

A CASE STUDY OF ONTARIO CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY

A Case Study of Child and Youth Advocacy in Ontario

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Abstract

In 2019, the Province of Ontario underwent a drastic change regarding child and youth advocacy. The Progressive Conservative Government announced they would close the Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate and shift some of its functions to the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario in a new Children and Youth Unit. Although research exists on child and youth advocacy in Canada, relatively little attention has been paid to this change. In this study I sought to address a knowledge gap by investigating how child and youth advocacy has shifted in Ontario and what implications this change has had on the lives of children. This research employed a descriptive case study methodology using one-on-one interviews with nine participants in child and youth advocacy in Ontario, including previous employees of the Provincial Advocate's Office, Children's Aid Society employees, lived experts, and other child advocates. Additionally, *the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007, Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability, 2018*, and reports from the former Advocate's office and the current Ombudsman's Office were analyzed in conjunction with the interviews, using a reflexive thematic analysis. Childism was utilized as the guiding theoretical framework. The key thematic findings from this study demonstrated that child and youth advocacy has important requirements to ensure it is being conducted in a meaningful way; there have been some significant changes in how child and youth advocacy is conducted within the province of Ontario that have had negative effects on the lives of children, but some things have remained the same; as well as there were multiple recommendations made by the participants on how to improve children's experiences with advocacy, such as ensuring advocacy is reinstated in legislation. The implications of this study demonstrate that having a formal appointed provincial child advocate, or legislated advocacy, is critical to ensure child and youth advocacy is taking place at the

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provincial level. Additionally, findings suggest the need for outreach being conducted at the Ombudsman's Office to be expanded to encompass much more than just children's rights pertaining to care. Outreach should include places like schools, and discuss the rights prescribed to children within the UNCRC.

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A Case Study of Child and Youth Advocacy

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Child and youth advocacy in Ontario has undergone significant changes in recent years. The first Canadian provincial Child and Youth Advocate's (CYA) Office opened in 1978 in Ontario (Monsebraaten, 2019). In 2007, through the passage of Bill 165, the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act* established Ontario's first independent office to partner with children to promote and protect their rights while amplifying their voice in matters pertaining to their lives. Per the Canadian Government (2024) and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), a child is classified as a human being who is younger than eighteen years old. The term 'youth' is also used by the Canadian Government to articulate those between twelve and seventeen years old (Government of Canada, 2021). The two terms both refer to a person under eighteen years old, however, 'youth' is used to articulate the older children.

Ontario's Advocate's Office was guided by the UNCRC four guiding principles, as well as the other rights prescribed to children within the treaty. These four guiding principles include Article 2 Non-Discrimination, Article 3 The Best Interests of the Child Principle, Article 6 The Right to Survival and Development, and Article 12 Respect for the Views of the Child (herein UNCRC). The UNCRC is an international treaty that prescribes children with fifty-four specific articles pertaining to their civil, social, and political rights, and has since been outlined by scholars and Advocates alike as a critical tool in advocacy for children (Bacon & Frankel, 2014; Bendo, 2021; Bendo & Mitchell, 2017). The UNCRC was unanimously ratified by Canada's federal parliamentarians in 1991.

On November 15th, 2018, the Ontario Progressive Conservative government leader and Ontario Premier, Doug Ford, announced the government would be repealing the *Provincial*

Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007. Part of this repeal included the closure of the Ontario Provincial Child and Youth Advocate Office (the Advocate's Office), with some of the responsibilities being transferred to a new Children and Youth Unit at the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman. Previous Ontario CYA, Judy Finlay (2018), described the office closure as “especially devastating for young people living on the margins, Black youth, Indigenous youth, young people living in the care of public institutions like child welfare or youth justice and those with special challenges or disabilities” (n.p.).

In Canada, provincial advocacy is particularly important because of the lack of federal structures for children's advocacy. Canada continues to be one of the few countries in the Minority World that does not possess a formal, independent mechanism to monitor the well-being and rights of children, ensuring their best interests are articulated within policy and legislation (UNICEF Canada, 2010). Without leadership at the federal level, child and youth advocacy has remained in the hands of the provincial and territorial governments.

Research Aims and Questions

Through this research, my aim was to develop an understanding of how child and youth advocacy has shifted in the province of Ontario since the 2019 closure of the Advocate's Office. As such, the following research question addresses existing gaps in the literature and guides the proposed study: how has child and youth advocacy changed in Ontario, with respect to the shift in legislation from the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*, to the *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2018*?

Specifically, this study employed a descriptive case study methodology. Descriptive case studies often have the objective of developing a holistic portrayal of the chosen phenomenon “to get the story down for the possible benefit of policy makers, scholars, and other citizens” (Odell,

2011, p. 162). To conduct a descriptive case study, researchers often rely on document review and in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of individuals' experiences in a specific circumstance (Schwant & Gates, 2018). In this study, former child and youth advocates, former employees from the previous Advocate's Office, children engaged in youth-led initiatives from the Advocate's Office, current employees of the Ontario Office of the Ombudsman, and others who had experience with advocacy in Ontario were invited to participate through one-on-one, open-ended interviews. Nine individuals consented to participating in the study. By interviewing children and adults, multiple perspectives could be provided to develop a thorough understanding of the legislature and its perceived impact on child and youth advocacy in Ontario. Additionally, an analysis of the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*; *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2018*; *The Ombudsman Act, R.S.O. 1990*; as well as relevant reports from the two offices were undertaken to complement the interview data and understand changes or stability in Ontario's child and youth advocacy.

Researcher Positionality

This study, including the research aims, questions, methodological design, and interpretation of the findings, have been molded by my personal standpoint, which includes my ontological beliefs. This standpoint recognizes children as capable beings who possess their own unique voice and deserve the opportunity to be both heard and taken seriously by the adults in their lives. My academic experiences in Childhood and Social Institutions (B.A.) at King's University College and Child and Youth Studies (M.A.) at Brock University, coupled with my practical work as a Shaking the Movers Child Right's Workshop Coordinator through the Child Right's Academic Network (Palozzi, 2021; Palozzi, 2023), education assistant, after-school

teacher, and Education and Day Camp Coordinator at the London Children's Museum, have shaped my beliefs in promoting children's rights and participation.

In addition to my academic and practical experience, my age, gender, and location in Ontario have played a critical role in shaping my personal and epistemological standpoint. I am a twenty-four-year-old cisgendered woman residing in southwestern Ontario. In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), I am no longer considered a child and these rights no longer pertain to me. Despite no longer having access to things like the UNCRC, the Advocate's Office, or Ombudsman's Office, I am still passionate, as a twenty-five-year-old, about ensuring youth voices are heard, valued, and taken seriously.

This research began with a thorough review of relevant literature, which has provided critical information on child and youth advocacy in Ontario, how the province compares to rest of the country, and pre-existing research on the matter. The literature review provides a further understanding of child and youth advocacy and highlights the knowledge gap, demonstrating the need for further investigation into child and youth advocacy in Ontario. Following the literature review, the study's methodology is outlined in detail. Within the methodology, details regarding the descriptive case study analysis technique employed, as well as the study's use of Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, can be found. The methodology chapter outlines the specific procedures used during participant recruitment, transcribing interviews, collecting documents relevant to the research question, and how the data was analyzed. After these methods have been explained, the study's findings from the interviews and document analysis are presented and immediately followed by the study's results. The study concludes by outlining the strengths, limitations, and directions for further research into this legislative and policy arena.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter will review literature relevant to the research question: how has child and youth advocacy changed in Ontario, with respect to the shift in legislation from the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*, to the *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2018*? More specifically, the literature reviewed included academic articles, Ontario legislation, media reports, investigative reports, and international treaties. These documents provided the study with information regarding how scholars define the term ‘child and youth advocacy’, Ontario’s past and present advocacy, the Ontario Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario Child and Youth Unit, child advocacy across Canada, and the UNCRC.

What is Child Advocacy?

Many scholars (Cutter et al., 2014; Frankel, 2018; Howe, 2009) have worked to describe what advocacy in relation to children and youth entails. Frankel (2018) states that the term advocacy was coined from the Latin term, *advoco*, “which means to call, invite, convoke, or summon” (p. 16). This depicts advocacy as creating opportunities to demonstrate that something needs to be improved or enhanced, while seeking responses from individuals, such as policy makers, on how these improvements can be implemented (Frankel, 2018). Cutter et al. (2014) further described advocacy as both a strategic and deliberate process that works to create necessary changes in both policies and practice. No matter the population involved, scholars have stated that advocacy often entails amplifying the voices of disadvantaged peoples in a meaningful and co-participatory manner (Cutter et al., 2014; Frankel, 2018). As with other forms of advocacy, child and youth advocacy seeks to incorporate the voices of children through co-participatory opportunities (Howe, 2009).

Types of Advocacy

Within the context of child and youth advocacy, there are three types of advocacy that are important to explore: individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, and public outreach.

Individual Advocacy. A prevalent theme in the literature is individual advocacy, also commonly referred to as case advocacy. Individual advocacy involves the act of receiving complaints from a child, young person, or a concerned adult (Bendo, 2021; Howe, 2009; Hunter, 2020). Often, these complaints are investigated and resolved in partnership with the young person involved in the complaint to ensure their opinions, views, and preferences are taken into account (Bendo, 2021).

Within the working relationship created between the advocate and young person in individual advocacy, scholars (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017; Hunter, 2020; Mitchell, 2003) have articulated the imperative role the UNCRC plays. Specifically, literature has emphasized the importance of Article 12 as it pertains to the inclusion of the young person's voices by asking for their opinions and perspectives before developing a plan specific to their case (Bendo, 2021). Mitchell (2003) further demonstrates the importance of this document, stating that "the UNCRC's ideology of participation and underlying values of mutual respect for children provide the widest international reference points surrounding theoretical constructions of children as competent" (p. 290).

Systemic Advocacy. Geigen-Miller (2016) states that systemic advocacy does not focus on the individual. Rather, it seeks to address a problem within a service or system. In the domain of children and youth, systemic advocacy seeks to create change regarding public services that have a direct impact on this population (Hunter, 2017). When conducting systemic advocacy involving children and youth, advocates analyze the broad issues at play within the institution

but must remain cognizant of the young person's direct experience, as well as have a full understanding of the matter based on research they have done when conducting their investigation (Hunter, 2017).

Much like individual advocacy, literature has also demonstrated the voice of the child as key in systemic advocacy. Hunter (2017) states that despite advocating beyond the individual child or young person, systemic advocacy still works within the realm of their voice to ensure the changes and/or recommendations made are in conjunction with an original complaint. Bendo (2021) reiterates the importance of the UNCRC, in particular Article 12, to ensure meaningful co-participatory opportunities are created, ensuring children are on an equal playing field to the advocate.

Advocacy Through Outreach and/or Education. The third and final form of advocacy referenced in literature involves moving beyond an individual young person and/or institution. This particular type of advocacy is often depicted in the form of public outreach and education (Geigen-Miller, 2003; Hunter, 2017; Whitehead, 2004). Public outreach and education can involve teaching children and their families, as well as organizations and individuals working directly with or for children, about the UNCRC and other child rights prescribed by the provincial or federal government (Geigen-Miller, 2003; Hunter, 2017; Whitehead, 2004). Additionally, an integral part of this outreach and education is ensuring it does not simply involve reading children their rights, but making sure they understand them (Bendo, 2021). Another prevalent component to this form of advocacy is providing information and advice to policymakers, decision-makers, and in some instances, service providers who are publicly funded (Hunter, 2020). These recommendations often take place in the form of public reports, informal meetings, or direct conversations with policy and decision makers (Bendo, 2021).

Past and Present Advocacy in Ontario

Ontario Office of the Child and Youth Advocate 1978-2019

As previously stated, the first Canadian provincial child and youth advocate's office was opened in 1978 by Bill Davis's Progressive Conservative Government (Monsebraaten, 2019). Following this, in 1984 under the *Child and Family Services Act*, the Legislature created the Office of Child and Family Services Advocacy (OCFSA) (Ontario Child Advocate, 2019). Judy Finlay, who was the former Ontario child and youth advocate from 19991 to 2007, noted in an interview that they worked for several years to make the OCFSA an independent office who reports directly to the Legislature, rather than a government minister (CBC Radio, 2018). Furthermore, they pushed to create this change so no one would be able to undermine the role of advocate (CBC Radio, 2018). The OCFSA was not the same as the former Advocate's Office. Rather, OCFSA was also responsible for advocating for "developmentally challenged people" and individuals on social welfare (CBC Radio, 2018). Finlay stated these issues consumed the office's time, leaving very little resources for children (CBC Radio, 2018). Then in 2007, through the passage of Bill 165, the Ontario Legislature changed the OCFSA to become an independent office of the Legislature creating the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* (Ontario Child Advocate, 2019).

A notable function of the former Advocate's Office was their commitment to advocate both with and for children and youth. As outlined in the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*, the purpose of the Advocate's Office was as follows:

- provide a voice for Inuit, First Nations, and Métis children and children with disabilities

- create a line of communication between children, their families, and service providers
- educate children and their caregivers on their rights as laid out in both the federal and provincial legislature
- conduct formal investigations on matters pertaining to Children's Aid Societies (CAS) and other services provided by residential licensees where CAS is the agency that placed the young person, to make recommendations on how improvements can be made in the best interests of the child

The Act formally established Ontario's Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth as independent officer, separate from the Legislature of Ontario. Establishing this independence allowed new opportunities to promote the voice of children and youth and for children, youth, and advocates to partner together to bring issues to light. The Advocate's Office often received calls from children covering a multitude of complaints: e.g., about mistreatment within a facility, lack of safety, and privacy invasion, as well as inquiries about culture, religion, or rights (Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, 2019a). The Advocate's Office conducted their work on these calls with the goal of amplifying the voices of children to identify issues and find solutions that aligned with their views and preferences (Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, 2019a). In a study conducted by Bendo (2021), former Ontario Child and Youth Advocate Irwin Elman articulated that the office placed value on children's voices, even if they did not necessarily agree with the things being said. The Advocate's Office took instructions directly from the young person and worked in partnership with them to ensure their thoughts and opinions were taken seriously (Bendo, 2021).

In addition to working alongside children on their investigations, the Advocate's Office also provided them with the opportunity to participate through youth-led initiatives. The Advocate's Office oversaw the facilitation of several youth-led initiatives which were rooted in advocacy and community development. These initiatives provided children with a platform to voice their personal experiences with decision makers to seek change (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019b). An example of one youth-led initiative, Feathers of Hope, is now its own non-profit organization. Feathers of Hope is an Indigenous youth-led charity that works to provide culturally safe spaces for Indigenous children to amplify their voices on their lived experiences to create healthier and safer communities (Feathers of Hope, 2022). Feathers of Hope and similar initiatives were supported by the Advocate's Office to provide children with the opportunity to share their experiences with decision-makers and to articulate gaps in legislation or policy that need addressing (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019b).

In addition to conducting individual investigations and working on youth-led initiatives, the Advocate's Office often undertook systemic reviews to provide recommendations and advice to service providers and government officials regarding changes in legislation, policy, or regulations (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a). As well, the Advocate's Office provided outreach education to spread awareness to children and adults on the larger topic of advocacy, as well as the rights of children, following the UNCRC (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a).

Ontario Office of the Ombudsman Child and Youth Unit 2019-present

The *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act*, 2018, which replaced the *Provincial Advocate for Child and Youth Act*, 2007, provides the Ombudsman Office's Children and Youth Unit with investigative powers regarding the following groups:

- children involved in Children's Aid Society (CAS) services
- children receiving services from a residential licensee (e.g., children residing in treatment programs licensed under the Child, Youth, and Family Service Act, children detained in custody under the Youth Criminal Justice Act)
- children receiving or seeking a service that is funded through the *Child, Youth, and Families Services Act*, 2017

To help children and youth, the Children and Youth Unit receives and reviews complaints from children and concerned adults; conducts investigations when necessary; reviews, analyzes, and follows up on reports of death and serious bodily harm regarding children; promotes and protects children's rights when they are in the care of the Children's Aid Society; conducts outreach with community groups, youth in care, service providers and other professionals who help children; and liaises with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (Ombudsman Ontario, 2023a).

As stated on the Ombudsman website, under the *Frequently Asked Questions* section, the job of the Ombudsman is to be impartial and not to advocate for any side (Ombudsman Ontario, 2023b). Rather, the Ombudsman's Office prioritizes the principle of fairness when conducting investigations. The principle of fairness is seen by the Ombudsman's Office through three different lenses: process, decision, and service. When a decision is being made that directly impacts a person, it must meet two key elements to be considered procedurally fair (Canadian

Council of Parliamentary Ombudsman, 2022): the person has the right be heard and the person has the right to an impartial decision maker. A fair decision will follow applicable rules while considering an individual's case to ensure it is equitable and exercises discretion. Finally, fair service refers to accessible, respectful, and responsible service that is also accountable to the individuals it serves.

Comparing the Advocate's Office and the Ombudsman's Office

There are several notable differences between the former Advocate's Office and the current Ombudsman Office's Children and Youth Unit (see Table 1. Differences Between the Advocate's Office and the Ombudsman's Office). One of these differences is the process through which each office investigates an individual and/or systemic complaint made by or on behalf of a young person. To begin, when a young person calls the Children and Youth Unit at the Ombudsman's Office, the staff will answer any questions they may have and let them know how and if they are able to help (Ombudsman Ontario, 2019b). The Ombudsman's Office identifies that their role is not to provide advocacy to children (Ombudsman Ontario, 2019a). Rather, they provide children and youth with information regarding their rights, find out what may have caused the problem, and recommend ways to resolve the issue to ensure everything follows the principle of fairness (Ombudsman Ontario, 2019b). In contrast to the Ombudsman's Office, the Advocate's Office reported that they conducted their work through the voice of the young person, valuing their views and opinions (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a). The Advocate's Office reported that they received instructions directly from the child, working together in an equal partnership to bring their issues to light (Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, 2019a).

