



# Annual Report

## 2023-2024





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This report covers the time period from  
1 August, 2023 to 31 July, 2024.  
Our fiscal year is 1 April 2023, to 31 March 2024.





The Canadian Foundation for Children Youth and the Law was formally incorporated in 1978 as a Registered Charity. We operate as “Justice for Children and Youth” (JFCY), a specialty community legal aid clinic. JFCY specializes in protecting the rights and interests of young people within the legal, education, social service or mental health systems. This year we celebrate our 46th anniversary.

**JFCY’s vision** is to advance and protect the legal rights and dignity of children and youth.

**JFCY’s mission** is to provide child-centred legal services that enhance justice and support inclusion for vulnerable children and youth through:

- Specialized legal expertise and representation
- Leadership on systemic law reform and advocacy
- Legal education and outreach

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Anne Irwin, Chair and President

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# OUR TEAM



Alicia Lam, Education Navigator, TNW Justice Centre  
Alisha Riley, Client Support Worker  
Allison Williams, Litigation Lawyer  
Athena Caldarola - Communications and Outreach Coordinator  
Candice Suter, Litigation Lawyer  
Claire Millgate, Street Youth Legal Services Lawyer  
Dennique Lavia, Project Assistant, CASA  
Emily Chan - Community Development Lawyer  
Gab Gagnon, Law Clerk  
Gnanu Krishnapillai, Education & Outreach Manager, CASA  
Jin Chien, Litigation Lawyer  
Kaffie Abdirashid, Education Advocate Lawyer, TNW Justice Centre  
Karien Gibson, Operations Manager  
Katherine Long, Litigation Lawyer  
Lisa Salenga, Human Resources and Finance Assistant  
Mary Birdsell, Executive Director  
Miriam Roger, Program Lead, Your Way Forward  
Olayemi Fadesere, Receptionist  
Samantha McDonald, Legal Assistant  
Samira Ahmed, Litigation Lawyer  
Sarah Pole, Program Director, CASA  
Stephanie Giannandrea, Litigation Lawyer  
Talayeh Shomali, Project Director, Borderless Access to Education

**On leave:**

Jane Stewart, Litigation Lawyer



# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is with an enduring sense of gratitude and amazement that it is once again time to reflect and report on our year's activities. The clinic has operated with stability after a few years of radical growth. We have continued to provide exceptional child-centered legal services to children and young people in Ontario. We continue to see how the complexity and intensity of the issues and the adversity our clients face contribute to their complex and challenging legal issues. We continue to see children who have experienced violence, who are experiencing homelessness, who lack secure immigration status, who struggle to access education, social supports, and health and mental health services, and who are caught up in the criminal justice system; children who are marginalized and excluded, whose equity, dignity, and rights are not being respected, and who struggle to find access to justice.

As you will see detailed in this report, we had what may be a record number of opportunities to engage in test case litigation this year. We hope that as you review the pages of this detailed annual report you will see reflected the very broad range and complexity of issues, and activities we have been involved with this year.

Another 2023-2024 highlight was the relaunch of our new Website! This was a massive project - we have received some wonderful feedback about it - we hope that you will check it out: [WWW.JFCY.ORG](http://WWW.JFCY.ORG)

We offer heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our incredibly hard working staff. A group of people whose compassion, intellect, skills, and dedication are unparalleled. The confluence of these qualities can be hard to find. We do not take their choice to dedicate their efforts to justice for children and youth for granted, and recognize that our success as an organization and the excellence of the services we offer is due to their commitment.

Finally, we wish to extend our deep appreciation for the dedication and hard work of our volunteer Board of Directors. Board members have been busy with a range of activities, maintaining strong governance structures, reviewing policies, fundraising, among other things. We anticipate starting a new strategic planning process in the year ahead. The health the Canadian Foundation for Children Youth and the Law, operating as Justice for Children and Youth depends on a committed, dedicated and hard working volunteer Board of Directors - each of our Directors brings these qualities and important individual skills that keep us moving forward.

We look forward to another year of advancing and protecting the legal rights, equity and dignity of children and youth in Ontario.



Mary Birdsell,  
Executive Director



Anne Irwin,  
Board Chair



# OUR APPROACH TO CLIENTS

JFCY provides legal advice, information, and representation directly to children and young people in Ontario on a wide variety of legal issues. Our services are trauma-informed and strengths-based - we take a multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving - an intentional recognition of the whole client and their circumstances.

Our unique approach to our clients is to provide our most comprehensive services to young people facing complex personal, social, and legal issues, and situations that create overlapping vulnerabilities.

We take time to understand what these clients' lived experiences look like, sound like, and feel like - we meet them where they are, follow what they identify as their priorities and concerns, and begin our work there. We know that our clients are underserved - we seek to build bridges, and to help our clients access the community, institutional, and organizational services they need, while fighting systems that diminish and devalue their dignity and rights.

We engage in systemic test case litigation where outcomes in the courts, tribunals, and with decision-makers will influence children's equity and rights beyond the individual case. We have specialized programs focusing on young people whose vulnerabilities intersect with systemic discrimination and social exclusion.

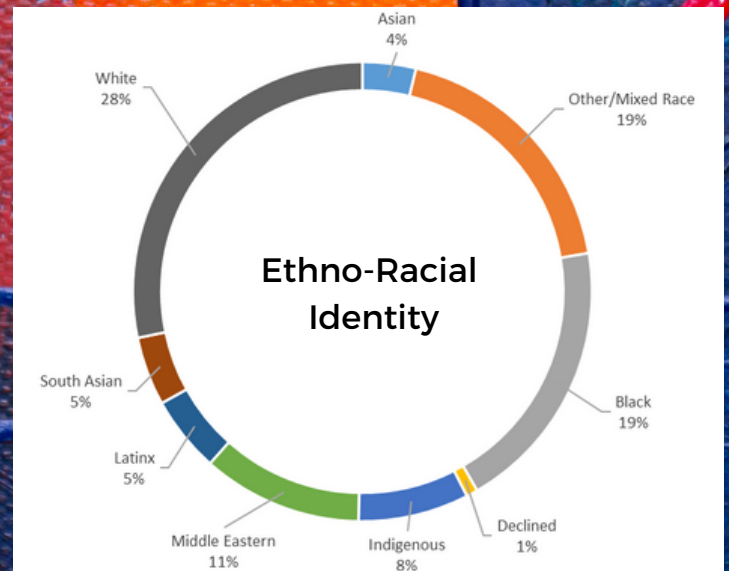
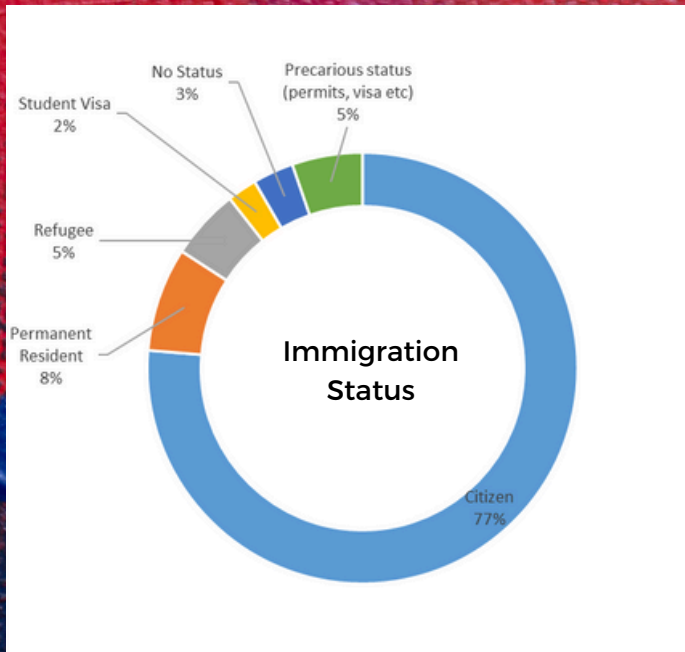
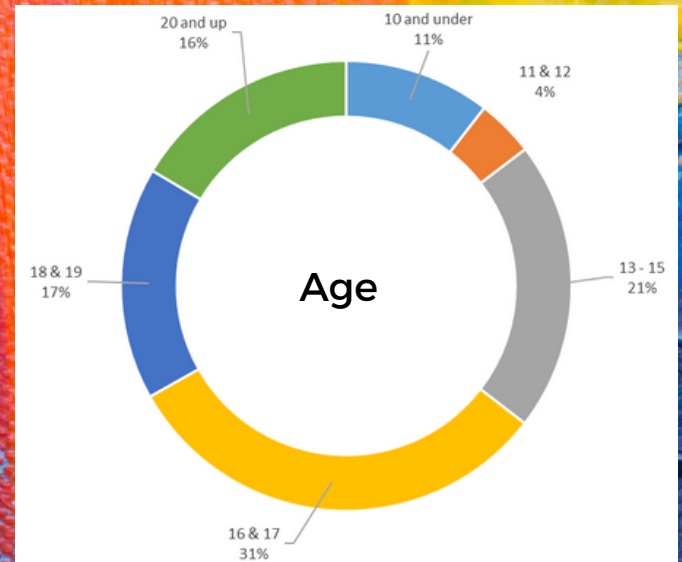
In everything we do, we promote an equity seeking approach, promoting a child rights-respecting legal system and society, where children and young people are taken seriously, where their voices are heard and their dignity is honoured.



