



# OCYA YOUTH COUNCIL HANDBOOK

# ABOUT US

## WHAT WE DO

The Council provides input, advice and feedback on OCYA initiatives and ongoing work. The council meets bi-monthly to inform the work of the OCYA. We also receive requests to consult from external groups and meet with government leaders to offer their ideas for improving services and supports for young people.

The OCYA Youth Council is guided by the OCYA values of having integrity, approaching situations with respect and working in collaboration when providing their insight, advice and feedback to the work of the OCYA as well as external stakeholders.



## WHO WE ARE

The youth council consists of up to 10 members of young people from across Alberta, who have lived experience with child intervention and/or youth justice systems.

Council members represent the diversity of those the OCYA serves (including young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, 2SLGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, etc.) from rural and urban communities in Alberta.

## FUN FACTS

- Our first Youth Advisory Panel was formed in 1995
- Youth Council members regularly meet with the Child and Youth Advocate
- The Youth Council has been highly sought after for consultations by universities, NGO's, not for profits and other community serving agencies throughout its history.

“The most rewarding part is being part of people’s lives...”  
Yarrow, Peer Mentor

# WHAT WE VALUE

## **We stand up for young people**

Young people are the foundation of our work at the OCYA.

Their involvement through platforms like the youth council helps us to grow our understanding of young people’s rights, interests and viewpoints, and to have those reflected in each area of our organization.

The council amplifies young people’s voices, and helps increase their understanding of systems and their rights within them. It strengthens our advocacy with and on behalf of young people.

### **Accountability**

We are answerable for our own actions and the actions of the OCYA

### **Respect**

We value the feelings, wishes, rights and traditions of others

### **Integrity**

We do what we say we will do

### **Rights-focused**

We are guided by the rights of young people

# COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Are 14-24 years old
- Serve terms of two years and are supported by a mentor
- Have lived experience with Children and Family Services and/or the Youth Justice System
- Are open to input from others and help create safe spaces for young people to amplify their voices
- Members give honest feedback on issues that impact youth
- At times, graduating council members volunteer to provide ongoing mentorship to new members. They provide a unique form of support and guidance as someone who has experience as a member of the OCYA Youth Council. They attend meetings, provide coaching to other youth and help facilitate activities when they would like to.

## Council members are:

Engaged  
Creative  
Reliable  
Committed  
Respectful  
Open-minded  
Passionate  
Diverse

- If a young person misses three consecutive meetings, their membership is reviewed.
- Members suggest items for the council to discuss and work on.
- Members work on issues of interest, develop projects/actions to deal with issues, and actively participate and take leadership on action plans.

# MENTORS

- Are a supportive adult identified by potential council members
- Are 25 years or older
- Help to arrange meeting transportation for council members when needed.
- Help create space for council members to share, respect young people's opinions, and elevate youth voices; a mentor should be someone who has or is building a supportive or encouraging relationship with a young person.
- Check in prior to the meeting to see if the young person feels prepared and able to participate.
- Encourage the young person to share their thoughts to the best of their ability, and to help them formulate their thoughts on topics being covered.

## Mentors are:

Approachable  
Caring  
Committed  
Encouraging  
Non-judgmental  
Reliable  
Supportive  
Adults who elevate  
youth voices

- Some topics can be emotional and have an impact on council members. Mentors help support them in these discussions. We also have professionals who can help members and mentors debrief.
- Mentors support the young person, both at meetings and back in their home communities between meetings.

# PEER MENTORS

## KEY ASPECTS

### OF THE PEER MENTOR ROLE:

#### **Peer support**

- Provide soft support and guidance to members during meetings and outings

#### **Sharing experience and wisdom**

- Support members by sharing their own experiences on youth council

#### **Connection**

- Welcome and help foster a sense of belonging on council

#### **Empowerment**

- Support members to participate in consultations, council discussions, and activities through encouragement, individual support, and peer-coaching

#### **Role modelling**

- Model positive social relationships and behaviours for members and help to reinforce council guidelines and expectations

#### **Model boundaries**

- Demonstrate boundaries about what and how to share past experiences

### REQUIREMENTS:

- Previous youth council experience
- Enthusiasm toward supporting new council members
- Weekend and evening availability for council gatherings
- Positive attitude and willingness to learn

### PEER MENTORS ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Safety decisions
- Managing high-intensity emotional moments
- Leading conflict mediation
- Being the primary support for a young person

“I love how involved we are...”  
Chad, Council Member

# WHAT TO EXPECT



## WHEN

- September to June
- 6 meetings a year
- Extra meetings might be held if necessary

## WHERE

- Virtual and In-person

## EXPECTATIONS

- Attendance is required at 80% of council meetings
- Participation is encouraged to all meetings, but we are flexible - members are asked to inform an OCYA coordinator or their mentor if they are unable to attend
- Everyone supports new members as they join the council

