



**Building Advocacy Strategies:
Formal and Informal Challenges to Advocacy,
and Promising Ways Forward**

A Report for the Frontline Partners with Youth Network

Public Good Initiative

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Introduction

In writing this summary report of our research for the Frontline Partners with Youth Network (FPYN), we have had two primary aims: 1) to offer a basic overview of the legal and policy parameters which guide and constrain advocacy efforts within the context of charitable organizations in Canada; 2) to highlight a variety of domestic and international studies and reports, which discuss the challenges and culture surrounding frontline youth work and advocacy.

We should note that we are not legal experts. What we have attempted to do here is, to the best of our ability and understanding, give a sketch of the legal boundaries surrounding advocacy work in charitable organizations, and explain some of the legislative structure on which these laws and rules are built. There may well be nuances that we have missed or legal considerations which require more interpretation. Still, this discussion should help to clarify many of the legal factors at play when determining potential advocacy strategies.

In terms of our survey of studies on advocacy and frontline youth work, our goal is not to decide which studies are good or bad, and which recommendations made in these studies should be adopted by FPYN. Rather, our hope is that we have highlighted for FPYN a range of studies that consider a variety of important questions related to advocacy and frontline youth work, from which key lessons can be drawn. Of course, FPYN has the best sense of their own goals and capacities, and so ideally this survey of the literature can serve as a departure point for further thinking and research about what effective advocacy strategies for FPYN might be.

Ultimately, the goal of this report is to further the dialogue at FPYN in terms of understanding the formal and informal challenges facing FPYN's advocacy efforts, as well as highlighting potential strategies for effective advocacy in the future. FPYN plays a crucial role in serving youth and connecting frontline workers in Toronto; hopefully this report can contribute positively to these efforts moving forward.

Legal Guidelines for Policy Advocacy by Registered Charities

The choice of a registered charity to take on an advocacy role turns on a number of factors, including the goals and aspirations of the charity, the nature of the charity's work, and the legal environment within which registered charities operate. Registered charities may take on an advocacy role; however, the scope and types of advocacy activities allowed are limited. This section will detail these legal limits and guidelines.

1. Sources of Law on Advocacy

There are three major authoritative or legal sources governing advocacy by registered charities. The *Income Tax Act* (ITA) is a federal piece of legislation that establishes the regulatory regime through which charities register (Carter and Man, 2011). The ITA confers benefits on charities but also sets several restrictions. There are two major benefits of becoming a registered charity under the ITA: charities registered under the ITA are exempt from federal and provincial income tax, and donations to registered charities are encouraged by tax laws (Parachin, 2010). The ITA does not define what is a charitable purpose or activity, or what is a political purpose or activity. These terms have been defined by *common law*. Common law is the body of law developed by courts through legal decisions in various cases. It is not set down as a piece of legislation, but past legal decisions set a precedent – that is, a rule established in a legal case which is referred to and used for future legal decisions. The ITA has codified some aspects of common law with respect to charities. The third and final source of authority governing advocacy by registered charities is the *published guidelines of the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency* (CRA). These guidelines are not law themselves, but are authoritative guidelines of how the law is applied by the CRA.

Take-Away 1.1

The three authoritative sources governing advocacy by registered charities are the Income Tax Act, common law, and published guidelines of the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency.

2. Prohibited, Political, and Charitable Activities

There are three types of activities that may fall under the term *advocacy*. Advocacy may be understood generally as an attempt by individuals or groups to influence public policy. Public policy includes but is not limited to legislation, resource allocation decisions, and program design and implementation. Advocacy may be understood differently by different organizations. For instance, advocacy may include attempts to change public discourse around a policy issue. The three types of activities that encompass the CRA's conception of advocacy are prohibited activities, political activities and charitable activities. Each will be discussed in turn.

a. Prohibited Activities

Registered charities are prohibited from engaging in *partisan political activities* ("Policy Statement", 2003). Registered charities may not support or oppose a political party or a candidate running for office at any level of government (federal, provincial or municipal). Support or opposition may be explicit or implicit. For instance, registered charities may not campaign for a political party or a candidate; may not offer resources (e.g. staff, offices) to a political party or a candidate; and may not include a notice of support for a political party or a candidate in charity publications (e.g. a newsletter or a website). Registered charities also may not invite a candidate running for office to speak at a charity function. This is considered implicit support. Registered charities are also prohibited from highlighting the voting records of a political party, a member of parliament, a member of provincial parliament, a municipal councillor or any other elected representative.

A good rule of thumb is never to single out a political party in registered charity activities. *This includes the current government.* For example, a registered charity may not state in communications to the public, such as at a public meeting, that the government voted against increasing funding for a crucial after-school program for at-risk youth. However, if the registered charity mentions the voting record of *all of the political parties* and therefore is not singling out one political party, it may

effectively and legitimately communicate the same information. Additionally, a registered charity may invite a candidate running for office who is sympathetic to the charity's cause to speak at an event, as long as all of the other candidates running for the same position are also invited.

Take-Away 1.2

Registered charities may not support or oppose a political party or a candidate running for office at any level of government (federal, provincial or municipal).

Registered charities are also prohibited from conducting activities or stating policy positions on issues that are *not connected to the purposes of the charity* and/or that are *not presented in a well-reasoned manner* ("Policy Statement", 2003). For example, if the purpose of a registered charity is to provide support for youth living in poverty, it may not state a position on the government policy on nuclear weapons. It is worth noting that many policy areas are indeed connected. More important is to present charity positions in a *well-reasoned manner*. A registered charity's policy position, as well as any information provided to the public and policymakers must be objective, based on factual information and methodologically-sound, and must seriously consider counter-arguments. For instance, if taking a stand against changes to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, a registered charity should present evidence about the benefits of rehabilitation, community-based sentences and prevention programs, but also should present evidence about the concept of deterrence.

Take-Away 1.3

All activities and stated positions of registered charities must be connected to the purposes of the charity and must be presented in a well-reasoned manner.

b. Political Activities

Registered charities are allowed to engage in political activities; however the scope of these activities is limited ("Policy Statement", 2003). In general, registered charities can devote up to 10% of their resources to political activities. As long as 90% or more of the charity's resources are devoted to charitable activities, the charity maintains a *charitable purpose* and therefore can maintain registered

charity status. While there are exceptions (which will be discussed), if more than 10% of the resources are devoted to political activities, the primary purpose of the charity is no longer charitable and the charity may lose its registered status.

Political activities include any activity and/or communication that involves *a call to action* or a particular position on a policy issue (“Policy Statement”, 2003). A call to action includes an explicit communication that a policy or law or a government decision should be maintained, opposed or changed. This includes calls to action at any level of government (federal, provincial and municipal) as well as foreign governments. Examples include:

- Asking the public to contact their elected representatives about a new law that the registered charity feels is detrimental to youth;
- Calling a news conference in support of a new government initiative;
- Publishing an editorial on a government decision to reduce funding to special education high school courses on the registered charity’s website.

As discussed in the previous section, the registered charity’s policy position must be connected to the purposes of the charity and be presented in a well-reasoned manner. For instance, in a registered charity’s editorial about a government decision to reduce funding to special education courses, the registered charity would be expected to have the provision of education or support for special needs youth as its primary purpose. Additionally, the registered charity would be expected to present evidence about the importance of special education courses for youth development, the government funding history, and any other pertinent factors, including the government’s rationale for reducing funding (e.g. that the government is facing a budget deficit).

Take-Away 1.4

Political activities include any activity and/or communication that involves a call to action or a particular position on a law, policy, or government decision at any level of domestic or international government.

c. Charitable Activities

Some activities take the form of advocacy but are considered charitable activities, and therefore more than 10% of funds may be spent on these activities (“Policy Statement”, 2003). Registered charities should be cautious about these forms of advocacy as they can easily cross the line into political activities.