# INTAKES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

## AUGUST 2023 - JULY 2024

We supported  
**1057** individual  
young people



### JFCY CLIENT STORY

A teenager, who had recently arrived in Canada, contacted our office because her school board refused to enroll her based on her lack of immigration status. Desperate to start school the young person connected with us for support on what can be done. The young person was entitled to access education as a result of s. 49.1 of the Education Act, and through our advocacy her rights were realized and she started high school in Ontario.



# INTAKES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

## AUGUST 2023 - JULY 2024

We addressed **1310**  
unique legal issues across a  
spectrum of practice areas

Administrative	40
Child Welfare	32
Criminal	303
Education	324
Employment	13
Family	80
Health Care	39
Housing	59
Human Rights	20
Immigration & Refugee	138
Income Maintenance	70
Leaving Home	84
Policing	9
Privacy	8
Violence	85
Wills and Estates	6

### JFCY CLIENT STORY

A young transgender woman met our lawyer at one of our SYLS drop-ins. She had survived childhood trauma and sexual violence. The police had been called while our client was experiencing a mental health crisis, the situation escalated our client was criminally charged. Our lawyers advocated for this client until her charges were withdrawn. We also helped her to navigate a separate complex and emotional matter in which she was a complainant as a victim of violence. Months later, the connection that our lawyer had established with this client allowed us to act as a guarantor when she applied to change her legal name to accord with her gender identity.



# CLIENT SUPPORT WORKER

The role of our Client Support Worker (CSW) is to provide social and systems support and advocacy for JFCY clients who experience varying levels of marginalization and disenfranchisement due to their complex social circumstances. The CSW role has been fully integrated into JFCY's legal service programming for three years and continues to grow.

Our CSW works closely with our staff lawyers and clients directly to identify goals and address gaps in young peoples' circles of care. The CSW provides comprehensive and ongoing support, case management, crisis intervention and direct assistance in accessing community-based supports and services.

***DURING 2023-2024 OUR CLIENT SUPPORT WORKER  
PROVIDED SERVICES TO 240 YOUNG PEOPLE - WITH A  
CONSISTENT ACTIVE CASELOAD OF UP TO 30 INDIVIDUALS.***

This year, our CSW continued to assist clients with the highest level of need for frontline social support alongside legal services; she provided dedicated intensive support with time and attention based on each individual's unique needs. Goals and areas of support can vary significantly.

Many themes arise in our work with young people, some of them may seem unexpected. For example, pets are an important part of so many young people's lives, providing young people with a sense of safety, security, purpose and routine. This year our CSW addressed the needs of young people and their pets by identifying: free or lower cost spay and neuter services, vet care, pet food banks, accessing training, re-homing pets, and safety planning. Honouring the relationship between young people and their pets while providing a safe place to make important, and sometimes difficult, decisions arose in novel ways this past year; an example of our need to be nimble, creative, and responsive to issues as they arise.

Looking ahead to next year, our CSW will be increasing her involvement with our social work students - strengthening our student programming and training in providing high-standard levels of care and service to the individuals we work with.



# TEST CASE LITIGATION

**Voting Age Challenge – Penney- Crocker et al. v Canada, Superior Court of Justice, Court File No. CV-00673129-0000**

JFCY and the David Asper Centre for Constitutional Rights are representing a group of young people from across Canada and acting as a public interest litigant in a constitutional challenge to the Federal Voting Age.

The young people represented range in age between 13 to 20 years old and hail from coast to coast to coast, residing in Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that all Canadian citizens have a right to vote in federal and provincial/territorial elections, and section 15 states that everyone is equal before and under the law without discrimination based on age. The Supreme Court of Canada, in the case Frank v Canada, (2019 SCC 1) made it clear that any limit on Canadians' right to vote must be clearly justified. Children represent nearly one quarter of Canada's population, yet they remain the only disenfranchised citizens in our society. Interestingly, the four larger political parties in Canada all allow people to be members of the party and to vote for party leadership at age 14, and there are jurisdictions around the world that have lowered the voting age below 18, including Scotland, Wales, Austria and Germany (local).

We successfully advocated for the Court to dispense with the need for litigation guardians and have tendered most of our evidence. The Government has also tendered their evidence. The next stage will be to conduct cross-examinations and prepare to go to trial.

**Test case: a legal challenge where the outcome will be important not only for the person bringing the case, but for many others too.**





# TEST CASE LITIGATION

## **Safe Streets Act Challenge - Fair Change v. His Majesty the King in Right of Ontario, 2024 ONSC 1895**

JFCY intervened in the Charter challenge of Ontario's Safe Streets Act. On April 2, 2024 the Ontario Superior Court of Justice found that the Safe Streets Act violates the Charter freedoms of unhoused people living in poverty. The Court found the law's definitions of "aggressive" panhandling and soliciting were overbroad, while striking down the majority of the law's restrictions against panhandling in certain locations, such as outside of ATMs or at transit stops. JFCY filed a factum and made submissions to draw the Court's attention to the lived experience of young people who are homeless or precariously housed and highlighted the particular evidentiary and legal contexts which intensified the impact of the Safe Streets Act's infringements of the Charter rights of children and young people who panhandle. Lawyers at JFCY have been advocating in various capacities for the repeal of the Safe Streets Act since the law's enactment in 1999. The Court's decision in this case represents a significant victory for young people in Ontario who live in extreme poverty and are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect as they express their needs.

## **Saskatchewan (Minister of Education) v UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Gender Diversity, Docket: CACV4329 (Court of Appeal for Saskatchewan)**

JFCY was granted Leave to Intervene in this appeal in July of 2024. This case concerns Saskatchewan law that requires schools to obtain parental permission before using chosen names and pronouns by students who are under age 16. The Government of Saskatchewan pre-emptively invoked the Charter's notwithstanding clause (s.33) in its legislation. The organization UR Pride has brought a Charter challenge, claiming that the legislation violates the Charter rights to equality (s. 15), security of the person (s. 7), and to be free from cruel and unusual treatment (s. 12) of vulnerable and marginalized students, and seeking declaratory relief. The Government of Saskatchewan claims that the use of the Notwithstanding clause insulates the law from any judicial review. JFCY submits that the analysis of these issues must place children, whose interests are directly at stake, at the centre of each of the issues under consideration.



