

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Children and Youth in Care Day Event

*Amplifying, celebrating and learning from First Voice Advocates with lived expertise in Child Welfare*



partnered with



to host YICD2020 featuring a panel of First Voice Advocates from



Honorariums for young people provided by:



## What is Children and Youth In Care Day?

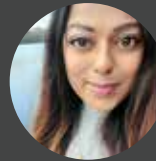
Children and Youth in Care Day was a recommendation from the My REAL Lifebook Report. It happens annually in Ontario on May 14<sup>th</sup> and was created to reduce stigma and recognize children and young people in care.

## Who is OCAC?

OCAC is a federally incorporated non-profit with provincial focus – Ontario. It is driven by First Voice Advocates representing child welfare, children's mental health, youth criminal justice system, (dis)Abilities communities, and additional interconnected and intersectional identities and experiences.



**Wendy Hayes**  
Co-founder,  
Executive  
Coordinator

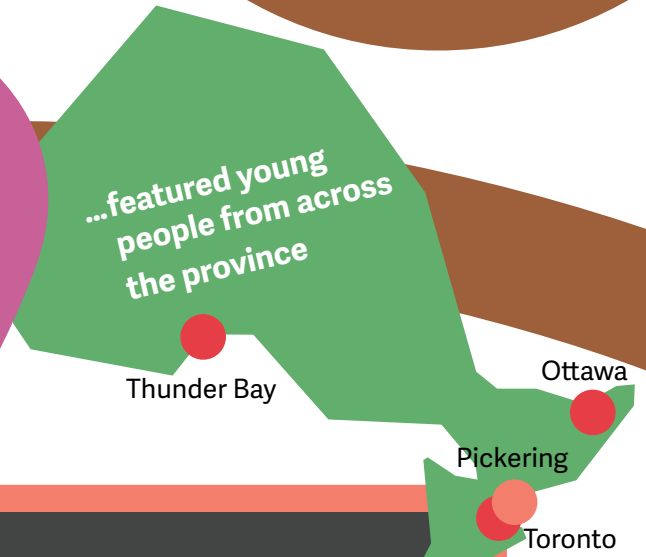


**Cheyenne Ratnam**  
Co-founder,  
Executive  
Director/Lead

## What is a First Voice Advocate?

To respect the dignity and expertise of people with lived expertise, we champion the term First Voice Advocate. This is the language that OCAC's Executive lead has been utilizing and pushing for within other sectors, and this is the language that OCAC will utilize when referring to Leaders with lived expertise. Leaders are bigger than their lived expertise, and can also have professional and academic backgrounds interconnected to their overall expert skill-set and invaluable knowledge.

## The Online Panel...



... and reached **3,420 people** with the live event



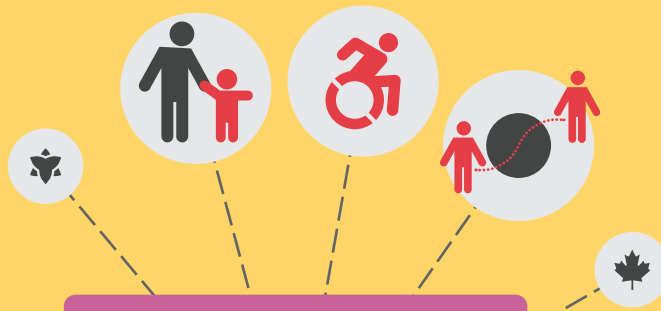
**433 comments** (& counting)

**144 shares** (& counting)

# OCAC led two virtual town halls

to address the unique challenges that COVID-19 exacerbated and created for young people.

Over 100 people attended our town halls including young people from various communities including (dis)Abilities, child welfare, (im)Migration, as well as representatives from both the Provincial and Federal governments.



## Identity for Young People From Care is Complex

- Everyone is on a different journey re: child welfare experience/identity.
- Child welfare can be a vehicle for bringing rich diversity to our experiences as we live with families, and other young people, from different backgrounds and walks of life.

