



Addressing the Needs of Child Victims and Their Families: The Role of the Victim Advocate

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1. Introduction

Child victimization has devastating consequences for child and youth victims and their families. Child victimization leaves these young victims and their families with a number of needs to help them through not only the immediate aftermath, but throughout the criminal justice process and beyond.

There are a number of different organizations in Canada that provide services to these victims and their families. These organizations meet the needs of child and youth victims and their families through a number of mechanisms, including through victim support and advocacy services. Victim support and advocacy services may be provided by one designated individual, or by a number of individuals, who are often referred to as victim advocates.

The purpose of this report is to examine the needs of child victims and their families and how various children's advocacy centres (CACs), both established and in development, respond to these needs through victim support and advocacy services. The mechanisms through which the centres provide victim support and advocacy services will be examined. In addition, the reasons for why the centres chose to provide these services in a particular way will be discussed, as will some of the challenges that arose in making these decisions.

1.1 The Needs of Child and Youth Victims and their Families

In the aftermath of a victimization incident, child and youth victims and their families have a number of needs, some of which are common, and some not (Cossel 2010; Cunningham 2009). Child and youth victims and their families require both immediate and on-going support throughout the entire criminal justice process, including after the criminal justice process has ended (Bala 2005; Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System 2002; Cunningham 2009). Cunningham states, “[t]he prosecution is over but victims and their families may continue to need support, with unresolved emotional issues, reverberations in the family or community from revealing the crime, on-going legal issues such as child custody, or the continued need to limit an offender’s contact with the victim or other children” (2009, 70).

Child and youth victims and their families also need different types of information, including up-to-date information on the case, the criminal justice process, their rights, and the services available to them. It is also important to ensure that information provided to children is presented in an accessible way in terms of format, language used and images (Ben-Arieh and Windman 2007; Cody 2010; Jones et al. 2007; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] 2009).

In addition, the following may need to be considered:

- Physical and mental health needs;
- Needs related to specific familial circumstances, including cultural needs;
- Assurance that the child/youth is not to blame for their victimization;
- Emergency housing or other placements;
- Basic items such as food and clothing; and

- Court preparation and explanation of the criminal justice process and decisions made in court (Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System 2002; Cody 2010; UNODC 2009).

Non-offending caregivers may also need to be kept up-to-date on the case and may also need to be provided with post-trial follow-up and services to help them cope with their children's victimization, such as counselling (Alaggia et al. 2009; Bonach et al. 2010; Cody 2010; Nova Scotia Department of Justice 2000).

1.2. Children's Advocacy Centres

To help address the needs of child and youth victims and their families, various organizations have been established in countries around the world, including in Canada. One example of such an organization is a children's advocacy centre (CAC). A CAC "is a child-focused, facility-based program in which representatives from many disciplines [a multi-disciplinary team], including law enforcement, child protection, prosecution, mental health, medical and victim advocacy, child advocacy, work together to conduct interviews and make team decisions about investigation, treatment, management and prosecution of child abuse cases".¹ The primary goal of CACs is to prevent the re-victimization of child victims as a result of their involvement with the criminal justice system.²

In order to be certified as a CAC, an organization may receive accreditation from the National Children's Alliance (NCA), which is based in the United States. Although there is variability in the way that services are provided, there are core services, or standards, that CACs must attain to become certified. The 10 standards of accreditation focus on: 1) a multi-disciplinary team; 2) cultural competency and diversity; 3) forensic interview; 4) victim support and advocacy; 5) medical evaluation; 6) mental health; 7) case review; 8) case tracking; 9) organizational capacity; and 10) a child focused setting (National Children's Alliance 2011).

There are many organizations in Canada that are seeking to become CACs or that have applied for funding from the Department of Justice Canada to more completely reflect the CAC model. For the purposes of this report, these latter organizations will be referred to as developing CACs.