# TEST CASE LITIGATION

## **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation v. Ontario, 2023 ONSC 4348**

Eight girls were arrested and charged with second-degree murder in relation to the death of a man in downtown Toronto in December 2022. There was and continues to be a lot of media interest in, and coverage of, the case. A number of media outlets and journalists requested access to the full, unredacted youth court files of all eight young people. The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) protects the privacy of young people in many ways, including limiting the people who can access youth court files. The Youth Court Judge gave the media partial access to the records of the young people, redacting some personal identifying information, to allow ongoing coverage and accurate reporting of the case, while protecting the privacy of the young people.

The media outlets applied to the Superior Court for a review of the decision, alleging that the Youth Court had erred, and again seeking access to all the records. They also asked that parts of the YCJA be declared unconstitutional. JFCY was retained by the lawyers on behalf of several of the girls to represent them with respect to the youth records issue. The reviewing Court upheld the decision of the Youth Court, and refused to hear the constitutional application, finding that the appeal court was not the appropriate forum to hear the challenge and that it did not have the evidence it needed to consider the issues.



## **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation et al v His Majesty the King and Young Persons 1-8, Court File. COA-23-CR-0907 (Court of Appeal for Ontario)**

The media outlets appealed the decision of the Superior Court to the Court of Appeal for Ontario. JFCY was again retained by the lawyers for six of the eight girls on the appeal. JFCY argued the reviewing Judge properly applied the law, which restricts access to the identifying and personal information of the young people except as authorized by the YCJA and that it had the power to decide whether to hear the constitutional question or not. The hearing was held June 11, 2024 and the Court of appeal reserved its decision. We are waiting for the decision.



# TEST CASE LITIGATION

## **ASP v. Health Professions Appeal and Review Board 2024 ONSC 4386**

JFCY intervened at the Divisional Court in a judicial review about the right of an Indigenous 7 year-old female child to refuse an unwanted genital exam. The child was experiencing symptoms of a urinary tract infection, and instead of reviewing the urine screen, the physician insisted on completing a genital examination of the child. The child clearly and unequivocally refused the genital examination, physically resisting and saying no. The medically unnecessary genital examination was performed against the girl's clear wishes.

The family made a complaint against the physician, and there is a lengthy procedural history (including prior complaints that dealt with allegations of anti-Indigenous racism), but the core issue at the recent judicial review was concerns that the regulatory bodies, in reviewing the complaint, had failed to engage with health care consent law as it applies to minors.

As interveners, JFCY successfully argued that a decision cannot be reasonable where it ignores the right of a capable child to consent or refuse treatment under the Health Care Consent Act. A child's right to autonomy and bodily integrity is informed by Charter values of security of the person and the child's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to health, bodily integrity, and non-discrimination, among others.

In its reasons, the Divisional Court held consent is "not a minor or collateral issue". A child has just as much of a right to consent to, or refuse, treatment as an adult.

## **Law Society of Ontario v AA, Superior Court of Justice (Divisional Court), court file No. 204/24**

JFCY intervened in a judicial review before the Divisional Court related to the licensing application of AA with the Law Society of Ontario. AA had been diagnosed as a pedophile in remission and admitted to sexually abusing three children; although he lied, or was not forthcoming about it, for a period of eight years. First, at the Law Society Tribunal Hearing Division, and subsequently at the Law Society Tribunal Appeals Division, AA was nevertheless found to have met the standard of being currently of good character and was licensed to practice law, subject to a condition that he not meet with children unsupervised.

JFCY made submissions to the Court that the Law Society Tribunal decisions were unreasonable, arguing that they failed to adequately consider the interests and vantage point of children as equity seeking members of the public whose interests, dignity and integrity must be a central and primary consideration. The hearing occurred on August 22nd, 2024 and we are awaiting the decision.



**THE SYLS PROGRAM ASSISTED  
124 YOUNG PEOPLE WITH  
176 DISTINCT LEGAL ISSUES**



The SYLS program at JFCY aims to increase access to justice for young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We provide legal services directly to young people at regular drop-ins across the GTA, educate young people and their service-providers about common legal issues and legal resources, and participate in policy development and law reform work.

The SYLS lawyer helps prevent youth homelessness through their role as advocate, problem solver, and systems navigator. They can identify and help resolve legal issues that often precede homelessness, such as tenancy issues, disruptions to income or family violence. They can also help remove barriers that interfere with young people's transition out of homelessness, such as immigration status precarity, criminal victimization, barriers to receiving health care and accessing employment, education and housing.

The SYLS program collaborates with youth-serving agencies in the GTA to promote access to legal assistance. This year the SYLS program became a member of the Young Parent No Fixed Address (YPNFA) network and participated in their resource fair. The SYLS program further strengthened its community partnerships by offering tailored legal information workshops for service providers and updating its online resources, including its website and the Toronto Teen Street Guide.

As set out in the "Test Case Litigation" section of this report, this year JFCY and the SYLS program successfully intervened in the constitutional challenge of the Safe Streets Act, brought by Fair Change. In our factum and submissions, we centered young people's experience of being street-homeless and receiving tickets.

JFCY lawyers continue to sit on the board of A Way Home Canada. The SYLS lawyer will participate in the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' Prevention Matters online panel in September 2024 and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference in October 2024. We also contributed to the American Bar Association's Homeless Youth Legal Network's blog post entitled "The Role of Lawyers in Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness". We look forward to the launch of a new legal information resource in 2025.



Your Way Forward (YWF) is a Federal Department of Justice (DOJ)-funded program, which seeks to create access to justice opportunities for survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), family violence and sexual violence. Now in its third year, JFCY is partnered with eight other specialty and community legal clinics in providing these essential violence-informed legal services.



JFCY remains the coordinating clinic and we are pleased to report on both JFCY's individual project work and the collective efforts of the nine community legal clinics.

JFCY continues to provide comprehensive legal services to the many clients who come to us having experienced violence, including sexual violence, family violence and the violence endemic in sexual exploitation. The YWF funding has been essential in making it possible for us to maintain a level of service across Ontario, but the demand continues to outstrip our resources. We represent children and young people who are victim witnesses in criminal court, or who seek family justice remedies. We advocate with police, children's aid societies, schools and school boards, health care providers, and other community service providers including emergency homelessness shelters to ensure that children and young people who have been victimized are able to access the supports and services they need.

Young people who have been victimized by violence have a wide range of legal needs. They may want information to understand the legal, social, and personal implications of disclosing the violence; they may need legal advice and representation in criminal and family court, or in relation to employment, housing, education, child protection, health care, and human rights. JFCY staff provide the holistic and expert services that are needed by clients facing the adversity that is wrought by violence.

**JFCY PROVIDED SERVICES TO  
167 YOUNG PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFIED THAT THEY  
HAD EXPERIENCED FAMILY OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE,  
ON 298 UNIQUE LEGAL MATTERS.**



YWF is fortunate to be working with the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) at Western University who are conducting our program evaluation. With their support, we have instituted an extensive project-wide data collection process. This will help describe the complexity of our clients' legal needs, as well as resources that are required to do this work. We anticipate that the resulting reports will help to demonstrate the merit of having dedicated survivor-focused services in the clinic setting.