Registered charities may conduct *public awareness campaigns* to publicise their work or an issue related to their work (“Policy Statement”, 2003). The campaign should be subordinate to the charity’s purpose. For instance, the charity may run a youth homeless shelter and conduct a public awareness campaign about the risks related to youth homelessness, but the business of running the youth homeless shelter must remain the primary purpose of the charity. It is paramount that the public awareness campaign does not involve a call to political action or any statements about current policy needing change, opposition or support; otherwise, it will be deemed a political activity. The campaign should be based on a well-reasoned position, and cannot rely on primarily emotive content. Emotive content attempts to evoke people’s emotions, rather than necessarily relying on facts. A public awareness campaign about the risks of homelessness for youth should not rely primarily on testimonials from homeless youth about their experiences. Such information should be supplemented with facts and data about health risks, susceptibility to crime, etc.

Registered charities may also conduct *educational activities* (“Policy Statement”, 2003). Educational activities are different from public awareness campaigns in that they take an active stance towards spreading information and expanding knowledge. This active stance may occur through workshops, courses, conferences, and research. Like public awareness campaigns, the information presented must be based on a well-reasoned position; be supported by fully analyzed factual evidence; not rely on emotive content; and be supplemented with counter arguments. Registered charities should be careful to eliminate any possible bias in their educational activities and

not create a *climate of opinion* (Policy Statement”, 2003). Members of the target audience should be able to form their own opinions based on the facts presented. Finally, the educational activities should not include a call to action or state an opinion on a law, policy or government decision; otherwise, such activities would be considered political.

Registered charities may be asked to *make a representation*, in person or otherwise, to an elected representative or public official (“Policy Statement”, 2003). These representations could occur before a committee in the House of Commons or in the Senate, as part of an advisory committee, as part of stakeholder consultations, and in many other circumstances. Significantly, in such cases the registered charity may explicitly advocate for a law, policy, or government decision at any level of government to be supported, opposed or changed as part of its representation. *This is not considered a political activity.* The representation should follow the guidelines established by the government body, elected representative or public official soliciting the representation. Additionally, the representation must be based on a well-reasoned position, and be on an issue related to the purpose of the charity. The registered charity may also release the *entire text* of their representation to the public, but *without the call for political action.* For instance, if a registered charity is presenting a briefing to a Senate committee on the issue of arts funding and its value for youth development, it may explicitly state it supports greater funding (as long as factual evidence is presented). It may also release the brief in full on its website, but must remove the call for expanded funding.

Take-Away 1.5

Registered charities have several options for advocacy that are considered charitable. These include public awareness campaigns, education activities, and representations.

3. Costing

Registered charities may spend up to 10% of resources on political activities (see section 2b).

Resources include but are not limited to financial assets, staff, volunteers, directors/managers, sites

(e.g. office space) and equipment (“Policy Statement”, 2003). Some *activities may be partly political and partly charitable*. For instance, a registered charity may conduct research on the advantages of early childhood education for child and youth development. The registered charity may later use this research (considered an educational activity as per section 2c) to make a representation to a House of Commons committee and include an appeal for greater funding. Finally, the charity may release its briefing to the committee, including the call for policy change, as part of a massive information campaign. The first two activities – the research and the representation – are charitable. The latter activity – the information campaign including a call for policy change – is a political activity.

If more than 10% of the resources expended on a single activity are expended on a political action, the entire activity is considered political (“Policy Statement”, 2003). For instance, if a registered charity conducts research for the purpose of launching a television appeal for policy change, and the televised appeal for policy change accounts for more than 10% of the resources spent on both the research and the appeal, the entire activity will be deemed political.

There are some exceptions to the 10% rule for smaller charities:

- If the registered charity earned less than \$50 000 in annual income in the previous year, it may devote up to 20% of resources to political activities.
- If the registered charity earned between \$50 000 and \$100 000 in annual income in the previous year, it may devote up to 15% of resources to political activities.
- If the registered charity earned between \$100 000 and \$200 000 in annual income in the previous year, it may devote up to 12% of resources to political activities.

There is an additional exception to the 10% rule with respect to *sporadic political activities*. If a registered charity devotes over 10% of its resources to a political activity in one year, but has devoted much less than 10% of its resources to political activities in previous years, it may still pass the 10% test. This decision will be at the discretion of the CRA.

Take-Away 1.6

Generally, registered charities should not expend more than 10% of their resources on political activities. However, smaller charitable organizations may expend more than 10% of resources on political activities.

4. The Broader Context: Charities and Other Entities Involved in Advocacy¹

Other entities may be involved in advocacy activities. The CRA defines *non-profit organization* as “a club, society, or association that’s organized and operated solely for: social welfare, civic improvement, pleasure or recreation, or any other purpose except profit.”² Under the ITA, non-profit organizations are exempt from tax; however, unlike registered charities, non-profit organizations cannot issue official donation receipts.

Lobbyists are also involved in activities that may aim to maintain, oppose or change public policy at one or all levels of government. At the federal level, lobbyists are persons paid to communicate with federal public office holders in relation to: the making, developing and amending of federal legislation, regulations, policies or programs; the decision to award federal grants and other financial contributions; and in the case of consultant lobbyists, the arrangement of meetings between clients and public office holders.³ Public office holders include elected and non-elected members of the federal government.⁴ The federal Lobbying Act defines three types of lobbyists: consultant lobbyists are persons hired to communicate on behalf of a client with public officials; in-house lobbyists (corporations) are persons who work for for-profit organizations; and in-house lobbyists (organizations) are persons who work for non-profit organizations, including registered

¹ In Section 4 we have included a series of links in footnotes, for the sake of providing easy access to a variety of web pages on lobbying regulation.

² “Non-Profit Organizations.” Canadian Revenue Agency. Web. June 2012. <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/nnprft/menu-eng.html>

³ “Ten Things You Need To Know About Lobbying” Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. Web. June 2012. <http://www.ocl-cal.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/00403.html>

⁴ “The Lobbyists Code of Conduct.” Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. http://www.ocl-cal.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/h_00013.html

charities.⁵ The activities of federal government lobbyists are governed by the Lobbying Act and the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct; lobbyists must register with the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada (OCLC).⁶ With respect to communications between registered charities and public officials, an employee of a registered charity must only register with the OCLC if lobbying constitutes a significant duty of this employee (over 20% of their time).⁷

At the provincial level, lobbyists are persons paid to communicate with provincial public office holders with the goal of influencing legislation, regulations, policies, programs, grants and other financial contributions, and the arrangement of meetings between public office holders and any other persons.⁸ The Ontario Lobbyists Registration Act also defines three types of lobbyists; these are similar to the lobbyist categories defined under the federal Lobbying Act. Employees of registered charities must only register as in-house lobbyists if lobbying constitutes a significant portion of their duties.⁹

5. Accessing Parliamentary Committees

Federal parliamentary committees exist in the House of Commons and in the Senate. Committees study a subject or a piece of legislation; they are given tasks through orders of reference, which determine what they are to study ("Guide for Witnesses", 2008). House of Commons committees may be delegated to study bills clause-by-clause and may make amendments to bills¹⁰ before or after a bill's second reading. House of Commons committees do not make final legislative decisions but

⁵ "The Lobbying Act." The Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. Web. June 2012. http://www.ocl-cal.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/h_00008.html

⁶ "About Us." The Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. Web. June 2012. http://www.ocl-cal.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/h_00004.html

⁷ "Ten Things You Need To Know About Lobbying" Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. Web. June 2012. <http://www.ocl-cal.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/00403.html>

⁸ "Lobbyists Registration Act, 1998." Office of the Integrity Commissioner. Web. June 2012. <https://lobbyist.oico.on.ca/LRO/GeneralSettings.nsf/vwEnHTML/FaqPage.htm#1.1>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Bills are proposed laws. They go through several readings and amendments before they are passed. Not all bills become law.

do present findings and recommendations to the House; significantly, committee reports may request that the government provide a substantive response to the committee's recommendations.

