

Gathering and unifying our work on child rights and well-being in Nova Scotia

National Child Day event organized by the Healthy Populations Institute, IWK Mental Health and Addictions and the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers

November 18, 2022

1:00 PM to 3:30 PM

Summary of Meeting

Background

In recognition of National Child Day, November 20, 2022, a panel was convened to engage in critical conversation about work in Nova Scotia aimed at addressing child rights and well-being. The organizing committee for this event was composed of Sara Kirk and Cecilia Carrea from the Healthy Populations Institute at Dalhousie University (HPI), Kristyn Anderson, Lila Pavey and Jenna Hopson from the IWK Mental Health & Addictions, N. Leger Siritsky from Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW), and Charlene Gagnon, Manager of Advocacy Research and New Initiatives, YWCA, Halifax.

Format

To enable as many people as possible to take part, participants were provided the opportunity to attend the session virtually. An immersive experience was created using Meeting Owl, which gave participants a clear 360-degree view of the room and the panelists.

A graphic recorder, James Neish, visually captured real-time key messages from each panelist. The facilitator and IT support for the event was provided by Cecilia Carrea (HPI), the Zoom host was N. Siritsky (NSCSW); the event moderator was Charlene Gagnon (YWCA) Halifax.

Approach

Each panelist spoke about their work with children and responded to questions from the moderator that had been given to them in advance. The chat room was then opened to questions from the audience. A notetaker, Clare O'Connor, took minutes and prepared this report. The meeting was recorded for uploading to the NSCSW YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChNI61LRmEWoKJGqNfWV64w>).

N. Siritsky opened the meeting with a land acknowledgement and an invitation to participants to identify their geographic location using its Mi'kmaw name. Many participants added the name of their area in the meeting's online chat. C. Gagnon introduced the event and the panelists. She noted that the discussion would combine lived experience, work experience, and academic research. Before introducing panelists, she also acknowledged the work of the Nova

Scotia Home for Coloured Children Restorative Inquiry as a catalyst for the establishment of the Child and Youth Commission (CYC).

Panel Presentations

In order of presentation, the panelists were:

Estelle Alexander, Fourth-Year Health Promotion Student, Dalhousie University and youth representative

Danny Graham, Chief Engagement Officer, Engage Nova Scotia

Crystal Hill, Social Worker, Nova Scotia Legal Aid

Charys Payne, Lawyer, African Nova Scotia Justice Institute

Lynn Brogan, President, Nova Scotia College of Social Workers

Jacqueline Gahagan, Professor and Associate VP of Research, Mount Saint Vincent University

Malcolm Shookner, President, Atlantic Summer Institute

Lila Pavey, Health Promotion Specialist, Mental Health and Addictions Program, IWK Health Centre.

Estelle Alexander discussed her Honours thesis research and offered the perspective of the youth she worked with. Her work drew heavily upon *One Chance to Be A Child*, a data profile that provides a contemporary and comprehensive snapshot of how children and youth are doing in Nova Scotia. She shared her research findings from youth between the ages of 11 and 18. The youth she worked with read a summary of *One Chance to Be A Child* and participated in one of several focus groups. Participants of the focus groups were eager to be heard and to see change happen.

When asked to define what well-being meant to them, participants said:

- Feeling safe
- Being loved
- Being happy
- Having the support needed to go further in life and achieve goals
- Having the tools and resources to feel connected in your environment
- Feeling like you belong

Although many participants understood what well-being meant to them, they said they were not experiencing well-being as defined in *One Chance to Be A Child*. They also noted that the well-being of others has a significant impact on their individual well-being. A key message from the focus groups was that all participants, regardless of age and background, wanted to be heard and given a voice for their ideas, their well-being, and their one chance to be a child. Ms. Alexander shared a few direct quotes from the focus group session.