1.3. The Victim Advocate

One of the NCA standards of CAC accreditation is that of victim support and advocacy services for children and their non-offending caregivers. Victim support and advocacy is a key component of the multi-disciplinary team. "The focus of victim support and advocacy is to help reduce trauma for the child and non-offending family members and to improve outcomes" (National Children's Alliance 2011, 14). "They are there to serve as a "neutral" party and to ensure the family feels safe and that their needs are being met. Essentially, the Advocate becomes a central point of contact for all information regarding the child and the family and ensures that the information is shared amongst all members of the multidisciplinary team"

¹ <http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/index.php?s=5>

² <http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/index.php?s=24>

(Twigger 2011, 4). The services provided through this function focus on the needs of children and their families, and include:

- Crisis intervention and support at all stages of investigation and prosecution;
- Greeting and orientation of children to the CAC;
- Updates on case status;
- Court education, support, and accompaniment;
- Referrals for treatment and other services;
- Securing transportation to case-related meetings;
- Information regarding the dynamics of abuse and the coordinated multidisciplinary response (National Children's Alliance 2011, 14-16).

Many CACs differ in the ways that victim support and advocacy services are provided. Victim support and advocacy services can be provided by one designated individual, or by a number of different individuals, as long as the services provided are continuous and consistent. The advocacy function can be fulfilled by a member of the CAC, who can be a paid staff member or volunteer. The advocacy function can also be fulfilled by others outside of the CAC, such as community advocates (e.g., domestic violence advocates) and/or system based advocates (e.g., victim witness coordinators) (National Children's Alliance 2011).

As will be seen in Section 3 below, CACs and developing CACs differ in the way that they fulfill the function of the victim advocate and in their reasoning for fulfilling the role in a specific way. For example, some CACs and developing CACs consider the issue of duplication of services in their decisions. In some jurisdictions, victim support and advocacy services may already be provided by other organizations and CACs often work in close partnership with these organizations. As such, some choose to implement the services provided by victim services organizations outside of their own organization rather than providing victim support and advocacy services via a designated victim advocate within the CAC. Alternatively, the CAC may provide victim support and advocate services directly through a victim advocate at the centre. Other centres may provide some victim support and advocacy services and partner with outside victim services to provide other services (e.g., the victim advocate may walk alongside the family throughout the process from reporting until the CAC services are no longer needed but may not provide court preparation, support and accompaniment. This might be offered by the victim services organization or division within the community).

The term used to describe the advocacy function may also differ in each centre. Some of the terms used to describe the individual(s) who provide victim support and advocacy services include: victim advocate, child advocate, and family advocate.

1.4 Victim Services³

In Canada, the provincial and territorial governments are responsible for administering the majority of services to victims (McGibbon 2008). The governments can provide these services directly, provide funding to other agencies to provide services, or do both. There are several victim service delivery models, including:

- Systems based – Victim services are provided through a provincial or territorial government, often through their respective Ministries/Departments of Justice;
- Police-based – Services are provided through a federal, provincial or territorial police service;
- Court-based – Services are provided for victims who become involved in the criminal justice process; and
- Community-based – Services are provided by non-profit organizations (Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime 2010; Ford 2012).

For the purposes of this report, organizations that are not CACs or developing CACs will be referred to as victim services.

2. Methodology

The information for this report was collected in two phases. First, an in-person facilitated discussion was held in January 2012 with 14 individuals representing 13 different CACs and developing CACs who had applied for funding from the Department of Justice. One additional representative from a developing CAC participated via telephone in April 2012. Some of the organizations were already established, while others were in the process of being established. Many of the representatives were directors of the organizations or those in a leadership role. Other representatives included members of steering committees and a victim advocate.

Each representative was asked to answer the following three research questions:

1. How does your organization, or how will your organization, fulfill the role of the victim advocate?
2. What influenced your decision to fulfill the victim advocate role in this way?
3. If you already have a victim advocate, how is it working?

In order to gather information about services provided to child victims and their families in provinces and territories without CACs or developing CACs, Directors of system-based victim services were contacted shortly after the facilitated discussion. These individuals were provided with the option of responding to the research questions in writing and/or by telephone interview. The research questions posed were:

³ Note that in some cases, the terms “victim advocate” and “victim services worker” are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this report, they are used separately: a “victim advocate” refers to an individual who fulfills the victim support and advocacy services within a CAC or developing CAC, while a “victim services worker” refers to an individual employed by system-based or community-based victim services organizations.

