

What We Mean by Advocacy

When an office to advocate on behalf of children and youth in care was set up in 1989, the definition we adopted identified advocacy as:

“Intervention on behalf of children and groups of children in relation to those services and institutions that impinge on their lives.”

Kahn, et al. (1972) “Child Advocacy: Report of a National Baseline Study”

While the OCYA still uses this definition today, there are a variety of definitions used by other organizations that are just as good. Just as significant and as important, however, are the principles that underlie the provision of advocacy services. These principles include:

- Children and youth have rights as individuals, separate from the right to be protected from abuse and neglect. For example,
 - The right to participate and be heard* in decisions that affect them;
 - The right to know and access rights provided through policy, regulation and legislation;
 - Rights of privacy and confidentiality;
 - The right to know and maintain connections with their biological, cultural, religious and linguistic heritage.
- Advocacy has, as a primary focus, the empowerment of the youth to speak for him or herself or to direct and instruct the activities of an advocate on his or her behalf;
- Advocacy seeks to enhance and support rather than replace the child’s relationships with natural and community advocates and support systems;
- Advocacy must be separate from provision of services to better maintain its focus on the child;
- Advocacy services must be available and responsive to the child’s circumstances.

* It is important to understand that the youth’s right to be heard is not the same as the right to decide. This understanding is crucial to reducing resistance and opposition to an advocate’s involvement.



Natural Advocacy Initiative

Beyond the formal role of advocating for children and youth, the OCYA is expected to “facilitate the involvement of family or community members in assisting in advocating for a child who is receiving services”. The Natural Advocacy Initiative seeks to recognize and support the advocacy efforts of family and community members already known to and involved with children and youth in their communities.

... facilitate the involvement of family or community members...

Individuals in parental, guardianship or decision-making roles relative to that youth receiving services (for example: natural parents, foster parents, youth workers), already have an advocacy role. In these cases the Advocate’s office will provide information on what those individuals can do to advocate on behalf of the child or youth.

For individuals who are not in parental, guardianship or decision-making roles, the Advocate’s office is interested in helping potential “natural” advocates provide advocacy support to a young person.

What We Mean by “Natural” Advocate:

“an adult who is known to and accepted by an articulate youth*, and who is willing and able to assist the youth in taking the youth’s issues forward and having the youth’s voice heard.”

Given this definition, the Advocate’s office believes a natural advocate must:

- Be an adult;
- Have a significant, positive relationship with the child or youth;
- Be accepted by the child or youth as his or her advocate;
- Be prepared to represent the child’s or youth’s rights, interests and viewpoints;
- Understand his or her role as an advocate for a young person;
- Not already be in a formal guardianship and/or decision-making role with respect to the child or youth.

* An articulate child or youth is one who can express his or her wishes, wants and needs, and can understand what an advocate is compared to someone who is a decision maker.

Natural Advocate Role

The role of the natural advocate is primarily one of providing support to a youth who is receiving services from the Ministry of Children's Services.



Because this role emerges out of an already existing relationship between a young person and an adult, their relationship and interaction may, or may not, change a great deal when the adult takes on the role of "natural advocate." The primary intents of the natural advocate designation are: to recognize that the relationship between the youth and adult goes beyond friendship; to signify that this adult is willing to recognize the young person as someone special in that adult's life; and to indicate the adult will "be there" for the young person based on the youth's determination of his or her need for support.

In conjunction with the characteristics noted above, there are two other particular characteristics of the natural advocate role:

- *The role of the natural advocate is not one of a custodian or guardian. A natural advocate has no decision-making authority and does not assume the roles or responsibilities of a parent or care-provider.*
- There is no end to the natural advocate role except as decided by the particular youth and the particular adult who is in the role of natural advocate (or as necessitated by some external circumstance).

By accepting the role of natural advocate, the adult may find him/herself involved in a variety of activities, and interacting with an array of other adults already involved with the youth including caseworkers, care-providers, foster parents, youth workers, and natural parents.