As described in section 2c, registered charities may make representations to committees. Committees regularly invite individuals, experts, representatives of organizations, lobbyists, public servants and Ministers to appear before them in order to elicit information relevant to the committee's topic of study ("Guide for Witnesses", 2008). One can also become a witness by following advertisements in print media and on committees' web sites about committees' intentions to hold hearings on a particular subject and by contacting the Clerk of the Committee; the committee has final say of who participates. For more information, please see Appendix 1. If your organization is invited, select the persons with the most appropriate knowledge on the issue being studied; witnesses will be asked to submit a written brief in addition to or instead of in-person participation ("Guide for Witnesses", 2008). Briefs must be prepared in advance so they can be translated into the other official language. Briefs must include factual information in support of the views of the witness. Amendments suggested in briefs must be specific.

Registered charities may also make representations at provincial Legislative Assembly committees. In Ontario, interested members of the public must register as witnesses with the Clerk of the Committee¹¹ (See Appendix 1). Alternatively or in addition to an appearance as a witness, interested members of the public may send written submissions to relevant committees. The briefs submitted must be relevant to the issue being considered by the respective committee (See Appendix 1). Registered charities must be aware that any participation and/or any written submissions for Legislative Assembly committees will become part of the public record. The name

¹¹ "Participation in Committees." The Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Web. June 2012. http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/go2.jsp?Page=/getting-involved/committee_participation_appear&menuItem=getting_involved_participate_committee&locale=en#tabdetail

of the witness, their testimony and/or their written submission will be published in the committee's Hansard transcripts (in print and online) and the testimony may be taped and published online.¹²

Take-Away 1.7

Parliamentary Committees study issue areas and bills. Registered charities have several options for accessing committees to make a representation.

Summary

There are three authoritative sources governing advocacy pursued by registered charities, which include the *Income Tax Act*, common law, and published guidelines of the *Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency*. Registered charities must remain neutral with respect to support for political parties, and these organizations' activities must be connected to the purpose of the charity (as opposed to some unrelated political end). On average, charitable organizations are permitted to spend up to 10% of their resources on political activities, where a political activity is understood to be any activity and/or communication that involves a call to action or a particular position on a law, policy, or government decision at any level of domestic or international government. In terms of the advocacy efforts charitable organizations *can* pursue, such organizations can launch public awareness campaigns, run education activities, and offer representations at different levels of government.

¹² Ibid.

The Canadian Framework: Child and Youth Advocacy & Frontline Workers

In this section we discuss the context of child and youth advocacy, as well as frontline work within Canada. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that there are often barriers to advocacy that exist beyond legal constraints. We consider the efforts in Canada to institutionalize child and youth advocacy within Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates (CCPCYA). We also examine professional considerations surrounding youth advocacy and frontline workers.

1. Institutionalized Child and Youth Advocacy in Canada

Since the 1989 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations, there has been a rise in international interest in promoting the rights and voices of children and youth. Many countries have endorsed the CRC, in turn, establishing special agencies to advocate for the rights of children and youth.

In recent years, Canada has joined in promoting the ideals of CRC. Although Canada does not have a national office for child and youth advocacy, the CCPCYA has been established. The CCPCYA is “an alliance of provincially appointed children's advocates from the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Newfoundland; the Nova Scotia Children's Ombudsman, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse from the province of Quebec; and the British Columbia Child and Youth Officer,” (Canadian Children's Rights Council). The role of these Offices is to give a voice to and advocate for children and youth under age of 18. As Howe (2009) points out, these Advocacy Offices are guided by conventional principles. Each Office:

1. Must be independent from government;
2. Must be a stand-alone body with a particular focus on children and youth;
3. Must be accessible to children and youth; and

4. Must have a wide mandate, strong statutory powers, and a broad advocacy function that integrates the voices of children.

Howe asserts that the more firmly these criteria are in place, the greater the effect of the Office in advancing children's and youth's rights. Howe distinguishes between Offices with higher and lower levels of impact. Offices with 'lower impact' – that is Offices that implement the above four criteria less effectively – are ones that focus largely on case-by-case advocacy rather than making a systemic or collective impact on child and youth advocacy as a whole. Offices with 'higher impact' – that is Offices that have a higher degree of successful implementation of the above four criteria – are ones that go beyond case advocacy in four ways. First, these Advocacy Offices have the ability to affect policy and legislative change, including improving existing legislation while monitoring its implementation. Second, these advocacy offices have the ability to influence systemic reform of procedures, programs and systems that involve children and youth. Third, these Offices are active in raising public awareness of the Office and gaining wider political support for its work. Lastly, the advocacy work of higher impact Offices incorporates the voices of children and youth through consultation with children and youth.

Howe's study found that over a five-year period, from 2005 and 2009, the Provincial Advocate Offices in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba had higher levels of impact relative to the other provincial Advocacy Offices. In the case of Ontario, the Ontario Advocate Office has made major impacts in legislation, establishing the *Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act* in 2007, and making the Office independent from government. The Office also influences systemic reform by improving procedures relating to work of children's aid societies and improving the operation of housing facilities for youth in trouble with the law (Howe, 2009).

The Saskatchewan Advocate Office has had a significant impact through its proposed *Child and Youth First Principles*, which the government of Saskatchewan accepted in 2009 as a framework

for a new child-related legislation and policy. These principles are based on the CRC and include objectives such as ensuring child and youth participation rights, the best interests of the child, equal treatment, and the greater protection of children from harm. The Saskatchewan Office has also had impact on its *Education Act*, and has worked to reform the *Youth Drug Detoxification and Stabilization Act* to ensure that there is a sufficient treatment plan for detained youth. It has also impacted policy on the prevention of bullying in schools by integrating principles of the CRC. Still further, the Office was able to influence systemic reform by positively impacting child welfare procedures resulting in more foster care homes available for children and youth (Howe, 2009). The Manitoba Advocate Office has also had major policy impact through legislative reform in the realm of child deaths. The *Children's Advocate's Enhanced Mandate Act* in 2007 gave the Office the ability to review issues following the death of a child while working to improve services for children and youths in care so that they are better protected from the risk of death or harm. The Office also influenced systemic reform by creating more spaces in shelters for youth in need (Howe, 2009).

All of the Offices in these three provinces were also able to effectively impact public perception and consciousness as they were active in increasing their public profiles and raising public awareness. They effectively utilized media releases on their websites and covered news stories regarding child and youth issues. These Offices were also able to incorporate the voices of youth in advocacy work. Beyond hearing from individual child and youth complaints, these Offices actively facilitated wider youth participation through consultations and meetings. For example, the Saskatchewan Advocate included the input of youth in the development of their *Child and Youth First Principles* and in the preparation of special reports on drug detoxification (Howe, 2009).

Take-Away 2.1

Advocacy organizations with a greater degree of independence from the government, focused on child and youth advocacy, and which maintain a wide mandate, strong statutory power and broad advocacy functions stand to have a significant and positive impact.

Much of the professional advocacy done on behalf of children and youth is facilitated through Advocacy Offices that are provincially-led. These Advocacy Offices have the ability to affect policy and legislation while advocating for the rights of children and youth. As such, they are governing bodies that aim to take the concerns and problems of children and youth to create positive change. But importantly, while these are important considerations to keep in mind, these Offices do not directly counsel children and youth nor do they directly experience the day-to-day problems of children and youth – they are not frontline workers. The following section discusses the role of frontline workers in child and youth advocacy and the barriers this group of child and youth advocates experience despite their direct involvement in the issues of child and youth.

2. Perception of Frontline Work and Professionalization

While advocate offices work within the administration and governance of child and youth advocacy, frontline workers have a direct relationship with and focus on individual children and youth. The expertise gained by frontline workers is characterized by their ability to handle uncertainty and change and their ability to work within complex relationships. Often, these workers do not see themselves defined by a given position nor do they limit their responsibility to either professional or personal, or to a particular job or time. As such, frontline workers who are often the service providers for children and youth are confronted with the reality of the lives of the young people who they help, which gives them firsthand knowledge of the experiences of young people.