- *The best people to give feedback or accurate information on what it's like is us, not just a bunch of adults who think they know what it's like.*

- *It is frustrating because I wish we got a voice more or people would take us more seriously. I'm a person, too.*
- *We are responsible enough to have a job, or if you are 18 to vote, or drive a car, or be on our own, or consent to certain things, or make decisions on what programs we want to apply to at university. But I feel like no one consults us about us.*
- *There needs to be some sort of way to access information, so kids are not left in the dark about decisions being made about them without them.*

Children and youth in Nova Scotia feel they are not being heard or considered in decisions about their life and well-being. In reference to the six recommendations in *One Chance to Be A Child*, all participants agreed that provincial and municipal governments across the province need to take explicit action to realize articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This can be done by enacting legislation or bylaws that require a child-rights impact assessment to be submitted when considering new legislation, policies, or relevant child-focused programs and services.

The recommendation Ms. Alexander emphasized in her presentation was the need to establish child and youth panels or advisories within government to provide counsel on decisions that affect young people. This includes topics regarding child and youth mental health, bullying, different ways of learning, changes to the school curriculum, at-home supports, equitable access to opportunities, and overall well-being.

Danny Graham spoke about the work being undertaken by his organization regarding *The Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative*. The goal of the initiative is to include well-being as a measure of success and progress guiding the province into the future. A survey, launched in 2019, will be repeated in 2024. It asked 230 questions and garnered almost 13,000 responses. This survey and other tools enabled Engage Nova Scotia to better understand the needs and concerns of families with children and youth. Of particular interest were the voices of families with children under 13 and those led by single parents and dual parents.

Mr. Graham identified areas of particular concern. Single-parent family concerns differed significantly from those of dual-parent households when it came to loneliness and social isolation and sense of belonging. He noted that, for anyone interested in knowing more about the issue of loneliness, the survey can quantify this variable.

Single-parent families, predominantly led by women, don't feel that the system is designed to meet their needs. This demographic more frequently accesses facilities for leisure and culture and experiences more significant economic issues. Having sufficient time was a concern for all families.

When adjustments are made for dual-parent families with an income below \$40,000, their concerns are commonly shared with that of single parents.

Mr. Graham closed his remarks by highlighting that, compared to the provincial average, single-parent households with children and youth living at home are 262 percent more likely to report not being able to pay bills at least once in the past year. He also pointed out that a universal comprehensive healthy starts program that begins at the pre-natal stage is needed.

Mr. Graham encouraged everyone to visit the Engage Nova Scotia website, www.engagenovascotia.ca, to learn more about the survey and explore the data more thoroughly.

Crystal Hill provided a brief history of how Legal Aid Nova Scotia first hired an Indigenous social worker to bridge a gap in services for this population especially with respect to support in court proceedings. Ms. Hill works with legal aid clients who have family matters before the court.

She supports them through the court process in whatever capacity is most needed. She encourages clients to follow through with what the court has deemed necessary to reunite a family, and she connects them with resources better designed to suit them. Essentially, Ms. Hill described herself as “the bridge between client and lawyer.” She can be in the room when a client meets with a lawyer and assist the client in understanding what is being recommended and how they can be successful in the reunification of their family. Although every case is unique, Ms. Hill felt a fundamental component of her role is to help individuals not feel alone in the family court process. She also participates in family group counselling and in conferencing if that is needed to resolve difficulties with family members.

Charys Payne began by noting that her comments were based on her work experience, which represents lived data. She provided an overview of the ANSJI, which began operating in July 2021. It is a provincially funded, community led, organization established in response to the systemic racism faced by African Nova Scotians in the justice system. The ANSJI mandate is to address issues of systemic racism in the criminal justice system that negatively impact African Nova Scotians while ensuring fair, legal and constitutional treatment of all African Nova Scotian community members.

Since the ANSJI’s creation, it has made valuable contributions to the justice landscape. For example, the ANSJI was an intervenor in *R v Anderson*, 2021 NSCA 62. This was a Nova Scotia Court of Appeal decision that affirmed the use of Impact of Race and Culture Assessments (IRCAs) as a valuable tool when sentencing people of African descent. The IRCAs provided a framework for applying systemic and background factors related to race and culture. The ANSJI is currently working on standardizing training for all eligible IRCA assessors. It is also hiring a team of core and senior staff to work on:

1. Creating programs and services that address institutional racism faced by African Nova Scotians and their families when dealing with human rights complaints, the justice system, all forms of law enforcement, and incarceration.

