

# CELEBRATING 5 YEARS

Progress Report 2015-2020



**CHILDREN  
FIRST  
CANADA**

# RAISING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Abigail Steeves, 14

“I believe that standing up for what is right is the most valuable thing you can do with your life. As humans, we have a moral obligation to make the world a better place than it was before we came along, and I believe that it is my responsibility to stand up.”

- Climate Justice Activist and member of the Young Canadians' Parliament



Kamil Kanji, 17

“We have arrived at the place in time where the rights of children matter now more than ever. We are seeing a paradigm shift across the world in regards to the elevation of the voices of young people. Canada needs to get on board with this shift and create [the Commissioner for Children and Youth position] so that my peers and I are no longer left behind or forgotten.”

- Chair of CFC's Youth Advisory Council



## About Us

Children First Canada (CFC) is a national charitable organization that serves as a strong, effective and independent voice for all children in Canada. CFC harnesses the strength of many organizations and individuals that are committed to improving the lives of children in Canada, including children's charities and hospitals, research centres, government, corporations, community leaders, and children themselves. Visit [childrenfirstcanada.org](https://childrenfirstcanada.org) for more information.



*CFC founder and CEO Sara Austin (left) and Youth Ambassadors Amina Sanogo, Sagni Kuma and Kiah Heneke-Flindall gather on Parliament Hill with Irwin Elman (right), Ontario's former child and youth advocate and member of CFC's Council of Champions.*

**A**fter five years of dedicated advocacy for children, we invite you to join us in taking a moment to celebrate, reflect on our journey and look to the future. Children First Canada has progressed from an idea – the identification of a gap in advocacy for children in Canada – to a nationwide movement guided by the voices of Canadian children and youth. Our vision to make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up has experienced significant advancements thanks to bold supporters – just like you.

**Together, we can make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up!®**



## POINTS OF PROGRESS

2015

### A Bold Vision for Children in Canada

Experts across the country unite and commit to action to do better for children in Canada. CFC is established with a bold vision that together we can make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up.®

2016

### Taking Action – The Kids Are Not Alright

In conjunction with the Angus Reid Institute and the Economic Club of Canada, CFC releases its landmark report, *The Kids Are Not Alright*, and hosts a national speaker series shining a light on the shocking realities many Canadian children face.

2017

### The Canadian Children's Charter

CFC consults thousands of children and youth from coast to coast to coast to establish the first draft of the Canadian Children's Charter: a plan by children, for children, to make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up. The first National Summit of Children is hosted on National Child Day in Ottawa, along with a special visit to the Prime Minister's Office.



# 2018

## The First Raising Canada Report

The O'Brien Institute for Public Health and CFC work together to outline the top threats to the health and well-being of Canadian children in the first *Raising Canada* report. CFC follows up with a second report that highlights an economic analysis and business case for investing in children.

## The Canadian Children's Charter is Finalized

CFC mobilizes children and adult leaders from across the country to gather to celebrate National Child Day in Toronto and release the final version of the Canadian Children's Charter. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau releases a statement sharing his support for the nation's first Children's Charter.



# 2019

## The First Step Towards A Children's Budget

In February, the federal government releases the first-ever budget analysis on the federal investments in children and youth – an important step towards a Children's Budget. The Minister of Finance meets with CFC's youth ambassadors in Calgary and Ottawa to hear their feedback.

## #IfKidsCouldVote Campaign

In the lead-up to the federal election, CFC launches #IfKidsCouldVote – a nationwide campaign to bring awareness to the issues that children want on the radar in the election. Children and youth also gather at a forum hosted by CFC in Ottawa to speak with members of Parliament and senators about the issues that matter most to kids.

## Raising Canada: Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada

Working together with the O'Brien Institute for Public Health, CFC releases the second *Raising Canada* report, revealing the top 10 threats to childhood in Canada. *Raising Canada: Election 2019* raises the voices of children and sheds light on the reality that one-third of kids in Canada do not enjoy a safe and healthy childhood. In response, children and adult leaders gather across the country to call on the nation for urgent action.

## #8MillionReasons to Celebrate National Child Day

CFC launches the #8MillionReasons campaign to promote the rights of every child in Canada. The organization also releases a new national poll, which highlights the gap between perception and reality of childhood in Canada. On November 20, CFC rallies Canadians to celebrate National Child Day and mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Together with Canadian children, youth and adult leaders, CFC calls for action to address the unfinished business of children's rights in Canada.



# 2020

## Leading a Coordinated National Response to COVID-19

In response to the global pandemic, CFC leads a coordinated national response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children, working with our Council of Champions to advise Prime Minister Trudeau and members of cabinet. CFC is invited to testify in front of the Senate committee studying Canada's response to COVID-19. Two of CFC's youth ambassadors are the only youth invited to testify, and their contributions are specifically noted in the Senate committee's interim report.