As key individuals in the lives of children and youth, frontline workers play a significant role in child and youth advocacy. The frontline worker directly links to the child or youth as they provide the essential services while ensuring that the concerns of children and youth are heard and taken into account. However, the role of frontline workers as advocates has become more difficult as a result of the increasingly bureaucratic nature and professionalization that advocacy has taken.

Professionalization of a practice is often seen as a way to attract power (Dalrymple, 2004). As child and youth advocacy done by frontline workers is a relatively new occupational group, it has yet to fully establish itself as being professional in the ways that government-funded and government-backed advocacy offices are. Since most child and youth advocacy work involves negotiating with other adult professionals, the lack of official professionalism in the advocacy of frontline workers can potentially result in these well-qualified advocates to not be taken as seriously as they should be.

Take-Away 2.2

Frontline workers play a significant role in child and youth advocacy as they deal directly with issues affecting young people, though the lack of technical professionalization associated with the field can potentially serve as a barrier to being taken seriously or given sufficient attention.

Interestingly, some frontline workers may resist professionalization. These are frontline workers who view themselves as allies of young people and as such refuse to submit to the power-based structure of professionalism. This group of frontline workers argues that professionals, with their exclusive elitist groups, create distance between themselves and the children and youth which could cause the active voice of the children and youth to be drowned out. Some frontline workers argue that professionalizing child and youth work would inevitably be sacrificing the values inherent in youth advocacy which are based on treating young people as equals and fighting alongside them to resist oppression. As such, these frontline workers prefer child and youth work taking place in a variety of settings – both professional and non-professional (Dalrymple, 2004).

3. Child and Youth Advocacy – Essential to Frontline Work

Grover (2004) asserts that advocacy must be considered a fundamental professional responsibility of frontline workers in child and youth care. Grover argues that it is only through the vigorous advocacy of frontline workers that individual children and youth can have their rights respected along with having access to appropriate and adequate government services. While provincial

advocacy offices include children and youth in their formal decision-making processes, the institutionalization of the advocacy process often ends up creating levels bureaucracy that can potentially further alienate the concerns of young people. Further, in terms of self-advocating, the concerns of the provincial level ombudsperson (e.g., children’s advocate) is often poorly communicated to youth. For example, in the 2001 annual report, the Saskatchewan Advocate Office noted: “we have been serving Saskatchewan children for seven years, and still many children and youth are not aware of the Office and its role to assist young people” (Grover, 2004, p. 408).

This is similar in other provinces as well – young persons are often unable to have the capabilities to contact Advocate Offices. Additionally, children or youth may fear reprisal within the system. For example, the Ontario Children’s Advocate conducted a survey on why many young people did not utilize the Office. The results indicated that 315 of the children and youth respondents (from Child Welfare, child mental health residential facilities, group homes, shelters or youth offender facilities) had a fear of punishment that discouraged them from making contact with the Office (Grover, 2004, p. 408).

Take-Away 2.3

While there are benefits to the professionalization of advocacy, professional services may be more intimidating and less obviously welcoming for youth. Finding a balance between professional advocacy and a nurturing environment, which does not alienate youth is key to effective frontline work.

Advocacy efforts in the case of government appointed Advocate Offices are sometimes seen as a ‘mediation’ rather than direct enforcement of the legal rights of children and youth (Grover, 2004). The relatively limited power of Canadian children advocacy system is reflected in the following mission statement of the Alberta Children’s Advocate Office which emphasizes mediation and lack of enforcement power:

The critical feature of the role of the Children’s Advocate is the absence of decision-making power. The Advocate’s role is not to personally protect... Rather, the role is one of pure advocacy [which is to] petition and provide relevant information; to seek

decisions which consider the child's point of view; and to advocate that decisions be made in a timely and considered manner. The Children's Advocate has no authority to impose opinions or views upon those who are responsible for making and implementing decisions. Rather we depend on our ability to access and influence individual decision makers and decision-making processes (Grover, 2004, p. 410).

Thus the various Canadian provincial children's Advocate Offices might be better described as spokespersons or mediators who represent young persons' best interest. Importantly, it was suggested at a National Symposium on Equality Rights that no human rights instrument such as constitutional law or provincial law can guarantee the protection of children and youth without the advocacy efforts of frontline workers (Grover, 2004, p. 420). However, at present, the professional criteria of many frontline workers such as psychologists, and social workers along with other professional workers in child and youth care in Canada are lacking specific reference to advocacy for children and youth as being a core professional responsibility. According to Grover:

Both professional child and youth care workers and other such professionals as well as government or non-governmental children's service employers must come to understand that advocacy is an ethical and professional responsibility of the frontline worker. Without the youth and childcare worker as a competent and effective advocate, the young person often has, in practice, no access to redress for human rights violations (Grover, 2004, p. 421).

Take-Away 2.4

Advocacy should be considered a fundamental professional responsibility of frontline workers in child and youth care.

4. Important Lessons and Potential Strategies

Building a culture of professionalism within the child and youth advocacy field – particularly frontline workers as professional advocates – is crucial to ensuring the voices of children and youth being heard. In order to facilitate this, Dalrymple (2003) asserts that there needs to be additional priority given to the involvement of young people collectively while enhancing their individual voices through the development of independent advocacy services. Independent advocacy services

would complement government endorsed advocacy offices, perhaps alleviating some of the problems associated with the bureaucratic nature of provincial Advocacy Offices. Most importantly however, having such independent advocacy services would alleviate the conflict of interest often faced by many advocates. For instance, health and social welfare practitioners on the one hand are expected to play an advocacy role on behalf of the children and youth they service, but they are also constrained by the expectation set for them by their managers or the institutions in which they work. In cases where frontline workers work for ‘departments’ rather than directly young people, there is a need for third parties that focus not only on child and youth advocacy but also advocacy on behalf of the frontline workers themselves, who are often caught within the system.

Take-Away 2.5

Third party child and youth advocates that are neither constrained by government nor by specific organizational policies are important for the success of child and youth advocacy.

Providing independent advocacy that focuses on children, youth and frontline workers can often begin within the community. For example, a communitarian approach to advocacy has been adopted by the Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate in British Columbia. The work of the professional advocate in this case is defined in terms of providing individuals the necessary advocacy support they need. As Dalrymple argues:

Real solutions need to be local. We need to work to change the context in each community, so that advocacy is understood, accepted and embraced, whether the advocate is the young person him or herself, a friend or relative, a child care or youth care worker, a foster parent or a social worker. Answers lie, not in bringing in people from outside, but in providing support, information and the means of real empowerment to young people and to those who are already part of their lives and communities (Dalrymple, 2003, p. 1049).

This community-centered approach allows young people in trouble the ability to approach someone they know and trust to help them and who may become their advocate. BC’s Office recognized this strategy and provided training and recognition to *natural advocates* based on the premise that

communities have a responsibility to develop and sustain effective advocacy processes. An important element of the Office has been *systemic advocacy* and in 1997 they devised a review entitled *Barriers to Service Framework*. This review revealed there are multiple barriers experienced by children and youth in receiving advocacy services. Based on a sample of approximately 4,500 requests for help, the review highlighted 28 barriers that limited access to child and youth advocacy services (Dalrymple, 2003, p. 1049). This review also provided a way of “presenting the collective grievances of young people to government in language that could be used by relevant government ministries” (Dalrymple, 2003, p. 1049). By having a systemic element to advocacy, young people along with frontline workers are better able to participate in decision making, both in their personal lives and in the planning and delivery of services.