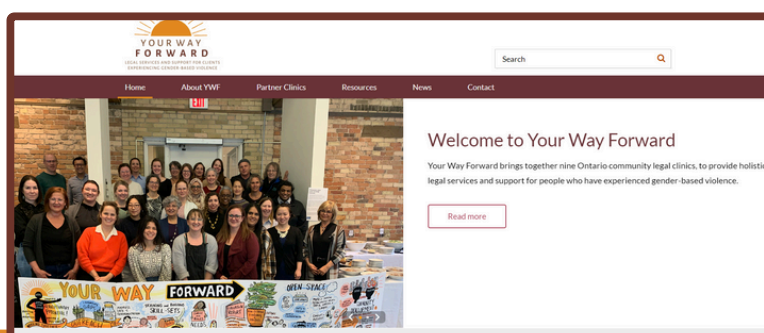
The YWF Program Lead also sits on the Law Commission of Ontario's Protection Order Project's Advising Committee. This project is investigating how various protection orders protect or fail to protect survivors of gender-based violence and the front-line input from community legal clinics has been essential.

Looking forward, YWF is tracking two provincial bills (Bill 173 – IPV Epidemic Act and Bill 189 – Lydia's Law) before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. As a group, we will decide how to contribute, including supporting the advocacy of other survivor-focused experts and agencies in Ontario.

Over the past year, YWF staff have had the opportunity to contribute and share our knowledge in a variety of settings. For example, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants in Ontario YWF team presented at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference in October of 2024. Our Program Lead and YWF staff from Peterborough Community Legal Centre and Durham Community Legal Clinic also provided a session at the Ontario Bar Association's Human Rights Update on the discrimination that sexual assault survivors can experience during their interaction with the criminal legal system.

On a national level, YWF presented alongside our inspiring fellow DOJ-funding recipients RISE P.E.I. and Rise Women's Legal Centre out of B.C. during the DOJ's Victims and Survivors of Crime Week 2024. Our presentation introduced our respective independent legal advice & representation projects. We shared information and experiences, highlighting the importance of survivor-focused advocacy and the power of doing this work in collaboration with other service providers.

The YWF website has information about collaborative news and contact information for the partner clinics:  
[www.yourwayforward-on.ca](http://www.yourwayforward-on.ca)





CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS  
SUPPORT & ADVOCACY

CASA supports young people who arrived in Canada as children and who are living in Ontario with precarious or no immigration status. CASA's services include summary legal advice, ongoing legal representation (either at JFCY or externally), systems navigation, help accessing essential services, assistance with immigration application fees and associated expenses, as well as outreach in schools and youth-serving organizations. December 2024 will mark five years since CASA launched at JFCY, and the program has grown in leaps and bounds over that time. Funding for CASA is generously supported by the Law Foundation of Ontario, as well as other funding supports.

CASA believes that all children and young people deserve to be secure and safe, and to have access to opportunities to reach their full potential and to live chosen lives, regardless of their immigration status. CASA continues its mission of empowering young people with precarious or no immigration status through its direct services, outreach, and education. Amidst global economic, political, and climate changes, as well as growing anti-immigrant sentiments in Canada, CASA's work is more important now than ever.

Young people with precarious or no immigration status, sometimes referred to as "undocumented", often face significant uncertainty and insecurity. They can experience compounding and intersecting legal and personal issues, including limited access to education, healthcare, housing, financial resources, legal employment, as well as marginalization, discrimination, and psychological stress.

Many young people in this situation were brought to Canada when they were very young, and consequently have little connection to their country of origin. Most had little involvement in the decision to come to Canada. Many are unaware of their lack of status, or its consequences, until they are late teenagers or high school graduates, when it becomes more difficult to resolve their challenges. CASA's clients are predominantly racialized and low-income. Some are supported by family and others are alone. Social isolation and fear of detention or deportation often prevent them from getting the advice and help they need.



Mary Birdsell, Senator Jaffer  
and Sarah Pole at CWICE  
supporting Bill 235



One of CASA's major priorities is outreach directly to young people, primarily through high school workshops. This year, we delivered over 130 CASA high school workshops across Ontario, including in Toronto, Peel, Durham, Windsor, and Leamington. CASA workshops centre curriculum-linked content on youth rights, youth agency, equity, and inclusion – relevant to all students – while information about immigration status regularization is discreetly embedded to assist to youth with no or precarious status. This inclusive method avoids singling out students with precarious immigration status, and encourages allyship.

We saw increased demand from adults who work with young people, including school/school board administrators, educators, guidance counsellors, and youth workers, for training about immigration status and its intersections with aspects of young people's lives including education, youth criminal justice, child protection, housing, financial supports, and young people's right to apply in their own names to regularize their status.

*THIS YEAR CASA PROVIDED SERVICES TO 152 YOUNG PEOPLE WITH PRECARIOUS OR NO IMMIGRATION STATUS, ON 182 DISTINCT LEGAL ISSUES INCLUDING OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ENROLMENT, ACCESSING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, AND PREPARING AND NAVIGATING IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS OR REFUGEE CLAIMS.*

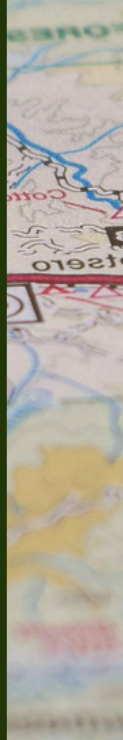
CASA also presented at and participated in numerous conferences, school board forums, community events, festivals, and more, with a broad range of partners and stakeholders.

Alongside client services and outreach, 2024 saw us focusing on systemic advocacy, including; encouraging the Federal government to center children's rights and children's issues in immigration regularization pathways; encouraging the Senate to pass Bill S-235, which will provide a pathway to citizenship for young people without status who are, or were, formerly in care; encouraging Ontario school boards to appropriately register students in primary and secondary school; and, encouraging Ontario postsecondary education institutions to create access pathways for students with no or precarious status.

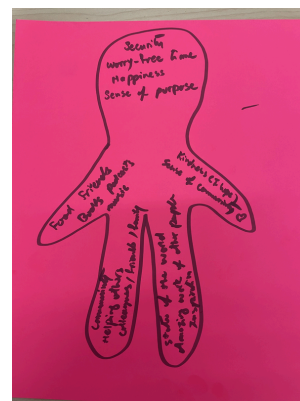
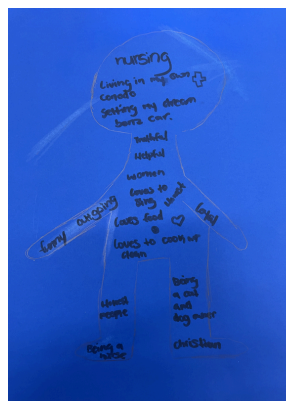
We continued our research partnership with Associate Professor Arlo Kempf from OISE at U of T, exploring the many ways immigration status impacts students' educational experiences. Our pro bono partnership with Blake Cassels and Graydon LLP provided services to a number of particularly vulnerable young clients, and we continue to benefit from the stellar fund-and-friend raising efforts of the volunteer-led "Friends of CASA".

Finally, a photo essay on our CASA Art project, developed in partnership with visual artist Cindy Blažević, was featured in the Jan/Feb edition of The Walrus magazine; and, CASA Director Sarah Pole joined a panel on "The Agenda with Steve Paikin" to discuss barriers for young people with no or precarious status.

A vertical strip of a map, likely from a historical or geographical document. It shows a river flowing from the top towards the bottom. The river is depicted with blue lines and has some text written along its course, including "flowing" and "EAGLE". The surrounding land is colored in shades of yellow and brown, with some red lines indicating boundaries or roads. The map is oriented vertically, matching the orientation of the text on the left.