Natural Advocates and the OCYA

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate manages the processes involved when an adult becomes a natural advocate for a young person. Once the designation is established, the further involvement of the natural advocate and youth with a formal advocate from the OCYA will depend on the circumstances of the youth. The relationship will be influenced by the following:

- The involvement of a natural advocate with a young person receiving services from Children's Services does not depend on the formal advocate's having an existing or ongoing working relationship with the youth;
- The natural advocate and the youth can always contact the OCYA for information and advice;
- The natural advocate and youth can request the involvement of a formal advocate to address (or help address) a particular issue that they feel is beyond what they are comfortable handling on their own.

Natural Advocate and Youth

The support to the youth may take on many different forms and must be guided by the wishes of the youth. Activities are not limited to, but may include:

- Assisting the youth to understand his or her circumstances with respect to the services being provided by the Children's Services Ministry;
- Ensuring the youth is aware of his or her rights in relation to the Ministry's intervention;
- Assisting the youth through the legal system;
- Taking issues, concerns and difficulties forward both with, and on behalf of, the youth when requested by the youth;
- Being someone to listen to the youth's perspective with respect to his or her circumstances;
- Assisting the youth in problem solving;
- Providing supports to the youth during alternative dispute resolution processes;
- Providing ongoing interaction with youth both during and following the provision of intervention services.

It is important to understand that the role of the natural advocate is to support the youth. It is not intended to promote or advance the agenda of adults (parent, natural advocate, foster parent, caseworker, et al.) that may be involved.

Natural Advocate and Children's Services

Children's Services is interested in supporting and maintaining the positive relationships a youth has developed both prior to, and during, the period that intervention services are being provided. While the Ministry may have multiple interests with respect to the provision of services, it also recognizes the role of an advocate in ensuring youth rights, interests and viewpoints are not lost when decisions are made and services are provided. With this in mind, it is expected the Ministry will assist in the identification and support of natural advocates in the lives of children and youth they serve.

A natural advocate plays an important role in ensuring issues brought forward by youth are considered when decisions are being made about them. As an advocate for the youth, he or she is in a position to ensure the youth's voice is heard and considered. The involvement of an advocate is aimed at empowering the youth to provide his or her viewpoint, assisting the youth when he or she is having difficulty expressing himself or herself, and providing support and understanding once decisions have been made.

The natural advocate can be both a source of support to the youth as well as a resource for the service system. It is expected that the natural advocate and those in the delivery system will have mutual respect for each other and work in a collaborative manner to the benefit of the youth. While the role of the advocate can be challenging and difficult at times, it does not have to be antagonistic or disrespectful.

Where to from Here?

Before a person becomes a natural advocate in association with the OCYA, there are a number of steps he or she must take.



Youth Agreement

The OCYA will assess the young person's capacity to understand the role of, and provide direction to, a natural advocate. The OCYA will confirm the youth has an existing relationship with the applicant and is interested in having the applicant as a natural advocate.

Advocacy Agreement – see [Appendix A](#)

Following the satisfactory completion of all required steps, the OCYA will facilitate the signing of an agreement between the youth and the natural advocate. The agreement will include:

- The youth's agreement to have the applicant as a natural advocate;
- Any specific areas of interest or involvement of the natural advocate;
- Any areas in which support or assistance may be required;
- That either party to the agreement has the right to terminate the role of natural advocate;
- Identification of those people who should be notified of the natural advocate's involvement and who will be facilitating the notification.



Intervention Record Check (CYIM Check) – see [Appendix B](#)

The OCYA has been requested to obtain an 'Intervention Record Check'* on all natural advocate applicants. An Intervention Record Check, also known as a CYIM (Child and Youth Information Module) check, is a request seeking information with respect to the applicant's previous involvement with the child intervention system. A history of involvement does not necessarily mean an applicant will not be accepted as a natural advocate. Information received through a CYIM Check may be reviewed and shared with the youth's caseworker and/or legal guardian.