2. Creating a place African Nova Scotians can turn to when seeking legal advice, guidance, and advocacy. This will be rooted in the understanding that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people.
3. Building a reputation for ANSJI with government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and community groups as a leader in legal research, advocacy, and education on justice issues affecting African Nova Scotian communities.

Much of the work of the ANSJI is intended to prevent and address systemic harms perpetrated against African Nova Scotian children and youth in the criminal justice system. A priority recommendation is that the powers, education, and advocacy strategies of the CYC are robust enough to mandate structural requirements.

The following examples of such requirements were offered:

- The collection of race-based data as it relates to over-representation of youth in social and criminal justice systems.
- The development of culturally competent practice standards for staff working with African Nova Scotian and racialized youth.
- That proposed legislation include a provision recognizing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent. This provision should require the CYC to be responsible for educating and advocating for the interests and needs of children of African descent and mirror Prince Edward Island's *Child and Youth Advocate Act* section 12 subsection 1, subsection C.

Lynn Brogan delivered a presentation via recorded message. She provided an overview of the findings of *Wisdom to Action*, a social enterprise and consulting firm focused on facilitating positive change and strengthening communities. The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers contracted with this organization on a project aimed at gaining insight into how the child welfare system could be better designed to help the rights and needs of children in this province.

A wide range of stakeholders in the province were consulted. Two guiding questions were asked.

1. What would it take for every child in Nova Scotia to live in a home and a community free from poverty, violence, and harm where they were allowed to reach their full potential?
2. What would it take to create a child-protection system that embraced the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child?

To reflect the perspective of young people with past lived experience in the child welfare system in Nova Scotia, a youth advisory council was created. This group designed stakeholder-engagement tools, such as surveys and focus groups, and analyzed the findings from the

consultation process. A literature review was also conducted to provide insight into historic and pervasive issues.

Ms. Brogan noted that the findings from the consultations will be more clearly articulated in a forthcoming policy paper. However, key findings can be confirmed. Specifically, there is evidence of systemic racism, discrimination, and bias within the child welfare system. Issues of poverty and housing are intertwined with this system impacting the need for intervention and undermining positive outcomes for reunification, safety, and well-being. The current system in Nova Scotia is bureaucratic and rule based, fragmented, stigmatizing, liability driven, complex to navigate, and closed to criticism.

The amendments made in the 2017 *Children and Family Services Act* resulted in unintended negative consequences for Nova Scotians at risk as they created greater inequity and inequality.

Jacqueline Gahagan and their research team are currently examining and evaluating the impact of post-secondary tuition-waiver programs for former youth in care.

Education is a key determinant of health and can serve as a buffer against various social, health, and economic challenges that Canadians face across their lifespan. Youth in the welfare system usually have lower educational attainment and outcomes than those who do not have experience in the child welfare system.

Less than 50 percent of former youth in care complete high school and even fewer complete post-secondary schooling. Dr. Gahagan emphasized that this issue matters because Canada is a signatory on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Goal number four states that “education must be inclusive, equitable, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Despite this goal, reality paints a much different picture. They noted that there must be a focus on the direct implications of this issue as it relates to underemployment and unemployment rates for this population. It’s also important to note that Black, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQ youth are over-represented in the child welfare system. However, these same groups are widely under-represented in post-secondary educational settings as students and, therefore, as administrators and decision-makers in these settings. The disconnect between the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and other national and international agreements that Canada has signed cannot be overlooked when considering the implications of inaction in reducing barriers to post-secondary education for former youth in care.

The lack of comparable data across provinces and territories needs to be addressed to fully understand how to do better. An inadequate job has been done of evaluating if, how, and why certain government-funded initiatives are addressing issues of educational attainment, employment, civic engagement, social mobility, and health outcomes. Given the lack of data, Dr. Gahagan’s research team is using evaluations of existing tuition-waiver programs offered across the four Atlantic provinces.