As the Borderless Access to Education project team wraps up the second year of its research and development phase in 2024, we are excited to move forward with developing pilot projects based on the data collection findings. These pilot projects will be designed to address the specific challenges identified in the research, aiming to create more inclusive and supportive environments for all students. The team is committed to working closely with educators, administrators, and community stakeholders to implement these initiatives and foster lasting change in the education system.





# EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM



JFCY's Education Support Program (ESP) is part of a team of specialist justice partners situated within the Toronto Northwest Justice Centre (TNWJC) – a Ministry of the Attorney General project that began in 2021. Justice Centres are intended to move justice out of traditional courtrooms and into the community to address the root causes of criminal justice. The TNWJC brings together a number of community services and supports for young people who have been charged under the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Our ESP ensures that young people charged with criminal offences have direct access to expert education law supports and services. Young people at the intersection of youth criminal justice and education law face a range of complex legal, social, and personal issues that can directly or indirectly impact their schooling and can have long term consequences.

This year, due to the increasing demand, and in anticipation of the expansion of services, the ESP team brought on a social worker in the role of the Education Navigator to work alongside the Education Advocate lawyer. Both of these roles are embedded in the TNWJC where this intersection is identified as one important component of a young persons' experience that requires expert assistance.

The expansion of this program to include legal and social work sources made it possible for us to support more young people on a broader array of needs. Our ESP works to ensure the provision of meaningful, timely, and robust services to support young people's access to education, and to support rehabilitation and reintegration in ways that enhance community safety and well-being. Expanded staffing and additional social work expertise has allowed more time and attention to be given to the previously identified spectrum of complex, often non-legal issues, that impact a young person's criminal justice and education needs.

In support of our own ESP team's work, JFCY litigation lawyers provided legal services, support and advocacy to Justice Centre participants across myriad practice areas including criminal justice.

# LAW & POLICY REFORM

JFCY seeks to engage with law reform and policy-making activities as they impact the equity, rights, and dignity of young people in Ontario and in Canada. Our policy and position papers can be found on our [website](https://jfcy.org/policy-position-papers/): [jfcy.org/policy-position-papers/](https://jfcy.org/policy-position-papers/)

We consult regularly with those who are interested in children's rights and equity issues: academics, lawyers, other professionals and adults who work with young people, governments, community organizations, schools and boards of education, children's aid societies, service providers, and more. A selection of this years' activities include:

## **Ontario Youth Justice Task Force**

We participated in consultations with the Ontario Youth Justice Task Force around themes and trends within Ontario's youth justice system including: emerging adults (18 - 24 year olds); increasing case complexity; and, the intersection of federal and provincial legislation.

## **MCCSS Child Welfare Secretariat Consultation**

We participated in consultations and made written submissions to Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services regarding their program development for young people transitioning out of the care of children's aid societies into young adulthood: the "Ready, Set, Go" program.

## **Review of Regulatory Proposals RE Licensed Care under the CYFSA**

We provided written submissions to Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services in its inaugural 5-year review of the Child, Youth, and Family Services Act (CYFSA) and participated in roundtable discussions with respect to the impact of the CYFSA and promoting child rights in child welfare in Ontario.

## **Meetings with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada ("IRCC") regarding the ability of 16 and 17 year olds to submit their own permanent residence applications**

An issue emerged where our 16 and 17 year old clients who had withdrawn from parental control were being told they could not submit immigration applications without the signature of a parent or guardian. Through directed advocacy we were able to work with IRCC to resolve this issue at a policy level.

## **Submission RE Proposed GC27 on Access to Justice**

### **General Comment Submission - UNCRC - Access to Justice and Effective Remedies**

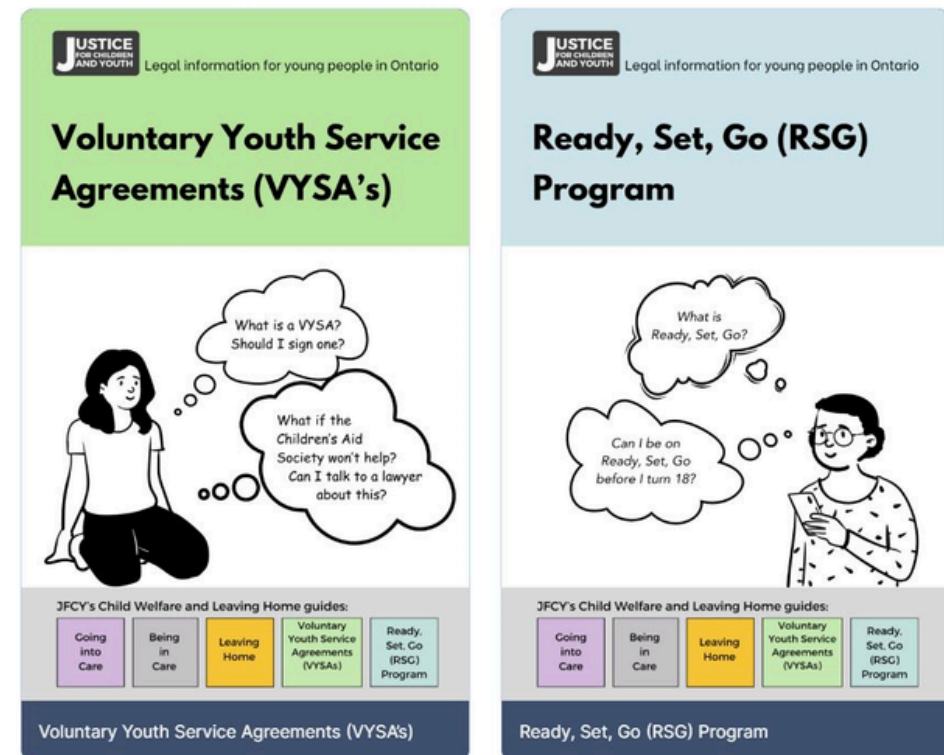
We made submissions on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's draft general comment No. 27, on children's right to access to justice and to an effective remedy.



# PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

We seek to improve access to justice by increasing access to information, knowledge, and agency for young people.

We do this by: creating and maintaining a wide range of public legal education materials and an on-line Legal Wiki; providing workshops to young people and adult supporters; providing training and professional development; and always striving to increase awareness, knowledge, expertise, and engagement around legal issues impacting young people.