As previously mentioned, in addition to working alongside the young person during an investigation, the Advocate's Office also provided them with the opportunity to participate through youth-led initiatives. These initiatives provided a platform for children to share their personal experiences and opinions with decision makers to create changes in areas they deemed necessary (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019b). Unlike the Advocate's Office, the Ombudsman's Office does not currently appear to have any youth-led initiatives or opportunities for children to engage in advocacy-based work. However, it is important to note that there are four specialized outreach teams within the Ombudsman Office: The Black Child, Youth and Families Table; the Indigenous Circle; the 2SLGBTQIA+ Outreach Team; and the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Outreach Team. These four outreach teams work to target the special concerns of the corresponding populations.

Another notable difference is the guiding lenses through which each office conducts their promotion and protection of children's rights. Additionally, when educating children and their families, as well as professionals working with children, the Advocate's Office included rights contained in provincial and federal legislation, and the UNCRC (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a). Examples of these rights include "the principles of non-discrimination; adherence to the best interests of the child; the right of all children to life, survival and development; and the right of children to participate" (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a, n.d.).

Table 1: Differences Between the Advocate’s Office and the Ombudsman’s Office

Topic	Advocate’s Office	Ombudsman’s Office
Responding to Children’s Calls	When a child called the Advocate’s Office, the advocate would take their instructions directly from the child to ensure they were working together in equal partnership (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a).	When a child calls, they provide them with information regarding their rights, identify the root of the problem, and recommend ways to resolve the conflict with methods aligning with the principle of fairness (Ombudsman Ontario, 2019b).
Advocacy	Advocated alongside children and youth to ensure their voices are heard (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a).	Stipulates on their website that they are not advocates (Ombudsman Ontario, 2019a).
Youth-Led Initiatives	Contained youth-led initiatives for children to become involved in the office and have their voices heard (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019b).	Does not have youth-led initiatives, but does contain four outreach groups to target specialized groups: The Black Child, Youth and Families Table; the Indigenous Circle; the 2SLGBTQIA+ Outreach Team; and the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Outreach Team
UNCRC	The UNCRC was directly mentioned in their mandate as it acted as a guiding lens	Their mandate does not specifically mention the UNCRC. Rather, the

	<p>through which the Advocate and their office conducted their work. The Advocate’s Office also conducted public outreach to ensure children, their families, and people who worked with children were aware of the Convention.</p>	<p>Ombudsman’s Office focuses primarily on children’s rights in care. However, it is important to note that Ombudsman Dubé has stated that the office does work within the guiding principles of the Convention (Dubé, 2017).</p>
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The Ombudsman’s Office Child and Youth Unit does not possess a mandate within *The Ombudsman Act, R.S.O., 1990* to work within the guiding principles of the UNCRC or to educate children, their families, and professionals on the treaty. Rather, the Ombudsman’s Office emphasizes the rights children possess in care. The rights that are primarily promoted and protected by the Ombudsman’s Office include children’s right to access their file, and rights to safety, identity, proper health care, and to request and receive help (Ombudsman Ontario – Children & Youth Unit, n.d.). However, as noted within the Ombudsman’s *Submission to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services regarding the Five-Year Review of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, the UNCRC does guide the work of the Ombudsman’s Office, despite not being included in the Office’s mandate. Additionally, the Ombudsman’s Office does not appear to have specific work dedicated to Indigenous youth and youth with disability within their mandate, aside from the four outreach teams, despite being previously included within the Advocate’s Office.

Child Advocacy Across Provinces and Territories

Canada does not currently have a national children’s commissioner even though, globally, more than 60 countries have appointed a national children’s commissioner to protect

and promote children's rights. Bendo (2021) has argued that the lack of children's commissioner is largely due to the jurisdictional divide amongst provincial and federal governments, and organizational and political barriers that have prevented private members from introducing bills to develop this position. Rather, in place of a federal children's commissioner, Canada has created the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) to form an alliance of CYAs across the country who are legislatively mandated to exercise specific advocacy functions, such as individual and systematic investigations and rights-based education, in relation to children and children (Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, 2020). The CCCYA is comprised of 12 individuals who represent provinces and territories across Canada, apart from the Northwest Territories. Among these representatives, only two are Ombudsmen: Ontario and Nova Scotia. It is worth noting that Nova Scotia announced in March 2022 that they would be creating their own provincial Child and Youth Commission (Hoffman, 2022). At the present time, the office and its responsibilities are still being defined (King, 2024).

While every provincial or territorial CYA is its own distinctive institution with unique legislation, there are several similarities among the offices and in the work they do with children (Hunter, 2020). A vital component of each office is outreach. In these offices, it is the CYAs responsibility to provide children and the public with information regarding children's rights by means of social media, outreach and/or education (Hunter, 2020). Children need to be aware of how their rights pertain to their lives and what to do in the event they are not being met, as demonstrated in the following quote from a participant at a 2009 Canadian children's rights workshop: "it's one thing to know your rights; it's another to know how to use them" (Lockwood, 2009, p. 24).

Provincial and territorial advocates employ co-participatory opportunities, for example, through youth advisory councils (Hunter, 2020). Several offices have been known to create and implement these councils. For example, the Alberta Office of the Child and Youth Advocate created their Youth Advisory Panel in 2013. The Alberta Youth Advisory Panel comprises several children who meet on a quarterly basis to provide their input to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, as well as other organizations and agencies (Hunter, 2020). Additionally, the Alberta office has often invited children to be 'Friends of the Advocate' to give them the opportunity to become involved and contribute in other ways (Hunter, 2020). Several other provinces and territories have also begun establishing youth advisory panels. The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth implemented a youth advisory council in 2020; the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth created a Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad (YAAS!); and the PEI Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has the Child and Youth Advisory Committee. While not every office may possess a formal youth advisory panel, or a similar group for children, offices in each province and territory, except for Ontario, have created their own unique opportunities for children to participate and collaborate on initiatives (Hunter, 2020).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UNCRC was completed in 1989 and ratified in Canada in 1991. It was the outcome of an international movement seeking the promotion of children's rights (Moody, 2015). Throughout the course of the 20th century, advocates in what was referred to as Westernized society became increasingly interested in creating and adopting a specific set of rights for children under the age of eighteen (Moody, 2015). The political lobbying for children's rights that ensued during this time resulted in intergovernmental organizations creating and adopting three legal instruments: *The Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1924); *The United*

Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959); and the *UNCRC* (1989) (Moody, 2015). To this day, the *UNCRC* remains the most widely ratified international treaty, with 196 nations having ratified the document (Senate of Canada, 2007). Other United Nations international treaties that possess similar frameworks to the *UNCRC* are the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

The realization of the breadth of rights contained in the *UNCRC* “requires a holistic analysis of measures undertaken by State Parties in respect of every right, taking into account the Convention’s four General Principles” (G. Lansdown et al., 2002, p. 2). The four general principles (right to non-discrimination, best interest of the child, right to life and healthy development, right to be heard and participate) act as a guide that encompasses the *UNCRC* in its entirety and influences a State’s implementation of the document, working in conjunction with each other and the other articles (G. Lansdown et al., 2002; Mitchell, 2003). Furthermore, a rights-based approach, as often executed by Advocates, is employed through a “transparent, participatory, inclusive, and accountable process” (Lansdown et al., 2002, p. 10).

The Convention was mentioned in Ontario’s *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (2007) three times. First, the *UNCRC* was mentioned in section 2(3), which stated that when interpreting the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (2007), there must always be reference to the *UNCRC*. Second, Section 15(4b) states that when carrying out advocate-based functions within the Act, the Advocate must reference the *UNCRC* and its principles. Finally, the *UNCRC* is mentioned under section 16(2), which provided Advocates with the power to conduct a systemic investigation if they felt it was necessary to promoted children’s best interests, well-being, protection, and principles contained in the document. Ultimately, the *UNCRC* in its

entirety guided the work of the Advocate's Office, acting as a framework in each investigation and initiative. Unlike the former Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act (2007), the revised Ombudsman Act does not mention the UNCRC. It is important to note, the UNCRC was ratified after the former Advocate's Office was established. Therefore, the UNCRC became a useful tool for the former Advocate's Office once it was ratified.

Literature has demonstrated how valuable the UNCRC is in conducting child and youth advocacy. However, it is also important to note some researchers have criticized some aspects of the UNCRC. The participatory rights enshrined in the UNCRC have been critiqued for reflecting a view of childhood that has been derived from a romantic developmental discourse (McNamee, 2016). The romantic developmental discourse, coined by Jean-Jacque Rousseau, defines children and youth as immature, describing them as vulnerable and in need of protection from corruption (McNamee, 2016; Wyness, 2006). By viewing children with this discursive lens, their participatory rights are undermined and not followed to the fullest extent. This critique can be further depicted in the following excerpt from Article 12: "State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (herein UNCRC, 1989, p. 4). This wording leaves the interpretation of the child's ability up to the adult, rather than recognizing them as capable social agents. Alternatively, it could be argued that children's vulnerability adds to the importance of their participation and voice.

The power adults possess, even within the UNCRC, constitutes many difficulties for advocates and children. While nearly every CYA in Canada possesses a legal mandate to refer to the UNCRC in their work, advocates have noted that the environment of the organization they

are investigating and/or working with often hinders their ability to properly engage with this responsibility (Bendo, 2021). For example, organizations are often hesitant and/or resistant to allowing children to participate with the advocate's work. This resistance has created many difficulties for advocates as it has inhibited their ability to engage with the UNCRC and has created significant barriers that greatly influence the amount of participation afforded to children in the decisions that will ultimately impact their lives (Bendo, 2021).

Additionally, the Convention has a Committee on the Rights of Child which is a group of eighteen independent experts who monitors State implementation of the UNCRC (Office of the High Commissioner United Nations Human Rights, n.d.). As Canada has ratified the UNCRC, we have a legal obligation to ensure the UNCRC is promoted and upheld in its entirety. This obligation also includes reporting to the Committee and upholding the recommendations they make to ensure children's rights are being met within the country. In 2022, the Committee published the *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Canada*. This report outlines the country's previous follow up measures and the Committees areas of concerns and recommendations in regard to children's rights being fulfilled. Amongst the many recommendations, was the specific mention to the Ontario Government's decision to close the Advocate's Office. The Committee noted that they regret the closure of the office and strongly urge for it to be reinstated with their full previous mandate.

Advocacy in Ontario

Former Ontario CYA, Irwin Elman, described advocacy as a "tool used to bring the voices, views, and suggestions of children forward while remaining cognizant of the potential harm speaking on their behalf entails, without their regard" (Bendo, 2016, p. 53). Child and youth advocacy involves adults consciously placing children's voices in the forefront of their

work to ensure that advocates are truly capturing the issue from their point of view. Elman has further described his perspective on advocacy as a tool for creating change, in conjunction with the voices of children through the work of his previous office:

One of the measures about our advocacy is, ‘is it influential and is it creating change?’ I think advocacy is also about change, not just about writing a report. And I think we have taken that definition of partnering with children and youth in their terms about change. So when we do advocacy, we always have goals in mind about, ‘what is the change in mind we are looking to see?’ and not just ‘what is the voice we are trying to elevate?’ (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017, p. 347).

The Advocate’s Office conducted advocacy-based work on individual, systemic, and public levels.

Individual Advocacy. The Advocate’s Office often received calls directly from children or concerned adults with complaints. These complaints often included comments regarding mistreatment, privacy or safety invasions, or the desire to learn more about their heritage (Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, 2019a). In addition to filing a complaint, children, on a regular basis, would also call the office to inquire about their rights (Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, 2019a).

Within the scope of individual advocacy, Bendo (2021) and Howe (2009), in their previous research with Canadian CYAs, stated that once a formal complaint has been made by a young person, or the voice of a young person has been heard in relation to a complaint by an adult, investigations regarding the matter began to take place in partnership with the young person. Such partnerships were important throughout the course of the investigation to ensure the solutions prescribed took the views and preferences of the young person into account (Ontario CYA, 2019c).

Systemic Advocacy. Within the former Ontario Office of the Provincial CYA, a large portion of the systemic advocacy included Ontario’s systems of care. However, as evidenced in

Initiative Reports provided by the Advocate's Office archival website

(<https://ocaarchives.wordpress.com/>), the Office also placed specific focus on systemic advocacy through initiatives for LGBTQ+ youth (e.g., *You Are Not Alone*), Black youth (e.g., *HairStory*), Indigenous youth (e.g., *Feathers of Hope*), and children with disabilities (e.g., *We Have Something to Say*).

Hunter (2017) articulated the importance of systemic advocacy with children and children by demonstrating the way it works to target the issues these groups experience within the larger institutions around them. Specifically, this can be seen through the following report, published by the former Ontario Office for the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2015):

When the Advocate's Office engages in systemic advocacy, we draw on the expertise of young people who have direct experience with the issue. We work with them to recommend changes at the level of policy, funding, program delivery, and in how service providers, decision makers and the public view and treat young people who need government services (p. 12).

Initiatives such as *Feathers of Hope* involved matters selected by children as deemed pertinent to their lives and in need of crucial change (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017). Creating the opportunity for children to not only express their opinions but select the scope of the initiatives was considered beneficial by the Advocate's Office as "advocacy is the most effective when outcomes can also be measured in social change that benefits [children] as they expressed themselves" (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017, p. 347).

Advocacy Beyond the Person and/or Institution. Bendo (2021) found that CYA offices across Canada often try to visit schools or organizations to promote both the advocacy work they engage in and the UNCRC, so that children can be aware of how their rights pertain to their lives. In addition to participating in public outreach and education, Ontario's Advocate's Office

also provided information and advice to policy makers, decision makers and service providers. As portrayed on the Advocate's Office archival website, the office often wrote submissions on specific topics, bills or legislation to present to legislative bodies at both the provincial and federal level. The 2016 *Submission to MCYS on Legislation Amendments to CFSA* is one example of this advocacy. One of the proposed amendments in this submission included *Katelynn's Principle*. *Katelynn's Principle* provides children under the age of eighteen with the right to be heard, considered, and given due weight regarding their evolving capacity, unless there is a necessary reason to do otherwise (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2016; OACAS, n. d.).

This form of advocacy also involved making recommendations in the form of public reports, informal meetings, or direct conversations with policy and decision makers (Bendo, 2021; Hunter, 2020). Many of these reports can be viewed on the Advocate's archived website (<https://ocaarchives.wordpress.com/advocacy-reports/>). These reports demonstrate the work the office engaged in with respect to outreach and education.

Despite the many advantages of provincial and territorial advocates, they have faced some barriers and limitations, specifically pertaining to outreach (Bendo, 2021). Perhaps the largest limitation is the lack of processes in place to ensure there are enough resources for this form of advocacy (Bendo, 2021). Despite what policy makers may believe, outreach and education require much more beyond the general budget provided to the advocate offices (Bendo, 2021). One of the advocates within this study stated,

Education outreach actually requires a separate budget to work with, it's materials, it's training, it's transportation, it's event management, it's videos, and communication campaigns, social media, and if you want to do quality work in that area, then you need good resources...we would easily need another quarter of a million dollars in our budget... (Bendo, 2021, p. 829).

The financial barrier with respect to this form of advocacy creates a profound limitation on the work offices can engage in. However, education is a vital component of advocacy as it often works to inform the individual and systemic investigations (Bendo, 2021). Furthermore, another notable limitation within the scope of child and youth advocacy is the risk of an elected government leader deciding an Advocate's Office is no longer needed, as demonstrated within the province of Ontario.

Advocacy at the Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit

It is important to note that while it is not the job of the Ombudsman to advocate for any side, there are still indications that advocacy takes place within the Children and Youth Unit at the Ontario Office. As previously defined, individual advocacy involves receiving a complaint from a young person and/or a concerned adult, then investigating and working to resolve the issue at hand (Bendo, 2021). The Ombudsman's Office pursues these investigations for children when they believe they have been treated unfairly, or who are experiencing a problem within one of the organizations the Ombudsman oversees, such as the Children's Aid Society (CCCYA, n.d.). As part of their investigation, the Ombudsman Office reviews and resolves the complaints by recommending solutions to the parties involved (CCCYA, n.d.). For example, on July 25th, 2023, the Ombudsman Office reported a complaint made by a concerned mother as she believed her son was being mistreated by a staff member in his group home (Ombudsman Ontario, 2023b). The office stated they got in contact with the young person immediately and also passed on the mother's complaint to their local Children's Aid Society and an investigation was then conducted (Ombudsman Ontario, 2023b). After the investigation, the young person reportedly felt better and did not have any more concerns about their placement (Ombudsman Ontario, 2023b).

In addition to individual advocacy, the Ombudsman Office also conducts systemic investigations pertaining to group home, foster home, treatment centre, and youth justice facilities, thus engaging in systemic advocacy. For example, on June 28th, 2021, the Ombudsman Office reported an investigation caused by a complaint from a ‘whistleblower’ who reported several disturbing allegations regarding a group home that provided services to children who are defined as ‘medically fragile’ or having other types of vulnerabilities (Ombudsman Ontario, 2021). The allegations included failure of the home to provide the children with medical services, hygienic issues, and physical abuse (Ombudsman Ontario, 2021). CAS conducted an investigation and the Ombudsman Office remained involved to monitor the outcome (Ombudsman Ontario, 2021).

The Ombudsman’s Office also engages in outreach-based advocacy. The Ombudsman Office often meets with children living in care to educate them on their rights. The Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit website (<https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/what-we-do/topics/children-youth>) states that it is imperative that children are aware that they possess specific rights regarding the things they are entitled to and how they are to be treated in care. The Ombudsman Office also meets with service providers and staff working in youth justice facilities to educate them on children’s rights and the services provided by the office (Ombudsman Ontario, n.d.b).

In summary, both the Advocate’s Office and the Ombudsman’s Office appear to provide or to have provided advocacy-related services. Although there are apparent differences between the two offices, there have been some uncertainties pertaining to the ways they engage in advocacy and the types of advocacy they provide.

Theoretical Framework

Moving beyond the specific focus on child and youth advocacy, this next section will describe the concept of childism as it served as the guiding framework for this study. Childism is an emerging concept that is deeply rooted within the field of child and youth studies (Burman, 2022; Wall, 2022). Childism “refers to the critique of social norms and structures in response to what is marginalized in the experiences of children” (Biswas et al., 2023, p. 2). Childism, as a theoretical approach, asks researchers to interpret children’s suppressed lived experiences into social understandings for all by amplifying their voices and experiences (Biswas et al., 2023; Wall, 2022). The purpose of childism is to respond critically and creatively to the experiences of children by transforming understandings of pre-existing, powerful societal norms (Wall, 2022). Childism can be regarded within the same realm as feminism, post-genderism, post-colonialism, and queer theory, as they each seek to create dialogue about a marginalized population into sociopolitical thinking and practice (Burman, 2022; Wall, 2022). Much like feminism, childism suggests that there is an underlying problem for children, in how they are understood and perceived by the individuals around them, and also in the political and social foundations that predetermine their lived experiences (Wall, 2022).