## AGREEMENTS

No judgement  
Be respectful  
Focus on issues, not people  
Use person-first language  
Participate: listen and contribute  
Be committed  
Resolve conflict  
Be transparent  
Give grace  
Relationships matter

## HOW TO JOIN

Contact us at  
1-800-661-3446 or  
[youthcouncil@ocya.alberta.ca](mailto:youthcouncil@ocya.alberta.ca)

# COORDINATORS

- OCYA staff who help develop and lead the youth council
- Support and build connection between OCYA teams and the council
- Help advance the youth council's goals
- Serve two year terms
- Recruit new members and mentors
- Coordinate training opportunities based on the council's interests
- Ensure the council's work is consistent with the OCYA mission, vision and values

## Coordinators are:

Providers of guidance  
Good facilitators  
Engaged  
Kind  
Open-minded  
Receptive  
Adaptable  
Organized  
Understanding

Coordinators support the facilitation of council meetings. Their work includes providing leadership and guidance to all participants. Need a problem solved or have an idea to make the council better? Let them know! They're here to help.

“I have developed lifelong friendships here”  
Shaylene, Council Member

# IN-PERSON MEETINGS



## FRIDAY

Dinner

## SATURDAY

Morning activities

Afternoon activities

Dinner

Evening activity

## SUNDAY

Brunch

Half day of activities

(trainings, cultural and  
arts-based activities)

- Meeting weekends are substance-free for all members, mentors and coordinators.
- Members suggest items for the council to discuss and work on.
- Members work on issues of interest, develop projects/actions to deal with issues, and actively participate and take leadership on action plans.
- Council meetings may take place in different communities. This may require travel. We cover travel costs and help make arrangements with members.

# SUPPORT SYSTEMS

## YOUTH COUNCIL REIMBURSEMENT

Costs like travel, meals and hotels are covered by the OCYA. While most expenses are covered up front, sometimes council members and mentors pay out of pocket for things like meals or child care. Members and mentors are reimbursed for expenses to come to youth council meetings, per this agreement and as approved by OCYA.

## TRANSPORTATION

**01.**

- Use of private vehicle at a rate of \$0.570 cents CAD per kilometers
- Intra-city public transportation
- Taxi fares
- Parking charges up to a maximum of \$12.75 CAD per day

## MEALS

**02.**

Meals are reimbursed at the following Government of Alberta rates:

- Breakfast (departure time is 7:30 a.m. or earlier, or return time is 7:30 a.m. or later): \$13.00 CAD
- Lunch (departure time is 1 p.m. or earlier, or return time is 1 p.m. or later): \$18.00 CAD
- Dinner (departure time is 6:30 p.m. or earlier, or return time is 6:30 p.m. or later): \$28.00 CAD

## CHILD CARE

**03.**

If a council member is parenting, the OCYA can reimburse them for child care costs while they participate in council meetings. Child care costs are covered at a rate of \$30 for a half-day and \$60 for a full day.

## HOW IT WORKS

**04.**

Hold onto your receipts and get an expense claim form from a coordinator. We can set you up for direct deposit.

# FAQ

## 1. “Hey, here’s the receipt for this thing” or “Hey, will you guys pay for this?”

There are some things we can’t cover, such as mileage to see a friend who is not on council after the meeting, or snacks purchased over the break. We will often have to check with our finance team and get back to you.

## 2. “I’ll have receipts after the meeting on Sunday. How do I hand those in?”

Scan or take a photo of receipts and email them to [youthcouncil@ocya.alberta.ca](mailto:youthcouncil@ocya.alberta.ca) within 7 days of the council meeting (or sooner if indicated by coordinators).

## 3. “I made a mistake on my expense claim form. Do you have extra forms?”

Yes, we do.

## 4. “I paid for someone else’s lunch. Can I get reimbursed?”

If you paid for someone else as well (i.e. Steve covered both his and Candy’s lunches on the drive up to Edmonton), you need to make a note on the expense claim form that you were also paying for this other person. You will be reimbursed for both at the Government of Alberta rates.

## 5. “I was a driver for the special activity on Saturday. Can I claim those miles as well?”

Yes, include them in your kilometers total. Reminder: We will pay for mileage but do not reimburse gas receipts on top of that.

## 6. “Can I get a direct deposit instead of a cheque?”

You can! Talk to a coordinator and we can forward you a direct deposit form.

## 7. “I am 18 or older. Can I have an alcoholic beverage with my dinner?”

No. The OCYA does not cover the cost of alcoholic beverages. More importantly, council weekends are meant to be a safe, substance-free opportunity for young people to come together to make positive change. Drinking or consuming other substances is not allowed.

