



A newsletter created with young people for young people

Fall 2026

In this edition

You will hear directly from young people across Alberta as they share their artwork, poetry, reflections and messages of hope. You will also learn about the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's newest special report, A Place to Belong.

Did you know?

Feeling like you belong can improve your mental health, strengthen relationships, and help you overcome challenges.

Reflection

What does belonging mean to you? As you read this issue, think about the communities, people, traditions and experiences that help you feel accepted, valued and connected.

What we do

We help young people in Alberta who are involved with the child intervention or youth justice system with issues that are important to them. Sometimes adults make big decisions about your life, like where you live, the support you get, or what happens in court. We help make sure your voice is heard, your rights are respected, and people listen to what matters to you. We can help if you:

- Feel like you're not being heard.
- Have questions about your rights.
- Think something isn't fair.
- Need help speaking up for yourself.
- Want someone in your corner when big decisions are being made.

"You might not know where you're going, but you'll be okay." – OCYA Youth Council

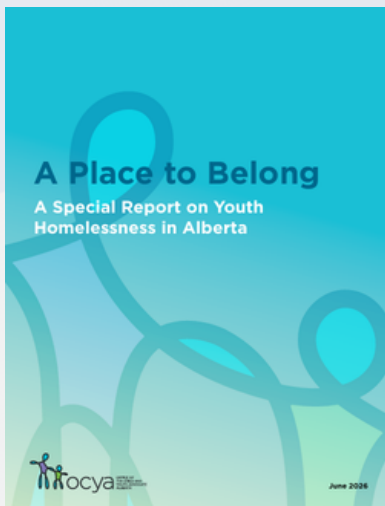


Right to culture

When I think about my culture, I think about my family and how grateful I am to know my heritage. I may not have had the most privileged upbringing but as I push through to adulthood, I've learned to be grateful for things I could not see as a teenager.



Art and quote by Doreen Rose



Here's what we heard

- Young people told us they need to feel safe, cared for, accepted, and connected.
- The sooner young people get support, the more likely they are to stay safe and avoid homelessness.
- Having trusted adults, friends, family, Elders, mentors, or community members can make a huge difference.
- Young people leaving government care often need extra support finding housing, building life skills, and creating a strong future.
- This means feeling valued, respected, listened to, and knowing someone is in your corner.

Recommendations

More than 150 young people shared their stories, and their voices helped shape recommendations to improve life for young people across Alberta. The recommendations focused on:

- Preventing youth homelessness before it starts.
- Helping young people get support sooner.
- Making sure young people leaving care have the housing and support they need.
- Strengthening connections with family, trusted adults, and community.

Did you know?

If you're connected with Child Intervention, or you've recently transitioned from care, there may be people and services available to support you. Reach out and ask questions. You don't have to figure everything out on your own.

Most importantly, remember this: Your current situation does not define your future.

A place to belong

Homelessness feels like
carrying your whole life
in a bag that never feels light.
It feels like watching windows
glow
from the outside,
wondering what it would be like
to be expected somewhere.

It is not just cold air,
or sidewalks,
or finding somewhere to sleep.

It is the quiet ache
of not knowing who to call,
the fear of being seen,
and the pain of feeling invisible.

It is being young
when you should be dreaming,
but instead, you are planning
how to make it through the night.
Still, somewhere underneath it all,
there is hope.

A hand reaching out.
A voice saying,
"I'm glad you're here."

A door opening.
A place that feels safe.

Not just a roof.
Not just a bed.
A real home.

— by Poppy

*"My roots are underground, and unknown, not visible
to the eye. So how am I supposed to be connected to said
roots without help to embrace them?" — Suzie*



What helps you belong?



Check out our Youth Have Rights booklet

If you receive child intervention services, you have rights.

Learn about your rights and what you can do if you feel they are not being respected.



bit.ly/ocya-rights-booklets

"Even if you don't know anything about your culture, you always have the right to get connected with it." – OCYA Youth Council

Did You Know?

One trusted adult can make a lasting difference.

What is belonging?

"It's having people who care and who want you to succeed." - Sara

"Home is where I feel safe even when life is hard." - Brett

"Belonging is here I be myself and not worry about being judged." - Lilly

Myth

Homelessness only means sleeping on the street.

What I wish I'd known

When I was growing up in care, I worried about what would happen when I got aged out. I wondered, "Where will I live?" or "Who will help me if things don't work out?" If you ever find yourself without a safe place to stay, I want you to know one thing:

You are not alone, and asking for help is a sign of strength, not failure.

Sometimes being homeless doesn't look the way people think it does. It might be sleeping on a friend's couch, staying with different people every few nights, living somewhere you don't feel safe, or not knowing where you'll sleep next. This can be scary and you deserve better.

If this happens to you, don't keep it to yourself. It's not your fault. Tell someone you trust, a former foster parent, a family member, a teacher, a youth worker, an Elder, a coach, or another trusted adult. They may be able to help you find a safe place to stay and connect you with support in your community.

— by Maddy

Fact

Some young people stay with friends, move between temporary places or don't have a safe stable place to call home. Every young person's experience is different.