The purpose of this three-year study is to understand how tuition-waiver programs are impacting the lives of former youth in care who are in these programs. It is also to evaluate the programs from the perspectives of the youth themselves as well as the post-secondary institutions that offer them. Among the areas being assessed are financial barriers to education as well as the core elements needed to provide wrap-around supports and services that may include counselling, food security, housing, and transportation.

Many former youth in care have experienced a variety of intersecting forms of disadvantage such as trauma, neglect, and abuse. Dr. Gahagan argued that free tuition is not enough to support educational attainment. Coordinated efforts need to be made to provide positive educational experiences for these populations.

One key recommendation flowing from their research is for the Nova Scotia Government, in collaboration with post-secondary institutions, should direct more funding toward reducing barriers among those with experience in the child welfare system. The goal of this must be to help address disparities of educational attainment and to evaluate these at the national level with a shared minimum set of standards. Society pays the cost of inaction on this topic.

Malcolm Shookner provided an overview of ASI and its mandate as a catalyst for social change focused on the determinants of health. In 2015, ASI began to focus on child and youth mental health. Researchers approached the ASI regarding the need for a platform to showcase the evidence they had been working on related to this topic. Overriding themes emerged as a result. For example, a whole-of-government approach in terms of intersectoral action across departments is required. A whole-of-society approach is also required as is an on-the-ground, whole-of-community approach.

By 2017, the ASI website included information on policies, programs, practices, research, and networks. By 2020, the ASI was urged to develop policy. A working group with people from across the region and the country was established to review evidence and identify policy priorities. The policy focus was broadened to include four priority areas for action: 1 - A **whole of government** approach by implementing a Mental Health in All Policies Framework by all sectors; 2 - A **whole-of-society** approach through development of a Multistakeholder Platform for the Atlantic region, where representatives from diverse communities, Indigenous organizations, academia, governments and the private sector share knowledge and codesign solutions for evidence-based policies and programs; 3 - A **whole-of-community** approach through Investment in Community Action; 4 - **Sustainable and Integrated Funding Model** that supports these comprehensive approaches to invest in and maximize social capital in our communities.

Mr. Shookner noted that the ASI recommendation for the CYC is as follows: Focus upstream on the social determinants of health that support infant, child and youth mental health. Do this by building on the extensive evidence that has been compiled and reported by organizations represented at the panel discussions.

Lila Pavey began by stating that Nova Scotia currently has the highest provincial rate of police-reported human trafficking in Canada and one of the highest provincial rates of trafficking of victims aged 12 to 17 years.

To find an answer as to why these rates are so high, the YWCA Halifax, Association of Black Social Workers, and the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association partnered in 2021 to undertake a series of consultations called *Hearing Them*. The process resulted in the recruitment of 149 adults with past or present lived experience in the sex industry to explore what makes people vulnerable and to identify specific risks. Consultation participants came from partnering agencies in the Trafficking Exploitation Support System known as TESS.

The *Hearing Them* report combines participant self-identified risk factors at the time of their first involvement in the sex industry along with the literature on risks. It overlays this information with the statistical data for those specific risks for children and youth in the province. Ms. Pavey noted that the sex industry operates on a continuum. However, the consultations were specific to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth because these experiences can have harmful lifelong implications and contribute to poor health outcomes.

Of those who participated in the consultations, 31 percent met the definition for commercial sexual exploitation at the time they first became involved with the sex industry.

The global literature on commercial sexual exploitation indicates factors such as living in poverty; physical, sexual, or emotional child abuse; substance use; and witnessing violence among other factors create the risk. When children and youth needs are not able to be met within their existing living circumstances there is an increased vulnerability for poor outcomes. Ms. Pavey stated that, "this is the crux of why Nova Scotia is in the position we are today."

To effect change, improvements in the conditions that surround children, youth, and families must be made.