To understand the theoretical framework of childism, it is important to first distinguish the concept from its two previous uses within literary and psychoanalytical academia (Wall, 2022). Literary theorist Peter Hunt first developed the term childism in the 1990s as a method for researching and studying children’s literature (Wall, 2022). As described by Chapleau (2005), Hunt intended childism to be used to understand how children’s reactions to literature may differ from adults, which then allows criticism regarding children’s literature to become involved within post-structural discussions. This use of childism has been critiqued by scholars, as despite

its recognition of children as meaning-makers, it fails to recognize the potential for children's agency to be understood as its own object of research (Wall, 2022).

The next variant of the term childism was developed by Young-Bruehl, a psychoanalyst, in the 2000s to study psychological-based hardships that influence children's state of oppression (Wall, 2022). Specifically, Young-Bruehl (2012) defines childism as a "prejudice against children" (p. 4). This use of childism seeks to understand why some adults, or the greater society, feel justified in their failure to support children's development and well-being (Young-Bruehl, 2012). Wall (2022) notes this use of the term as problematic as it only offers academics a negative, deficit-oriented lens when researching childhood, rather than an agentic one. Young-Bruehl's approach has been noted to repeat a limitation that has been demonstrated within some developmental psychology, specifically that children are largely focused on as passive subjects of adults (Wall, 2022). This concept of childism is likely to deepen children's oppression as it creates the notion that only adults can empower them, failing to recognize children as social actors (Wall, 2022).

Childism does not seek ways children and adults can exercise the same level of agency as doing so would only "fit children into political constructions which take adulthood as their starting point, rather than challenging the constructions themselves" (Sundhall, 2017, p. 166). Instead, childism provides the possibility to analyze how adulthood has been naturalized within society as an unmarked age, thus making it possible to examine how the dominant relations are challenged and re-positioned by both adults and children (Sundhall, 2017). As a theoretical framework, childism works not only to critique. Instead, it takes on a more critical and radical task of responding to children's lived experiences by reformulating societal norms (Burman, 2022).

Analyzing children through the perception that there is an underlying problem in the way they are understood by others and social institutions allows for a better understanding of how children and children's lives have been impacted by the change in advocacy within the province of Ontario. Childism as a theoretical framework allows for a thorough investigation of how children can be equal partners alongside adults, as well as respond to the marginalized position they often face within legislation (Wall, 2022). Acknowledging the role childism has in research is pertinent to the proposed study as it seeks to capture the implications the change in Ontario legislature, with respect to child and youth advocacy, has had on the lives of children. In addition to interviews with previous adult employees of the Advocate's Office and current employees of the Ombudsman Office, in this research I sought to speak with children from youth-led initiatives, such as Feathers of Hope and HairStory, to gain their perspective on the matter and ensure their voices are included.

Childism is often critiqued as in some capacities it has alternatives uses than the one serving this study's theoretical framework. Previously, childism was defined as "the presumption of superiority of every adult of any child" (McGillivray, 2022, p. 113). Childism was often referred to as the antagonist of rights as it is where many forms of prejudice began (McGillivray, 2022). Pierce and Allan (1975) noted that the theory of childism as a form of oppression stemmed from a project studying children and mass media. Specifically, Piece and Allan (1975) were studying commercials and other forms of content broadcasted on television regarding racism, the similarities between the two concepts is what sparked the initial definition of the word. In addition to these critiques, there are other theoretical frameworks that could have been employed for this study, such as the sociology of childhood and developmentalism. However, as previously described, the more recent variation of childism best served this study as it responds

critically to children's experiences by seeking to transform adult understandings of societal norms.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This study relied on a descriptive case study methodology. Yin (2018) defines a case study as, first, an empirical method that seeks to examine matters regarding the social world as they relate to a specific case inquiry (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Second, case studies do not seek a singular set of data, but rather rely on multiple sources to triangulate data (Yin, 2008).

Descriptive case studies (Yin, 2018) are often found among two major disciplines, sociology and political science, as well as the practicing professions, such as psychology, social work, or education due to their practicality. A third integral part of employing case study methodology is to ensure there is a specific, real-world case that is not simply an abstraction, to ensure a real-world perspective can be retained (Yin, 2018). As the research study involved investigating Ontario's legislative change regarding child and youth advocacy, a real-world event, case study was the chosen methodology.

Descriptive case study methodology is appropriate for this study for three additional reasons. As articulated by Yin (2018), a case study is appropriate in a study where the main research question is 'how' and the focus of the study is not entirely historical, but also contains a contemporary phenomenon. This study sought to reach the wider audience of policy makers, scholars, and citizens to demonstrate the importance of child and youth advocacy with the hope of creating changes that are critical to the lives of children. Additionally, this methodology can help provide a voice to those who are often rendered voiceless as it seeks to capture the perspectives of those directly involved in the matter and ensure their being heard (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Some scholars (Bendo, 2021; Hunter, 2020) have argued that the change in legislation and the work that has followed has not included the voice of children. The aim of this research is to bring multiple voices forward by investigating the change in legislation while also

speaking directly with those involved in child and youth advocacy, to outline how this type of advocacy has shifted and what impact the shifts might have had on children and youth's lives.

Data and Data Collection

Interviews

Online individual in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of nine participants. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes to conduct. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Due to the nature of the study, purposive and snowball sampling was employed. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who possess specific characteristics that are relevant to the research (Andrage, 2020). Snowball sampling, sometimes referred to as chain-referral-sampling, includes participants recruiting and referring others they feel would contribute to the study (Etikan, Alkassim, & Abubakar, 2015). Regarding the current study, the most important characteristic among the desired participants was that they had been connected to the field of child and youth advocacy in Ontario in some capacity. Utilizing purposive sampling allowed for participants with this characteristic to be recruited. Snowball sampling was also advantageous as it allowed for participants to suggest individuals they thought would also contribute to the study.

Participants were invited to partake in the study if they were formerly, or were currently, connected to child and youth advocacy within the province and/or country. Twenty-four individuals were asked to participate in the study through email with a formal invitation and letter of consent. These participants included former employees of the Ontario Office of the Provincial Child and Youth Advocate, former appointed Ontario Child and Youth Advocates, and employees from the Ombudsman Office's Child and Youth Unit. Additionally, to broaden the eligibility criteria, I sought to recruit participants from child and youth organizations, such as

Children's Aid Societies, who have seen the impact the former Advocate's Office and/or current impact the Ombudsman Office has had on child and youth advocacy. Additionally, youth participants from Hairstory and Feathers of Hope were invited to participate in the study to provide their perspective on the matter. It is important to recognize that certain individuals might have been prohibited by their employer from participating. Although none of the potential participants stated that this was the case, it is still possible that concerns about their current position might have been a barrier for some individuals.

Participants had a variety of experiences with advocacy. Two participants formerly worked within the Advocate's Office, two participants had experience within a Children's Aid Society, one worked for UNICEF Canada, one worked for the Ombudsman's Office, and almost every participant had advocacy experience working with smaller organizations. Participants demonstrated expertise in child and youth advocacy, family law, children's rights, child and youth participation, and social services. Every participant was over the age of eighteen, even though youth under the age of eighteen were invited. Of the nine participants, four participants identified as male and five identified as female. Participants also represented different geographical locations, including the Greater Toronto Area, Ottawa, and provinces outside of Ontario.

During the interviews, participants were asked a variety of open-ended questions exploring their experiences with child and youth advocacy in Ontario (see Appendix A). Participants were asked about the kind of work they currently do or did in the past, how their work involved children, and what tools are necessary to conduct child advocacy in Ontario. Additionally, participants were asked if they felt advocacy has changed and/or remained stable in

Ontario with respect to the closure of the Ontario Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and if so, how has it changed and what population has been impacted the most.

All research activities in the current study followed the guidelines set by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. Ethical clearance from the board was provided in December 2023 (REB 23-161 RAMEY, see Appendix B). Each participant provided an informed consent form (see Appendix C) prior to participation. The document informed the participants of the intent of the study, methods of data collection and data analyses, assurances of confidentiality, and the option for participants to either have their data anonymized or have their names and titles attached to their comments. To ensure confidentiality, all copies of data were stored in a secure cloud storage provided by Brock University via Microsoft OneDrive. All data files were encrypted, password protected, and were only accessible by the research team.

Some participants who had recent or past connections to the Advocate's Office and Ombudsman's Office may have been hesitant to participate in the study as they may not have wished to have their names attached to the quotes published. To be mindful of this, participants' identities were kept confidential, unless they requested to waive their right to confidentiality. To ensure participant confidentiality, data did not contain any identifying information such as specific job titles, unless the participant requested that it be included. Names of respondents who did not waive their right to confidentiality are identified as Child and Youth Advocate 1 to Child and Youth Advocate 7.

Document Analysis

In addition to interviews, to triangulate findings, a document analysis was also conducted. During data collection, the Google search engine and the Brock University Library OMNI database were used to access various legal and media texts for this study by entering

keywords such as “Ontario Advocates Office”; “Ontario Ombudsman Office Child and Youth”; “Advocate Office closure”; “Ontario child and youth advocacy”; and “United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada”. This search allowed for both media and legal reports to be found that provided detailed information regarding the transfer from the Advocate’s office to the Ombudsman’s Office, as well as information on the impacts these changes have on the lives of children within the province. Documents were selected if they discussed the work the former Advocate’s office conducted, the closure of the Advocate Office, and/or the current Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit. Documents were also selected if they were published between 2017 and the present day. This specific time period allowed for documents from one year prior to the announcement of the Advocate’s Office closure, when it was functioning as normal, up to the present day. Additionally, these documents provided relevant information to the greater discussion of child and youth advocacy within Ontario. To provide a multitude of perspectives, the documents considered included policy documents, legislation, advocacy reports, and media reports.

The documentary analysis began with the case reports. The reports included in the study were publicly accessible through either the Ontario Ombudsman’s Office website or the Advocate’s Office archival website. The Reports on Investigations from the Ombudsman office and the Advocacy Reports from the Advocate’s Office both provide critical information pertaining to formal case investigations based on complaints from children or adults on behalf of a child. As noted by both offices (Ombudsman Ontario, n.d.; Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a) not every case requires a formal investigation, however when it is deemed that one is necessary, reports such as these are created for the public to access. Each report included an executive summary, an investigation process, contextual

background information, concerns derived from the investigation, recommendations, and concluding responses. The criteria used to select these reports included ample detail of the case investigation and that they were the most recently published versions between the years 2019 and 2023 for the Ombudsman's Office and 2015 and 2019 for the Advocate's Office. By selecting the most recent reports from each office, a thorough analysis of how advocacy has shifted within Ontario since the legislative change to the Ombudsman office could take place. Additionally, a more in-depth analysis of *The Provincial Child and Youth Advocate Act, 2007* and *The Ombudsman Act, R.S.O., 1990* was conducted within the context of the larger dataset.

The final document dataset included four investigative reports from the Advocate's Office and the Ombudsman Office, two pieces of legislation, and seven media reports. Each document, while different in nature, discusses the work of the former Advocate Office, current Child and Youth Unit at the Ombudsman Office, the initial thoughts and feelings expressed by the public following the announcement of the closure, and the current state of advocacy within the province. These documents can also be viewed in Appendix D: Documents Analyzed.

Analysis

The interviews and documents of this study were employed by following the analytic strategy of a descriptive case study, as well as Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. When conducting a descriptive case analysis, often researchers will begin with questions rather than the actual data (Yin, 2018). This process involves starting with small questions, then identifying the evidence that answers the questions (Yin, 2018). The Case Study Protocol can be seen in Appendix E: Case Study Protocol.

Once the questions have been answered with the collected evidence, such as documents and interview transcripts, the researcher will begin 'playing' more thoroughly with the data to

search for insights and patterns that relate to the larger research question (Yin, 2018). The analysis undertaken in this study was conducted using NVivo software. NVivo allowed me to highlight excerpts that offered insights into the research question, create tentative codes, and gain a deeper understanding of the material. NVivo acted as a successful aid when beginning to analyze the research as it tabulated the frequency of each code, highlighting the key themes of the study. Working with the data in this way allowed for a smooth transition into what Yin (2018) describes as one of the four general strategies that can play an integral role when beginning an analysis: working with your data from the “ground up”. In this strategy, researchers work through the data to see if there are noticeable patterns, much like playing with the dataset.

In the analysis, triangulation was imperative in ensuring the research was considering multiple perspectives (Flick, 2018). As a research tool, triangulation employs the use of multiple approaches to a research question (Heale & Forbes, 2013). As child advocacy is considered a social justice issue, Flick (2018) states that triangulation is especially relevant. Triangulation produces knowledge on numerous levels, going beyond a singular knowledge, thus promoting quality in research (Flick, 2018). Furthermore, triangulation offers the limitations that can be seen within each method of the study to be transcended by comparing the varying perspectives (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Using triangulation when studying social justice issues indicates researchers are using their potential of conducting research for both societal and academic purposes to demonstrate qualitative inquiry, using it to address issues that are societally relevant (Flick, 2018).

Through analyzing and triangulating the dataset, patterns were developed, analyzed, and interpreted using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) reflexive thematic analysis technique. In this analytic strategy, coding data and developing themes, which are the researcher’s ultimate

analytic purpose, involves a systematic process. This specific form of analysis offered a robust and accessible method of qualitative analysis. A reflexive thematic analysis is also theoretically flexible, providing researchers the opportunity to apply their own theoretical framework to the dataset.

A reflexive thematic analysis includes key aspects of reflexivity. Reflexivity can be defined as a researcher's way of relating themselves to the phenomenon they are studying (Alvesson et al., 2022). Braun and Clarke (2022) state that keeping a reflexive journal is one of the most critical things a researcher can do. Moreover, reflexivity is imperative in every phase a research study undergoes (Alvesson et al., 2022). Following Braun and Clarke (2022), reflexive journal is a space for researchers to document their thoughts, reflections, and create meanings from their findings. There are no specific rules to a reflexive journal as they are meant to reflect the researcher's personal thoughts and questions. These entries at times may be mundane, shorter in nature, and not very interesting, but they are still important to journal. To ensure I was critically engaged and conducting a proper reflexive analysis in my research, I kept a reflexive journal to log my thoughts and reactions after each interview, and when I engaged in document analysis. When writing in my journal, I asked myself questions such as, "why might I be having this particular type of response, and how might this matter for my research?" (p. 19). These questions allowed me the opportunity not to question whether my personal beliefs impact the research, "reflecting the idea that the knower and knowledge cannot be separated and that the two needs to be constantly assessed" (Alvesson et al., 2022, p. 28).

The coding process for this research study was inductive. Inductive coding uses the dataset as a starting point to engage with meaning and brings forth the idea that qualitative research possesses the ability to give voice to participants by telling their stories (Braun &

Clarke, 2022). In this study, I sought to capture the perspectives and experiences individuals within the child and youth advocacy field within the province of Ontario.

There are six phases to conducting a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), each of which was undertaken in the research study. The first, familiarization, involved becoming immersed in the dataset. Once familiarized, the coding process began. Following the coding process, phase three, developing initial themes from the codes, took place. This process involved grouping codes together that are connected and exploring the connections for patterns and similarities to develop initial themes. Next, these themes were further developed or reviewed. The process of reviewing involved evaluating the themes for quality and validity, ensuring they were rich. To ensure each theme was of high quality, as Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest, a definition containing a few sentences was written. This process was critical to the theme development as if a theme's core concept is unable to be illustrated in a simple statement, further refinement may be necessary.

Finally, the last phase of theme development involved writing (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Writing the report differs greatly from the analysis. Writing the report was a critical step to the research process as it allowed for a final opportunity to refine themes and make any necessary changes. The writing process should be thought of as storytelling: it needs to be engaging and able to convince the reader of analytic claims. This phase was pertinent to the study to ensure readers are being provided with specific evidence of what the dataset and its patterns are. Additionally, the data in the analysis was interpreted and placed in relation to the research question and the scholarly fields regarding child and youth advocacy.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, there were multiple themes identified (see Table 2. Themes). The following section synthesizes the insights and experiences of interview participants and the thematic analysis of the documents. These findings include the advocate's personal beliefs of what meaningful advocacy require, as well as the changes child and youth advocacy has undergone regarding the closure of the former Advocate's Office. Additionally, the findings include various recommendations from the participants pertaining to how child and youth advocacy can be improved within Ontario. Two interview participants, Mr. Irwin Elman and Ms. Cheyanne Ratnam, chose to be identified in reporting. Seven individuals within the child and youth advocacy sector chose for their identities to remain confidential. It is important to note that in many of the documents and participant interviews, children and youth are defined as 'young people', therefore when reporting on the data, the term 'children' and 'young people' are used interchangeably to present the research findings.

Requirements for Child Advocacy

During the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked numerous questions about child advocacy. Many of these questions focused on their personal perceptions of what conducting meaningful child advocacy requires. Participants reflected on the importance of listening to children's voices, viewing children as capable and competent co-participants, funding, and acting on the rights prescribed to children.

Listening to and Amplifying Children's Voices

When prompted to define child and youth advocacy in their own words, every participant stated that they believed it involved listening and amplifying the voice of children: "The most important part of advocacy is that process and to go even a little bit more specific, the process to

hear from children and youth in their own words” (Child and Youth Advocate 2). Furthermore, when asked to state what they believe are the most critical tools in conducting advocacy with children, each participant also identified the voice of the child. Participants emphasized the importance of creating space in decision making to bring children’s voices forward in all matters that impact their lives. This can be seen within the following quotation from Child and Youth Advocate 3:

Really, I have always worked to make sure that child and youth voice are at the centre of decision making. I find often it’s forgotten so for me thinking about advocacy from a childhood standpoint, it’s really about voice because children, youth and often families that they’re connected to are not in the room where decisions are being made that directly affect them. So when I think about advocacy, I think about ways of bringing that voice to decision making on funding and funding decisions, policy decisions, service decisions. You know for me it kind of evokes what comes through when I think about like childhood advocacy, advocacy is that concept of “nothing about us without us”, right? Like anything that touches a child or youth’s life should be informed by the views and voices of child and youth.