Related to the discussion of ‘professional advocacy’, there are areas of caution for the professional advocate with regards to power balance. The empowerment debate, in relation to advocacy, focuses on the “provision of services and the power relationship between providers and users” (Dalrymple, 2003, p. 1052). Using Gomm’s (1993) model of power relationships between professionals and service users, Dalrymple frames this within the context of the advocate being ‘the professional’, while the child, youth, or even frontline worker utilizing the advocacy services as being ‘the user’. These two groups can potentially take on four types of relationships:

1. *The Oppressive Relationship*: when the professional focuses on effectively maintaining or increasing the wealth, power and control of the dominant sector of society. In this case, users are made to feel that it is their fault that they are in need of advocacy services which thus oppresses them.
2. *The Disabling Relationship*: when professionals depict themselves as experts with specialist knowledge and use their power to deny the user access to the skills and resources necessary to manage their own lives.
3. *The Helping Relationship*: the legitimization of the power of professionals through their acknowledged skills which in turn are used to help users identify their own needs. This kind of relationship focuses on ‘enabling’ users.

4. *The Brokerage Relationship*: legitimates the power of professional skills and expertise by providing information about potential resources. This kind of relationship empowers users, enabling them to obtain resources themselves. (Dalrymple, 2003)

Dalrymple argues that it is important to consider the nature of professional relationships since professional advocates “have the potential to oppress in the same way that any other professional in the lives of those seeking advocacy support” (Dalrymple, 2003, p. 1053). Additionally, since users are in need of someone to work on their behalf, advocacy in and of itself assumes that the user is powerless to some degree. As such, the major focus for professional advocates is to work within the current systems to voice the concerns while upholding the agency of young people.

Take-Away 2.6

Professional advocates must be careful not to fall into the power imbalance that can take place between ‘the professional’ (i.e. the advocate) and ‘the user’ (i.e. individual being advocated for).

Summary

Advocacy on behalf of children and youth in Canada is beginning to be institutionalized through provincial Advocacy Offices. These Advocacy Offices have the ability to affect policy and legislation while advocating for the rights of children and youth. However, the role of frontline workers is crucial to effective child and youth advocacy since it is often through the vigorous advocacy of frontline workers that individual children and youth can have their rights respected along with having access to appropriate and adequate government services. While provincial Advocacy Offices include children and youth in their formal decision-making processes, the institutionalization of the advocacy process often ends up creating levels of bureaucracy that can potentially further alienate the concerns of young people. As such, frontline workers taking on the role of ‘professional advocate’ is essential to the success child and youth advocacy. However, child and youth advocates must ensure to take note of the dangers of the potential power imbalances that can occur in the process of advocacy.

International Review: Identifiable Barriers to Advocacy and Possible Strategies

The goal in this section is to survey international studies, in order to better understand some of the challenges experienced by frontline workers, the culture surrounding youth work, and promising options for effective advocacy. We discuss a number of studies, which should both highlight helpful information as well as important questions and studies worth further exploration.

1. Informal and Institutional Challenges

As already discussed, the barriers to effective frontline work and advocacy do not exist on purely official, legislative grounds. There are a variety of other factors that can, for better or worse, constrain advocacy activities, and hinder the efforts of frontline youth workers. In *Straws in the Wind: The State of Youth Work in a Changing Policy Environment* Bernard Davies (2010) considers the increased pressure put on the youth work sector by the UK Government's efforts to reduce public debt and minimize the size of government, particularly in light of the recent financial crisis.

Within the context of youth work in the UK right now, Davies argues that the focus has shifted to 'meeting targets' – for example, youth crime reduction targets. While he notes that some have found such targets to be helpful in shaping youth work, many others have found them to be distracting. Some workers have expressed the concern that as a result of focusing on measuring the achievement of targets, too much of their time is consumed by paper work, with not enough time spent engaging with youth face to face. As one worker articulates, "Out of a three and a half hour working session ... I spend (only) two hours in the actual work. We need to prove what we've achieved," (Davies, 2010, p. 13). Similarly, some of the targeted measures fail to capture the actual outcomes of youth work. As another worker notes: "On reception ... I'm just ticking boxes. Just young people coming in. But ... a 'contact' could be two minutes or two hours," (Davies, 2010, p. 13). This is particularly concerning for voluntary organizations whose funding depends on meeting

targets – again, requiring more time is spent on meeting targets and less on engagement with youth. As Davies points out, the effects of an emphasis on targets are felt by youth as well. One group of youth, explaining their view on targets, notes that “[targets] make workers rushed. [They] end up putting pressure on young people – making you feel bad if it’s not done,” (Davies, 2010, p. 14).

Take-Away 3.1

An emphasis on meeting goals and targets by youth organizations can require too much time spent on measuring the achievement of goals, which takes time away from actively engaging with youth.

Christine M. Oliver discusses some of the challenges associated with funding advocacy for children and youth in her paper *Setting the Scene: Funding, Patterns of Advocacy Provision and Children’s Access to Advocacy Services*. Among other things, Oliver (2008) considers whether the source of advocacy funding can limit the independence of organizations in terms of how they function. As she notes, the UK Department of Health set out the *National Standards for Advocacy*, which state that advocacy services must be “funded and managed in a way that ensures independence from the commissioning body, so that children and young people have confidence that their advocates will act for them and are free from any conflicts of interest,” (Oliver, 2008, p. 32). Of course, this is hard to guarantee. Of the advocacy workers she surveyed, the results were split: some thought the relationship with funding organizations was positive and promoted healthy partnerships, while others expressed that the lack of independence hindered their efforts. For example, one advocacy service manager suggested that “with a smaller and less bureaucratic partner, we would be able to be much more flexible and creative and there wouldn’t be such a culture of suspicion about what we’re doing,” (Oliver, 2008, p. 33). Additionally, another advocate expressed the concern that a lack of independence from funding authorities can put pressure on them to ‘toe the party line’ (Oliver, 2008, p. 34). These views highlight the potential conflict of interest that exists for youth advocacy workers. While their primary goal should presumably be promoting the well-being of youth, the

strategies available to them may be limited by certain policies outlined by funding agencies.

Take-Away 3.2

It is possible that advocacy efforts on the part of frontline youth workers might be limited by policies maintained by their funding agency. It is important to consider how youth work and advocacy can be funded and managed in a way that allows it to be most responsive to the needs of youth, and less constrained by funding agencies.