1. How does your jurisdiction respond to the needs of child and youth victims and their families?
2. How does your jurisdiction fulfill the role of the victim advocate?
3. Are there any challenges in fulfilling the role in this way?

Please see Appendix A for a list of organizations and victim services that participated. It is important to note that the information in this report is not necessarily comprehensive. Even at the time of writing this report, there were more applications for Department of Justice funding from CACs and developing CACs coming in. The information in this report reflects only a portion of what services are offered to child victims and their families in Canada.

3. Results

3.1 Victim Support and Advocacy Services

As will be discussed below, the various organizations and jurisdictions differ in how they fulfill the role of the victim advocate. Despite the differences in how the role is fulfilled, each organization and jurisdiction that participated has a means of providing victim support and advocacy services.

3.2 How the Role of the Victim Advocate is Fulfilled

Each CAC or developing CAC in Canada is at a different stage in its development and each differs in the way that services are provided. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of these organizations differ in the way that they fulfill the role of the victim advocate.

There are three main approaches that are used in Canada to fulfill the role of the victim advocate. Some organizations fulfill the role through a paid, full-time staff member, some use the services of volunteers, and others rely on victim services available in their jurisdiction. The jurisdictions that do not have a CAC or developing CAC rely on victim services. Indeed, the most common approach to fulfilling the role of the victim advocate is through victim services.

As will be seen in the sections below, the rationale for fulfilling the victim advocate role in the various ways also differs by organization and jurisdiction. Similarly, many of the organizations use different terms to describe the individual who provides victim advocacy and support services. Despite the differences, each of the participating organizations and jurisdictions indicated that they were satisfied with how the role of the victim advocate was being fulfilled.

3.2.1 CACs and Developing CACs

3.2.1.1 Paid Staff Members

Three of the established centres fulfill the role of the victim advocate through paid staff members. These three centres have one paid full-time victim advocate, while another centre also employs an advocate on a part-time basis.

The Regina Children's Justice Centre (RCJC)

The Regina Children's Justice Centre (RCJC) recently hired one full-time Victim Services Responder (VSR) to provide support and advocacy services. The decision to implement the role of the VSR came as a result of the finding that many children and their families were only receiving referrals to the Victim Services Unit when a social worker or investigator requested one. As such, many children and families were not receiving the services that they required. The implementation of a full-time VSR responds to this gap by ensuring that there is an individual available to provide a rapid response, consistent referrals and services throughout the criminal justice process. The Victim Services Responder works closely with the multi-disciplinary team at the RCJC. Each file that is received is forwarded to the VSR, and if she can help, she will become involved.

The VSR provides child victims and their families with links to community resources, maintains contact with the family throughout the criminal justice process and is present for interviews. In addition to these services, the VSR also provides referrals to mental health and other resources; provides information, emotional support and practical assistance; ensures that the child and non-offending caregiver have access to victim compensation benefits; provides early intervention and preventative services; and provides assistance on case, police, and justice system procedures.

Child Advocacy Centre Niagara (CACN)

“Child Advocacy Centre Niagara (CACN) fulfills the role of the victim advocate through a full-time paid Family Advocate. The decision to implement the Family Advocate role was made after the Centre examined gaps in services among Niagara service providers, and with its partners (Family and Children's Services Niagara, Niagara Regional Police Service, Family Counselling Centre Niagara). When developing the program, the Centre worked closely with its partners to determine what the role of the advocate would look like.”⁴ “CACN considered the use of volunteers to fulfill the advocate role; however, the Centre's partners preferred a staff position dedicated to providing support and referrals for children, youth and caregivers. Accordingly, a decision to fund the position was made. The Centre will assess how the full-time paid staff role is working, and may consider involving volunteers in the future”.⁵

“The Family Advocate provides many services, including supporting children/youth and their families/caregivers throughout the investigation and court processes; supervising children in a structured, child friendly environment; maintaining communication and answering questions regarding victim's rights and compensation; providing referrals to Family Counselling Centre Niagara counselling and to community-based resources; and follow-up phone calls. Formalizing a close link with the Victim Witness Assistance Program to provide court support and accompaniment is a program priority for 2012-13”.⁶

⁴ C. Paskey. Personal Communication. July 10, 2012.