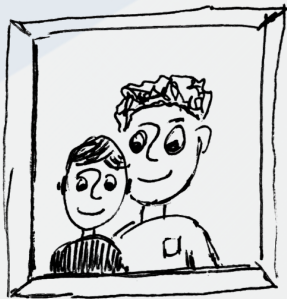
“Culture is more than traditions or language. It is family, community, land, ceremonies, food, stories and everything that makes us who we are. We encourage young people to explore, ask questions, and connect in ways that feel right for you. Your journey is yours and it matters.”

— A youth in care

“My culture is my strength. It reminds me that I come from people who survived so I could be here today.” — A youth in care

“Know you're more than your struggles or what you've been through. This is not it for you! There's so much waiting for you beyond what you know.”

— Tiara Heals



With culture

“My tongue twists with the taste of my grandmother’s words, The rhythm of drums carries me back to a time of no borders, I wear the past in every step, every thread, I am both ancient and new, grounded in what is yet to be.”

Without culture

“My tongue craves the taste of my grandmother’s words, The rhythm of a forgotten instrument carries me to a time of never having been, I yearn for the past in every step, every thread, I am both ancient and new, grounded in what is yet to be.”

— A

The spaces in between

I carry fragments, like a puzzle without the picture on the box.

The threads of my ancestors are frayed, like fabric worn too thin, patterns lost in the wash of time and I stand, tangled in what’s left, hands too small to hold it all.

Where do I begin?

What does it mean to be whole when everything is a whisper, of a history that’s been blurred, then blurred again?

My parents never told me how to dance the dances they learned as children, because they never learned to dance at all.

Their culture was diluted by the spaces they didn’t fit into, and I spend my life trying to gather the drops of a river that once flowed full.

I pick up pieces; a word here, dish there, a song that hums under my skin.

I piece them together, but they don’t always make sense.

Like a map with missing roads, I find myself tracing new paths, not lost, but rebuilding something new from dust and hope.

So I stand here, half stranger, wondering if this is what culture feels like; an art of making something from broken parts, and the spaces in between.

— A

Community spotlights

Life in a rural community can be awesome but sometimes it can be harder to find support when you need it.

Kickstand is a free, welcoming place for young people between 11 to 25 years old. For when you are feeling stressed, need someone to talk to, are looking for help with school, work, housing, or just want a safe place to hang out.

Kickstand offers mental health support, peer support, substance use services, primary health care, Indigenous wellness, and help connecting with community resources all in one youth-friendly space. You can drop in without a referral.



Kickstand youth centres

“Even if you don't know anything about your culture, you always have the right to get connected with it. — OCYA Youth Council”

Where can you find Kickstand?

Young people can visit centres in communities including Medicine Hat, Strathmore, Drayton Valley, Bonnyville, Grande Prairie, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton, with more hubs expanding across Alberta.

Want to learn more?



Find a centre near you!



Services are free.



Many centres are located in rural and smaller Alberta communities.



If there isn't a centre near you, you can still connect virtually.

A long road home

Not every story starts with a song.
Some start with silence.
Some start with forgetting.

I was raised in a culture.
That was never really mine.
Not because I didn't belong.
But because I was never shown.

No Teachings.
No stories.

No language.
Just questions...

Who am I?
Where do I come from?
But even in the silence.
Something can be remembered.

A name.
A drumbeat.
A piece of land.
A smell of sage.

Little pieces.
Slowly.
Like stitches.
On a torn blanket.

Now I walk with
both worlds.
Not perfect.
Not complete.
But strong.

Because I'm not just
Learning my culture.
I am living it.
And I am proud.

— by Suzy

Learn how we help young people



Intake

Not sure where to start? This team is often the first people you'll talk to. They listen to what's going on, answer your questions, and connect you with the right support or the right people on our team.



Individual advocacy

Need someone in your corner? If you're having a hard time, have questions about your rights, or feel like no one is listening, this is who can help. They'll listen to you, explain your options, and help make sure your voice is heard when important decisions are being made.



Legal Representation for Children and Youth (LRCY)

Sometimes young people need their own lawyer in certain child intervention court matters; our office helps make that happen. Your lawyer's job is to represent the young person and make sure their views and interests are heard in court.



Investigations

People who help prevent the same thing from happening again. When a young person involved with the child intervention or youth justice systems dies or is seriously injured, our investigative review specialists look at what happened. They help us learn from tragedy and identify what can be learned and recommend changes to help make systems safer for other young people in the future.



Systemic advocacy

When we notice that lots of young people are facing the same problem, we speak up. We share what we've learned with government and organizations and recommend changes that can make things better for young people across Alberta.



Youth and community engagement

Our youth and community engagement work helps us connect with you and the people, services, and communities that matter to you. This work includes teaching young people about their rights and what the OCYA does; strengthening our relationships with Indigenous communities; and helping young people have a voice in the work of our office through initiatives like the OCYA Youth Council.

Get in touch!

Need help or have a question? Want to learn more about your rights and what we do?

You can call us or send us an email. Our office is open between 8:15 am and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday. If you leave a message with your name and phone number, we will call you back.

1-800-661-3446

ca.information@ocya.alberta.ca



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