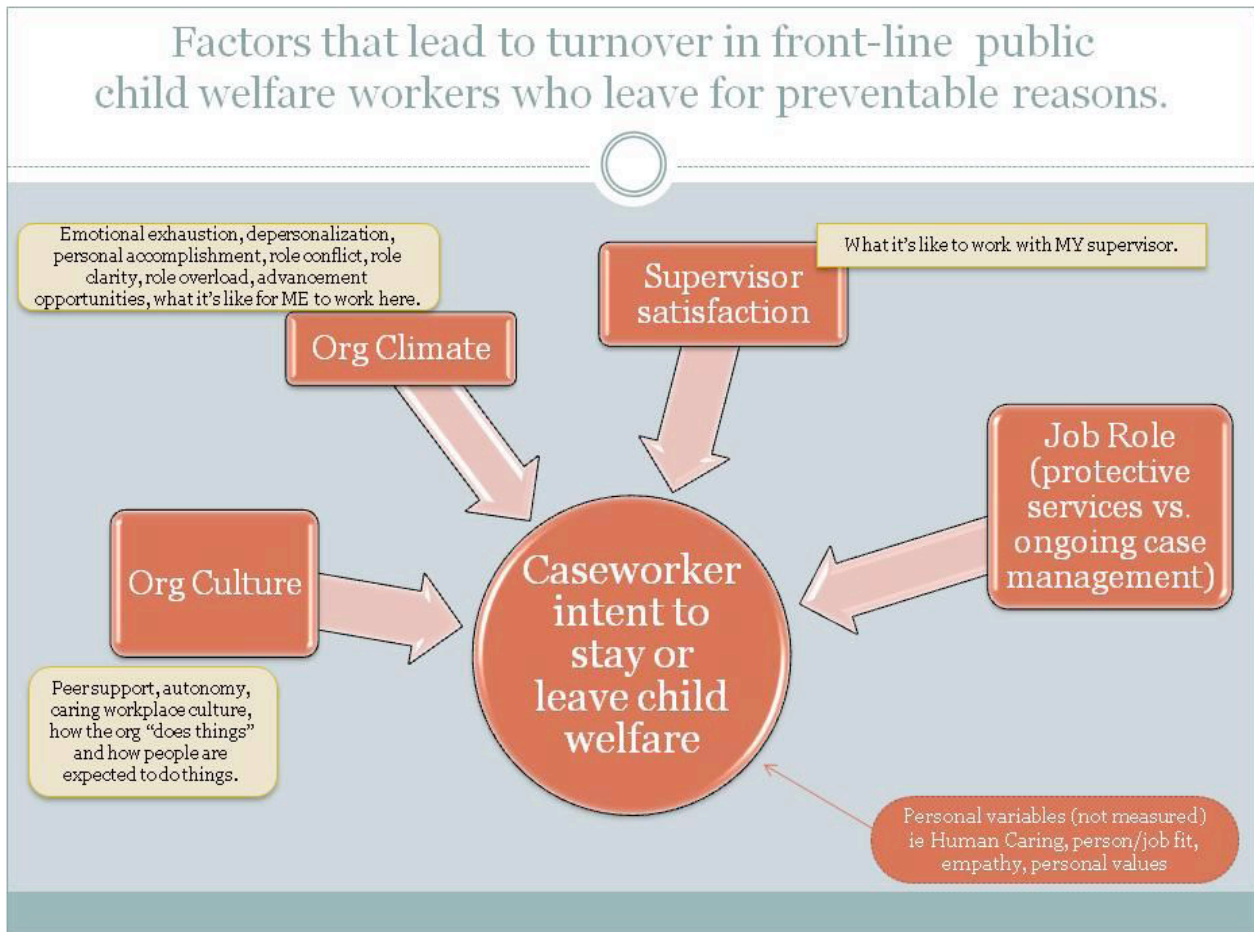
2. Culture and Perceptions of Youth Advocacy & Frontline Work

Part of understanding both the challenges to effective advocacy as well as possible strategies moving forward is having a sense of the culture surrounding frontline youth work and advocacy. Of course, fundamental to youth work are the youth workers themselves. In Melanie Dawn Sage's dissertation *Child welfare workforce turnover: Frontline workers' experiences with organizational culture and climate, and implications for organizational practice*, Sage asks: "What are the organizational factors that lead frontline child welfare workers to stay or leave the agency, and what, then, are the implications for agency administrators?" (Sage, 2010, p. 65). Collecting and studying survey data of 400 State-employed Oregon child welfare case workers across the state, Sage studied the relationship between a variety of organizational factors and employee turnover. In Figure 1, we have included a graphical representation designed by Sage, which highlights some of these factors.

Where a given workplace's 'climate' is defined as an employee's view of what it is like to work at a given agency, and is measured by their perception of things like emotional exhaustion related to the job and opportunities to advance, Sage finds that "amongst workers who intend to leave the agency for preventable reasons, a worker's perception of how it feels for them to work within the organization predict how likely a worker is to stay in 25% of cases," (Sage, 2010, p. 144). Specifically, Sage found that the clarity of workers' professional roles, the amount of role conflict they experience, in addition to emotional exhaustion experienced all had predictive value in determining whether a worker would stay or leave. Indeed, "the higher a worker's satisfaction with

organizational climate, the less likely they are to intend to leave,” (Sage, 2010, p. 144). In other words, it is often workplace factors which are able to predict whether workers will choose to stay at the organization and continue to engage in youth work.

Figure 1



(Source: Sage, 2010, p. 66)

Not only does this research indicate the ways in which the climate of a given organization can make it harder for the frontline and advocacy workers, but of course this has consequences for those served by these organizations. As one Oregon Child Welfare Worker expresses:

It is exhausting to continually have new people in our workplace. Just when you think it is all going smoothly people leave. It is difficult for families as even under the best

circumstances families can be left for periods of time without their own worker to stay on top of their case. There is more often significant discord and dropped balls when cases have been transferred repeatedly to new workers due to turnover. (Sage, 2010, p. 123-124)

Take-Away 3.3

Whether there are workers who can be counted on to remain at an organization and build relationships with those individuals who it supports is often determined by workplace factors, and so by ensuring a healthy workplace, a youth advocacy organization will be better able to serve youth in its community.

Following up on this theme of the importance of maintaining a stable workforce at a youth advocacy organization, in *Competency in Establishing Positive Relationships With Program Youth: The Impact of Organization and Youth Worker Characteristics*, Davidson, Evans and Sicafuse (2011) discuss the six factors the US National Collaboration of Youth highlight as key to successful youth work:

- “Adequate compensation and opportunities for advancement;
- Opportunities for professional development and training;
- Working in supportive environments and climates that foster success (including adequate supervision and co-worker collaboration);
- Clear role descriptions and perceived competence to perform that role;
- A sense that their work is valued; and
- Opportunities for networking.” (Davidson, Evans and Sicafuse, 2011, p. 338)

In turn, in their study Davidson, Evans and Sicafuse, have two objectives: 1) to see if these qualities do in fact have a relationship with successful youth work, and 2) to see if these qualities predict the capacity of youth workers to form positive and supportive relationships with youth. The authors argue this second goal is key to effective youth work, claiming that: “By forming strong, supportive relationships with youth, frontline staff can increase youth’s participation in program activities, strengthen their commitment to staying in the program, and ensure that program goals are met,” (Davidson, Evans and Sicafuse, 2011, p. 337).

Perhaps most significantly, the authors found that youth workers' perceptions of their own skills were significant indicators of their ability to build strong supportive relationships with youth. Accordingly, they suggest that "efforts to improve youth workers' self-confidence in their ability to complete work tasks, including providing youth workers with clear and manageable work objectives and rewarding strong job performance may prove an effective means of enhancing youth workers' commitment to successfully engaging program participants and forming long-lasting relationships with program youth," (Davidson, Evans and Sicafuse, 2011, p. 352).

Take-Away 3.4

A youth workers' perception of and confidence in their own skills is a key factor in strengthening their ability to build strong relationships with youth, which itself can be of significant importance in encouraging participation in youth programming and services.

3. Important Lessons & Potential Strategies

In the previous two sections we have highlighted studies looking at some of the challenges facing youth work and youth advocacy, as well as some of the factors at play in determining whether youth workers are able to be effective in their work. In understanding these considerations, we can begin to see what questions need to be asked in undertaking advocacy and how to support youth workers. Here we will discuss studies that more specifically consider youth work and advocacy strategies and how they might be pursued.

In *Advocacy ABCs*, Sandra Sims (2007), a professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, offers a series of tips and techniques, which she suggests are of critical importance to successful advocacy efforts. While not specific to frontline youth work, many of the suggestions can be applied generally. For example, Sims recommends that organizations 'agree on a plan of action'. More specifically, she suggests that leaders develop a plan of action, which "includes specific goals with benchmarks and timelines for achieving each goal." (Sims, 2007, p. 35) While this might seem

obvious, it is of great importance. Having leaders on the same page in terms of short and long term goals, as well as how those goals will be achieved and who will take lead on different projects are key organizational considerations which can greatly help the achievement of goals. Sims also highlights the importance of building relationships with policymakers in the relevant areas and regions, not just at times when the organization needs their help, but consistently. As Sims notes, if policymakers only “see you when you need them, it is not a relationship – it is a ‘usership,’” (Sims, 2007, p. 35). Of course, building these relationships on an ongoing basis not only allows for more genuine relationships, but allows these policymakers to gain greater exposure to an organization and better understand their cause and their needs.