⁵ C. Paskey. Personal Communication. October 1, 2012.

⁶ C. Paskey. Personal Communication. July 10, 2012.

An evaluation of the Family Advocacy Program was conducted in 2012 through interviews with partners (child protection and police). The results of the evaluation revealed that all partners who worked with the Family Advocate found that the Program was beneficial, as the advocate provides valuable resources and neutral support for children and families. The participating partners also found that having the Family Advocate as part of the time was beneficial both to themselves as well as to families.

The Toronto Child and Youth Advocacy Centre

BOOST Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention is currently implementing a pilot project of what is to be the Toronto Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC). The Toronto CYAC pilot project is implementing as many components of the CYAC as possible, including the role of the victim advocate. The role of the victim advocate is being fulfilled by one full-time and one part-time employee who are referred to as Child and Family Advocates. One Child and Family Advocate is assigned to a family for the entire process. The CYAC steering committee was consulted on the responsibilities of the Child and Family Advocate.

The CYAC chose to implement a paid position to ensure that the families are in contact with the same individual throughout the entire process. Given that the first 24 hours after a victimization experience are so critical, it was important for the CYAC to assure the child and parent that support is available and would continue to be available by the same person throughout.

The Child and Family Advocates provide a number of services. The role of the advocate is that of a shepherd, connecting the various pieces for the family. The advocate greets the family at the Gatehouse (the designated interview facility), provides a tour of the facility, explains what will happen during the forensic interview and is present for the forensic interview. The advocate also introduces the family and child to the key players in the process, provides education and referrals to services, and information about the justice system and trial process using age appropriate language. In order to avoid duplication of services, the child is referred to BOOST for court preparation; however, the advocate will attend court when it is needed. The advocate provides case management and support to the family throughout the process, including from the initial investigation through the criminal justice system and beyond. The advocate also provides specific support for caregivers, including providing referrals for services, discussing the dynamics of abuse, and providing information on the criminal justice system.

The pilot has experienced some challenges in regard to the victim advocate role which have mainly been the result of the pilot function of the project. For example, it has been difficult for the advocates to engage families when they are not interviewed at The Gatehouse. Also, because the multi-disciplinary team is not co-located, it has been difficult to organize follow-up consultation calls and subsequent communication. Despite these challenges, the program has received very positive feedback from the families.

3.2.1.2 Volunteers

Only one organization in Canada, the Zebra Child Protection Centre, fulfills the role of the victim advocate through volunteers.

The Zebra Child Protection Centre

The Zebra Child Protection Centre fulfills the role of the victim advocate through volunteer Child and Family Advocates. The centre employs two full-time coordinators that supervise 35 to 55 volunteers who provide a continuum of care to children and families. Zebra chose to fulfill the advocate role with volunteers due to capacity issues (the case load at the centre can reach up to 450 families) and because volunteers represent a community response to child abuse. The volunteers are provided with 30 hours of training that focuses on children and families in victimization situations. The volunteers are also provided with one-on-one training and are supervised by knowledgeable team leads who are also volunteers.

The volunteers specialize in the services they provide. For example, one volunteer will provide court preparation; one will provide court accompaniment; and another will conduct intake duties. Zebra chose to provide services through specialized volunteers to provide a continuation of services, and to ensure neutrality, which provides some protection against defence lawyers who may argue that testimony or evidence was contaminated by the advocate.

The advocates provide a number of services that reflect the continuum of care, including ensuring access to services, providing updates on court investigations, and providing information. They also provide support at pre-trial meetings, provide court preparation sessions, and update families and answer questions about the trial process.⁷ Children under 12 are provided with court accompaniment and when the child goes to court, there are always two advocates present: one for the child and one for the family.

3.2.1.3 Victim Services

Four of the organizations indicated that they fulfill, or plan to fulfill, the role of the victim advocate through victim services.

Le Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent

Le Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent fulfills the role of the victim advocate through personalized support services provided at the Centre and through partnerships with social justice partners, including Crime Victims Assistance Centres (CAVACs), which are local victim services offices found in several locations around the province of Québec. "Police and medical services are provided under one roof by the Centre's partners. Personalized services are also available to parents of child victims of sexual abuse during police or medical investigations. A parental support program is offered for eight weeks and more support is offered at disclosure. Information pertaining to victimisation, services, resources and the processes following disclosure are provided by their partners at the CAVACs".