In this instance, Child and Youth Advocate 3 acknowledged that children are often left out of the decision-making process in many circumstances despite these conversations having a great impact on their lives. Therefore, the advocate noted the importance of bringing this voice to the table of these meetings, while remaining cognizant of the difference between speaking for children rather than speaking with children. Child and Youth Advocate 3’s perspective on the importance of incorporating children’s voices was conveyed. This is demonstrated when they noted that advocacy should be required to consider and centre the child’s voice, as seen within the following quote: “for me, the most important part of child and youth advocacy...is the requirement that [advocacy] is there”. The Advocate noted that this may be “through a policy, legislation, framework, the most important thing is remembering that the step needs to be placed in what it is we are talking about”.

Table 2: Themes Derived from the Analysis

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Requirements for Childhood Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to and Amplifying Children’s Voices • Children as Co-Participants • Funding • Children’s Rights
2. What Are the Changes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less Advocacy-Related Work • Loss of Resources • Youth Perceptions of Each Office • Less Attention to Equitable Treatment • Systemic Advocacy • Outreach and Public Education • Continued Individual Advocacy and Outreach
3. Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandate Advocacy • Partner with Child and Youth with Lived Experiences

In addition to describing advocacy as amplifying children’s voices, Child and Youth Advocate 4 also noted the importance of empowering children to exercise their voice in matters that impact their lives, while also ensuring that decision makers are taking their voices seriously. Child and Youth Advocate 4 stated that a decision-maker should directly include children’s voices in their work as it will impact the decisions being made and help ensure children’s voices are taken seriously.

Similar to the points raised by the Child and Youth Advocates, the former *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* defined the term advocacy as “promoting the views and preferences of children and youth” (s. 2(1)). The advocacy discussed throughout the entirety of the legislation involves creating opportunities for children to participate meaningfully by partnering with them to bring their voices forward (*Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*). These partnerships are also conveyed in the published Initiative Reports, such as *HairStory Rooted* (2019) and *Together We Are...Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan* (n.d.). Together, in an equal partnership with children who were directly impacted by the issues being discussed, reports such as *HairStory Rooted* (2019) and *Together We Are...Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan* (n.d.) were created to raise awareness on matters pertaining to youth’s lives. For example, in *HairStory Rooted* (2019), children present the challenges they face in Ontario’s systems of care due to systemic racism. In this report, children are quoted saying:

In this report, you will read recommendations you may think will make some aspects of your job more challenging at first, but please consider them carefully. We need you to carry our voices along with you, to speak to the decision-makers in your organizations and to advocate for the change that ultimately will make your job easier. Please ask yourself, “Have I done all that I can for the young people I serve?”, “Have I listened to and really heard what the young people I serve say?”, or “What have I done today to create better outcomes for the Black children and youth I serve?” (p. 13).

Children as Co-Participants

When prompted to discuss the critical components of child and youth advocacy, many of the participants highlighted the importance of going beyond the voice of the child to creating true and authentic partnerships with children to understand how they can work towards a change that is meaningful and informed by the views of children themselves. As Child and Youth Advocate 5 stated, this includes “speaking on behalf of or together with children and youth about the

matters that matter to them”. The theme of children as co-participants was mentioned numerous times when participants were asked to define child and youth advocacy in their own words.

In his interview, Mr. Elman, stated that his definition of child and youth advocacy aligned greatly with the former *Ontario Provincial Child and Youth Act, 2007*. During this conversation, Mr. Elman noted:

Well, you know, the Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act 2007 defined child and youth advocacy as partnering with children and youth to bring their issues forward. So, I guess after all this, after 11 years of doing that, I guess that kind of definition of child advocacy has stuck with me.

In reflecting on personal experience with children to reinforce the importance of the partnerships between adults and children, Mr. Elman discussed how the nature and authenticity of the relationship was critical in conducting effective and meaningful advocacy. Notably, Mr. Elman referenced a specific experience of having a young person tell them that they want adults to be curious. When humans are curious, as noted by the child, it means they are genuinely interested and care about what they are discussing. This is demonstrated in the follow excerpt:

So the nature of the partnership is really important. And I wondered a bit about that. What does that mean? Like how does a young person know that someone cares about them? And a young person told me to say this, to show they care these workers should be curious because when people are curious, if they are genuinely curious, they are only curious about things they care about. They want you to ask questions and be interested in the question. You do not have to like them. Just be curious.

Later in his interview, Mr. Elman continued this dialogue by stating:

It’s not like sitting down with the youth or child and saying, how are you going to get there? Instead say, how are we going to get there? That gives them license to say I do not need you or to be there if they do need help and work together to figure out how you may get there. You will probably have no idea how you are going to get them there, but it shows that you are willing to travel. You are not even promising that you will get them there. But you say let’s make a plan together to travel on so that it makes their voice heard even if you do not think it is possible. You are not promising possible, you are promising traveling together.

Numerous participants went one step beyond the nature of the relationship to acknowledge the importance of partnering with children who have experience in the matters being discussed. Many participants noted that it is important to hear directly from, what they defined as, lived experts. For example, Child and Youth Advocate 1 stated:

Keep asking children and youth what they see as priorities and do not just ask children and youth generally. Instead, ask those who are affected by the policy and issues we are talking about.

Conversations with lived experts will be significantly more meaningful and have a much greater impact on the issues being brought forward. As an example, Child and Youth Advocate 1 noted the recent discussions there have been around Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) and mature minors. Mature minors, as noted by the participant, would most likely be around the ages of sixteen- or seventeen-years-old. When having these conversations, it is important that “policy [and decision] makers are talking to people who are affected by particular policy decisions” (Child and Youth Advocate 1), to gain their perspectives. Child and Youth Advocate 1 noted that this could be done through “partner[ing] with SickKids” to ensure their voices are being heard.

In discussing matters regarding the Advocate’s Office and the Ombudsman Office, participants noted the importance of placing priority on supporting and investing in the children who have experience within services designed specifically for children and youth. As Child and Youth Advocate 2 noted, children with experience in the system “are going to be the most effective advocates for children in the future because they have seen the failures of some of these service systems and they understand what does and does not make a difference in the lives of children in those situations”. Child and Youth Advocate 1 also pointed to the importance of fostering those with lived experience as current and future advocates:

There can be child and youth advocacy for children and youth, and also by children and youth, and both are really important because you know, one of the things that I think we

have all learned in the last sort of 20 years is that you need people with lived experience to talk about the issues that affect them.

Child and Youth Advocate 6 added that it is important to speak with children to have a clear understanding what it is you are advocating for. Child and Youth Advocate 6 specified that when speaking with children, it is important to listen to them and actually hear what they are saying.

Additionally, Child and Youth Advocate 6 spoke about the importance of not speaking on behalf of a person or group of people. This can be seen through the following excerpt:

What I've understood advocacy to mean is not speaking for other people but summoning and leveraging all the levers of power that you have access to...so the model of advocacy that I understand has within it an idea of power, not power over something, but power to do something, power with other. So, it is kind of a shared power with children.

This approach to advocacy demonstrates the importance ensuring adults are not speaking on behalf of children. Rather, advocates should do something meaningful and work with children in partnership to create a shared power.

Appropriate Funding

Moving beyond the scope of children's voices and participation, nearly every participant discussed the important role funding has on child and youth advocacy. Advocates reported that child and youth advocacy has become fragmented within the province of Ontario, leading to a funding and overall advocacy crisis, due to the former advocacy mandate no longer being part of legislation. Participant Cheyanne Ratnam noted in her interview that funding has a serious impact on an organization and/or individual's ability to conduct advocacy. Often, due to the limited funding sources, the lack of funds impedes Advocates' ability to engage in meaningful work, rather than enhancing it. Ms. Ratnam discussed that "funding definitely goes to mainstream organizations that are larger, oftentimes not founded or driven by lived experts".

Some participants had personal experience with smaller organizations, non-profits, and other advocacy-based projects, and reflected on these experiences to articulate how critical funding is in conducting child advocacy. Ms. Ratnam reflected on her experience with the Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition:

Part of the issue as well is that for example, [with] OCAC...one of the [problems with] child and youth advocacy is the fact that funding, to fund activities, definitely goes towards on-the-ground type of programming and not necessarily to systemic change where the change needs to happen for trickle down effects. OCAC does systemic advocacy, so it is a very tough situation to sustain and tough to consistently do activities when funding is scarce.

Similarly, Child and Youth Advocate 1 discussed their knowledge of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) (<https://rightsofchildren.ca/>), noting that there are similar organizations around the world that are working towards advancing children's rights. However, in the province of Ontario or in Canada more generally, funding is very scarce, which means organizations like the CCRC are often side projects for its members rather than being prioritized work. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

In many countries around the world, there is an organization like the CCRC that advocates for children's rights. But in Canada, there is no funding, so we do not get funding from anywhere. So, it makes us very independent. But on the other hand, it makes it harder to do our work, so we do not have any paid staff. If we become a vendor, we get paid to do the project. But again, we're doing it kind of off the side type of thing. So, it is a big issue.

As a result of the loss of a formal Advocate for children within the province of Ontario, numerous smaller organizations were created by child rights enthusiasts, child and youth advocates, and those that are "harnessing the power of lived experience of people who used to be in systems of care or are run by them" (Irwin Elman) to try and fill the void. This increase in advocacy-based programs has created a sense of competition within the field to secure funding. As noted by Ms. Ratnam:

It's like capitalism, right? It is a dog-eat-dog world, and it is the same within the community of advocates because everyone is competing for some reason. You know? And funding wise, we get it, we are competing for funding. But then again, a lot of us do not get funding.

Without funding, organizations are unable to engage in meaningful advocacy that is relevant to the problems faced by children and impactful in their lives. As previously noted by Child and Youth Advocate 1, without a secure and constant funding source, the projects conducted by these organizations cannot be prioritized work, as advocates need to retain their previous paid positions to ensure they are making an income.

Furthermore, without funding, organizations are unable to pay honorariums to the lived experts they rely on in helping conduct their work. Ms. Ratnam reflects on this in her interview:

There is very scarce funding to pay people. That is, that it does not always happen, unfortunately. And that is why much of my work has been for free for a long time. If we did get a little bit of money, I gave it to other people and did not necessarily pay myself as I wanted to make sure, especially lived experts, were getting something. They were not big honorariums or anything either. Sometimes 20 bucks or something, but it is still something to give them. There is an expectation that our burden of labour should be free or underpaid – classism, discrimination, inequity.

When asking lived experts to reflect on their experiences, Ms. Ratnam notes the importance of ensuring these individuals receive an honorarium. These experiences, dependent on the topic discussed and the individual's circumstances, may be traumatic and/or difficult for them to share publicly. Additionally, as these individuals are conducting work for the organizations, advocates express their belief in the importance of ensuring they receive a form of compensation, even if it is only a small amount.

Finally, participants reflected on the limitations funders often place on their work. For instance, Child and Youth Advocate 3 noted that even if advocates were able to secure funding within the province of Ontario, some sources are very restrictive of the work they can do due to the funder's requirements:

I think the ministry funding, while it is good that they have funded some of the initiatives, there is always a bit of a dynamic around like, this money is not meant to be spent in order to criticize the government. It needs to be something they would want to support. So it is always with this understanding that like, sure have your meetings and talk about what is needed, but again, what is the concrete commitment around funding this like, are you doing this because we want to take steps in this direction and tell us how or are you funding it to have a feel good story because it is a thing but nothing ever comes from it. It is like great, have your meetings and meet, but to me, advocacy means like, let's see the change and that is what I want to make sure is not hampered by virtue of having, you know, too much ministry intervention and or really funding in the equation.

This funding, while it may have good intentions, often comes with too many guidelines and restrictions that can inherently impact the quality of advocacy that is derived from the organization and/or group. This can be seen as tokenistic. Therefore, participants expressed their desire for these funding opportunities to be considerate of children. Child and Youth Advocate 1 stated:

I am sure you have heard from other people, and are familiar with, but it is around like child-friendly budgeting. Ensuring that children themselves are considered during budgeting or that they have the opportunities to be part of the budget process, or even just that policymakers are considering children when they're engaging in budgeting.

Without funding, as noted by the participants, it is difficult to conduct meaningful child advocacy. Advocates expressed their desire for more funds to be allocated to the child advocacy sector and for these funds to not place limitations on the type of work being conducted. When discussing the importance of having a separate office for children and youth, Child and Youth Advocate 4 also noted that without an independent office, "money or the budget [can] get redirected into adults that make special interest groups that are putting pressure on the office."

Children's Rights

The fourth requirement discussed by participants as playing a critical role within child advocacy is children's rights. Participants noted the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of children, specifically those prescribed within the UNCRC. Ms. Ratnam, among other

participants, demonstrated this sentiment by stating, “I like to use a human right, human-centered lens and so the UNCRC is important”. In conversing about children’s rights and the role they play in advocacy, Child and Youth Advocate 2 stated,

I think the commonality amongst all of the forms is standing up for the rights of children and in particular, vulnerable children and youth who may not be able to protect their rights in the same way. Require adults to work in collaboration with them to ensure that their rights are upheld, protected, and promoted.

Child and Youth Advocate 2, along with other participants, made direct reference to the UNCRC. When asked about advocacy-related resources, Mr. Elman stated “[the] child advocate should be guided by the principles of the UNCRC”. As noted through the document analysis, the former Advocate’s Office were also mandated to educate children and their caregivers on their rights (*Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*). These rights include those granted to children under the *Child and Youth Family Services Act, 2017*, and the UNCRC.

Similarly, Child and Youth Advocate 4 said,

The whole UNCRC. It really anchors the work of the office. and we also look at general comments from the monitoring committee in Geneva to expand on the interpretation of the articles. We also reference concluding observations to Canada and identify which recommendations fall within provincial jurisdiction.

Child and Youth Advocate 4 described the UNCRC as an “anchor” to the work conducted by an Advocate’s Office. Additionally, it is important to note that the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2022) stated in their comments that they are concerned by the closing of the Advocate’s Office and stressed the importance that it be reopened to help ensure children’s rights are being met.

The UNCRC was not the only rights-based resource participants referred to. A few participants brought the Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA; Government of Canada, 2023) forward as an important resource in their work. The CRIA is a tool designed to assist decision and policymakers in assessing a proposed initiative’s potential impact on children. The resource

helps officials carefully identify and consider any potential impact that may directly or indirectly effect children's rights prescribed by the UNCRC. The CRIA consists of two stages. The first includes an initial screening of the project and the second is a full CRIA review, if it is warranted after the initial screening.

In discussion regarding children's rights and the CRIA, Child and Youth Advocate 1 stated the following:

Another example would be the Child Rights Impact Assessment and these of course, are very important, sort of a policy process that someone can undertake. What they really do is ensure that you're considering the best interests of the child and the children's rights.

This excerpt was derived directly from the question regarding child advocacy tools. In this instance, Child and Youth Advocate 1 was noting the important role the CRIA play in ensuring the UNCRC guiding principle The Best Interests of the Child is being considered and upheld. Furthermore, Child and Youth Advocate 2 added to the conversation surrounding the CRIA by explaining,

The Child Right's Impact Assessment tool, which I'm sure you are familiar with, can be incredibly, and has been incredibly, useful in terms of analyzing the child right's implications of, in particular proposed legislation, but also existing legislation and policies to really focus in on the impact of some of the legislative structures that we have.

Unfortunately, some participants felt that the UNCRC, while incredibly important, does not have as much authority as other Canadian legislation. Mr. Elman noted the following:

Stephen Harper once said the UNCRC is an aspirational document. It's true. He is right... You can use it as a supporting document, but it is not law. It is not a must. It is a should've, could've, would've. It is an ethical document in Canada, it's nothing more. But it was useful as a guidepost, and it is useful as a place to start. So, when asked, that is how we used it. When we asked the [children] what was wrong and what good looks like, our partnership did not say we had to only elevate their voice to fit within their rights, but it was a good place to start. We were supposed to be guided by it and ask does what they want fit within the principles or legal answer is can we make a rights-based argument for what they are asking for. So that was a good place for advocates to start and the staff we had mentioned the CRC was useful.

Participants also expressed their concern that the closure of the former Advocate's Office was a direct violation of children's rights. Participants expressed their belief that the closure of the Advocate's Office was a violation of the Human Rights Principle of Non-Retrogression, specifically in regard to Article 12 of the UNCRC. The Human Rights Principle of Non-Retrogression states that "States should not allow the existing protection of economic, social, and cultural rights to deteriorate unless there are strong justifications for a retrogressive measure" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008, p. 16). Child and Youth Advocate 2 explained that the provincial government had created structures for children to have their voice heard and taken seriously, but that was taken away. These sentiments are demonstrated in the following statement:

In a certain sense you could argue that that is worse than never having it in the first place because the children who had interacted with those institutions and systems woke up one day to find them gone. And so I think, I wouldn't be surprised if many of the [children] people felt abandoned by the government in the decisions that were made around the closure of the Child Advocates Office.

Child and Youth Advocate 1 continued the dialogue surrounding children's rights infringement by noting:

The Advocate's Office provided a really nice vehicle to ensure there was a better sort of communication between [children] affected by provincial government policies on child welfare, and education and health and all these other factors as well, and government officials themselves. So, I think that's what's really lost and I don't think the Ombudsperson fulfills that role. They are much more of a gatekeeper, not like in a bad sense, but an infringement of rights sense.

Finally, advocates described children's rights playing a critical role in child advocacy as oftentimes, advocacy is directly related to the promotion of these rights. This often involves conducting public education with children, families, and adults working in settings with children to ensure everyone is aware of the UNCRC and fully understands the document. In their interview, Child and Youth Advocate 2 notes that Canada, compared to other countries, does not

have as much awareness within the general population. There are many adults and most importantly, children, that are unaware of the UNCRC existence. Therefore, “when we advocate for children’s rights, we’re partially educating children as rights holders about the rights that they’re entitled to, and adults...about their responsibilities as duty bearers under the Convention to ensure that [their] rights...are upheld” (Child and Youth Advocate 2).