* formerly known as a CWIS or Child Welfare Record Check

Criminal Records Check – see [Appendix C](#)

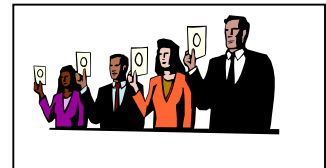
The OCYA has been requested to obtain a Criminal Records Check on all natural advocate applicants. This is a request seeking information with respect to the applicant’s criminal records history. A criminal records history does not necessarily mean an applicant will not be accepted as a natural advocate. Information received through a Criminal Records Check may be reviewed and shared with the youth’s caseworker and/or legal guardian.



The OCYA will reimburse the costs associated with a Criminal Records Check obtained for purposes of becoming a natural advocate for a young person. (See the [note in Appendix C.](#))

Existing Restrictions

All potential natural advocates will be screened for any restrictions that exist between the applicant and the youth. Court orders, custody restrictions and restraining orders are common examples of more formal restrictions however, case workers and other adults involved with the youth may be canvassed for concerns that may preclude the involvement of the applicant. Any identified restrictions will be discussed prior to any decision being made with respect to the role of the applicant as a natural advocate.



Confidentiality/Privacy – see [Appendix D](#)

Natural advocates will not have access to the youth’s file. To the greatest extent possible, the primary source of information a natural advocate has about the youth will come from that young person or other persons that the young person agrees the natural advocate can speak with. As a volunteer for the youth, the natural advocate must ensure that information they become aware of as a result of his or her role as a natural advocate remains confidential in order to protect the privacy of those involved. See [Appendix D, Section D-1.](#)



The OCYA also needs to gather, collect and use information about you as a natural advocate. To review the OCYA privacy policy in relation to the Natural Advocacy Initiative as it relates to your personal information, please see [Appendix D, Section D-2.](#)

Intervention Record Check

Summary

An Intervention Record Check is a review to determine whether information about a person is contained in an existing intervention record (previously known as a Child Welfare Record).

To have an Intervention Record Check completed in order to participate in the natural advocacy initiative you must:

- Attend the office/neighborhood centre of your local Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA).
 - For the Edmonton CFSA attend:
6th Floor, Oxbridge Place
9820 106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2J6
 - For the Calgary CFSA attend:
300, 1240 Kensington Road NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3P7
- Request that an Intervention Record Check be completed. You will be required to fill out an Intervention Record Check form (similar to the example on page 12). In so doing:
 - Please ensure your name, address (including Apartment number, City, postal code) and phone number are clearly printed on the request form. Please complete Section 2 checking the first box. Identify Child and Youth Advocate as the 'organization' and volunteer in the space for 'type of position'. Please do not sign or mark below the 'For Office Use Only' portion.
 - Please return both copies of the form with photocopied identification as indicated below (one piece of the identification must have your date of birth). Ensure that you have signed and dated the form at the bottom of Section 2.
 - Photocopy one of the following making sure the picture ID is legible:
Driver's Licence or Passport or School ID or Status Card
 - Also provide one photocopy of the following: Alberta Health Care Card or Social Insurance Card or Birth Certificate or Proof of Citizenship.

- Ensure the completed application with attached identification is provided to the appropriate local CFSA (as identified above). You may be requested to show picture ID and to explain the reason for requesting the Record check.
- Record checks can take a number of weeks to complete so apply early.
- Once the Check has been completed the form will be returned to you. (You will be required to pick it up.) You are responsible to release the information on your behalf as per the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)*.
- Please provide the completed Intervention Record Check to the Child and Youth Advocate Office. Based on the results of the Record Check you may be requested to provide further information. With your consent, information received through an Intervention Record Check (CYIM Check) may be reviewed and shared with the youth's caseworker and/or legal guardian. A copy of the Intervention Record Check will be retained for our records.