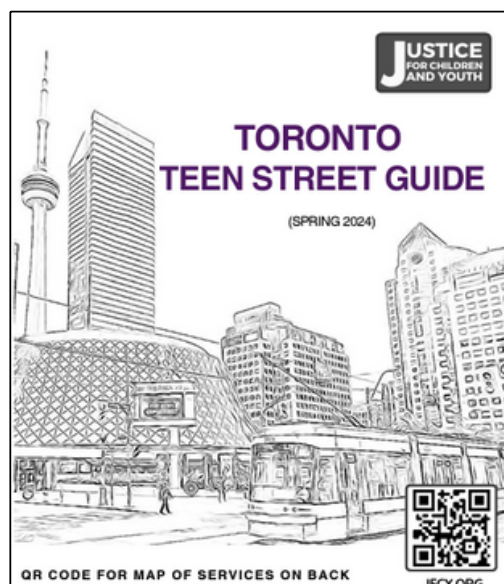
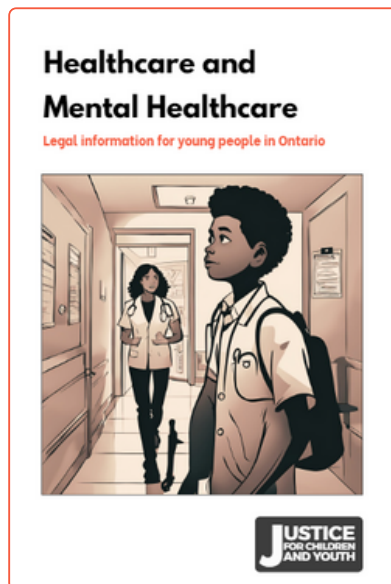
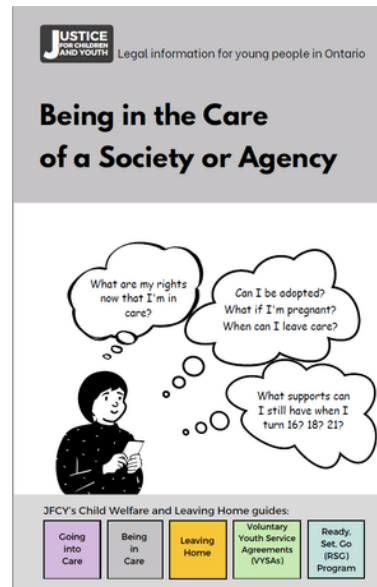
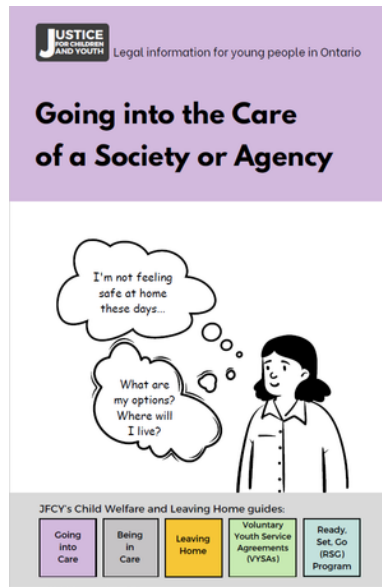


This year we created two new publications: "Voluntary Youth Service Agreements (VYSA's)"; and "Ready, Set, Go (RSG)". These two publications provide desperately needed information to 16 & 17 year olds and the adults who support them about the services available from child welfare, and child well-being agencies, and about the rights and entitlements of those young people seeking support.



## Four of our PUBLICATIONS have ALSO been RELAUNCHED!

- Going into the Care of a Society or Agency
- Being in the Care of a Society or Agency
- Health and Mental Healthcare
- Toronto Teen Street Guide



Our publications remain free  
to download and distribute:  
[jfcy.org/publications/ublications](https://jfcy.org/publications/ublications)



# WWW.JFCY.ORG

## Refreshed and Relunched in 2024!

Hide website

**JUSTICE**  
FOR CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH

I Need Help

Get Involved

Donate Now

Contact Us

Franglais

Who We Are

Legal Services

Your Legal Rights

Our Resources

**Legal services** for young people  
**under 18** and **up to 25** for  
**homeless** or **undocumented**  
young people in **Ontario**

Speak to a Lawyer

Learn my rights

Find resources

Know your legal rights

I am being expelled

The police have stopped me

Help with leaving home


I need immigration help


I need mental healthcare


I received a ticket


See all legal rights topics

Experts on the Legal Rights of Children

**Our Vision**  
Advance and protect the legal rights  
and dignity of young people

**Our Mission**  
Legal assistance for young people:  
justice, empowerment, voice

**Be Engaged**  
Learn about children's legal rights

**Donate and Change Lives**  
JFCY is a registered charity

Programs and Resources

**Legal Services**


Under 18 in Ontario

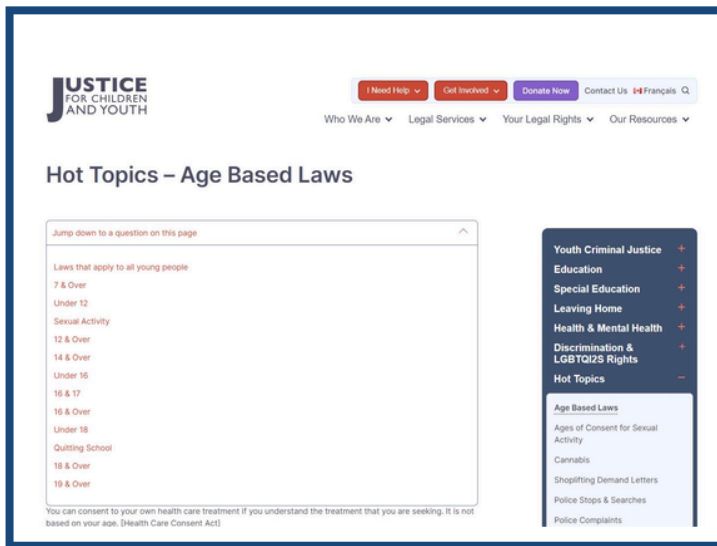
Street Youth Legal Services

Childhood Arrivals Support and Advocacy

YouthWorx Program

Toronto Justice Centre

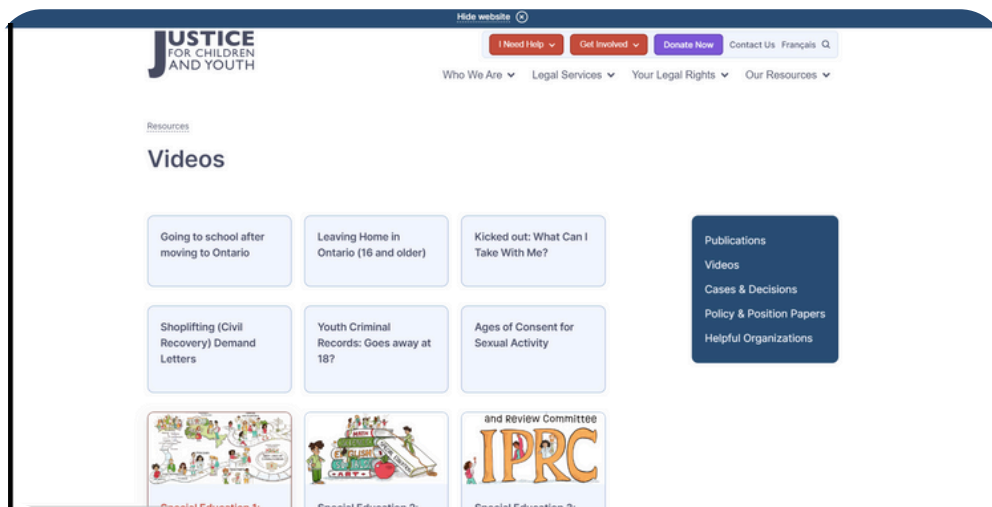
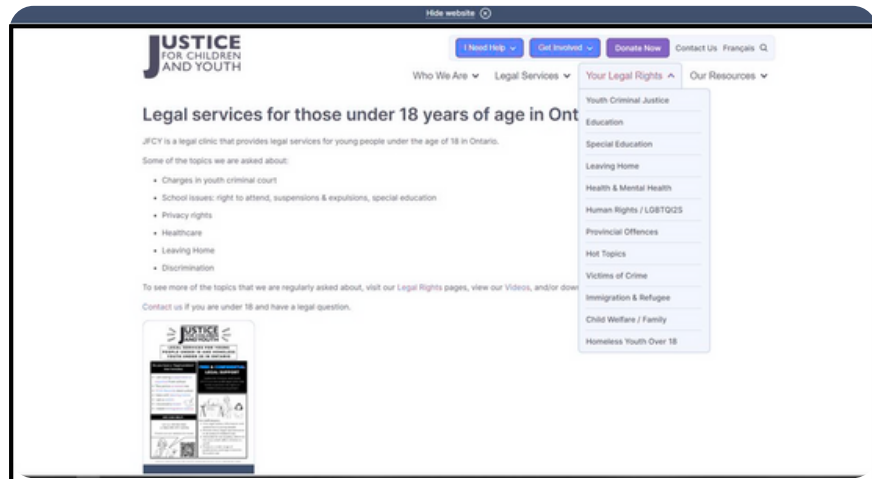




EACH TOPIC HAS  
A DROP DOWN OF  
INFORMATION  
REGARDING YOUR  
LEGAL RIGHTS!