## In the Same Breath

- Coming into child welfare systems often alienates and removes us from our cultural roots.
- The Child Welfare system is disproportionately overrepresented by Indigenous Peoples and Black Peoples. Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (JEDI) framework(s) and strategies must be normalized to meaningfully serve and support Indigenous Peoples, Black Peoples, and Peoples of Colour (IBPOC).
- Both in child welfare, and in our larger communities, young people need access to people, communities, groups, religious and spiritual connections, and culturally appropriate resources and supports to stay connected to, or re-connect to, our roots.

## Key Learnings

We crafted the questions for the Children and Youth in Care Day Panel with these learnings in mind...

**#1**

Listen to First Voice Advocates

**#2**

Identity deserves a complex and dynamic approach. Identity and roots play an important role in healing, surviving, and thriving.

**#3**

Turning 18 is hard.

**#4**

Access to technology is not equitable for young people from child welfare

**Learn About 5 Ways Your School Can Better Support Children and Young People in and From Care**

(as recommended by the OACAS Youth For Change Steering Committee)

Go to [www.oacas.org/5-ways-your-school-can-better-support-children-and-youth-in-care/](http://www.oacas.org/5-ways-your-school-can-better-support-children-and-youth-in-care/)

## COVID-19 Compounded Existing Issues & Challenges

### PRE-EXISTING REALITY:

Child welfare is a pipeline into poverty, poor health and homelessness

### COVID-19 LAYER:

COVID-19 impacted wellbeing negatively across multiple wellness domains including financial, physical and mental health.

### WHAT WE CAN DO:

Better crisis planning. Critical reflexivity re: Social Determinants of Health and Wellbeing.

**PRE-EXISTING REALITY:**  
Aging out at 18 is hard and scary



**COVID-19 LAYER:**  
Aging out into a more dangerous Ontario with COVID-19. Layer of uncertainty with moratorium.



**WHAT WE CAN DO:**  
Move from Arbitrary Age Indicators to a Readiness Based System that is led by First Voice Advocates in partnership with the government. An Ethical Systems Reset is needed.

**PRE-EXISTING REALITY:**  
Indigenous children and young people get disconnected from their communities



**COVID-19 LAYER:**  
With physical isolation measures and lack of access to technology, there was further disconnect.



**WHAT WE CAN DO:**  
Work with Indigenous communities and Indigenous Child and Family Wellbeing Supports to ensure connection to communities, elders, traditions, and language are not lost. Build meaningful and ongoing rapport with Indigenous children and communities.

**PRE-EXISTING REALITY:**  
Access to technology is not equitable, many young people do not have internet, computers, smart phones...



**COVID-19 LAYER:**  
Community resources young people relied on such as libraries closed. Young people may not have been able to continue with schooling due to technological and logistical barriers.



**WHAT WE CAN DO:**  
Ensure young people do not leave care without these necessities.

### A Note About Online

Moving to an online format gave people from remote communities access to services, programs, and opportunities traditionally offered in large cities such as Toronto...

- 1 if they already have access to the technology they need to use online services...
- 2 but some services do not translate the same way. Young people relying on in-person mental health and additional services suffered significantly when these programs closed or moved to online platforms (which may not have been accessible for all using the services/programs).

# Where do we go from here?

Lived experts have been, and are, over-consulted and over-researched about issues that non-First Voice stakeholders (child welfare agencies and governments) are already aware of. We don't need more consultations or roundtables. We need change led by First Voice Advocates.

Young people have been speaking and writing about the challenges of the child welfare system since the 1980s.



## What we've been up to since CYIC2020...

Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition is working on what we've coined as an **#EthicalSystemsReset** to move from Arbitrary Age Indicators to, what we call, a Readiness Based System (RBS). In order to do this, we have partnered with Youth In Care Canada (YICC). We are currently working toward a partnership with the government and will continue to engage with fellow First Voice-led organizations. This work is of vital importance.

We envision this work to be cross-jurisdictional, and will work with government to identify interconnected ministries and sectors.



## What you can do...

Partner with First Voice Advocates to bring meaningful change at multiple levels – individual, community, organizational, municipal, provincial, and federal. As well, pay First Voice Advocates equitably for the work they produce and lead.

### Stay connected



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<http://bit.ly/ocac-subscribe>



The funding for this infographic was generously provided by



First Nations Child & Family  
Caring Society of Canada