What Are the Changes?

The research question guiding this study focused on how child and youth advocacy may have changed since the former Advocate’s Office closed in 2019. Following this interest, multiple interview questions asked participants to describe their personal experiences with child and youth advocacy both before and after the closure of the Advocate’s Office. During these discussions, participants highlighted the various ways their roles have changed with respect to the closure and the differences they have noticed within the field.

Less Advocacy-Related Work

During interviews, participants were asked if they believe child and youth advocacy has shifted within the last five years due to the closure of the Advocate’s Office and if so, how. Every individual who participated in the interviews expressed that advocacy has faced significant changes, specifically reporting that advocacy-based work has become scarcer and more fragmented. Child and Youth Advocate 5 stated, “There is no formal advocacy at the provincial, institutional level. There isn’t, there is no provincial advocacy”. Currently, the Ombudsman Office lacks a mandate surrounding advocacy. When reviewing the *Ombudsman Act*, 1990, the only time the word ‘advocate’ is used is to discuss the role former Advocate’s Office employees will have within the Child and Youth Unit. There is no formal mention of child advocacy within the work of the Ombudsman Office.

Participants reported that advocacy has become taken over by small organizations and individual families. As Child and Youth Advocate 5 notes, “There are pockets of child advocacy that are issue-based and population-based and come out of different coalitions and institutions. Yeah, but from what I can tell they are ad hoc they are where I see them.” These groups of individuals have taken on the work as no one else is, but they are doing the work with little to no supports. Mr. Elman noted,

There are fragmented groups of organizations that are either harnessing the power of lived experiences and people who used to be in systems of care, or they are run by them. And they are fragmented too because they get little support, if any, in terms of finances...and they're dotted across the province I would say. These days, the biggest and strongest child advocates are the families and children themselves in the current systems. But I will tell you, they're exhausted...they are tired of speaking up, but they are also tired because they are trying to advocate with no supports. It's really rough and I think that's really sad.

In this quote, Mr. Elman notes that without these individuals stepping up, advocacy is significantly diminished. This is causing exhaustion and burnout. Child and Youth Advocate 2 points to the lack of ongoing advocacy with children as it is more prevalent in individual cases:

I would say that currently, obviously with the closure of the Ontario Child Advocate that the Article 12 side of the coin has been significantly diminished. There is insufficient structures for children to be informed and consulted on decisions that affect them. Some of the legal systems have adopted, you know, reasonable practices when it comes to including and consulting children, and also, they've done a reasonably good job of ensuring that the best interests of children are the principal, political factor, and decisions that they make on their own. But I would say the day-to-day voice of children, their ability to do maybe sort of soft advocacy, by which I mean, advocating for their rights in a general sense outside of a specific legal situation that they may find themselves in, that sure has been lost almost completely. At least from an institutional structural point.

Continuing the dialogue regarding the loss of advocacy-related work, Child and Youth Advocate 1 noted that the closure of the Advocate's Office “led to less advocacy and more of...looking at complaints from like a negative process”. Ms. Ratnam also explained that the

individual case work, while similar in some ways, is different as it is no longer advocacy-based and is much more focused on the investigation aspect:

In the capacity that we discuss the Ombudsman's Office's individual investigations, I would not call it advocacy, I would call it more like investigation. So, I think like the type of work is different.

Another key difference between the Advocate's Office and the Ombudsman Office is how each office's legislation differs. Mr. Elman continues to reinforce these participants' perceptions of the Ombudsman Office by noting the mandate differences and how the Ombudsman Act does not contain any advocacy-based legislation:

In legislation, the piece of our offices mandate that they [the Ombudsman Office] got was around child protection and welfare. But they are instructed not to advocate. So how could it be the same? It's not the same. It can't be because they cannot advocate, and the Ombudsman will tell you they do not advocate. Just like the coroner will say "I do not advocate". But the Ombudsman, actually it is legislation that says no, it is not your role. And the difference between an advocate and an Ombudsman, in terms of their function is to seek administrative fairness. So no, they are not supposed to advocate.

The discontinuation of child advocacy by the Ombudsman Office can also be noted on the Office's *Frequently Asked Questions – Children and Youth* webpage. Under the question, "Is the Ombudsman my advocate? Will the people at the Children and Youth Unit take my side?" it states, "the Ombudsman and our staff are not advocates. We do not take sides when we look into a complaint. But we can give you information about your rights, find out what caused the problem, recommend ways to fix it, and make sure you are treated fairly" (Ombudsman Office, 2023a, n.p.).

The difference in legislation can also be demonstrated through each office's investigation reports. For instance, in the former Advocate's Office *Investigation Report: "Alex"* (2021), it is stated, "when conducting its work, the Investigations Unit is also required to take into account the paramount purpose of the *Child and Family Services Act* ("CFSA") to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children; principles expressed in the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child; [and the] Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (p. 7). While investigators were unsuccessful in speaking directly with Alex, an Indigenous child, despite numerous attempts including travelling to their First Nation and nearby cities, their Band Representative was able to provide Alex with documents regarding the investigation and the reasons for the Advocate’s Office asking for their participation. However, Alex ultimately declined to participate. Despite this, their voice was carried throughout the investigation by using previous notes from his Intake Worker at CAS Algoma. In contrast, the Ombudsman Office report, *“A Voice Unheard: Brandon’s Story”* (2022) places a much heavier emphasis on the facts of the case. Much of the report lists the chronological order of Brandon’s CAS involvement, including social, emotional, psychological and physical health, as well as reasons for multiple investigations and supervision orders by CAS. There is very little reference to Brandon’s voice, depicting his own views based on his lived experiences. This difference appears to demonstrate a reduction of advocacy and replaced with a focus on administrative fairness.

Loss of Resources

In addition to the lack of advocacy-related work, participants noted the closure of the Advocate’s Office resulted in a loss of valuable resources for conducting meaningful child advocacy. These resources extend beyond the scope of funding. One of the most referenced resource losses is the connection to children. Without a formal office, participants described their inability to have access to children.

When asked about resources, Mr. Elman noted that without the office, he no longer has reasons to be connected to children: “I’d say not having access to young people is another [resource lost]”. Mr. Elman was not the only participant to note that their overall position has changed. Another participant who formerly worked for the office noted that they lost their job

due to the closure and the loss of resources this has created in their work: “the things that I was saying were really effective about the Advocate’s Office, I no longer have access to, so that’s very unfortunate”.

Advocates who did not work directly for the Advocate’s Office noted that they also have faced an extreme loss in the overall resource of the office. Previously, Child and Youth Advocates relied on the Advocate’s Office “as a go-to” to talk about “what is happening, what actually needs to change, what are [we] hearing directly from youth” (Child and Youth Advocate 3). Since the closure of the Advocate’s Office, Advocates have been forced to seek outside opportunities to engage in this line of work and speak with children. As noted by Child and Youth Advocate 3, “having that really strong youth advocacy piece is now no one’s individual responsibility. It was [the Advocate’s Office] individual responsibility and now we don’t have that”. Without the Advocate Office, child and youth advocacy in Ontario has lost what this Child and Youth Advocate described as “that unifying voice”.

Like Child and Youth Advocate 3, Child and Youth Advocate 5’s job was not directly impacted by the closure of the Advocate’s Office. However, they noted that the Advocate’s Office was a valuable resource to them, their coworkers, and the children they worked with. Child and Youth Advocate 5 described the Advocate’s Office as “the biggest tool”, noting the expertise, capacity, profile, and engagement the office had in matters that impact children’s lives. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from their interview:

There was capacity. There was profile. There was a requirement, I don’t know if it was every legislation required, but certainly an understanding that you would engage the Advocate’s Office as decisions were being made as policy was rolling out. I mean, it played a really important role.

Child and Youth Advocate 6 added to the conversation by noting, “I think, for kids in this province, they have lost a real champion”. This advocate noted that while the Ombudsman

Office does seem to publicly say they do similar things to the former Advocate's Office, they "do not know if all kids have access in the same way that they did when there was an actual child advocate".

Youth Perceptions of Each Office

When prompted to share their perceptions and experiences of child and youth advocacy, with reference to any changes that may have occurred, participants often recalled the culture and reputation the former Advocate's Office had within the province and how it differs from the Ombudsman Office. Ms. Ratnam, stated:

Young people don't think [of] the Ombudsman Office Youth Department [and start] jumping for joy. It's a different type of feel. Whereas the Ontario Advocate's Office was a gathering place as well for volunteers and so on and so forth. So even like the culture is different, you know, the Ombudsman's Office, even if it has a name of youth office or whatever it's very institutional itself. It's a very different vibe. I don't think they will ever achieve what the Advocate's Office achieved in terms of that type of culture and vibe.

In her interview, Ms. Ratnam stated that while she does believe the Ombudsman Office is conducting important work and anyone who needs and trusts the office should seek their services, she still believes the overall office dynamic is much more institutional and does not have the same feeling as the Advocate's Office. Her belief that children should continue to seek the Ombudsman Office's services can be seen in the following excerpt:

At the end of the day, people who are aware of the Ombudsman's Office youth department, and who trust the Ombudsman's Office and the youth department should connect with the youth department and get their issues investigated and have things resolved.

Participants described that the Advocate's Office "provided an open door" (Child and Youth Advocate 1) for children to ask questions about their rights or seek help. Child and Youth Advocate 1 stated, "the Advocate Office offered a wonderful place for [children] to learn how to advocate for themselves". Services that participants have expressed are now gone and do not

reside within the Ombudsman Office. Similarly, Child and Youth Advocate 5 stated, “there was always a good vibe” at the Advocate’s Office.

When discussing the culture of each office, Child and Youth Advocate 2 added how much of an impact the name of an office can have on a child’s likelihood of engaging with the office, or even whether they perceive the office as accessible to them. Child and Youth Advocate 2 stated:

I mean, you could write a master’s thesis on just the name Ombudsman. Like no 15-year-old is picking up the phone to call the Ombudsman’s. Whereas, if they’re picking up the phone, like you can call the advocate, they’re going to call the Advocate’s [Office]. It’s something that is accessible to them.

Participants demonstrated a belief that due to the name ‘Ombudsman’, those under the age of eighteen do not feel as though the office is accessible to them. The name, Advocate’s Office, was believed to be much friendlier, and much easier to spell while searching the internet for their services. This observation is demonstrated in Child and Youth Advocate 2’s statement: “Just the name alone. If I can’t spell it, I’m not googling it”.

Former children in the welfare system have also expressed their opinions regarding the closure of the Advocate’s Office, as noted in media reports. Bailey Beattie, who was formerly part of the child welfare system, was quoted, “I’m here today to let our premier know, on the behalf of youth in Ontario, we do not support a government that systemically institutionalizes us into believing that our voices don’t matter” (CBC News, 2018, n.p.) After suffering abuse, being placed in more than forty homes, leaving high school, and becoming a mother at fifteen, Beattie credits the Advocate’s Office for assisting her: “without the provincial Advocate, I could have easily become one of the youths who slip through the cracks” (CBC News, 2018, n.p.). Ashley Ash, who was also formerly part of the child welfare system and later became employed at the Advocate’s Office noted that “Indigenous, black and disabled children will suffer

disproportionately if the cut is made” (CBC News, 2018, n.p.). Expressing her concern, Ash was quoted, “I’m frankly really worried for what we’re going to see next for [children]” (CBC News, 2018, n.p.).

Less Attention to Equitable Treatment

When discussing the changes regarding child advocacy in the province with respect to the closure of the Advocate’s Office, participants were asked if they believed different populations may be inequitably impacted. The Advocate’s Office was mandated to provide advocacy to children, with specific mentions to children who are often more marginalized: First Nations children, Métis children, Inuit children, and children with disabilities (*Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, 2007). However, these populations are no longer referenced within the *Ombudsman Act*, 1990.

As with the loss of advocacy, participants all stated their belief that children are “without a doubt more vulnerable” (Child and Youth Advocate 2). Furthermore, as noted by Child and Youth Advocate 2, “the more vulnerable the children are, the more impacted they are by the closure of the Advocate’s Office”. Child and Youth Advocate 5 shared a similar sentiment when saying “the more marginalized you are, the harder the impact would be”.

Following the announcement that the Advocate’s Office would be permanently closing, numerous protests were organized across the province. These protests provided the opportunity for the community to express their outrage regarding this matter. In Thunder Bay, where the Advocate’s Office had a mobile office that allowed them to work closely with Indigenous youth in Northwestern Ontario, there were a series of rallies that were hosted to protest the closure (Vis, 2018). Debie Jensen, a child and youth worker, expressed her concern regarding these children: “Marginalized children are the voices that are heard the least. They are the children that

are actually trying to speak out the most. They need a voice. They need the support of an outside agency that has power to make their voices heard' (Vis, 2018, n.p.).

Through both interviews and various documents, it is evident that the Ombudsman Office has continued to serve children in care. Child and Youth Advocate 1, in their interview, reflects upon their previous employment in a child and youth organization where they had numerous interactions with the former Advocate's Office. In their interview, Child and Youth Advocate 1 remembers that children in care were already treated inequitably within the province of Ontario. They now believe "those young people are not getting as much of a voice and investigations are probably not being carried out with the same amount of care and thoughtfulness".

Additionally, when asked about populations that are often minoritized, like Black children, Indigenous children, newcomer children, children living in poverty, and children with disabilities, Child and Youth Advocate 1, like many other participants, expressed that they believe such populations are more impacted by the closure of the Advocate's Office:

And so yes, I am sure that kids that those populations, possibly Indigenous children, racialized children, newcomer children and youth, Black children, African children, and kids living in poverty to, I'm sure that those same people are affected. So yes, I would say it has certainly had a different impact. The Ombudsperson is probably more accessible for the middle-class high school student who know where to find them. Whereas the advocate had a broader mandate and was able to do more with partner organizations to support the structures of vulnerable young people and the groups discussed.

However, as Child and Youth Advocate 4 notes, "It's not so much the middle class, the upper class who really rely on those services, it is children who are suffering that are impacted the most". Child and Youth Advocates noted in their interviews that unlike the Ombudsman Office, the Advocate's Office was perceived to be much more accessible due to their larger mandate and the specific wording in their legislation to support children with disabilities, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children.

Mr. Elman also reflected on the wider mandate the previous Advocate's Office was legislated with:

Our mandate was to serve children connected to services under the Child and Youth Family Services Act, which included anybody connected in some way, seeking or receiving service. They did not have to be receiving service but seeking service. So anybody who might be in need of wanting service from child protection, child and youth justice, children's mental health, disabilities, I mean there is 70,000 on the autism waitlist. Then [the Act] says pay attention to First Nations... So those groups of people is bigger than just the people receiving service because it is seeking service. So those people lost something, I would say, for sure. By association, because, you know, all children are, who knows these days, some steps away from mental health challenges or from seeking that kind of service. So yes, lots of children are affected.

In this instance, Mr. Elman reflects on the marginalized populations previously discussed, as well as the stipulation that children only needed to be seeking service, not necessarily receiving it, in order to use the Advocate's Office. Both the Advocate's Office and Ombudsman Office were given the mandate to conduct formal investigations with children. These investigations are attributed to any matter that involves a child within Children's Aid Society; that concerns a child and a service they are receiving by a residential licensee; and any other matter that may concern a child who is seeking and/or receiving a service (*Ombudsman Act, 1990; Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*). The inclusion of children who are merely seeking services but have not yet received services is critical as often due to limited resources, not every child is able to retain immediate services. Thus, this employs investigatory power to a much wider population.

Another point articulated by Child and Youth Advocate 2, was the Advocate's Office policy to meet children where they are. This meant that if a young person was in need of their services, an employee would travel to where the child resided. For instance, "in so many cases, that meant travelling, flying to Thunder Bay, renting a car and driving to wherever the young person was" (Child and Youth Advocate 2). However, the Ombudsman Office does not share the

same policy. Child and Youth Advocate 2 states, “the Ombudsman has a strict policy that they do not do that. They take cases over the phone”.

In addition to the participants’ perceptions of children being treated inequitably, Grand Council Treaty #3 published a media announcement regarding the Advocate’s Office closure, sharing similar sentiments of shock and disappointment. Grand Council Treaty #3 is the traditional government of the Anishinaabe Nation in Treaty #3. This Government is approximately 55,000 square miles, covering areas from west of Thunder Bay, Ontario to north of Sioux Lookout, along the perimeter of the international border, to Manitoba (Grand Council Treaty #3, n.d.). Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh, Grand Council Treaty #3 Grand Chief, was quoted saying, “Government for the people means everyone, our children and youth today have been disempowered by the unilateral decision of the Provincial government to close the Office of the Provincial Advocate” (2018).

Systemic Advocacy

Another notable change discussed by numerous participants was systemic advocacy. Participants discussed systemic advocacy on numerous occasions, referencing how it was conducted both prior to the Advocate’s Office closure and recently within the Child and Youth Unit at the Ombudsman Office. Ms. Ratnam emphasizes the importance of systemic advocacy as without it, “change and transformation, not even change but transformation, you will have persistent issues on the ground. It might look different, but you’ll still have these problems and new problems and whatever until you nip the root of the issue in the bud”. When describing the significance behind systemic advocacy, Ms. Ratnam stated that “the main thing about the Advocate’s Office, was the systemic advocacy. You lost systemic advocacy when they closed the Advocate’s Office”. As noted by Child and Youth Advocate 1, “they [the Advocate’s Office]

literally were supposed to open like investigations or systemic investigations...they literally were supposed to, their job was to support these people". However, participants described their belief that this type of work is no longer taking place at the Ombudsman Office.

The systemic work conducted by the former Advocate's Office largely focused on investigations relating to serious occurrences, such as injuries and death, within care (*Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*). More specifically, in 2016, the Advocate's Office was granted the ability to be notified when a death or serious bodily harm takes place involving a youth who has either sought or received services from a Children's Aid Society within 12 months of the date of incident (Ontario Child Advocate, 2019). From 2016-2019, the Advocate Office was notified of 10, 552 reports (Ontario Child Advocate, 2019). The Advocate's Office worked closely with the Coroner and Ministry of Children and Youth Services to review the child death review process in Ontario.