Only one of the 149 participants said they didn't know what risk factors were at play when they first became involved with the sex industry. This strongly suggesting that individuals are aware of the risks that lead to their involvement. This also demonstrates that educating children and youth on their risks and on community programming alone is not enough.

Economic risk, unstable family dynamics, and substance use were the top three self-perceived risk factors at the time of first involvement. The effort to meet material needs to live is a major driver to the sex industry. Many participants also said they traded sexual services for things besides money with the most common non-monetary thing traded for being substances followed by rent/a place to stay and food.

Given today's current housing, food, and economic crises the climate for continued and growing exploitation is dangerously high.

The stories shared in *Hearing Them* further validated the literature on the impact of sexual abuse and witnessing violence as a child as well as another key finding related to the high rates of involvement with child protection and youth justice systems. More exploration of that relationship is needed. Unsurprisingly, there was an over-representation of African Nova Scotian and Indigenous individuals in those systems. Other areas that emerged from the data were the fundamental need to belong, the impact and role of substance use, the need for protected online spaces, and understanding how organized crime networks operate in Nova Scotia.

Ms. Pavey emphasized that vulnerability for commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth needs to be analyzed within a broader societal context and not on an individual basis. Nova Scotia underperforms on several important health and well-being indicators compared to the rest of Canada. The rates of risk factors such as household poverty, food insecurity, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, youth substance use, and bullying, for example, are all higher in Nova Scotia than the national average. This is what is increasing the vulnerability for children and youth in this province to experiencing and becoming sexually exploited.

The good news is these conditions and environments can be changed. The *Hearing Them* report outlines six key recommendations. Given that the risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth are also health and well-being indicators, each one of these needs to be driven through a comprehensive whole-of-government approach. One place to start is by establishing an integrated plan with shared outcomes for Nova Scotia to ensure children and youth's rights are at the forefront of all decision-making.

Discussion Questions

Following the presentations, three pre-established questions were discussed.

1. *Across all the speakers today, what are your reflections on the key takeaways? Do you see shared goals among the work that all panelists are doing?*

Crystal Hill noted that youth having a sense of belonging and feeling like their voice is being heard was a central theme. In addition, mental health needs to be a top consideration when it comes to policy making. Finally, a guaranteed income for all Nova Scotia families, whether involved in child protection or among the working poor, could be a change maker for all.

Lila Pavey affirmed that the desire for a sense of belonging and loneliness were key themes. She noted that the same populations over-represented in some systems were also under-represented in others. All panelists represented different perspectives but were all talking about the same things. Everything comes back to core human needs. Now the tools and the information available on these critical issues need to be pushed forward.

Malcom Shookner stated that it all starts with the rights of children and youth. These rights are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sustainable development goals and social determinants are embedded in human rights charters. The government has an obligation to act but that has not happened. With the formation of the child and youth advocate office, an opportunity exists to advance the rights of children and youth in Nova Scotia.

2. *From your experiences, what are the key things that decision-makers need to know or do to support the well-being and rights of children/youth?*

Danny Graham acknowledged that the responsibility for bringing this issue to the forefront rests with everyone. The conversations need to cut across sectors and start with imagining a better start for young people when they arrive in Nova Scotia. They need to be surrounded by a framework of well-being. The early childhood years are critical. A strong economy means a focus on the early years.

Estelle Alexander reinforced that the comments being shared were reflective of what she heard from her focus groups. Children want to be involved in discussions. They are aware of the reality of Nova Scotia's situation and want to be heard. We need to give them tools and resources to speak.

Charys Payne reminded the audience that intergenerational, historic, and structural trauma has occurred. Government needs to hear the voices of those impacted by this and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. If we can respond to them, we can help all. We don't want to return to a state that didn't work. Instead, we need to be transformative. That's what the government needs to hear. That means including first voice and lived experiences of African Nova Scotians and inviting us and all groups to the table. The expertise lies in the lived experience.

3. *How can we work together and prioritize recommendations, advance them, and work with the CYC?*

Malcom Shookner stated that a mental health framework could be a catalyst. The ASI proposes a multisectoral forum to continue the conversation and build on the work that has been done.