IF VIDEOS ARE  
PREFERRED, WE HAVE  
MORE THAN A HANDFUL  
FOR YOU TO CHECK OUT!





# RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

JFCY is grateful for the opportunity to work with academics and researchers on a wide range of issues related to children's rights. Many of these projects involve long-term participation. Research projects we have been involved with this year include:

**Intellectual Disabilities in the Criminal Justice System** - JFCY is a community partner in research being conducted by Professor Dr. Daniella Bendo, King's University, and Professor Dr. Christine Goodwin-De Faria, Trent University. They are investigating the lived experience of young people with intellectual disabilities in the criminal justice system and the extent to which their rights are appropriately protected and advanced. They have an initial grant from King's University UWO and have made an application for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Grant. The first stage of the research results report on the extent to which justice system professionals (defence lawyers, crown attorneys, probation officers, etc.) are aware of intellectual disabilities, and the extent to which they do, or are able, to address those concerns as part of the underlying issues that bring young people into contact with the youth criminal justice system. JFCY will be active participants in helping to set up opportunities to present the research findings.

**Needs of Children and Youth in Canada** - JFCY consulted with researcher Tara Collins at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary (working with Children First Canada), who is conducting research to better understand the needs of children and youth in Canada considering the "Top ten threats to children's rights in Canada".

**Impact of lack of status on students** - JFCY's CASA team members are working with Associate Professor Dr. Arlo Kempf at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) on a SSHRC funded research project on how a lack of immigration status impacts students' school experiences, school relationships, and future planning.

**Border(ing) Practices: Systemic Racism, Immigration & Child Welfare** - JFCY is participating as community partners in a collaborative research project led by researchers at the University of Toronto and the University of Victoria. Professors Dr. Rupaleem Bhuyan and Dr. Mandeep Kaur Muncina are the Principal Investigators, and Professors Dr. Bryn King and Dr. Rhonda Hackett are Co-Investigators. They are working in partnership with child welfare, immigration, and gender-based violence service providers and advocates within Ontario and British Columbia. JFCY is on the Research Advisory Committee and other sub-committees.

**Police Interactions** - JFCY is working as a community partner on a research project with Professor Dr. Carla Cesaroni, and her colleagues at Ontario Tech University who are investigating the experience of young people in their interactions with the police, in and outside of the criminal justice context. The first stage of data gathering is complete, and work has begun to assess and evaluate the findings.

**Property Law and Homelessness** - JFCY is consulting with Professor Dr. Alexandra Flynn and her colleagues at the University of British Columbia and University of Ottawa who are working on a Critical Legal Geography study investigating the way in which property law impacts young people experiencing homelessness and the extent to which there are adequate legal protections for them.

**Children's Rights in Family Law** - JFCY consulted with researcher Johanna Nelles at McGill University regarding the perspective of child rights advocates on family law and separation, and in particular on the extent to which changes to the Divorce Act are improving recognition of children's rights in the context of family violence.

## JFCY CLIENT STORY

A teenager contacted JFCY after being kicked out of the house by his parents. He had been able to find some support through resources in his community to apply for Ontario Works and find a place to live. His local Children's Aid Society did not believe that his situation warranted more robust and long-term support through a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA). Our client had experienced exclusion as a queer person and violence in his parents' home, and we believed he was entitled to ongoing supportive services from CAS. Our lawyers tirelessly advocated for this client and were able to re-center his voice and his lived experiences in convincing the CAS to change their position and provide VYSA services before our client's 18th birthday. Along the way, our lawyers have also provided meaningful legal advice and services to this client about his housing and privacy rights. This client has now graduated from high school, and will benefit from our clinic's work as he navigates his next steps up to the age of 23.

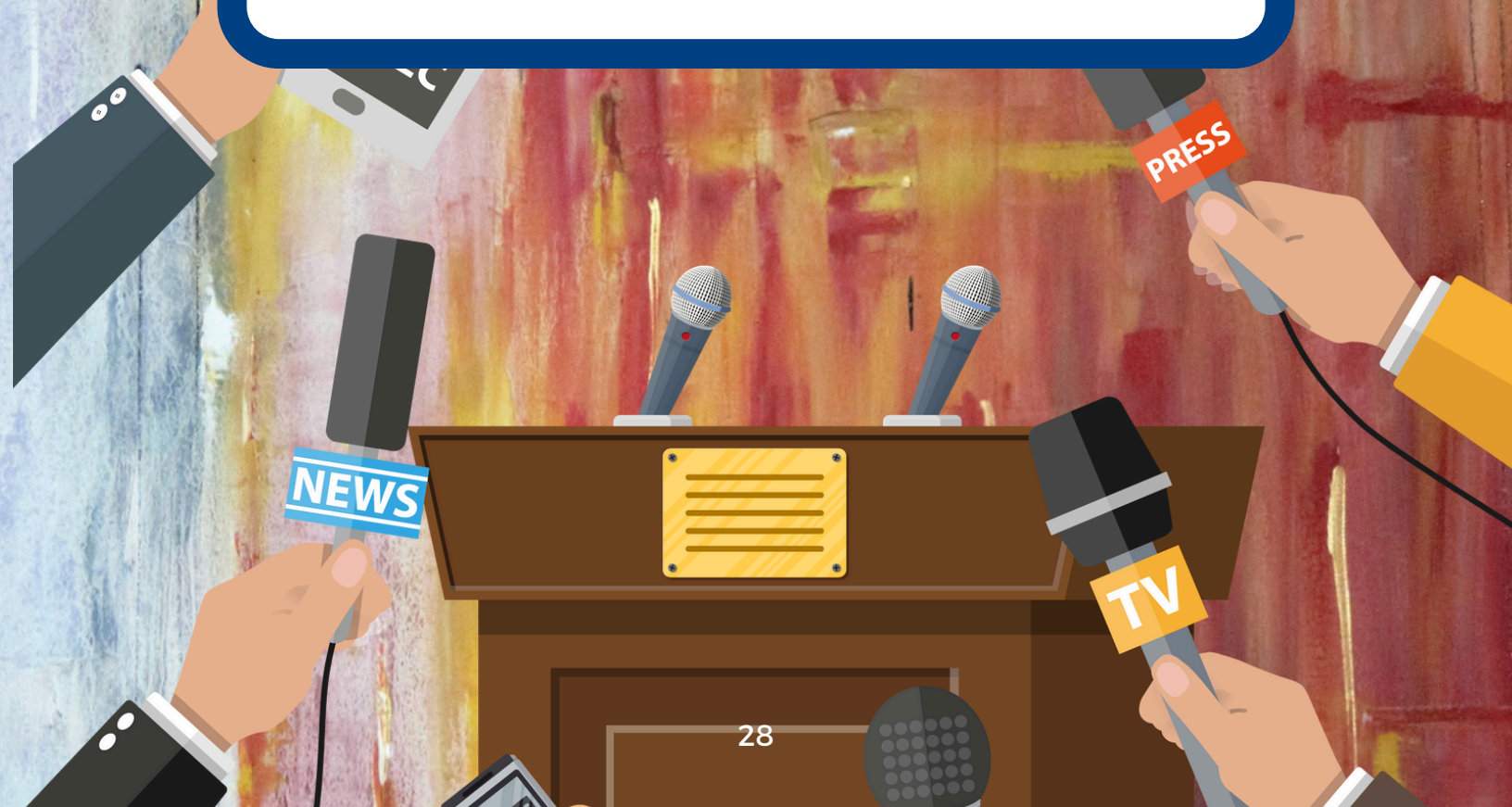


# MEDIA

JFCY responds to requests for interviews and consultations regarding our cases and expertise on issues that impact the equity, rights, and dignity of children and youth in Ontario and Canada.