On a related note, Sims recommends that an organization develop a handbook including contact information for local policymakers and legislators. This makes it easier for youth workers and advocates, as well as youth themselves or other community members to contact officials to discuss local challenges. Included in such a handbook could also be tips on how to effectively communicate with policymakers through different mediums – face-to-face, on the phone or by email. She also emphasizes the importance of collaborating with other organizations with similar goals for the sake of sharing ideas and strengthening the power of your cause (Sims, 2007).

Take-Away 3.5

Building action plans, and relationships with policymakers and organizations with similar goals are key to effective advocacy. Importantly, these relationships should be nurtured on an ongoing basis with regular communication.

Recalling Oliver’s article discussed earlier, she highlights different ideas about what advocacy is or should be. Importantly, youth advocacy can take both the form of advocating on behalf of youth, as well as empowering youth to advocate on their own behalf (Oliver, 2008). In *Frontline Worker Perceptions of the Empowerment Process in Community-Based Organizations*, Everett, Homestead and Drisko (2007) interview “28 family support specialists, social workers, and team leaders from four

Casey Family Resource Centers over a two year period” (Everett, Homestead and Drisko, 2007, p. 161) in an effort to explore the role of empowerment in helping to serve the individuals with whom they work. They highlight that community service providers often encounter mistrust and suspicion from individuals, which can be a product of negative past experiences with service providers. Accordingly, the authors highlight the importance of framing advocacy work and fostering relationships in ways that builds trust. A significant component of this work is empowering individuals. The authors discuss empowerment at the personal level – i.e. building personal competence, confidence and so forth – as well as at the societal level – i.e. how individuals organize at a societal level to achieve social justice goals (Everett, Homestead and Drisko, 2007).

Everett, Homestead and Drisko describe the process of empowering community members as a six-stage process: recruitment into programming, engagement, involvement, retention, partnership and leadership. In the ‘recruitment’ and ‘engagement’ stages, the authors highlight a variety of critical success factors, for example creating a welcoming environment, identifying community needs and client strengths, and in turn mobilizing resources to respond in ways which address these needs and use these strengths (Everett, Homestead and Drisko, 2007). Importantly, they highlight the significance of *collaborating* with community members, and approaching them as partners with an equal sharing of power, as part of the trust building process, rather than acting in an authoritative role.

In the following two stages, ‘involvement’ and ‘retention’, the authors highlight the necessity for frontline workers to be flexible, adaptable and creative in responding to community needs. At these stages, frontline workers try to teach community members how to start to take on and solve community challenges themselves. Accordingly staff must work as enablers, creating opportunities for individuals to use their skills in helping to solve problems, and achieve their goals (Everett, Homestead and Drisko, 2007). Here, frontline workers should take on more of a mentoring role –

i.e. the relationships between frontline workers and community members become more instructive than in the first two stages.

In the final two stages, ‘partnership’ and ‘leadership’ the authors consider the ways in which the empowerment process has become more interactive, one that requires give and take. Where in the previous two stages, frontline workers took on more of a mentoring/teaching role, here the goal is to help integrate community members as partners and leaders themselves. Of course, there are challenges with respect to negotiating this transition from teacher-student, to empowering them to be leaders and teachers in their own right. But again, this simply highlights the need for flexibility and collaboration in the empowerment process (Everett, Homestead and Drisko, 2007).

Ultimately the authors conclude: “Frontline workers in this study had to redefine their roles from that of ‘expert authority’ to that of a ‘collaborator.’ They had to shift their understanding and approach to practice from an individual therapy model to a community-based practice model” (Everett, Homestead and Drisko, 2007, p. 169).

Take-Away 3.6

Empowering youth is a key feature of advocacy, by strengthening their ability to advocate for themselves. The process of empowering youth requires flexibility and a great degree of collaboration between frontline workers and youth.

Of course, while empowering youth is a key component of advocacy, so too is bolstering the abilities of youth workers themselves. In *Educating Youth Workers as Public Advocates*, Judith Bessant (2009) discusses the formal education of youth workers in advocacy practice. Against the backdrop of various forms of oppressive public policies in Australia, with respect to incarceration laws and age-based discrimination, Bessant discusses the importance of including advocacy as a component of youth work education programs. As she highlights, in the youth work program at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University), the oldest youth work degree in Australia, a curriculum review was pursued to assess ways in which future youth workers could be trained to

effectively engage in public advocacy (Bessant, 2009). The idea at play in this review was that effective advocacy is a learnable skill; those seeking to engage in youth work should be equipped or at least given the opportunity to learn about methodology and practice advocacy.

Notably, Bessant discusses various forms of advocacy. Of course, youth advocacy can work to enable young people to advocate for themselves; it can also consist of presenting evidence for government inquiries and be practiced through research gathering and reporting, and evidence-based argumentation. Advocacy can take place in a variety of settings and exist in various forums, such as schools, government institutions, NGOs etc. It can actively engage media through media releases, opinion pieces, editorials etc. and be politically active through building relationships other organizations or movements (Bessant, 2009). Essentially, advocacy does not have a single, static form. What effective advocacy will look like for a given group will depend on the particular circumstances and resources of that group.

One concept discussed by Bessant that is worth considering is what she refers to as ‘usurpatory ventriloquism’. What can sometimes happen when youth workers advocate on behalf of youth is that they replace the actual views of youth with their own views. This might happen because advocates think they know what youth need or should want, but fail to understand what their actual wants and needs are. She notes: “One consequence of this is that the practitioner’s intervention can inadvertently compound or reinforce the oppression of young people by weakening or taking away their own stories and replacing them with other story lines that position young people and ‘their issues’ in particular ways. For example as not competent enough to participate in decisions in which they have a direct interest,” (Bessant, 2009, p. 73).

Importantly, Bessant highlights a straightforward way to work against this sort of misrepresentation. For example, “verifying with young people the accuracy of the worker’s interpretation of their account” is a simple way of ensuring that workers properly understand the

goals and interests of the youth they are representing (Bessant, 70, 2009). Understanding when workers are misrepresenting youths' interests in this way, and in turn successfully fixing or combatting this tendency requires both listening and self-reflection, in order to determine tendencies or biases the workers have which may have led them to change or reinterpret the actual views and accounts offered by the youth.

In advocating on behalf of another group, in this case youth, it is important to have strong lines of communication with those groups so that advocates can properly understand and communicate the interests of youth. Part of learning to do this effectively could plausibly be part of a rich education program for future or aspiring advocates.

Bessant also discusses the rational structure of building strong advocacy positions (Bessant, 2009). This includes building positions that are coherent – both in terms of how they are presented in writing, and how their objectives hang together. Part of doing this effectively is appealing to and utilizing sound reasoning and empirical research which supports the advocate's or advocacy group's position. Reason and empirical research, however, do not simply refer to quantitative studies. It is easy to assume that in gathering support for a position, advocates should focus on statistical studies. But the sort of support that is needed, Bessant points out, depends on the nature of the appeal advocates are making on behalf of youth (Bessant, 2009). If the appeal is a response to age-based discrimination, for example, then the more appropriate focus may well be arguments based in appeals to justice and equity, rather than in a statistical relationship of some sort. Fundamental to building a good position – either based in appeals to justice or quantitative evidence of some sort – is doing so in a way which follows a valid logical structure, and is sensitive to the specific audience to which the position is being presented. These are just some of the considerations Bessant discusses, but again, learning to do these things well can be part of advocacy education, and can help inform good advocacy practice.

Take-Away 3.7

There are many components of effective youth advocacy that can be learned or improved upon through advocacy practice and education. While such education could take place in a formal education institution, it also could be more informal in a group setting.

Summary

Through considering studies and articles from the US, UK and Australia, what we can see is that many of the challenges discussed in the Canadian context are challenges which exist elsewhere as well. Examining these cases facilitates a better understanding of our challenges in Canada, and points us in the direction of helpful strategies focused on advocacy education, youth empowerment and building relationships with policymakers. While there are no clear-cut solutions to the challenges facing youth and frontline youth workers, the considerations should help to further the dialogue for how effective advocacy can be pursued.