Jacqueline Gahagan reminded the audience that Canada is a signatory on a variety of human rights-based initiatives. We need evidence on how we are doing on these and on what is being done to reach these mandates. If data aren't being collected and reported, then who is accountable? It's important to determine how our international initiatives are doing. The solution rests in the voices of children and youth. What worked before may not even be responsive to what's happening today.

Charys Payne echoed that what we have done historically is not working. Children raised by the province in care are now having their own children being taken away. These individuals can't be

blamed for poor parenting, and it reflects a system gap when the system doesn't trust the children they raised. Responsibility must be taken.

Lila Pavey noted that *One Chance to Be A Child* set a standard because it was immersed in first voice. This report needs to be given more credit. It was community driven and is complete with important recommendations. We need to make sure that reports go forward in a way that advances these recommendations.

Questions for the Audience

N. Siritsky opened questions from the audience and read questions that had been posted on the chat function.

1. *Given the Legal Information Society report Free to be Me about conversion therapy risks, how do we help queer folks, and why isn't queerphobia specifically mentioned in the reports the panelists referenced? Why isn't there a specific report for queer youth when we know they are among the most highly trafficked?*

Jacqueline Gahagan stated that they wrote the section in *One Chance to Be A Child* about 2SLGBTQ issues. The terminology "queerphobia" is not specifically used in that section but 2SLGBTQ are referenced within the human rights framework. However, there is a larger structural issue regarding how those rights are enacted in systems, particularly the health and mental health systems, that show more work that needs to be done. There is a great deal of frustration regarding the disconnect between what the provinces are doing and what the federal government is saying about the protection of rights and how that manifests itself in services. Nova Scotia was among the first to ban conversion therapy, which means that MSI will not fund it. This is a win. However, it doesn't prevent other organizations from doing it.

Lila Pavey stated that more reports will be coming out in the *Hearing Them* series. There is an over-representation of 2SLGBTQ community members in the sex trade. It is important to talk about this and raise concerns. We need to continue to bring this to the table.

What constitutes youth? Many are aging out of care with intersecting issues such as homelessness, poverty, and poor mental health. These gaps make them more vulnerable. Do we know if the child and youth commission will be able to address the needs of older youth/young adults?

Lila Pavey stated that *Hearing Them* looks at poverty-reduction recommendations. One of the pieces that continues to be brought forward is around employment support and income assistance particularly among those aged 16-18 who face many barriers. If this group leans into one area of support, they are disqualified from another. Supports need to complement each other and not be punitive and ensure all ages are being represented. These are the types of recommendations that the commission will need to hear.

Jacqueline Gahagan stated that individuals age out of the system at a different age depending on geography. An arbitrary cut off depending on where you reside does not take into consideration the broader context that can lead to homelessness. They hope that the CYC looks at the issue of defining youth and will work toward standardization across the country. The focus needs to be on health and well-being.

2. *What are those on the panel committed to doing to ensure that youth are leaders at the commission, partners, and experts in their own experiences, and not just recipients of goodwill or the subject of research?*

Danny Graham stated that Engage Nova Scotia is looking to host a variety of conversations around the province with demographically excluded voices. The conversations will centre around what the future could look like.

Charlene Gagnon stated that we need to create channels to power and that expectations are set when we ask people for their voice. Follow through is needed.

Jacqueline Gahagan noted that we need to be mindful in our efforts to engage first voice as many are frequently asked. Adequate reimbursement must be considered to support engagement.

3. *What are other jurisdictions, beyond Canada, doing that we could adopt?*

Jacqueline Gahagan commented that their research is looking at Canada in relation to other OECD countries. This is leading to comparative analyses and bringing innovative ideas forward to decision-makers to show what's happening elsewhere. It allows a look at the art of the possible. It's important to look outside of Canada as poor policy decisions are inherited and generational effects continue. We need to find an appropriate way to interrupt that inheritance.

Danny Graham reminded the audience that Canada does well on a variety of social measurements but when you look at children and youth, it's quite discouraging. We need to sew together a safety net that's more robust than what we've been able to do so far.