"In addition, assessment of needs, specialized treatment and psychological services are offered to clients by a multi-disciplinary team composed of professionals including psychologists, sexologists, social workers and psychoeducators".⁸

⁷ <http://www.zebracentre.ca/multi-disciplinary-teams/> (Last accessed February 9, 2012).

⁸ L. Joyal. Personal Communication. July 9, 2012.

Winnipeg Children's Advocacy Centre

The Winnipeg Children's Advocacy Centre is in development and plans on fulfilling the role of the victim advocate through victim services via the Child Victim Support Service (CVSS) of Manitoba Justice Victim Services. The CVSS provides a number of services to victims, including providing information on the criminal justice system, court preparation and accompaniment, referrals to community services, and providing information on Victim Impact Statements.

There will be a dedicated individual from victim services assigned to the CAC and it is anticipated that the advocate will be on-site. Winnipeg chose to fill the role of the victim advocate in this way as Manitoba has many victim services partners and they intend to build on the excellent resources that are already available.

Family Services of Greater Vancouver (The Vancouver Child Advocacy Centre)

Family Services of Greater Vancouver is developing the Vancouver Child Advocacy Centre and intends on utilizing the services of 3 full-time community-based and police-based victim services workers to fulfill the functions of the victim advocate. Family Services of Greater Vancouver indicated that they could co-locate the victim service workers to be on-site at the centre. The Vancouver centre has chosen to fulfill the role in this way as they already have a pre-existing relationship with victim services.

*Lynx (Yukon Territory)*⁹

Lynx intends on fulfilling the functions of the victim advocate mainly through territorial (system-based) victim services. Victim services will continue to provide the same services, such as providing information and support, and will also coordinate the multi-disciplinary team. It is possible that the Lynx coordinator will provide some victim support and advocacy services, as this individual will be responsible for tracking the case throughout the process and ensuring that victims and their families receive the services that they need. Lynx will be fulfilling the role in this way because "the best practices emphasized the importance of a multi-disciplinary team. In order to integrate this and all best practices in Yukon (small population and service providers from multiple sectors), [they] saw the need for interagency collaboration rather than building services that are parallel to those that exist".¹⁰

3.2.1.4 Organizations Undecided on the Role of the Victim Advocate

Several organizations that were in the process of being established indicated that they were undecided as to which approach they would take in fulfilling the role of the victim advocate.

⁹ Note that in addition to victim services, the three territories also use the services of Crown Witness Coordinators (CWCs) who are part of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada and are federal public servants. CWCs provide the services of a victim advocate but only in situations in which the case is going to court. CWCs provide information, support, referrals to community resources and act as a liaison between victims and Crown prosecutors (Department of Justice Canada Evaluation Division 2011).

¹⁰ A. King, Personal Communication, April 12, 2012.

Among the organizations that had considered how they would fulfill this role, many considered using the resources that were already available in the jurisdiction. For some, this included using victim services or using the services that their organization already provides. Others indicated that funding is an issue, so they might consider the use of volunteers, while others indicated that because some main stakeholders were concerned about the use of volunteers, they will probably fulfill the role through a paid position at the outset, then may consider volunteers in the future.

3.2.2 Provinces and Territories without a CAC or Developing CAC

There are many services available for child victims in Canada. For example, in Ontario, there are a number of organizations that provide child victim/witness support programs that provide many support and advocacy services, such as court preparation, court accompaniment, and support for child victims and their families, but that are not composed of a multi-disciplinary team or based on the CAC model.¹¹

Although there are a number of different services for child victims and their families across Canada, this report is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of these various services. Rather, this report is meant to focus on established and developing CACs and how these organizations fulfill the role of the victim advocate. As such, this report focuses on these organizations. There are jurisdictions, however, that do not have such a centre either in development or already established.¹² As such, for the three provinces that do not have such a centre and that were not planning to establish such a centre at the time of this report, directors of victim services were contacted for information regarding what services are provided for child victims and their non-offending caregivers.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island fulfills the role of the victim advocate through provincial victim services. Victim services works in collaboration with a number of different groups, including police, Child Protection, Court Services and community organizations and provides help to children and families throughout each stage of the criminal justice process.