Overall Summary and Conclusions

In conducting this research, we have attempted to do a few things: to look at the formal guidelines and informal challenges to effective frontline youth advocacy work, and to consider best practices and key considerations in the field, domestically and internationally. At times it seemed like we arrived at further questions as opposed to answers; as we have learned, this is part of the process of attempting to understand how to respond to challenges in this field and build the most effective advocacy and frontline work practices. Here, we will briefly summarize and reflect on our findings.

In terms of the authoritative or legal sources governing advocacy by registered charities, the Income Tax Act, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and common law decisions set restrictions on the advocacy activities of registered charities. However, it is important to note that registered charities have significant opportunities to affect public policy, and more generally, to support youth at a systemic level. Through political activities and charitable activities, including public awareness campaigns, educational activities, and representations, registered charities may legally and effectively impact policy and public perception.

While this paper provides a guide to current law, standards and procedures, readers should keep in mind that changes are coming in the legal landscape. In the 2012 federal Budget – Economic Action Plan 2012 – the Government is proposing that the CRA take a more active stance towards enforcing current rules respecting political activities (“Enhancing Transparency and Accountability for Charities,” 2012). The Government is proposing to dedicate \$8 million over two years (2012-2014) on:

- Enhancing the CRA’s educational activities around registered charities’ political activities;
- Enhancing the CRA’s efforts to enforce registered charities’ compliance with current rules around political activities;

- Increasing transparency in registered charities' expenditure reporting by requiring more information on political activities; this information would include the extent to which political activities are funded by foreign sources (“Enhancing Transparency and Accountability for Charities,” 2012).

Furthermore, the Government is proposing amendments to the Income Tax Act that would restrict the extent to which charities may fund political activities of others and that would introduce new penalties for charities that exceed the expenditure limits on political activities or that do not provide full and accurate information on their annual return (“Enhancing Transparency and Accountability for Charities,” 2012). There will be more concrete developments that will emerge in the coming months.

In the Canadian context, child and youth advocacy has been institutionalized through provincial Advocate Offices that have the ability to affect policy and legislation but are however characterized as being relatively bureaucratic in their form of child and youth advocacy. This highlights the importance of independent advocacy organizations and the advocacy done by frontline workers. These independent and local organizations often have a direct relationship with individual children and youth which is ultimately necessary for effective child and youth advocacy. However, this may not necessarily mean that these two providers of child and youth advocacy must oppose each other. Ideally they can work in tandem with each other – each strengthening the other. In addition, it seems in Canada that each advocate office differs in the way they conduct and manage child and youth advocacy. Each province focuses on the particular problems affecting the child and youth of their specific communities – though all Advocacy Offices across Canada share the same core principle of helping children and youth in need. However, what is less clearly understood is how provincial Advocate Offices communicate with independent local advocacy organizations and the particular power dynamics that lie beneath these relationships. A better understanding of such

relationships may allow for effective coordination between local advocacy organizations and larger provincial advocate offices.

Looking to international studies, a variety of key considerations were highlighted. One was the challenges associated with pressure put on advocacy and youth work organizations from government or institutions to meet goals and targets, even when this may well detract from the advocacy work itself. Similar concerns were raised with respect to advocates and youth workers trying to pursue effective advocacy within the constraints set at higher levels of organizations, institutions or outside funding agencies.

What this brings out is that several parties have interests at play in these systems. First and foremost are the interests of the youth for whom advocates and frontline workers are attempting to help and advocate. Second are the advocates and frontline workers who need support and respect to do their jobs well. Third are funders – government and independent agencies alike – who want confirmation and verification that their investments are being successfully used. If the need to operate within the constraints of funding agencies and the requirements to meet pre-set targets and goals is ultimately undermining the ability of advocates or youth workers to successfully engage with youth, there seems to be a problem, when serving youth is the primary goal in the first place. While all of these perspectives are legitimate, a primary goal moving forward should be to seek to build relationships where these interests can be simultaneously pursued.

One of the other key issues that came up and was discussed in a few ways was understanding how to support frontline workers themselves, both for their own sake, and so that they are better able to serve youth in turn. Part of doing this successfully is building a healthy work atmosphere, where workers feel as though they are properly supported and respected in their work. Additionally, some research indicated that a worker's ability to help youth and engage with them successfully is rooted in their perception of themselves and confidence in their work. Again, part of building a

healthy climate within an organization is helping workers to develop a strong sense of self. At the organizational level groups should take seriously the need for building a healthy work environment; it can help to build better workers, and allows them to better serve youth.

There were also discussions regarding different advocacy strategies, in terms of building relationships with policy makers and other organizations, empowering the groups on whose behalf frontline youth workers are advocating, and figuring out how to build and incorporate advocacy education, which could serve to improve advocacy efforts. Much like building a healthy work environment, these ideas are best incorporated at the organizational level. Because each organization has different capacities, goals and levels of support, they are best equipped to determine a) who they should build relationships with, b) the best ways to build trust and empower the groups on whose behalf they are advocating and c) how to develop and institute educational opportunities with their organization. Having said that, while the shape of these efforts may differ in each case, they are all ideas frontline youth advocacy groups should take into consideration when trying to set advocacy goals and build strategies.

Remaining Questions and Further Areas of Inquiry

Given that this report has not been comprehensive in discussing all of the challenges facing frontline workers and the best practices available to them we thought it would be appropriate to highlight a number of important issues we were not able to address and questions which deserve further research.

1. Children and youth are not a static constituency. That is to say, youth grow up and become adults, and so the group of youth on whose behalf frontline workers advocate, and frontline workers themselves, are constantly changing. Does the changing nature of these groups impact how advocacy should be pursued?
2. How can groups best negotiate the risk between trying to pursue the most effective advocacy strategies, and the possibility of having funds pulled should their best efforts in some way conflict with the public or institutional framework within which they are operating?
3. Are the barriers at the individual advocacy level – i.e. individual workers advocating on a personal, case by case basis – similar or the same as barriers at the public, systemic or institutional levels?
4. What happens to youth and to youth workers when they are not sufficiently supported, protected and respected?
5. Is there a relationship between provincial advocate offices and local, non-profit or charitable organizations that conduct child and youth advocacy? If so, what is their power dynamic – in terms of political, legal and financial capabilities?
6. How do the cultural or historical differences in different cities, regions, provinces etc. impact or change the advocacy strategies available to an organization or movement?

Appendix 1

Accessing Federal House of Commons and Senate Committees

For a list of House of Commons committees, please see:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/CommitteeBusiness/CommitteeList.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=1>

For a list of Senate committees, please see:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/SenCommitteeBusiness/default.aspx?parl=41&ses=1&Language=E>

Each committee has its own webpage, which details the committee's sitting schedule, as well as the Clerk of the Committee's contact information. Interested parties must contact the Clerk of the Committee to become witnesses and make representations, or may be contacted by the Clerk of the Committee if the committee is interested in their representation.

Accessing Provincial Legislative Assembly Committees

Interested parties must submit the following information to register as a witness with the Clerk of the Committee:

- Contact name
- Organization Name
- Presenter(s) Name and Title
- Address
- Contact Information
- Bill name or number, or issue that they wish to address

For a list of currently active committees, please see http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/committee-proceedings/committees_current.do?locale=en. Under each committee's page, interested parties

may access the “Notice of Hearings” page for the Clerk of the Committee’s contact information as well as the schedule of committee hearings.

Provincial Legislative Assembly committees that may be relevant to registered charities serving youth include:

- Standing Committee on Social Policy
- Standing Committee on Justice Policy

For guidelines around written submissions, please see

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/go2.jsp?Page=/getting-involved/committee_participation_submit&menuItem=getting_involved_participate_committee&locale=en#tabdetail.

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