Additionally, Child and Youth Advocate 1 noted that the lack of attention these cases are now getting prevents them from honouring children whose lives were taken due to being unprotected by the system. This concern can be seen in the following excerpt:

I want to be mindful about how I am saying this, but in all provinces in Canada there have been times when children are from the foster care system, government care so they have passed away due to negligence or other reasons. And what I have seen in Ontario in the last few years is that those cases are sadly not being given the same amount of attention. They're not being reviewed in the same way. I don't think the Ombudsperson perhaps has the staff to do as good as a job as they have in the past. So I worry about like, notably the Ombudsperson, for these awful deaths because they happen everywhere but when we don't review them and when we don't study them and when we don't do our best to learn from them and produce reports that will teach us, we're not honouring you know, that child whose life was no protected so I think that's one thing I would worry about.

The documents that were reviewed also indicate that these cases may not be receiving the same levels of care as previous years. In 2024, MPP Monique Taylor, Hamilton Mountain

jurisdiction, has called for an inquest into the death of a four-year-old girl, Neveah (Ontario NDP, 2024). Neveah's body was found in a dumpster in Toronto in 2022 (Toronto Star Editorial Board, 2024). Neveah was placed into the foster care system within the first five days of her life and continued to live within foster care for approximately two years before being placed back into her mother's care (Toronto Star Editorial Board, 2024). When Neveah's body was found, tests indicated that Neveah had likely died as much as a year prior (Toronto Star Editorial Board, 2024). In total, 354 children with open or recently closed files within child services died between the years of 2020 to 2022 (Selley, 2024). Nearly 13% of individuals under the age of 18 who died in Ontario were under care of the province (Selley, 2024). Following the report of Neveah's death being published in February 2025, advocates like Mr. Elman and Kiaras Gharabaghi, a professor within the School of Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University, have called the case "a stain on an already pretty stained child welfare system in Ontario" and have advocated for an inquest into the death (Pagliaro & Gillis, 2025).

Neveah's case, described as tragic by many (Toronto Star Editorial Board, 2024), is not the only example of cases not receiving sufficient care. Another example includes the death of fifteen-year-old David Roman. On February 19, 2019, David was stabbed to death in a for-profit foster home (Sher, 2021). The foster home was noted for being ill-equipped to handle children with varying issues, like the violent behaviour demonstrated by the fourteen-year-old that murdered David (Sher, 2021). Roman's mother, Elena Dvoskina, was quoted stating, "they're making money on children. They're taking children in without any consideration if they know how to deal with those children. [Had I known], I would have never agreed for David to be placed there" (Sher, 2021, n.p.). David's case was not the first to demonstrate systemic problems in a privately operated foster home. In 2019, the final investigative report published by the

Advocate's Office included a 74-page document outlining their investigation into Johnson Children's Services Inc. located in Thunder Bay (Office for the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019). The investigation was handled with care and concluded with 10 recommendations to ensure no further children were placed in an unsafe living condition (Office for the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019). However, the Ombudsman's Office has not conducted an investigative report on David's case.

Participants reported that they did not believe these instances are being given the same investigatory process they formerly did at the Advocate's Office. The Ontario Ombudsman, Paul Dubé, has acknowledged that the change in offices has not been easy and there have been a few discrepancies in their work. As these gaps are noticed, action is being immediately taken to rectify them. Such action can specifically be seen when Dubé raised the issue that he was not originally mandated to be notified when a child is seriously ill or dies while in care, unlike the former Advocate's Office. Dubé articulates this through the following quote: "If we're going to be responsible for promoting the rights of children and youth in care and keeping an eye on the issues that arise, it'd be important to have that accountability, to have agencies have that obligation to report" (Duggal, 2020, n.p.). Therefore, actions like the reinstatement of the previous mandate regarding oversight of serious occurrences and deaths related to children in care, are being taken to rectify these discrepancies.

Document analysis indicates that the Ombudsman Office does appear to do systemic advocacy, but on a much smaller scale than the Advocate's Office. For example, in the 2023-24 Annual Report, the Ombudsman Office states that as part of the provincial government's request for input in their five-year review of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, they made nine proposals that would allow for substantial change in protecting the rights of children in care.

However, the Ombudsman Office does not appear, at this time, to produce partnership reports and external reports like the Advocate's Office did (e.g., *Verdict of Coroner's Jury to the Inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students in Thunder Bay*). Also, the Ombudsman Office does not appear to make their work as public as the Advocate's Office did, with only four investigation reports being published in the past five years, while the Advocate's Office had three published in 2019 alone. It is important to note that the archival website was not the formal website of the Advocate's Office. Rather, this website was created prior to the office handing their documents over to the Ombudsman's Office as an attempt to ensure that some materials remained visible to the public. It is hard to confirm if these three reports were the only ones for that year, or if there were more that are not accessible.

Outreach and Public Education

Another type of advocacy is outreach and public education. The Advocate's Office conducted regular outreach presentations with children, families, and service providers (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a). As noted by Child and Youth Advocate 2, service providers like Children's Aid Societies were more likely to take the Advocate Office's outreach much more seriously than if "[they] were just a non-governmental organization or even a part of government that didn't have those powers". The powers, referenced by Child and Youth Advocate 2, include "the ability to, for example, subpoena documents and testimony and interview people under oath". Child and Youth Advocate 5 also referred to the outreach as part of the "bread and butter" of their work.

In addition to the more formal outreach presentations, the Advocate Office also partnered with youth to create initiatives which functioned as both advocacy and community development (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019b). One of these

initiatives included the previously mentioned, Feathers of Hope. Feathers of Hope, which still exists today, was created in 2012 as an initiative by the Advocate's Office with support from First Nations leadership and Intergovernmental Network provincial and federal members. This initiative initially started as a plan to bring together youth who identify as First Nations from 92 different remote and fly-in communities within Northern Ontario to discuss their concerns and lived experiences within policy and decision-makers. Feathers of Hope, in the fiscal 2018-19 year, released their *Feathers of Hope Child Welfare Toolkit* and *Feathers of Hope Culture of Belonging Forum* Report, as well as hosted a Health and Well Being event in Thunder Bay, bringing together 100 First Nation Youth (Ontario Child Advocate, 2019). Like Feathers of Hope, the initiatives created by the Advocate's Office are youth-led, whereas there is no current evidence of the Ombudsman outreach teams being led by children.

While it is important to note that the Ombudsman Office does not possess a mandate to conduct outreach, like the former Advocate's Office, there is evidence that outreach is taking place. In 2019, the first year the Child and Youth Unit was available, the team developed posters, brochures, and videos that were accessible on social media and distributed to Children's Aid Societies across the province (Duggal, 2020). Cooke noted that the Child and Youth Unit team was planning to visit areas that have large communities of children within them: "We'll pick the group homes that have the largest number of [children] and the institutions, and go out and directly talk to young people" (Duggal, 2020, n.p.).

Additionally, as noted in the Ombudsman 2023-24 Annual Report, the office "delivered more than sixty presentations to children and youth in care, Children's Aid Societies and frontline workers (e.g., foster parents, group home staff), as well as post-secondary students, faculty and conference attendees connected to the child welfare field" (p. 55). These

presentations were provided to children and youth in care, Children's Aid Societies, post-secondary students, conferences regarding child welfare, and frontline workers such as foster parents and group home staff. When conducting presentations to children in care, the Ombudsman Office staff follow up with each child after the presentation to address any concerns they may have. Additionally, as previously mentioned, there are four specialized outreach teams within the Ombudsman Office: The Black Child, Youth and Families Table; the Indigenous Circle; the 2SLGBTQIA+ Outreach Team; and the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Outreach Team. Each of these unique teams works to target outreach to ensure the specific concerns of the corresponding populations are being heard.

Furthermore, Child and Youth Advocate 7 noted that the Advocate's Office used to be one "large bullhorn for children's voices", ensuring their opinions and views were heard and taken seriously. The media and social discourse that surrounded the Advocate's Office was much stronger than the current Ombudsman's Office Child and Youth Unit. These social pieces are important "to remind everybody that these kids in care, these Indigenous students who have to go to high school 400 kilometers away, these kids with special needs in rural and remote areas who do not have access to any services, could really use them" (Child and Youth Advocate 7). The public education piece is missing in the administrative, operational work.

Both offices have prioritized conducting outreach with children to ensure they are informed about their rights and the services accessible to them. As noted on the former Advocate's Office website, the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007* that mandated the work of the office, they were expected to educate children and their caregivers on their rights (Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019a). Dubé noted that there was a focus within the Child and Youth unit to conduct outreach, adding that it is

their duty to put out as much information as possible for children to become knowledgeable about their rights, as well as the obligations of service providers to facilitate contact between the child and Ombudsman Office (Duggal, 2020).

Between the two offices, one main difference is the topics being discussed. Both the Ombudsman Office and Advocate Office provided information about their respective office, including the work they engage in and how to contact them, as well as educating the various groups on children's rights. However, the Advocate's Office largely provided education regarding the UNCRC, whereas the Ombudsman's Office focuses primarily on educating about children's rights in care.

Continued Advocacy

There were some instances where participants noted that their role or perception of advocacy on individual, systemic, or outreach levels had not been impacted by the transfer of offices. When asked about the differences between the Ombudsman Office and Advocate's Office, Ms. Ratnam noted many things that had changed, but also stated that she believed the Ombudsman Office and its work is imperative to the lives of children within the province of Ontario. This is demonstrated in her statement,

Do I think that office is necessary? Yes. And I am pretty sure there is a news article where I said, and this was prior to the Ombudsman's Office getting the powers, and I had said that even if they do you know, have that power, one of the things they need to do is just like in the hospital system, they have a kid's unit. They need to do the same thing in the Ombudsman's Office. It can't just be like they are going to add some workers and they're going to do advocacy for like investigations for young people. It has to have an individual like unique department and a focus. So, I was very happy with the fact that it was done afterwards.

This separate office is critical to ensuring there are a specific set of employees with the desired skillsets whose entire focus is on the lives of children.

Ms. Ratnam also noted that she believed “the work of one-to-one staff hasn’t necessarily shifted any differently because that has transitioned right from the Advocate’s Office to the Ombudsman Office”. As previously mentioned, Ms. Ratnam believes that youth should be encouraged to connect with the Ombudsman’s Office. Furthermore, she goes on to state “in that manner, I think it’s done very well”.

Similarly, Child and Youth Advocate 5 noted that they believed the Ombudsman’s Office is doing their best to ensure they are conducting meaningful work. As the investigation team from the Advocate’s Office was transferred to the Ombudsman Office, many who worked alongside the former office know the employees personally. Thus, Child and Youth Advocate 5 felt it was important to note the following in their description of the current climate of child and youth advocacy:

I mean, the obvious things that we know, they closed the capital A, Advocate’s Office and shifted all the functions except for the advocacy function to the Ombudsman’s Office. The Ombudsman Office, Child and Youth Unit are also our friends because they were all colleagues of the Advocate’s Office, so they’re, they’re doing their best and trying to do good, and I think doing good work.

Furthering the conversation regarding the importance of the work being conducted by the Ombudsman Child and Youth Unit, Queen’s Park published a media release (Duggal, 2020) on the Ombudsman Office website quoting both Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé and Child and Youth Unit Lead Diana Cooke. Dubé noted, “the objective is to take as much care of children and youth as possible and to provide as much service as possible and information and we’re not going to leave anybody high and dry – it’s too important a responsibility and we take it very seriously” (Duggal, 2020). One of the things the Ombudsman’s Office is doing similarly to the former Advocate’s Office is employing early resolution officers, who take phone calls, inform

children of their rights, connect children to resources, and conduct follow up when needed (Duggal, 2020).

As noted by Child and Youth Advocate 7, “when we think of child and youth advocacy in Ontario, we do not automatically think of the Ombudsman, right?” However, this is not due to their ability to conduct meaningful work, rather it is most likely because “Irwin Elman was around for so long...and was a very effective communicator”. The Ombudsman, as noted by Child and Youth Advocate 7, “has very strong investigative powers” and is effective in their work as can be seen in the following excerpt:

It is literally an Ombudsman’s job to ensure fairness and that includes relational fairness. With children and youth, you have to start with relational fairness, otherwise the rest will not work. I think the Advocate Model we had before is like, all relational fairness all the time, which is great, but you need to make sure you are tinkering with the process, you’re tinkering with these more granular things. And I think that’s where the Ombudsman sort of provides that, that good space.

The Ombudsman’s Office does what Child and Youth Advocate 7 describes as a “warm handle” where they hear the child’s voice, acknowledge what they are saying, and passed them along to the person who can is responsible for taking care of the issue. These transfers are different than the procedures that the former Advocate’s Office followed as they are not involved in the entirety of the process however, they are still advocating for the child’s needs during the initial conversation.

Recommendations

During the interviews, advocates were asked if they had any specific recommendations for the Ontario Government, decisionmakers, or policymakers regarding child and youth advocacy within the province. In their answers, advocates overwhelmingly referenced two recommendations: mandating advocacy within the province and creating opportunities to partner with children and youth.

Mandate Advocacy Within the Province

One major recommendation most participants made was to mandate advocacy within the province. Many referenced the creation of an independent office dedicated solely to children and youth to ensure proper advocacy is taking place. As noted by Child Advocate 6, “you look at the [Ombudsman Office] website and there’s like all these little children and youth ‘click here’ buttons. It is subsumed under all these things”. Child and Youth Advocate 4 noted that when offices are intermingled with other issues, like they are at the Ombudsman Office, children’s interests and rights are often not as prioritized as they would be in an independent office. They referred to a former news article they had spoken in, stating, “when you look at research and experience, those offices that have a singular focus on advancing the rights and interests of children and youth are more effective. And when ... you’ve got some commitment to advance the interests of adults, as well as children and in many instances, the interests and the rights of children and youth take a secondary role within the office.”

In discussing the creation of a separate office, numerous participants specifically referenced the reinstatement of the Advocate’s Office. Irwin Elman stated, “Well, I think there should be, and obviously I am going to say this, is reinstate the office”. Likewise, Child and Youth Advocate 3 stated, “I think PACY needs to be reinstated. I think that needs to be a priority”. On a similar page, Child and Youth Advocate 5 also articulated their belief that the office should be reopened, however, they noted the unlikelihood of that happening. Child and Youth Advocate 5 then stated that the advocacy-based legislation that has not been transferred to the Ombudsman Office, should be. This way there is once again, mandated advocacy for children within the province. This can be seen in the following quote:

Bring it back or attach advocacy to the Ombudsman’s Office. I don’t see them ever reopening it to be honest. I don’t see them ever creating, recreating an office that costs

millions of dollars and has a bunch of people attached to it...But the format of the office, the way it was set up with a with an excellent budget and all those things I just don't see those things happening in 2024 or anytime soon. I would recommend, at the very least that the independent advocacy function, be integrated within the Ombudsman's Office and then I'd have all the same as many as possible with the same features that the other place did in terms of its scope.

Mr. Elman, like Child and Youth Advocate 5 also noted that he did not believe the Ombudsman Office would have the desire to reopen the Advocate's Office. Mr. Elman stated that they should move towards a similar model as Nova Scotia with a child advocate model, as well as revisiting the word 'advocacy' to provide a place for it within the *Ombudsman Act*, 1990. This can be seen in the following statement:

Nova Scotia is moving towards a Child Advocate model. So, Nova Scotia has a Deputy Children's Ombudsman. So rather than a manager or director of the Youth Unit, can we create two legislations amending the Ombudsman Act to have a Deputy Children's Ombudsman with specific powers and duties. And maybe re-look at the word advocacy and put it in the Ombudsman Act.

Like many of the other advocates, Child and Youth Advocate 6 also raised the idea of reopening the Advocate's Office. However, they noted that the office, if it were to be reopened, should have more than one appointed advocate. Child and Youth Advocate 6 recommended having multiple advocates working together in collaboration to ensure every community was represented. This is noted in the following quote:

I think if I were to recommend something...it would be that there is an Office of the Ontario Child and Youth Advocate that has maybe more than just one person, maybe a collaboration so that you have representation from people who understand Indigenous children's lives or racialized children's lives and have some kids in the office who are actively engaged in it.

In addition to the Advocates who participated in the study, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2022) stated in their *Concluding Observations on the Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of Canada*, "The Committee is seriously concerned by the lack of an independent children's rights commissioner at the federal level and regrets the closing of the

Office of the Ontario Child Advocate's" (p. 3). This concern is followed by their urge for the State party to "restore the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate and its entire previous mandate" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2022, p. 3). This statement not only demonstrates the Committee's distress over the closure of the Advocate's Office, but further demonstrates Child and Youth Advocate 2's sentiments of the closure as a direct violation of children's rights through the Human Rights Principle of Non-Retrogression.

Partner with Children and Youth with Lived Experiences

Moving beyond the discussion of reopening the Advocate's Office, participants also expressed the importance of providing funding to organizations that are committed to advocating for children. As previously noted, funding in the field is very scarce and often impedes an organization from being able to conduct their work. Thus, Cheyanne Ratnam notes her first recommendation as, "fund places like OCAC that do the work". Mr. Elman, in his interview also stated that if organizations are receiving funding to engage in this line of work, then there needs to be a commitment to ensuring they are partnering with children with mandatory requirements to work within these partnerships: "There should be a requirement that the organizations that receive the funds have a plan for partnering with children needs to bring their essence and it should be measurable."

Finally, participants expressed their recommendation to invest in children. Participants noted that children, who are being directly impacted by the matters decision-makers are discussing, are going to be the most effective advocates. These children, whether they are younger or older, as noted by Child and Youth Advocate 2, "[are] going to be the most effective advocates for children in the future because they've seen the failure of some of these services and systems, and they understand what does not make a difference in the lives of children in

those situations”. Child and Youth Advocate 1 also states, “I would say, keep asking children and youth what they see as priorities and don’t just ask children and youth generally. Ask those who are affected by the policy issues that we’re talking about.” Child and Youth Advocate 1 notes the importance of partnering with children who are being directly impacted by the things being discussed. Similarly, Ms. Ratnam adds the importance of “not utiliz[ing] advocates, leaders, and lived experts as tokens” to the discussion.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to critically analyze whether and how child and youth advocacy has changed within the province with the closure of the former Advocate's Office and transfer of some of its functions to the Ombudsman Office in the newer Child and Youth Unit. Through this qualitative research, my aim was to develop an understanding of how advocacy has changed through the perspectives of those directly involved in the field, legislation and other documentation, as well as how these changes have impacted the lives of children. In line with the intent of this study, qualitative data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and a document analysis of relevant legislation, case reports, policy reports and media reports related to the Ombudsman Office, Advocate's Office, or child and youth advocacy in Ontario. The findings of this study concluded that the closure of the Advocate's Office resulted in numerous changes to child and youth advocacy with Ontario. These changes include but are not limited to a decrease in opportunities for youth to participate; less funding for advocacy-related projects; more emphasis on policies and fairness than children's voices; and some continuation of advocacy-based functions, but also some decrease.