Victim services provides help to children and families throughout each stage of the criminal justice process. Services provided to child victims and their families include: “information about the case and court process, court preparation and accompaniment, emotional support and short term counselling, assistance to prepare a victim impact statement, help to access testimonial aids where appropriate, and assistance in making application for Criminal Injury Compensation, which can include funding for counselling services”.¹³

¹¹ For more information on these organizations, please visit:
<http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/18000/276044.pdf>

¹² Note that although Nunavut is not described in detail in this report, preliminary planning for a CAC is underway.

¹³ S. Maynard. Personal Communication. February 2, 2012.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick responds to the needs of child and youth victims and their families through a number of avenues. First, Child Protection Services has legislated authority over child abuse investigations, which are conducted jointly with police. Also, the police and victim services provide seamless services to child and youth victims and their families in cases in which the criminal justice system is involved. Victim services provide support from police report through to involvement with the correctional system, including the Review Board system. Indeed, it is through victim services that the role of the victim advocate is fulfilled. Victim services staff work closely with Child Protection Services, Crown Prosecutors and police.

Victim services provides a number of services to child and youth victims and their families, including:

- In cases in which Child Protection Services is no longer involved, Victim Services provides referrals and payment for counselling for the child and non-offending parent who may be required to testify in court;
- Court preparation and support to child victims using closed circuit television or screens, including liaison with Public Prosecutions; and
- Providing compensation to victims through the Compensation for Victims of Crime Program.

In addition, the New Brunswick Department of Public Safety, Victim Services recently began a pilot project establishing a parent support group for non-offending parents and guardians of sexually abused children. The program provides parents with information and education on the dynamics of victimization, emotional support and resources (Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre, Inc. 2011). The pilot project was implemented in two sites: the Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre and Services à la Famille de la Péninsule. The pilot project was successful and the program is expanding. Victim Services also provides targeted resources for youth victims and their parents, entitled “You Are Not Alone”, which provides information on the criminal justice system and available services.

Newfoundland and Labrador

In Newfoundland and Labrador, there are a number of organizations that provide services to child and youth victims and their families. These organizations include: Child, Youth and Family Services; the Janeway Family Centre; Sexual Abuse Counselling Services; Mental Health Counselling Services; and victim services. Newfoundland and Labrador fulfills the role of the victim advocate through provincial victim services. Victim services provide services to child and youth victims and their families in cases in which a charge has been laid and the child may have to testify in court.¹⁴

The services provided by victim services to child and youth victims and their families include:

¹⁴ Please note that in Newfoundland and Labrador, Child, Youth and Family Services, the Janeway Family Centre, Sexual Abuse Counselling Services and Mental Health Counselling Services provide services to children both when a charge has and has not been laid.

- Support services for children and their families;
- Education regarding the dynamics of abuse;
- Information regarding rights and services;
- General information on the criminal justice system;
- Updated information on what is happening with the court matter;
- Pre-court preparation and court support;
- Help with preparing a Victim Impact Statement;
- Assessments and referrals for counselling; and
- Information for families to help support/prepare children involved with the court process.¹⁵

In addition to the services listed above, victim services has also created court preparation booklets for children and youth, court preparation videos for children in a number of languages, Victim Impact Statement guidelines for children and youth and a pamphlet for parents on preparing child witnesses for court.

3.3 Challenges Associated with Fulfilling the Role of the Victim Advocate

The participants also noted some challenges that they encountered when determining the role of the victim advocate.

3.3.1 Terminology

Many of the organizations use a different title for the victim advocate role (e.g., Victim Services Responder, Family Advocate, Child and Family Advocate, etc). For some organizations, the title was chosen to reflect the services provided by the advocate. For example, Child Advocacy Centre Niagara chose the title “family advocate” because the family as whole requires services, rather than only the child. For other organizations, the title was chosen as a result of factors outside of the organization. Some organizations decided on a different title for their advocate in order to avoid difficulties with other organizations that have advocates and to avoid confusion among parents for other “advocates” that exist in their jurisdictions, such as a legislated provincial child advocate, or a victim services advocate.