A sample of when we have appeared in TV, radio and in print media this past year:

- The WALRUS - [Invisible Lives: Meet Canada's Undocumented Kids](#)
- "The Agenda with Steve Paikin" - CASA Program Director Sarah Pole joined a panel on to discuss barriers for young people with no or precarious status: <https://www.tv.o.org/video/who-are-ontarios-undocumented-youth>
- CBC Canada news - JFCY Executive Director Mary Birdsell interviewed regarding "Act recognizes importance of rehabilitation: advocate."  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ken-lee-toronto-swarming-family-1.6719316>





# STAY UP TO DATE WITH JFCY AND FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Orange Shirt Day  
Katherine, Allison, Kaffie



Carla Parnell, Kenora JC Case Management Coordinator,  
Rebecca Senior, Kenora JC Crown Attorney,  
Kaffie and Allison



Mary, MP Matthew Green, Sarah- CWICE  
for Bill 235 Citizenship for people who  
have been in care



JFCY and supporters @ the Toronto Waterfront Marathon



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@jfcyontario



Justice for  
Children  
and Youth

follow us



@jfcyontario



Emily and Gnanu at Toronto Youth Justice Fair



# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

As part of JFCY's vision and mandate, we are involved with a wide range of people and community, educational and professional organizations from many sectors. We are involved in a number of on-going partnerships and are continuously engaging in new initiatives and consultations. This year our community involvement has included:

- Executive on Ontario Bar Association's sections: Child and Youth Law; Constitutional, Civil Liberties and Human Rights; and Education Law
- The Canadian Bar Association's Child and Youth Law section
- Board member of:
  - Canadian Coalition on the Rights of the Children (and treasurer)
  - Canadian Association for the Practical Study of Law in Education
  - A Way Home Canada
- Advisory group member for the Centre for Refugee Children
- Community member of the Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee
- Children's Rights Academic Network (CRAN) member
- Sex Trafficking Advisory Committee of Covenant House
- Toronto Northwest Justice Centre
- Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
- Trans ID Clinic
- Unaccompanied and Separated Children Network
- Young Parents No Fixed Address Network
- Sanctuary Students Solidarity and Support Collective (S4 Collective)
- Black Creek Youth Initiative
- Our System, Our Children, Our Responsibility: A Campaign Against the Deportation of Child Welfare Survivors Coalition
- The Toronto District School Board
- Covenant House
- Yonge Street Mission – Evergreen
- Native Child Resource Centre
- Y-House
- Central Toronto Youth Services
- Eva's Place
- Friends of Ruby
- Sojourn House
- SKETCH Working Arts
- Office of the Children's Lawyer
- Victim/Witness Assistance Program
- City of Toronto
- Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (Peel CAS)

# STUDENTS

Having students as part of the JFCY team makes it possible for us to meet more of the demand for our services than we would without them. We hope to enhance the academic experience that students have, and to educate and model for them the high standards we demand of ourselves and our work.

Thank you to the students who were part of our office - we are grateful for your work and dedication to JFCY and our clients - we offer our heartfelt thanks and appreciation. The students who were part of the JFCY team from August 2023 - July 2024 are:

- **Jennifer Grant** (2023), **Taylor Cumpson** (2024), **Clara Le** (2024) and **Dania Bajwa** (2024) - Professional Placement Program, Lincoln Alexander School of Law, Toronto Metropolitan University
- **Heeya Rahman** (2023/2024), **Virginia Wilson** (2023/2024) and **Lydia Hernandez** (2024) - BSW Student Placement, Toronto Metropolitan University
- **Ruben Pinchas** (2024) - Summer Law Student, secondment from Blakes LLP
- **Eliza Glady** (Faculty of Law, Western University), **Mark Jones** (Toronto Metropolitan University, Lincoln Alexander School of Law), **Michelle Kim** (University of Toronto, Faculty of Law) and **Omar Abdelgawad** (Toronto Metropolitan University, Lincoln Alexander School of Law) - 2024 summer students
- **Dummie Abdul** - Community Research Partnerships in Ethics program student, University of Toronto
- Law students through Pro Bono Students Canada



JFCY Staff and Students



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# SUPPORTS & DONORS

As a charitable foundation, and as an organization with a challenging mandate that struggles to meet the complex demands for our services with inadequate funding, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all our members, the individual donors and granting foundations who support JFCY.

A special note of thanks for unique and significant contributions to:

- **Legal Aid Ontario** – our core funder.
- **Department of Justice Canada** – funding our ‘Your Way Forward’ program - assisting victims of sexual and family violence, and people victimized by human trafficking - supporting JFCY, and a nine legal clinic program.
- **Ministry of the Attorney General for Ontario** - funding the Education Advocate Lawyer, and the Education Navigator Social Worker at the Toronto Northwest Justice Centre.
- **Bulmash-Siegel Foundation**, Laurence and Judy Siegel – funding our Client Support Worker.
- **Law Foundation of Ontario, Catalyst Program** – funding our CASA program - assisting young people living in Ontario with no or precarious immigration status.
- **Ontario Trillium Foundation**, systems innovation fund – for funding the Borderless Access to Education Project - seeking to improve access to education for students with precarious or no immigration status.
- **La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso** – funding for our CASA clients’ immigration application fees and associated expenses.
- **Court Challenges Program / Programme de contestation judiciaire** - funding for our Voting Age Challenge.
- **City of Toronto’s** Investing in Neighbourhoods - funding specialized staff.
- **Jonathan Kahn and Anne Irwin** – for a significant personal donation through the United Way.
- **Bonnie Goldberg and Friends of CASA** – for generous donations and ongoing support to CASA.



# IN MEMORIAM

The nature of the work we do provides us a unique view into the harsh lived realities of many of our communities' most vulnerable people. We are all too aware how many of our clients go about their daily lives at heightened risk of significant mental, emotional and physical harm, and that many are at risk of loss of life. Disenfranchisement and marginalization - the intersections of homelessness, child welfare, victimization, violent communities, mental health, criminalization, indigeneity, and racialization, mean that our clients often face near unsurmountable barriers to their well-being.

We wish to acknowledge and memorialize the deaths of two clients this past year. While the nature of our relationships with these young people means that we are not able to disclose the details of their deaths, we honour their lives, their light, and their memory. They were loved by family, community, and friends. Their loss leaves an indelible mark with us and others.

We acknowledge their loss of life was the result of neglect and violence, and ultimately the failing of systems and adults around them to keep them safe.

JFCY is committed to working for a safer, more just and caring world for children and young people. We will remember these clients.





LEGAL AID ONTARIO  
AIDE JURIDIQUE ONTARIO

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Fondation  
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An agency of the Government of Ontario  
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BULMASH-SIEGEL  
FOUNDATION



Department of Justice  
Canada

Ministère de la Justice  
Canada



The Law  
Foundation  
of Ontario  
*Advancing access to justice*

**J**USTICE  
FOR CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH

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