Criminal Records Check

Summary

A Criminal Records Check is a review to determine whether information about a person is contained in an existing law-enforcement data bank. To have a Criminal Records Check completed in order to participate in the natural advocacy initiative you must:

- Attend the office of the local law-enforcement agency. In most of rural Alberta that will be the local RCMP detachment. In the larger centres, Criminal Records Checks are completed by the municipal police departments.
 - For the City of Edmonton attend:
Edmonton Police Service Headquarters
9620 103A Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5H 0H7
 - For the City of Calgary attend:
Calgary City Police
Police Administration Building
316 7th Ave SE
Calgary, AB T2G 4Z1
- Request a Criminal Records Check be completed. Complete and submit the required application (similar to the example attached). There may be variations in either the process or procedures as described herein. Please follow the directions provided by the law enforcement agency. Submit the request as an individual rather than from the Child and Youth Advocate office. You will be charged the full fee (see note below regarding reimbursement). In filling out the application:
 - You will be required to produce two pieces of government issued identification. In most cases at least one must be photo ID. A suggested listing is on page 15.
 - You may be requested to provide an explanation for requiring a Criminal Records Check – your interest is in advocating on a volunteer basis on behalf of a vulnerable youth.
- Criminal Records Checks can take a number of weeks to complete so apply early.

- In most cases there is a fee charged for having a Criminal Records Check completed. Obtain a receipt when paying the fee and submit to the Child and Youth Advocate Office for reimbursement. If payment of the fees causes undue hardship, please speak with an advocate from the Child and Youth Advocate office.
- Once the Check has been completed the form will be returned to you – please check with the appropriate law-enforcement agency for details. You are responsible to release the information on your behalf as per the *FOIP Act*.
- Please provide the completed Criminal Records Check to the Child and Youth Advocate office. Based on the results of the Records Check you may be requested to provide further information. With your consent, information received through a Criminal Records Check may be reviewed and shared with the youth's caseworker and/or legal guardian. A copy of the Criminal Records Check will be retained in our records.

Criminal Records Check Identification

**2 PIECES ARE REQUIRED
1 PIECE MUST BE PHOTO ID**

Acceptable ID

- **Alberta Motor Registries ID
(Driver's Licence, Learner's and Identification Card)**
- **Birth Certificate**
- **Alberta Health Care Card**
- **Passport**
- **Immigration Papers**
- **Citizenship Card**
- **Indian Status Card**
- **Firearm Card**
- **Permanent Residence Card**
- **National Defence Card**

Unacceptable ID

- **Social Insurance Card**
- **Student ID**
- **Credit cards**
- **City of _____ Licence Card**
- **Blue Cross Card**

Sample of a Criminal Records Check

SECURITY CLEARANCE DETAIL						
SECURITY CLEARANCE CHECK						
<input type="checkbox"/> VOLUNTEER		<input type="checkbox"/> STUDENT PURPOSE				
<p>WARNING: This form is not to be used by persons receiving wages or remuneration as a result of this security clearance check. Use or acceptance of this Clearance by anyone for any purpose other than as a volunteer or student can result in civil liability. Letter from agency, organization, or educational institution must be attached to this form verifying that use of this Clearance is for volunteer or student purposes ONLY for waiver of \$30.00 fee.</p>						
Last Name / Family Name		First Birthname In Full	Middle Name In Full	Sex	Date of Birth	
					Year Month Day	
Maiden Name or Any Other last Names EVER Used		Aliases		Place of Birth		
Street Address		City or Town	Postal Code	Province		
Driver's Licence Number / Issuing Province			Home Phone (inc. Area Code)	Work Phone (inc. Area Code)		
Previous Addresses (if any) within the last 5 years (City / Province Only)						
MUST BE COMPLETED	Verification of Applicant's Identification (by a Representative of Requesting Agency or Security Clearance Detail staff ONLY)					
	Name		Signature		Phone Number	
	Check Identification Provided: <input type="checkbox"/> Driver's Licence <input type="checkbox"/> Birth Certificate <input type="checkbox"/> Alberta Health Care <input type="checkbox"/> Passport <input type="checkbox"/> Other:					
	Agency Requesting Security Clearance		Department or Program	Phone Number	Fax Number	
	Contact Name of Volunteer / Student Co-Ordinator (if different from Verifier above)			Phone Number	Fax Number	
Description of the Work or Position Being Applied For						
VULNERABLE SECTOR	<p>This Area Related to Positions Working with "Children or "Vulnerable Persons - Read and Complete if Applicable</p> <p>This area is to be used by a person applying for a position with a person or organization responsible for the well-being of one or more "children or "vulnerable persons, if the position is a position of authority or trust relative to those children or vulnerable persons and the applicant wishes to consent to a search being made in criminal conviction records to determine if the applicant has been convicted of a sexual offence listed in the schedule to the <i>Criminal Records Act</i> and has been pardoned.</p> <p>"Children, as defined by the <i>Criminal Records Act</i> means persons who are less than 18 years of age.</p> <p>"Vulnerable persons, as defined by the <i>Criminal Records Act</i> means persons who, because of their age, a disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, are in a position of dependence on others or are otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by persons in a position of authority or trust relative to them.</p>					
	<p>Details of the Children or Vulnerable Persons (age, disability, or circumstances of dependency)</p>					
	<p>I consent to a search being made in the automated criminal records retrieval system maintained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to determine if I have been convicted of, and been granted a pardon for any of the sexual offences that are listed in the schedule to the <i>Criminal Records Act</i>. I understand that, as a result of giving this consent, if I am suspected of being the person named in a criminal record for one of the sexual offences listed in the schedule to the <i>Criminal Records Act</i> in respect of which a pardon was granted or issued, that record may be provided by the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to the Solicitor General of Canada, who may then disclose all or part of the information contained in that record to a police force or other authorized body. That police force or authorized body will then disclose that information to me. If I further consent in writing to disclosure of that information to the person or organization referred to above that requested the verification, that information will be disclosed to that person or organization.</p>					
	<p>_____ Signature of Applicant Consenting to Vulnerable Sector Search</p> <p>_____ Date</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">FOR POLICE USE ONLY</p> <p>Vulnerable Sector Included <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OFFICIAL'S SIGNATURE</p>			

