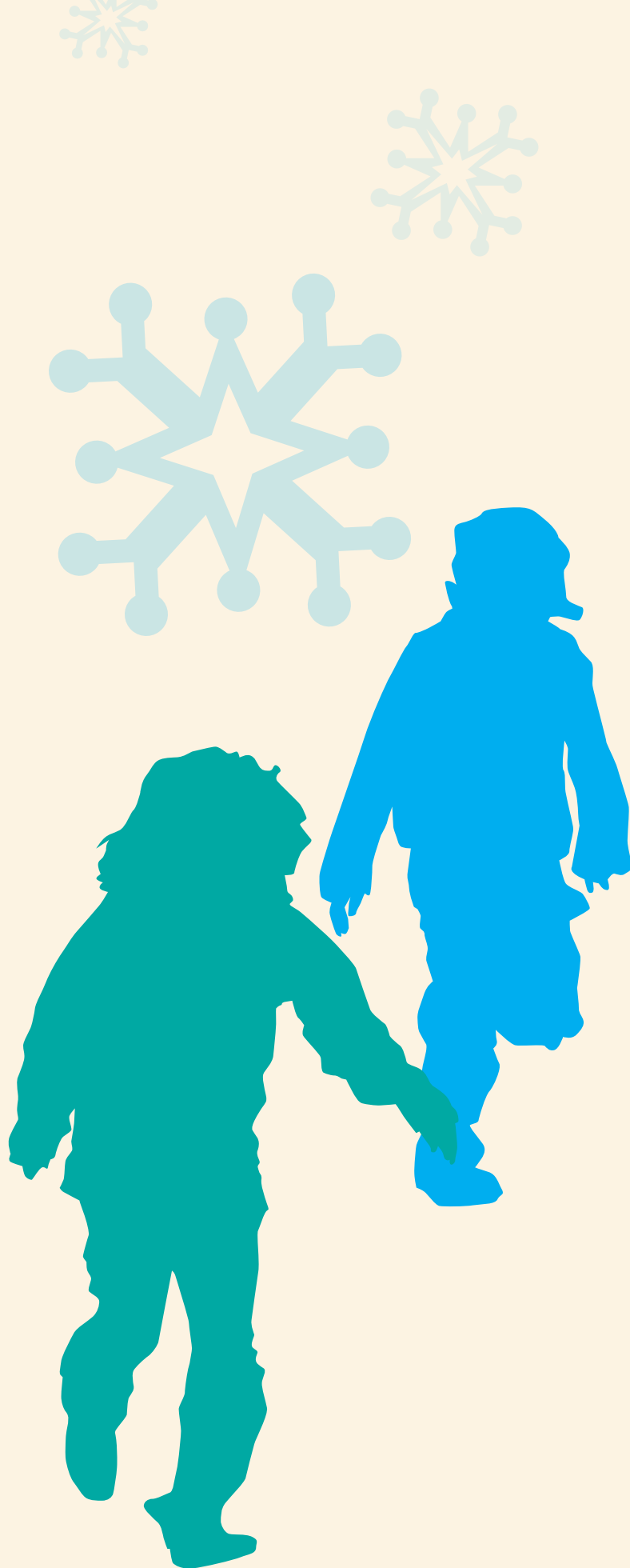
In Nunavut, coordinating dental surgeries is far from straightforward. When such procedures are needed, three different service areas in the Department of Health are involved. In addition, Health Canada often plays a role⁶. Service providers from all four areas need to communicate with each other and with parents or guardians to meet a child's needs.

One of our cases in 2015-2016 involved a very young child who suffered severe pain for several months while waiting for dental treatment. The dentist had decided that surgery was needed and the child needed to be sent out of the community for treatment. In this case, it was vitally important that the process from referral to approval to treatment moved quickly. However, considerable time had passed since the child's family had heard anything about the needed surgery.

The child and youth advocacy specialist assigned to the case pieced together who was responsible for each step in the process and what had happened to the referral. Our office learned that no service provider working in any of the four service areas had taken responsibility for following-up to make sure the request for surgery was moving forward. The professionals were not communicating with each other or with the child's parents. As a result, the referral had been lost and the child had not been put on the wait list for surgery. During all of this, the child suffered severe pain and was on a mostly liquid diet because an infection had developed. With better coordination of care, the child's prolonged suffering would have been avoided and the child's right to health care would have been supported.

Our advocacy specialist worked with department officials to coordinate a surgery appointment. Eventually, the child travelled out of territory to receive the necessary surgery.

⁶ This case sample reflects the process for Inuit beneficiaries that qualify for dental services under the Non-Insured Health Benefits program.





CASE SAMPLE

Inadequate Coordination of Care between Departments

Failure to coordinate services among multiple GN departments can have a profound impact on children and youth. This is particularly evident for youth who are involved in the youth criminal justice system.

In Canada, under section 19 of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*, a justice of the peace⁷ may order a case conference for young offenders to get expert advice. This advice can then inform sentencing or the terms of release. These case conferences are particularly helpful when a youth who is about to be released from custody does not have a safe place with appropriate supports to go to unless a service provider intervenes. Sentencing for young offenders does not necessarily automatically mean jail time or probation.