3.3.2 Neutrality

The victim advocate, like other criminal justice professionals, is a neutral role. As such, they do not learn about the details of a specific case to ensure that there is no reason on the part of the defence to subpoena the victim advocate. Where the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, there exists a concern among some (e.g., defence lawyers and Crown prosecutors) that a victim advocate may somehow compromise a case if the same individual is involved at each step of the case. As previously noted, one of the reasons the Zebra Child Protection Centre chose to use volunteers to fulfill the victim advocate role was due to factors related to neutrality.

¹⁵ A. Stanley. Personal Communication. March 1, 2012.

3.3.3 Duplication of Services

In determining how the role of the victim advocate would be (or will be) fulfilled, some organizations raised the issue of duplication of services. For example, in the Toronto CYAC, the child is referred to BOOST for court preparation; however, the victim advocates will attend court when needed. Some organizations are considering the issue of duplication as a factor when determining whether they should have a distinct role for the victim advocate, or if they should defer to the services that are already provided through victim services.

3.4 Other Challenges Raised by the Participants

In addition to the above-mentioned issues raised around the role of the victim advocate, there are also other general challenges to providing services to child and youth victims and their families that were raised by the participants. For example, some participants indicated that providing services to victims in a jurisdiction with a vast geography can be a challenge. Oftentimes, there is only one organization or core service that provides services to an entire jurisdiction, including to those in remote and rural areas that are not easily accessible.

Another general challenge raised was the providing of services to immigrants and others whose first language is not English or French. In order to mitigate this challenge, some organizations are able to access the services of those who are able to communicate in other languages. For example, in Toronto where there is a diverse population, BOOST is able to access services of CAS workers and police who speak different languages. They are also able to access interpreters.

An additional challenge for organizations that provide services to young victims that was raised is the sharing of information between agencies and the privacy implications associated with information sharing. To help mitigate this challenge, some organizations have established child abuse protocols with other agencies that allows for open information exchange.

4. Conclusion

In Canada, various CACs, developing CACs and jurisdictions differ in the ways that victim support and advocacy services are provided to child and youth victims and their families. Some organizations provide these services through full-time employees, some through volunteers, and some through victim services. Each has different reasons for providing victim support and advocacy services in the way they have chosen and many use different titles for the victim advocate role.

Some organizations have come across challenges in determining the role of the victim advocate and must also cope with other challenges of providing services to victims of crime more generally. Despite these differences and challenges, each jurisdiction and organization has a means or will have a means of providing victim support and advocacy services. Through the services each organization and jurisdiction provides, many of the needs of child and youth victims and their families are addressed.

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Appendix A
List of Organizations and Victim Services

CACs and Developing CACs:

1. BOOST Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention - Toronto Child and Youth Advocacy Centre Pilot Project (Toronto, ON)
2. Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent (Montréal, QC)
3. Child Advocacy Centre Niagara (Saint Catharines, ON)
4. Child Protection Branch, Family Services and Labour - Winnipeg Children's Advocacy Centre (Winnipeg, MB)
5. Family Services of Greater Vancouver – The Vancouver Child Advocacy Centre Project (Vancouver, BC)
6. Government of Northwest Territories Department of Justice, Victim Services (Yellowknife, NWT)
7. SeaStar Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (Halifax, NS)
8. Lynx (Yukon Territory)
9. Mental Health and Addictions Services, Saskatoon Health Region – Saskatoon Centre for Children's Justice (Saskatoon, SK)
10. ORCA Children's Advocacy Centre Society (Victoria, BC)
11. PrévAction (Cornwall, ON)
12. Regina Police Service Victim Services Unit - Regina Children's Justice Centre (Regina, SK)
13. Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (Sioux Lookout, ON)
14. Victim Services Association – Caribou Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (Grande Prairie, AB)
15. The Zebra Centre for Child Protection (Edmonton, AB)

Victim Services

1. Government of New Brunswick-Community and Correctional Services
2. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador-Victim Services Program, Department of Justice
3. Government of Prince Edward Island - Victim Services, Department of Justice and Public Safety, Office of the Attorney General