Confidentiality/Privacy

Section D-1:

Privacy Information for Natural Advocates

An individual volunteering as a natural advocate is a volunteer for the youth and not a volunteer for the Child and Family Services Authority or the Child and Youth Advocate Office.

For this reason, the disclosure and communication of child or youth's personal information by the natural advocate is not subject to section 126 (Confidentiality) of the *Enhancement Act* and Part 2 (Protection of Privacy) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*.

Note:

If the Natural Advocate discloses personal information to the OCYA, this information is subject to section 126 and Part 2 of the Acts mentioned above respectively.

Natural Advocates will not have access to the young person's file. To the greatest extent possible, the primary source of information a natural advocate has about the youth will come from that young person or other persons that the young person agrees the natural advocate can speak with. As a volunteer for the youth, the natural advocate must ensure that information they become aware of as a result of his or her role as a natural advocate remains confidential in order to protect the privacy of those involved. A privacy/confidential information sheet has been prepared for natural advocates as part of his or her information package.

All Child and Family Services Authorities place a strong emphasis on the protection of personal privacy and recommend that the following guidelines be followed when providing advocacy services to a youth.

Collection of Information:

- Make an effort to collect personal information directly from the youth. This will help to ensure that the information collected is accurate and reliable.
- Only collect information that is **required** to advocate for the youth.

Use of and Disclosure of Personal Information:

- Any personal information that you collect about a youth while advocating should be used only for the purpose of providing advocacy services to that youth.

- Personal information about the youth should only be disclosed to individuals where the disclosure is required to advocate for that youth.
- Let the youth know how you will use his or her personal information and to whom you plan to disclose his or her information.
- If a youth objects to the disclosure of his or her personal information do not disclose the information unless required by law to do so.

Protection of Personal Information:

- If you create written records about a youth make sure that these records are kept in a safe place where others will not be able to view his or her personal information. Once you have finished providing advocacy services it is recommended that any records you create on a youth be shredded and disposed of in a secure manner.

Confidentiality/Privacy

Section D-2: Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Natural Advocacy Initiative

Privacy Statement

In accordance with the values and principles of the Child and Youth Advocate Office (OCYA), the Natural Advocacy Initiative (NAI) is committed to protecting your privacy through the protection of all information you provide to the OCYA-NAI. This OCYA-NAI Privacy Statement is consistent with Alberta provincial privacy legislation including the *Enhancement Act*, *FOIP* and *PChIP*.