Our office worked with a youth who lacked a sentencing plan that took into account the youth's complex needs. The RCY team organized a case conference and our staff took on a coordination role, facilitating meetings among social workers, mental health counsellors, corrections officials, the Crown prosecutor and the defense lawyer to discuss options and develop a plan to present to the court. The youth was consulted to make sure their opinion was considered.

The discussion covered all aspects of the youth's care to maximize the youth's potential for development and minimize the potential for repeated criminal behavior. The plan was presented to the justice of the peace and was ultimately incorporated into the sentencing hearing. The youth now lives in an appropriate treatment centre and the RCY's office has received reports that the youth is doing well.

⁷ A section 19 may be convened by any one of the following: justice court judge, the provincial director, a justice of the peace, a prosecutor or a youth worker [s.19(1)].

One of our **loudest calls**

will be for the Government and its
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a child's right to participate in **decision-making.**

We will work tirelessly to ensure the GN hears and considers
their opinions and concerns — individually and as a whole.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2016-2017

As we move into 2016-2017, we enter our first full year of offering advocacy services to young Nunavummiut and their families. We begin with a continued sense of motivation and hope, inspired by the many young people and families we have already had the privilege of working with.

We also begin with a clearer sense of the work needed ahead: a deeper understanding of our individual advocacy program, awareness of emerging systemic themes, and a recognition of the need to further strengthen relationships with Nunavummiut.

Many people have already come to our office for individual advocacy support. With each person, we recognize the trust that has been put in our office. We don't take this trust lightly and we recognize that our work must continue to build on this trust – with both former and existing clients, new clients and entire communities.

Going forward, we will continue to work towards launching our core services through a phased-in approach. We will continue to offer individual advocacy support while further developing our systemic advocacy program's policies and procedures, assessment tool and database. Finalizing this work in 2016-2017 will ensure we can confidently launch a robust systemic advocacy program in 2017-2018.

We will also continue to build relationships with our many stakeholders. We will maintain our regular outreach to Nunavummiut across the territory. We will also work towards reinforcing relationships with government departments and service providers. We firmly believe that the principle of piliriqatigiinni is necessary to achieve improvements for young Nunavummiut.

Time after time, in 2015-2016 young Nunavummiut have shown us we must do more to ensure the GN adequately supports their rights. To this end, we will continue to call on the GN to respect all child rights. One of our loudest calls will be for the Government and its service providers to better support a child's right to participate in decision-making. We will work tirelessly to ensure the GN hears and considers their opinions and concerns – individually and as a whole.



Photo by Carmen Barrieau

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS, KEY MEETINGS AND COMMUNITY VISITS

Wherever possible, our office tries to meet with Nunavummiut in person to share information about our office and listen directly to their concerns. Below is a list of the RCY office's presentations, key meetings and community visits in 2015-2016.

- * Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre
- * Deputy Ministers Committee
- * Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
- * Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
- * Department of Health Senior Management Team
- * Department of Justice Senior Management Team
- * Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates
- * Department of Justice Staff
- * Department of Health (Joint Executive Committee)
- * Department of Family Services Senior Management Team
- * Department of Education Senior Management Team
- * Arctic Children and Youth Foundation
- * Department of Family Services Staff
- * Office of the Chief Coroner
- * Qikiqtani Inuit Association
- * Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Katimajit
- * Annual General Meeting of the District Education Authorities
- * Community Justice Outreach Workers
- * Iqaluit Group Home
- * Nunavut Housing Corporation
- * Akausisarvik Mental Health Treatment Centre
- * Iqaluit Northmart Public Awareness Display
- * Iqaluit Arctic Ventures Public Awareness Display
- * Isumaqsunngittukkuvik Young Offenders Facility
- * Department of Health (Oral Health Service Providers)
- * Schools, GN Service Providers and Community – Cape Dorset
- * Schools, GN Service Providers and Community – Hall Beach
- * Schools, GN Service Providers and Community – Igloolik
- * Schools, GN Service Providers and Community – Gjoa Haven
- * Schools, GN Service Providers and Community – Kugaaruk



The Representative, Sherry McNeil-Mulak and Christa Kunuk, Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist, visiting Hall Beach.



Kaajuq Kablalik, Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist, providing information to the public on the RCY's office at a local store.



Colby O'Donnell, Child and Youth Advocacy Specialist, speaking to young people. The office regularly conducts outreach at Nunavut schools.

BUDGET REPORT

Representative for Children and Youth's Office
Summary Statement of Budget and Expenditures
Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 2016

	BUDGET	EXPENDITURES	% OF TOTAL BUDGET
Permanent Salaries	1,083,000	1,124,198	62%
Casual Wages	-	3,971	0%
Travel & Transportation	185,000	45,984	3%
Materials & Supplies	185,000	108,016	6%
Purchased Services	65,000	51,940	3%
Utilities	15,000	-	0%
Contract Services	225,000	175,763	10%
Fees & Payments	5,000	11,383	1%
Other Expenses	-	18,005	1%
Tangible Assets	19,000	25,690	1%
Computer Hardware & Software	20,000	5,280	0%
TOTAL	\$1,802,000	1,570,230	87%
SURPLUS		231,770	13%