

Provincial Advocate *for Children & Youth*

Concerns at Roy McMurtry Youth Centre

Roy McMurtry Youth Centre (RMYC), a 192 bed secure custody facility, was formally opened on Thursday May 28, 2009. Youth began to arrive in small groups by mid July and a few weeks later the Advocate's Office received the first calls from youth. Over the next month, calls increased and youth identified a number of substantial concerns which were communicated to the senior management team and the Administrator at RMYC. Continued complaints about basic care and access to the Advocate's Office combined with complaints about programming, safety and peer violence prompted the Provincial Advocate to notify the Assistant Deputy Minister, Youth Justice Services Division and the Minister of Children and Youth Services about the reports from youth.

In early October, the Ministry implemented a number of changes at RMYC which appeared to result in some positive improvements in basic care, access to the Advocate's Office and access to family. Soon after, however, complaints about safety and security at RMYC increased. Over a three day period in February 2010, staff from the Office of the Provincial Advocate spoke with 86 youth who were surveyed regarding programming. During the course of these interviews, youth provided unsolicited additional concerns to the Advocate's staff. Concerns identified included: excessive lockdowns, increased peer violence, unfair treatment, lack of staffing prohibiting access to school, recreation and religious programming, infrequent and/or irregular programming and complaints about the quantity and quality of food.

The Advocate's Office has been working with the RMYC to support changes to improve the standard of care for youth. Although there have been some improvements, the pace of change is too slow - particularly in the areas of safety, staffing levels, staff-youth relations and programming.

Despite the fact RMYC has hired and trained new Youth Services Officers and increased staff to reduce program and visit cancellations, there are still concerns from staff and youth that staffing levels do not allow youth to attend programs on a regular basis. The concern still remains that there is insufficient staffing to ensure staff and youth safety.

It is the view of the Advocate's Office that many of the concerns raised could be mitigated by the following: clarifying the philosophy, goals and expected outcome of the relationship custody approach; increasing staffing levels; implementing dawn to dusk programming; as well as developing strong relationships with organizations in communities and priority neighbourhoods where youth will be returning.

The Minister's Office has advised the Provincial Advocate that an 'action plan' to address the issues at the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre is forthcoming.

In August 2010, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth will begin a formal review of the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre. At that time RMYC will have been operational for over one year. It is hoped the concerns raised in this report will no longer be evident.

For more information: see the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre report at our website: www.provincialadvocate.on.ca

The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent Office of the Legislature established under the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007.

The Provincial Advocate is mandated to serve children and youth being cared for by government services and is guided by federal and provincial legislation, the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and a strong commitment to youth involvement.