Personal Information

Personal information is information about an identifiable individual. Personal information can include name, address, telephone numbers (home and work), e-mail addresses, date of birth, employment information, CRIM and CYIM record check information, etc. The amount of information the OCYA-NAI collects about you will depend on the level of involvement you wish to have with the OCYA-NAI. While certain information is required to proceed with OCYA-NAI involvement, the choice to provide any personal information will always be yours to make.

What Information Does OCYA-NAI Require?

The primary objective of the OCYA-NAI is to facilitate the involvement of natural advocates in the lives of youth receiving services under the *Enhancement Act* and *PChIP* legislation. The OCYA-NAI will collect your personal information in order to review your involvement with services provided by the OCYA and more specifically the NAI. Your personal information will be used to determine your level of involvement in the NAI process within the OCYA. You will be involved in determining what information is collected and how the information will be used.

Why Does the OCYA-NAI Require Personal Information?

The OCYA-NAI will collect and use information in relation to your involvement in the NAI. Information collected will be used to communicate with you, to facilitate the delivery of services from the OCYA-NAI and to assist you in your role as a natural advocate for a youth receiving services through the *Enhancement Act* and/or *PChIP*. With your consent, personal information gathered as a result of your involvement with the OCYA-NAI may be shared with the youth's caseworker and/or legal guardian.

Limits To OCYA-NAI Use Of Personal Information

The OCYA-NAI will safeguard your personal information and use it solely for the purposes that it was collected or as permitted by applicable legislation (*Enhancement Act*, *FOIP*, *PChIP*). The OCYA-NAI will not share your personal information without your permission.

OCYA-NAI Commitments

The OCYA NAI will protect your privacy, and in particular your personal information, in accordance with basic principles of privacy and in accordance to legislation established by the Government of Alberta.

Commitment 1: The OCYA is responsible for personal information under its control. All OCYA staff will be made aware of the OCYA Privacy Policy, and be in compliance with confidentiality and privacy legislation in the province of Alberta.

Commitment 2: The OCYA will identify the purpose for which your personal information is collected at or before the time the information is collected.

Commitment 3: The OCYA will obtain your consent for the use and/or disclosure of your personal information, except where required or permitted by law.

Commitment 4: The OCYA will only collect personal information necessary for the purposes identified by the OCYA.

Commitment 5: The OCYA will only use your personal information for the purposes identified unless you provide consent or as required by law.

Commitment 6: The OCYA will maintain your personal information in an accurate, complete and up-to-date form as is necessary to fulfill the purposes for which the information was used and as required to meet OCYA record standards.

Commitment 7: The OCYA policy related to the management and use of personal information will be made readily available to anyone interested.

Commitment 8: The OCYA, upon request, will inform you of the existence, use and disclosure of your personal information and you will be given access to your personal information, subject to any legal restrictions. You may verify the accuracy and completeness of your personal information, and may request that the information be corrected or updated, if appropriate.

Commitment 9: The OCYA will respond to any questions or concerns respecting compliance to the OCYA-NAI Privacy Policy.

OCYA Understanding

The OCYA would like your consent to collect, use and disclose your personal information for the purposes identified in this document. You will be requested to provide consent prior to proceeding any further in the NAI process/procedure. You may refuse or withdraw your consent at any time, subject to legal restrictions and providing the OCYA with reasonable notice of the withdrawal of your consent. If you choose to withdraw your consent or not provide certain personal information your decision may limit the services and support the OCYA may offer and may make it more difficult for the OCYA to facilitate your role as a natural advocate.

Natural Advocate Applicant Information Sheet

Please complete the following information and provide to the Child and Youth Advocate Office.

APPLICANT

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Relationship to Youth:

YOUTH

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

CFSA Case Worker: _____

CFSA Office: _____

Assigned Advocate OCYA: _____

Note:

See Appendixes B and C regarding the Intervention Record Check (CYIM Check) and the Criminal Records Check