Requirements of Childhood Advocacy

Advocacy encompasses several different levels and can look many different ways. However, no matter the sector, advocacy is a deliberate and strategic process that seeks to create changes deemed necessary by impacted populations in both policies and practice (Cutter et al., 2014; Frankel, 2018). Child advocacy, as noted by Howe (2009), seeks to incorporate the voices of children and youth through co-participatory opportunities. In their interviews, advocates continued to depict the importance of including children's voices, specifically those with lived experience, when conducting advocacy within the child and youth sector. Much like childism,

child and youth advocacy also seeks to respond critically and creatively to the direct lived experiences of children by transforming the pre-existing understandings of powerful societal norms through actively listening to children's words and amplifying their voices (Biswas et al., 2023; Wall, 2022).

In addition to listening to children, amplifying their voices, and creating co-participatory opportunities for children to engage in their own advocacy, the data analyzed in both interviews and documents also points to the importance of securing proper funding and working within the rights prescribed to children. Without proper funding, it is difficult for advocates to conduct their work. Oftentimes, advocacy-based projects become side projects that are merely worked on when time allows, rather than being their sole focus. Without proper funding, advocates also note that they are often unable to provide honorariums to the lived experts they are working alongside.

As formerly mentioned, individuals under the age of eighteen are prescribed their own set of rights through the UNCRC. The UNCRC, as stated by scholars (Bacon & Frankel, 2014; Bendo, 2021; Bendo & Mitchell, 2017) and advocates through their interviews, is a critical tool in conducting child and youth advocacy. The UNCRC played a large role in the former Advocate's Office, as noted in the previous legislation and by study participants, as it was directly referenced within the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*. The UNCRC acted as a guide for how advocates were to engage with children and conduct their work.

What are the Changes?

On the surface, the clear difference is the change in offices and legislation. However, the current findings suggest that Ontario has undergone much more change. One notable change

discussed throughout the entirety of the research project is an overall decrease in formal advocacy being conducted at the provincial level. As highlighted by scholars such as Bendo (2021), Howe (2009), and Hunter (2020), child and youth advocacy has three important levels: individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, outreach and public education. Each type of advocacy, imperative to the lives of children and youth as they address various aspects of their lives, is given much less attention by the Ombudsman's Office than the Advocate's Office.

Also as previously mentioned, Bendo (2021) defines the act of individual advocacy as receiving a complaint from a child and/or concerned adult and actively working towards resolving the issue at hand. In conducting individual advocacy, the Ombudsman's Office still pursues investigations relating to an individual child and works to resolve the issue at hand, ensuring administrative fairness for all parties involved. However, in this specific form of advocacy, Advocates have noted that the Ombudsman's Office is more of a gatekeeper than a vehicle for children to participate like the former Advocate's Office. By placing a much larger emphasis on administrative fairness over the voice of the child(ren) involved, the Ombudsman's Office is lacking the crucial element of child participation, in their advocacy-based work.

Moving beyond an individual case, systemic advocacy has also faced significant changes. Previously, the Advocate's Office conducted systemic advocacy, primarily with Ontario's systems of care, through formal investigations and youth-led initiatives like the formerly mentioned HairStory and Feathers of Hope. In these investigations, children that were directly impacted by the topic at hand were consulted to ensure their voices were heard and views were taken seriously. As mentioned by Ms. Ratnam, one of the biggest losses child and youth advocacy endured due to the closure of the Advocate's Office is systemic advocacy. Systemic advocacy, like individual advocacy, is taking place on a smaller scale. The Ombudsman Office

opens cases that involve investigating systems, like Children's Aid Society, however, these appear to happen less often and do not incorporate children's views in the same way.

In terms of individual and systemic advocacy, participants expressed concern that some populations, including those identified as requiring special attention (e.g., children with disabilities, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children) have been inequitably impacted by the closure of the former office and are not being served to the same degree at the Ombudsman's Office. Additionally, advocates believe these children face barriers and challenges in engaging with the Ombudsman Office as it is "a different type of feel" and "very institutional". Advocates believe the Advocate's Office always had "an open door" and "always [had] a good vibe", making it much more accessible. However, it is important to note that the Ombudsman's Office has created specialized outreach teams for some of these populations.

Finally, the third type of child and youth advocacy, outreach and public education, has also undergone changes. Another piece of legislation that was not transferred into the *Ombudsman Act, R.S.O.*, 1990 is the mandate to conduct outreach with children, families and service providers to educate them on their rights. Despite not possessing a formal mandate, there is still evidence of outreach taking place within the Ombudsman's Office. The presentations still being conducted within schools and various conferences are demonstrations of outreach. Additionally, the four specialized outreach teams, targeting specific populations that worked closely alongside the Advocate's Office, is another example that despite not possessing a formal mandate, the Ombudsman's Office engaging in outreach.

Despite many differences between the two offices, participants expressed that the Ombudsman's Office is actively trying to do their best for the children within Ontario. As many of the employees at the Ombudsman's Office were former employees of the Advocate's Office,

they possess the skillset of empowering youth voices to ensure their perspectives are being taken seriously in their investigations. There are some discrepancies within the differing legislations, but that does not mean that these employees are not “trying to do good” (Child and Youth Advocate 2).

Recommendations

In both interviews and publicly accessible documents, Child and Youth Advocates expressed their desire to recreate an independent office dedicated to children and youth, rather than having it subsumed under adult issues. This way, children’s interests and rights would be prioritized and advocates’ attention would not be divided by multiple issues at hand. Multiple participants directly stated the Advocate’s Office should be reinstated, while others said at the very least, the advocacy-based functions that were not transferred to the Ombudsman Office, should be. This way, children once again have mandated advocacy at the provincial level. However, it is crucial to note the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s urge for Ontario to reinstate both the Advocate’s Office and their former mandate (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2022). This piece of international law drew a rare critique to the Ontario Government to articulate their disapproval of the decision, further demonstrating the Advocates desire for the Advocate’s Office to be reinstated.

The other recommendation offered by Advocates is to see children as competent beings. Advocates recognize that children, who are being directly impacted by the topics being discussed by policymakers, are going to be the most effective advocates as they have lived experience. Advocates want to see the integration of more co-participatory opportunities where children’s voices are heard, taken seriously, and implemented into advocacy-based projects.

Childism

Childism served as the dominant lens through which conclusions were drawn from the data. Analyzing the data through the theoretical framework of childism allowed for a better understanding of the data, specifically referring to how children have been impacted by the change within Ontario regarding their advocacy.

Often, children's voices are silenced or left out of conversations regarding political and social foundations that have substantial impacts on their lives. This can be demonstrated in many instances, including the decision to close the Advocate's Office. The decision to close the Advocate's Office did not include the perspectives of the population it would impact the most, children. As demonstrated in both the literature and participant interviews, the political and social foundations within Ontario continue to emphasize children as vulnerable, creating the assumption they are passive and incompetent, silencing their voices and limiting their agency.

Prior to the closure, Mr. Elman noted that the Advocate's Office provided a space where workers would "partner with children and youth to bring their issues forward". Participants articulated the office as a safe space where children could seek advice, assistance, and ask questions; specifically, this sentiment can be articulated by Ms. Ratnam in an interview from 2018, "you created and nurtured this environment where it was safe to speak up and now you're taking that away" (Reddekopp, 2018, n.p.). In addition to her articulation of the office as a safe space, this quotation from Reddekopp's (2018) article also demonstrates Ms. Ratnam's frustration behind the government's decision to close the former Advocate's Office.

Ms. Ratnam was not the only person to express this sense of anger. Most of the advocates interviewed, as well as many others in published news articles, have expressed concern regarding the closure. Advocates, such as Child and Youth Advocate 2, note the closure of the Advocate

Office was a direct violation of Children's Rights with mention of the Human Rights Principle of Non-Retrogression, specifically in regard to Article 12 of the UNCRC. As the Advocate Office closure was made without speaking to any children, and the Ombudsman Office works within the principle of fairness rather than the voice of the child, children are continuously being placed in lower positions of authority to the decision and policy makers, being rendered silent, and unable to act upon their own autonomy.

Wall's (2022) theoretical framework of childism points to how child and youth advocacy in Ontario has been significantly impacted by the underlying problem of how adults, like politicians, understand and view children. This framework was thus purposeful in furthering our understanding of how the change child and youth advocacy has impacted children's lives. Additionally, Wall's (2022) depiction of childism, along with child and youth advocacy, seeks to respond critically and creatively to children's direct lived experiences. These responses often attempt to transform the pre-existing understandings of powerful societal norms (Biswas et al., 2023). It is important to note, both Wall's (2022) definition of childism and the concept of child and youth advocacy both suggest the need to prioritize the voice of the child by listening and amplifying what they are saying.

Study findings suggest how dominant relations within society between children and adults can be challenged and re-positioned within the province of Ontario to establish meaningful child advocacy (Sundhall, 2017). This involves the process of embarking on a more critical and radical task of responding to children's lived experiences by reformulating societal norms (Burman, 2022). Study participants described actively working to challenge the adult-child hierarchy by creating opportunities for children to work as equal partners alongside them. It would be beneficial to continue investigating child and youth engagement and partnership within

Ontario legislature and the Ombudsman Office to ensure their voices and views are being heard and considered in matters pertaining to their lives.

Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful in recruiting youth participants, and every participant was over the age of eighteen. However, as noted within the theoretical framework of childism, it is important to critique the structures within society through the experience of children (Biswas et al., 2023). To ensure children's voices, perspectives, and experiences were at the forefront of the study, a thorough document analysis was completed. These documents included or referenced children's experiences with the former Advocate's Office. Additionally, participants who have worked directly alongside children within this field, they were able to relay their experiences.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study point to the complexities of undertaking child and youth advocacy within the province of Ontario. Findings suggest that a formal appointed provincial child advocate, or legislated advocacy within the Ombudsman Office, is critical to ensure child and youth advocacy is taking place. Although the former Advocate Office and the current Ombudsman Office are structured quite differently, as each is guided by a different mandate and legislation, opportunities for child advocacy can be embedded within current legislation to ensure children's voices are being heard, valued, and respected. Advocacy should be legislated in some form with a comprehensive forward-looking approach to ensure children are being viewed as partners. In order to do so, decision-makers should liaise with lived experts, advocates, and children themselves in order to work out the details and technicalities of how this advocacy would look.

Another implication pertains to the current outreach being conducted by the Ombudsman's Office. The Ombudsman's Office, specifically the Child and Youth Unit, should place priority on expanding their outreach to include populations other than children in care, such as schools, and discuss children's rights in both care and legislation, like the UNCRC.

Strengths of the Study

Although research in Canada exists on child and youth advocacy and children's rights, relatively little attention has been paid to the shift Ontario has experienced within the field of child and youth advocacy with respect to the Advocate's Office. Providing individuals who have experience with child and youth advocacy the opportunity to share their insights and experiences both before and after the implementation of the Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit, ultimately provides a stronger understanding of child and youth advocacy in Ontario.

Additionally, the qualitative and inductive approach that I adopted to fill the knowledge gap in this distinct area of study has revealed the opportunities and limitations faced by the closure of the Advocate's Office, which will serve to demonstrate the importance of creating opportunities to amplify the voices of children by conducting meaningful advocacy.

Moreover, findings from this study may contribute to social justice issues related to child and youth advocacy. This study is useful to children and youth in Ontario as it sought to highlight the changes of advocacy within the province with respect to the closure of the former Advocate's Office. From this, the intention is to create political suggestions based on the findings for how to make changes that will benefit the lives of children as a way of hopefully making the research useful to decision makers (Flick, 2018). Additionally, these suggestions for change will be used as steps towards both relevance and implementation of the study's findings (Flick, 2018).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A limitation to the study was that no participants had expertise or direct experience with the Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit. One participant did work previously at the Ombudsman Office and has a general understanding of how the office conducts their work, but did not work within the Child and Youth Unit. The Child and Youth Unit, as well as individual employees, were contacted numerous times with the Invitation and Consent Letter (see Appendix D), but they either declined to partake or did not respond. Additionally, no children and youth who have been assisted by the Ombudsman's Office participated, as this was outside the scope of the study. These limitations were addressed by triangulating the interview data with reports from the Ombudsman Office and the former Advocate's Office.

Three main suggestions surfaced from this study as directions for future research. Each of the recommendations revolves around the sample size and demographics of participants. To begin, as only nine participants consented to participating in the study, future studies may wish to include a larger sample to gain a broader understanding of child and youth advocacy within Ontario by reaching out to more organizations and/or individuals. While the intent of the study was to explore how child and youth advocacy has shifted within the province, the sample size was believed to be sufficient and feasible as these understandings were augmented with a document analysis of legislation, media pieces, advocacy reports, and legal documents.

In addition to broadening the sample size, future studies may wish to approach more individuals under the age of eighteen to gain an understanding of how these changes have impacted their perception of child and youth advocacy. While youth-led organizations that previously worked alongside the Advocate's Office, such as Hair Story and Feathers of Hope were contacted, no one indicated an interest in participating. Future researchers may wish to

include a wider range of participant requirements or create working relationships with organizations like Children's Aid Society, to reach more children in hopes of pursuing them as potential participants.

Finally, it would be beneficial for future researchers to create a working partnership with the Ombudsman Office and its employees to ensure these perspectives are heard. As the study sought to compare the two offices and its commitments to children, it would have been advantageous to have included more participants from the Ombudsman Office to gain insights to their perspectives on the matter. It is important to note that the Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit was contacted on three different occasions, however, no staff members expressed their interest in partnership.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The present study examined the stories and lived experiences of both children and Advocates, as well as the policies, legislation, and media that surround child and youth advocacy in Ontario, to gain an in-depth look into how the closure of the Advocate's Office has impacted children within the provinces. Through the interviews and document analysis conducted, final themes indicated that advocacy in Ontario has faced significant changes and some continued strengths. The most noteworthy difference is the change in legislation, however there are significantly more differences that continue to impact the lives of children.

The changes noted throughout the course of the interviews and document analysis include a significant decrease in opportunities for youth's voices to be expressed and heard. This change is a critical finding as youth participation and voice has been described as an important component of advocacy by the participants in the study. Other differences included more emphasis on policies than children's lived experiences and less funding to support advocacy-based projects. Additionally, while the Ombudsman's Office has created specific outreach teams to address concerns of specific populations, the legislation no longer specifically mentions the need to provide a voice for Inuit, First Nations, and Métis children, or children with a disability. It is important to note that some individuals believe that some aspects of advocacy, like individual investigations, have not changed. Moreover, the findings strongly recommend the need to legislate a formal body of child advocacy within the province to ensure children's voices are being heard and taken seriously.

Based upon the paucity of knowledge within Ontario regarding Child and Youth Advocacy within the province, this research makes a significant contribution to policy and practice. Specifically, this study provides policy makers, and all concerned stakeholders with

essential knowledge that expands the limited systemic literature in this field. This study provides these individuals with critical information on how meaningful and impactful change can be brought within the province of Ontario to ensure children's rights are being met, as well as to further improve the way child and youth advocacy is being conducted. An example of this includes following the Advocates and UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendation to reinstate the Advocate's Office and their mandate, as demonstrated through the following excerpt: "The Committee urges the State party to restore the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate and its entire previous mandate" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2022, p. 3).

Findings from this study are also relevant to children, parents and professionals involved in the various child service delivery systems that were previously served under the Advocates Office and the Ombudsman Office is currently responsible for overseeing. Other individuals in the child and youth sector that have not been served under either mandate may also find this information relevant as it pertains to the lived experiences of children within the province. The information presented in this study articulates how children's rights can be implemented within practice, such as ensuring children are provided with the opportunity to express their views and be taken seriously. The findings can also further aid these individuals and organizations to ensure they understand how services can be further improved to best serve all groups of children, with specific reference to those often classified as vulnerable.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

A Case Study of Child and Youth Advocacy in Ontario

1. If you feel comfortable answering, please answer the following demographic questions:
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. What is your gender?
 - c. What is your geographic location? (Where are you located)?
 - d. How do you identify, in terms of your ethnicity?
 - e. What is your current employment status?
 - f. Is there anything else about your background or demographics that you would like to share or that you think might be relevant?

2. Please describe how you would define ‘child and youth advocacy’.
 - a. How would you describe child and youth advocacy in Ontario?
 - b. What would you define as the most important components of child and youth advocacy?

3. Please describe your former role(s) and/or current connection with child and youth advocacy in Ontario. (*Note. If multiple roles, go through each in turn (e.g., past employment, current employment).*)
 - a. What duties did you/do have in this role?
 - b. What kind of work did you/do you do in this role?
 - c. Did you/do you conduct your work in partnership with (other) children? (*Probe. Can you provide any examples?*)
 - d. What tools or resources were important to you being able to work in this role (UNCRC, voices of children, legislation, funding, etc)?

4. (*For participants who were involved in advocacy prior to 2019*). With respect to the closure of the Advocate’s Office in 2019, has your role as a child and youth advocate shifted? (*Probe: If so, how? If not, please explain what aspects remained the same.*)
 - a. Did the change have any impact on your work?
 - b. Has your ability to work in partnership with children changed?
 - c. Are there different tools that now lead your work (legislation, UNCRC)?

5. Do you believe the change in law, and the change from the Advocate’s Office to the Ombudsman’s Office has impacted the way investigations are carried out, or impacted the way staff or officials advocate for children and youth? How?
 - a. Do you believe the changes have impacted the way staff or officials conduct advocacy at an individual case level?
 - b. Do you believe the changes have impacted the way staff or officials conduct outreach?
 - c. Do you believe the changes have impacted the way officials educate the public on children’s rights and/or child and youth advocacy?