Lila Pavey said that, in addition to looking at other countries, we also need to look at what our communities are doing that is human centred and about connection.

N. Siritsky introduced the last question, which, they explained, brought us back to the land acknowledgement and how we infuse that land acknowledgement into policy.

4. *What would panelists offer to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as the most urgent, the most specific action, for the CYC to hold the government accountable for addressing?*

Lila Pavey stated that Nova Scotia still has over 12 percent of eligible graduates not graduating. It's important that we move beyond an individual level and identify barriers. Education is an important factor for getting out of poverty. How do we hold government accountable to make sure people are getting and completing a quality education?

Jacqueline Gahagan stated that we need to look at the child welfare system as a whole and what it is doing and not doing to help educational attainment. The child welfare system and the education system need to talk to one another.

Estelle Alexander noted that school and different ways of learning are important to those she worked with. The students who she spoke with feel the curriculum is built for one type of learning style when there are many. The students want to be asked, "How do you learn?" and then see follow-up. They want to do well in the school environment, so the question is how can we provide for them and meet their needs?

C. Gagnon concluded by thanking everyone for coming. She commented that reinforcing that youth need to be heard was an appropriate note on which to end the discussion. She then thanked the sponsors, which were the Healthy Populations Institute, the Mental Health and Addictions Program at the IWK Health Centre, and the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers. Ms. Gagnon offered a special thank you to Kristyn Anderson, with SchoolsPlus Integrated Services, as this session originated from her vision.

Links

The links provided by panelists and audience members are:

[One Chance to Be A Child](#)

[Child & Youth Commission](#)

[Hearing Them](#) series first report

[Infographic](#) ASI Policy Brief

[Executive Summary](#) ASI Policy Brief

[An article written by Jacqueline Gahagan](#) about tuition waivers for former youth in care:

[The Nova Scotia College of Social Worker's submission](#) regarding child and family services legislation

[African Nova Scotian Justice Institute launch announcement](#)

[Mi'kmaq Place Names Digital Atlas](#)

GATHERING AND UNIFYING OUR WORK ON CHILD AND YOUTH RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING IN NOVA SCOTIA

NATIONAL CHILD DAY EVENT ORGANIZED BY THE HEALTHY POPULATIONS INSTITUTE, IWK MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS, AND THE NOVA SCOTIA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

PRESENTATION TAKEAWAYS

♥ ESTELLE ALEXANDER

● DANNY GRAHAM

★ CRYSTAL HILL

♥ CHARYS PAYNE

💧 LYNN BROGAN

👤 JACQUELINE GAHAGAN

■ MALCOLM SHOOKNER

▲ LILA PAVEY

- WELL-BEING IS:
 - "BEING SAFE, LOVED, & HAPPY... A SENSE OF BELONGING"
 - WELL-BEING NEEDED TO REACH GOALS
- SINGLE PARENTS PREDOMINANTLY WOMEN
 - ↳ STRUGGLING (LOSS OF FAITH IN SYSTEMS, LONELINESS, POVERTY)
- LEGAL PROCEDURES ARE STRESSFUL
- FAMILIES NEED HELP DURING THESE TIMES, COPING & UNDERSTANDING LEGAL MATTERS
- "RESEARCH & DATA DRIVE POLICY CHANGE."
- IT'S HARD TO HAVE JUST ONE RECOMMENDATION
- EDUCATE & ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN w/ AFRICAN DESCENT
- WISDOM TO ACTION IS EXPLORING WAYS TO IMPROVE EVERYTHING FOR CHILDREN
- THERE IS EVIDENCE OF SYSTEMIC RACISM
 - CHILDREN WHO GO THROUGH THE SYSTEM NOTICEABLY PERFORM LESS WELL COMPARED TO THOSE WHO DON'T.
 - WE'VE DONE A BPO JOB, SAID, GATHERING MORE DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION
 - FREE TUTORIAL ISN'T ENOUGH
 - EVALUATE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL
- PROMOTING CHILD & YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IS COMMUNITY WORK → IT TAKES A VILLAGE!
 - UPSTREAM: MENTAL HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM, SUSTAINED INTEGRATED FUNDING
- HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS A MAJOR PROBLEM IN NOVA SCOTIA
- CHILDREN ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE
- "WE JUST WANT TO BE HEARD"
- LISTEN TO US. "I'M A PERSON TOO"
- "YET NO ONE CONSULTS US."
- HEALTHY START PROGRAM NEEDED, BEGINNING AT PRENATAL STAGE
- CULTURAL CONNECTION
 - "EVERY CASE IS UNIQUE & DIFFERENT."
 - "A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE COURT & THE LAWYER"
 - ADDRESS SYSTEMIC ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN NOVA SCOTIA INSTITUTIONS
 - "THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE"
- MANY PLAINS OBSERVED IN THE NOVA SCOTIAN CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM
- POVERTY IS A MAJOR FACTOR
- BIPOC CHILDREN OVER REPRESENTED IN WELFARE, UNDER-REPRESENTED IN SECONDARY EDUCATION
- CHILDREN ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE

• CHILDREN'S NEEDS NOT BEING MET IS THE CRUX OF WHY WE'RE HERE
 • SUBSTANCE-USE, HOMELESSNESS → A DANGEROUS CLIMATE

HOW TO GATHER & UNIFY OUR WORK

- A WHOLE-GOV'T, WHOLE-SOCIETY APPROACH:
- LET'S HAVE A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE!

HOW TO ADVANCE FINDINGS

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

- "THERE ARE NO SILVER BULLETS."
- "BEGIN WITH BETTER QUESTIONS."
- OUR SOLUTIONS HAVE BEEN "REACTIVE" INSTEAD OF PRO-ACTIVE
- VALUE LIVED EXPERIENCE
- QUEERPHOBIA & 2SLGBTQ+ ISSUES NEED MORE ATTENTION
- WHAT ABOUT SUPPORTS FOR OLDER YOUTH? DEFINE WHO QUALIFIES AS 'YOUTH'
- "WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?"
- "THE ACCOUNTABILITY FACTOR IS BIG."
- CHILDREN RAISED BY THE SYSTEM AREN'T TRUSTED BY THE SYSTEM THAT RAISED & FAILED THEM.

THE IRONY

COMMONALITIES SHARED GOALS

- PRIORITIZE A VOICE FOR YOUTH
- MENTAL HEALTH & POVERTY → MAJOR FACTORS
- "BELONGING"/LONELINESS CAME UP A LOT!
- OVER-REPRESENTATION OF BIPOC YOUTH IN WELFARE SYSTEMS A MAJOR ISSUE
- "WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ISSUES SYMPTOMATIC WITH TRAUMA"

"WE'RE ALL TALKING ABOUT THE SAME THINGS."



PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- WE NEED TO LISTEN TO YOUTH & SUPPORT THEM BETTER → TOOLS & RESOURCES
- "BE TRANSFORMATIVE, NOT PERFORMATIVE."
- "I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS WERE."
- EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION/RESOURCES
- "TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS" → STOP PASSING ON FAILED SYSTEMS AS A NOVA SCOTIAN INHERITANCE
- "NOVA SCOTIA IS ALWAYS FIRST AT BEING LAST."

HOW TO ADVANCE THESE

HOW CAN THE CHILD & YOUTH COMMISSION HELP ADVANCE THESE?

- ↳ CAN PROVIDE A FOCAL POINT OR SPRING BOARD.
 - INVITE THE EXPERTS TO THE TABLE
 - ↳ FUND THEIR WORK
- MEET OR EXCEED EXISTING MANDATES!
 - A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH
 - MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
- A NEW STANDARD FOR REPORTING
- BETTER TRANSITIONAL SERVICES FOR YOUTH AGEING OUT OF SYSTEM
- LEARN FROM OTHER NATIONS, INCLUDING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES



NOVA SCOTIA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS



NOVA SCOTIA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS



Mental Health & Addictions