6. (If “yes” to previous question): Do you believe the change in provincial child and youth advocacy has impacted all children and youth equally? (*Probe*: Do you believe there are groups that have been impacted more?)
 - a. How were these groups previously supported?
 - b. What types of barriers are now preventing some children and youth from receiving the same level of support, or what factors are causing some children and youth to be more supported than others?
7. Overall, do you believe the closure of the Advocate’s Office and/or the opening of the Child & Youth Unit at the Ombudsman’s Office has changed child and youth advocacy within Ontario? *Probe*: How has it changed or remained the same? Can you think of any examples that show this?
8. What do you think should that the government or others should have as priorities, in terms of advocacy for children and youth in the future? (*Probe*. What kind of advocacy should be happening for children and youth? What recommendations do you have for the government, policy makers, or other people? Why? What difference would it make?)
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about advocacy related to children and youth in Ontario? Is there something we should be asking other people we interview?

Appendix B: Ethics Approval

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 12/21/2023

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: RAMEY, Heather - Child and Youth Studies

FILE: 23-161 - RAMEY

TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Felicity Hocking
SUPERVISOR: Heather Ramey

TITLE: A Critical Analysis of Ontario Legislation: A Case Study of Child and Youth Advocacy in Ontario

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 12/1/2024

The Brock University Health Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from **12/21/2023** to **12/1/2024**.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 12/1/2024. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Office of Research Ethics web page at <https://brocku.ca/research-at-brock/office-of-research-services/research-ethics-office/#application-forms>

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:



Stephen Cheung, Chair
Health Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable. If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix C – Letter of Invitation

Title of Study: A Critical Analysis of Ontario Legislation: A Case Study of Child and Youth Advocacy in Ontario

Principal Student Investigator: Felicity Hocking, Master of Arts Candidate, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University

Principal Investigator: Dr. Heather Ramey, Associate Professor, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University

Invitation

You are invited to participate in this research project because you have been involved in child and youth advocacy in Ontario or Canada.

The purpose of this research study is to explore child and youth advocacy in Ontario.

What are the good things that might happen in this study?

The benefits of this study might be:

- The results may provide information that enables policy and decision makers to create change.
- The results may help develop future policy and practice responses around child and youth advocacy.
- We appreciate and value the time and energy it takes to participate in a research study.

What are the problems that might happen in this study?

- You may feel obligated and pressured to participate in the study because the topic directly impacts you. Participation is completely voluntary.
- You may feel uncomfortable by the questions being asked. Please know that you do not have to answer anything you do not want to. You also have the choice to leave the study, without any consequences, at any time up until analysis is complete and findings are being shared (a minimum of one month after data collection).

What will happen during this study?

- You will be invited to participate in an open-ended, video-recorded interviews approximately 60 minutes long, online through Zoom.
- Once we are done creating transcripts of our conversation, we will erase identifying information (e.g., names) and we will use those anonymous transcripts for our analysis. Recordings will be stored separately until the study is complete, and then erased. We will send you a copy of the transcripts to your email or another way that you choose (e.g., mail) approximately two weeks after our interview, so that you can review them and ensure that your views were accurately represented.
- The information you provide will be considered confidential and grouped with comments from other participants.

What if you change your mind?

You may stop being in the study at any time by leaving the interview. If you want to stop, just let us know. You can also ask questions at any time.

If you decide to remove yourself from the study after the interview, we will remove your data, as long as we have not completed reporting our findings (at least two weeks after your interview). Unfortunately, it will not be possible to remove any comments contributed after analysis is done and reports have been shared. Real names and identities will not be used.

Please provide **contact information** (e.g., email address) where we can send your transcripts, and a summary of what we find. Feel free to list different contacts if you would like these sent to different places.

Interviews and Data Storage

Data will be encrypted, and password protected and stored on the Principal Student Investigator's password-protected computer. Only members of the research team will have access to the data. Data, stored with pseudonyms, will remain there for at least 7 years and may be used in future studies. Your confidentiality will be protected to the fullest extent possible by replacing your name with a pseudonym for all data and in all publications, such as participant 1. The code list linking real names with pseudonyms will be stored separately and securely from the data.

Scheduling an Interview

To schedule an interview please contact the Principal Student Investigator Felicity Hocking (fh21kt@brocku.ca).

I agree to participate in this study described above and to *have my comments remain confidential*. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in this letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw at any time up until analysis is complete and findings are being shared (a minimum of two weeks after data collection).

Yes, I would like to get a summary of what we find. Please send it to me here:

If you sign your name on this page, it means that you agree to take part in this research study.

I have made this decision based on the information that I have read in this form. I also have the opportunity to receive any additional information and ask questions at any time in the future.

Signature

Date

Name (Printed)

The study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file # 23-161 - RAMEY). If you have any questions regarding your rights and welfare as a research participant in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Board at Brock University: reb@brocku.ca, (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035.

Please keep the provided copy of this form for your records. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Appendix D: Documents Analyzed

Legislative Documents

1. Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2019, S.O., c.14, Sched. 1). Retrieved from the Ontario Government Website: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17c14>

Description: The Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2019) was created with the purpose to promote children's best interests and well-being, as well as ensure they are protected.

2. Ombudsman Act (1990, R.S.O, c. O.6). Retrieved from the Ontario Government Website: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o06>

Description: The Ombudsman Act (1990) was created to establish Ontario's Ombudsman and provide the person and their respective office of employees with their guidelines. The Act has been amended nineteen times, three of which followed the *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act*, 2018. Some of these more recent amendments included the responsibilities of the new Child and Youth Unit.

3. Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act (2007, S.O. 2007, c. 9). Retrieved from the Ontario Governments website: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/07p09>

Description: The purpose of this Act was to establish the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and outline their roles and responsibilities to the children and youth of Ontario.

4. Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act (2018, S.O. 2018, c. 17 - Bill 57). Retrieved from the Ontario Government website: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s18017>

Description: The *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act*, 2018, was announced in 2018 by Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Part of this Act included a repeal of the previous *Provincial*

Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007 and the closure of the advocate's office.

Additionally, this Act stated that some of the functions from the Advocate's Office to the Ombudsman's Office in a new child and youth unit.

Investigative Reports

1. Dubé, P (2022). *A voice unheard: Brandon's story*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/Media/ombudsman/ombudsman/resources/Reports-on-Investigations/A-Voice-Unheard-Final-report-EN-accessible.pdf>

Description: This investigation was originally being conducted by the former Advocate's Office, however, was transferred to the Ombudsman's Office in 2019. This report covers events between December 31st, 2015, to October 26th, 2018.

On Monday October 22nd, 2018, a ten-year-old boy named "Brandon" missed school due to being in immense pain from a bowel impaction and an undiagnosed kidney infection. On this day, Brandon's great uncle "Frank" was scheduled to have a meeting with Brandon's school principal and CAS caseworker but failed to show up. Out of concern, the principal and caseworker made the decision to go check in on Brandon to make sure he was okay. This is how they described the scene to the investigators:

So, we walked in and the place was in complete disarray...it was garbage everywhere, more so than when I had been there the time before. Soiled pull-ups throughout the floor. Feces on the floor. There was a litter box in the kitchen for the cats and clearly this litter box had not been changed in some time. ... There was again that strange odour and I could see Brandon lying on the futon, which is in the main living area ... curly up ... facing the wall. And he looked quite grey to me. ... I was quite alarmed at what I saw ... In the moment, I was overwhelmed (Dubé, 2022, p. 38 para 190).

The principal and casework immediately called emergency medical services which led to two police officers and two ambulances showing up. The CAS worker felt Brandon was at immediate risk and wanted to remove from him Frank's home, but the supervisor denied her request as they had been involved with the family for quite some time and were working with them to ensure

Brandon's safety. The police then apprehended Brandon, placing him in a foster home and contacted the advocate's office. This report then covers the investigative process, the recommendations made by the Ombudsman's Office, and the response of CAS.

2. Dubé, P. (2023). *Missing in action: Misty's story*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/Media/ombudsman/ombudsman/resources/Reports-on-Investigations/Ombudsman-Ontario-Missing-in-Inaction-April-2023-Report-accessible.pdf>

Description: The Ombudsman's Office was informed about concerns regarding the care that Johnson Children's Services (JCS) was providing to "Misty" while she was residing in Southwestern Ontario. Misty, an Indigenous 13-year-old, is considered by the Ombudsman's Office as particularly vulnerable due to her living with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Additionally, Misty has a history of abusing strong substances found on the street. Originating from Northern Ontario, Misty's local CAS and Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services were unable to find any local resources that could support her complex needs. Thus, she was moved to Southwestern Ontario as a last resort.

Misty spent approximately twenty-five days at her first home and did not settle very well. On the first day, Misty went missing, and again twice after. Once Misty was found after the final disappearance, she was disheveled, covered in blood, bruises, and bugs. She was immediately taken to the hospital for abuse treatment. Shortly afterwards, Misty was relocated due to a disturbance caused in her home. Again, Misty went missing on two separate occasions and her time at her home was brief. During the second disappearance, Misty returned to the former foster home claiming to have overdosed, been revived twice with naloxone, and continued using more drugs.

After another hospital visit, Misty was released into the care of Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services and was taken back up North.

After having only been in the care of JCS for forty-seven days, Misty went missing seven times, once for nineteen days. During these absences, there was evidence that Misty endured physical and sexual abused, required medical treatment for injuries sustained, used substances such as methamphetamine, and overdosed. There were several systemic issues that failed Misty during her time in Southwestern Ontario.

3. Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2019). *Investigation report: "Alex"*. Retrieved from:

<https://ocaarchives.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/alexreporten.pdf>

Description: This investigation report covers critical information from a 2016 case involving a fifteen-year-old First Nations child named "Alex", who was seeking mental health support and a safe place to live. The investigation was based primarily on a call from Alex's foster parent, "Renee" after being held at knifepoint, threatened to be stabbed, and had her front porch set on fire. Renee knew Alex's needs were beyond the support she could offer, and felt she was pressured into accepting him into her home after initially saying no. This report covers events that took place January 29th to 31st 2016. The information provided includes information about how the case was conducted and the recommendations made by the former Advocate's Office.

4. Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (2019). *Investigation report: Johnson Children's Services Inc (Thunder Bay)*. Retrieved from:

<https://ocaarchives.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/jcsinvestigationreporten.pdf>

Description: The decision to investigate JCS in Thunder Bay originated with a call from a concerned employee who felt the majority of the foster care staff were not properly trained and

equipped with the proper techniques to support the needs of the children and youth in their care. Many of these children were struggling with numerous mental health conditions, such as self-harm, depression, trauma from previous sexual assault, acute suicidal ideation, and the abuse of various substances. Additionally, this staff member was concerned about the safety of the children and youth and the overall physical condition of the foster homes. Complaints regarding the inability of staff to support the high demands of the children and youth were raised by numerous organizations, however, they did not know this.

Policy Documents

1. Committee on the Rights of the Child (2022). *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Canada: Committee on the Rights of the Child.*

Retrieved from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3978336?ln=en>

Description: Following Article Forty-Four of the UNCRC, States are required to present the Committee with periodic reports every five years to articulate their progress with regard to children's rights prescribed by the convention. Virtually on May 17th and 18th, 2022, the Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the combined fifth and sixth reports of Canada, then adopted concluding observations at the 2630th meeting that was held on June 3rd, 2022. Within this report includes a comment from the Committee regarding the closure of the Advocate's Office and that they strongly urge that the Ontario Provincial Progressive Conservative Government to restore the office and its former mandate.

2. Canadian Council of Parliamentary Ombudsman (2022). *Fairness by design: An administrative fairness assessment guide.* Retrieved from:

https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/Media/ombudsman/ombudsman/resources/Brochures/Fairness_by_Design-2022-accessible.pdf

Description: This document outlines the Ombudsman's Office's Fairness by Design policy.

Fairness by Design is an assessment tool used by Ombudsman Offices around Canada, as well as other public organizations, to ensure programs and decision-making processes are done fairly.

This guide is also used in the Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit investigations to create reports and recommendations.

Media Reports

1. Reddekopp (2018). *Ford's move to axe child advocate office 'a nightmare', children's rights lawyer says*. CBC News. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ford-s-move-to-axe-child-advocate-office-a-nightmare-children-s-rights-lawyer-says-1.4907142>

Description: This article written by Lorenda Reddekopp (2018), describes the initial thoughts and feelings of adults who were previously involved with the advocates office as a young person; Irwin Elman, the former Ontario Child and Youth Advocate; and Suzan Fraser, a lawyer who advocates for children's rights.

2. CBC News (2018). *Plan to close child advocate office 'unconscionable', youth, child welfare advocate say*. CBC News. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/child-advocate-office-rally-1.4925997>.

Description: This article includes quotes from child welfare advocate, Elsbeth Dodman; Bailey Beattie, a former young person that was in the system and sought help from the advocates office; Ashley Ash, another young person that received help from the Advocate's Office; and Lisa MacLeod, the Children, Community and Social Services Minister.

3. Duggal (2020). *'We want young people calling us directly': Head of the new children and youth unit in the Ontario Ombudsman's Office (QP Briefing)*. Ombudsman Ontario.

Retrieved from: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/news/in-the-news/2020/%E2%80%98we-want-young-people-calling-us-directly%E2%80%99-head-of-the-new-children-and-youth-unit-in-the-ontario-o>

Description: This media release from the Ombudsman Office includes key information from Ontario's Ombudsman Paul Dubé, specifically referencing his briefing at Queens Park in January 2020. This release was written nearly eight months following the closure of the Advocate's Office to share an important message with children, "if you have a question, call" (Duggal, 2020, n.p.). Additionally, information about the new Child and Youth Unit, their similarities to the former Advocate's Office, as well as differences, and the work they conduct is included.

4. Grand Council Treaty #3 (2018). *Closure of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth – is not government for the people*. Grand Council Treaty #3 News.

Retrieved from: <https://gct3.ca/closure-of-the-office-of-the-provincial-advocate-for-children-and-youth-is-not-government-for-the-people/>

Description: This media release from Grand Council Treaty #3 expressed their "shock and deep concern of the closure of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth" (2018, n.p.). The report included Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh's, the Grand Chief, worries for vulnerable children as he believed the office to be a key role in bringing attention to these populations (Grand Council Treaty #3, 2018).

5. Vis, M. (2018). *Local protesters rally against cutting child advocate*.

TBnewswatch.com. Retrieved from: <https://www.tbnewswatch.com/local-news/local-protesters-rally-against-cutting-child-advocate-2-photos-1141060>

Description: The former Advocate's Office had a second office located in Thunder Bay. This report, published by Matt Vis, includes the opinions of individuals who attended organized rallies held in Thunder Bay to protest the Progress Conservative government's decision to close the Advocate's Office.

6. Toronto Star Editorial Board (2024). An indifferent society failed Neveah. Now she deserves a reckoning. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/an-indifferent-society-failed-neveah-now-she-deserves-a-reckoning/article_47bc2130-63f1-11ef-826e-5fc8d6eeddab.html.

Description: This media report outlines the facts of four-year-old Neveah's death, the case, and Mr. Elman's perspectives on the matter.

7. Elman, I. (2024). *Why a standing committee on children, youth and families? In Neveah's name*. The Elman. <https://theelman.com/index.php/2024/09/03/why-a-standing-committee-on-children-youth-and-families-in-neveahs-name/>.

Description: In this blog post, Irwin highlights the numerous errors caused by the province to protect Neveah and hundreds of other children. Irwin notes the importance of creating a Standing Committee on Children, Youth and Families to advocate for children and youth as there is currently no one in the provincial government conducting this work.

Appendix E: Case Study Protocol

Section A: Overview of the Case Study

1. Through this research, my aim is to develop an understanding of how child and youth advocacy has shifted in the province of Ontario since the 2019 closure of the Advocate's Office. As such, the following research question will address existing gaps in the literature and guide the proposed study: How has child and youth advocacy changed in Ontario, with respect to the shift in legislation from the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*, to the *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2018*?

Section B: Data Collection Procedures

1. **Interviews.** Participants with a connection to child and youth advocacy will be recruited to participate in a one-on-one virtual interview. These interviews will be approximately 60 minutes in length and consist of open-ended questions that are listed in Appendix A. The individuals being invited to participate include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Formerly appointed Provincial Advocates for Children and Youth
 - Employees of the Ombudsman Office Child and Youth Unit
 - Former employees of the Advocate's Office
 - Child rights researchers
 - Youth involved in the Advocate's Office or continuing youth projects (e.g., Hairstory)
 - Others connected to child and youth advocacy in Ontario (e.g., Child Advocates working in Ontario, CYAs from other provinces or territories, employees of the Children's Aid Society)

2. **Documents.** To triangulate findings, a document analysis will be done in addition to one-on-one interviews. These documents will provide further insight to the current climate of child and youth advocacy in Ontario, noting the work of the previous Advocate Office and the current Ombudsman Office. Documents will include the following:

- Case reports from the Advocate Office and Ombudsman Office
- Legislation
- Media reports
- Policy reports

Section C: Protocol Questions

1. How is child and youth advocacy defined?
 - a. Do these definitions articulate the same concepts as previously found in the literature review?
 - b. Do these definitions depict what is currently taking place through the Ombudsman Office?
 - c. Do these definitions depict what was previously taking place through the Advocate Office?
2. Do you need specific tools to conduct meaningful child and youth advocacy?
 - a. Can advocacy take place without specific resources? Is it still meaningful?
 - b. Do all forms of advocacy require the same resources?
 - c. Does every identified advocate use the same resources?
3. Is advocacy still taking place in the province, even if it is not being labelled as ‘advocacy’?
 - a. Does the Ombudsman Office conducting work that can be considered advocacy?

- b. Is advocacy taking place outside of the Ombudsman Office?
- 4. If there are changes regarding child and youth advocacy, have these changes impacted child of minorities differently?
 - a. Are there specific groups of children that are more negatively impacted?
 - b. Have groups become positively impacted by the changes?

Section D: Tentative Outline for the Case Study Report

1. Results will be published through a master's thesis uploaded to the Brock University Database.
2. The intended audience to present the findings of this study is decision- and policymakers.
3. Attempt to share findings through media through platforms like The Conversation.
4. Publish article in advocacy and children's rights journals.