## Young Canadians' Parliament

Children First Canada achieves a significant milestone to create a platform for children and youth to have their voices heard. Launched virtually, the Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) is a national movement of young people under 18 who are speaking up for their rights and sharing their views with parliamentarians. The YCP meets monthly, focusing on a different theme of children's rights each month. Members of CFC's Youth Advisory Council, which also launches this same year, plays a crucial role in establishing the platform.

## Global Accountability for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Together with CFC's youth ambassadors, the organization submits reports to the United Nations (UN) and testifies at hearings in Geneva. Through this process, the Government of Canada must demonstrate progress in meeting its obligations to respect and protect the rights of children. The process will culminate in 2021 with a final report and recommendations from the UN to the Canadian government.

## Children and Youth Heard at the Senate

The Canadian Senate tables two potentially pivotal bills. Bill S-210 would establish a Commissioner for Children and Youth and Bill S-209 would lower the voting age from 18 years of age to 16. In partnership with Wisdom2Action, CFC also leads a national youth consultation to better understand how young Canadians feel about lowering the voting age.

## Raising Canada: Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada and the Impact of COVID-19

CFC releases *Raising Canada 2020*, the third in an annual series of reports that track the top threats to childhood. The most comprehensive report in the series to date, it reveals that the top 10 threats are increasing - or are in danger of increasing - because of the pandemic. A call to action endorsed by CFC's Council of Champions is also released. The report is jointly published by CFC, the University of Calgary Cumming School of Medicine's O'Brien Institute for Public Health, and the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute.

## National Child Day: The Right to be #SeenAndHeard

Our National Child Day celebrations go virtual, with a special live digital event hosted by CFC and CBC Kids News. More than 3,000 people sign up for the event - including kids, adults, families, schools, youth activists and industry leaders from across the country. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and all federal parties join our efforts to ensure every child in Canada is #SeenAndHeard.





*Top: In 2017, CFC Youth Ambassadors Sanaya Polobotu and Roman Wolfli represented their peers at the National Summit on Parliament Hill to establish the first draft of the Canadian Children's Charter. Centre, left: Youth gather to discuss the top threats to childhood at a Raising Canada event in 2018. Centre, right: Youth delegates for the Children's Charter summit visit the Prime Minister's Office and meet with Parliamentary Secretary for Youth Peter Schiefke (centre, second from right). Bottom: In 2017, Sara Austin was interviewed by Omar Sachedina on CTV's Power Play, where she spoke about the need for the federal government to appoint a Commissioner for Children and Youth.*



# OUR STORY

2015

## A BOLD VISION FOR CHILDREN IN CANADA

“We launched CFC out of passion for the health and well-being of children and a recognition that we, as Canadians, can and should do better to support and enable children to reach their fullest potential. Our aspirations were grounded by a sense of responsibility to leverage our knowledge and experiences to give voice to children and inform Canadians on how we measure up by sharing child-centric data and issues of concern.”

– Dr. Mary Jo Haddad CM, Chancellor, University of Windsor, President of MJH & Associates,  
Founding Chair of Children First Canada

In 2015, the need to do better for Canadian children could no longer be ignored. Having advocated for children’s rights internationally, founder and CEO Sara Austin could no longer tolerate the lack of action for children in Canada. At a global level, Canada’s ranking for children’s well-being had been steadily falling, yet most Canadians were unaware. Consultation and engagement with leading children’s charities and hospitals, research institutes, and major corporations revealed clear consensus that a gap needed to be filled. Experts in their fields all agreed that children in Canada deserve better – and more Canadians need to know the challenges that children face and mobilize to take action. Everyone agreed that in order to fill the gap, being united around a common vision for kids in Canada was imperative.

**Dr. Mary Jo Haddad**  
*Founding Board Chair*



**Gail O'Brien**  
*Founding Board Director  
and current Board Chair*



**Sara Austin**  
*Founder and CEO*



“I am passionate about kids and know that they often have no control over their circumstances and the horrific consequences that can result, including abuse, neglect and poverty. All of these social determinants, of course, have lasting consequences on their health and well-being later in life, including mental health, cancer, heart disease and diabetes. In legislation, kids are often unintentionally the forgotten victims.”

– Gail O'Brien, Chair of the Board, Children First Canada

CFC came to life to fill a gap in advocacy for children in Canada. The Advisory Board was formed, consisting of the country's leading experts on childhood in Canada, and CFC was established as a national not-for-profit organization. Our mandate was established with a belief that together we can make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up.<sup>®</sup> From the beginning, we committed to providing a platform for children and youth to learn about their rights, have their voices heard, and be leaders in driving change. In 2020, CFC became a registered charitable organization.

“Children First Canada is working to change the status quo. They centre their advocacy on youth and the opinions that youth hold, rather than solely allowing adults to make decisions for us young people. That's why their work is so important to me; it provides youth like me a platform for us to express our opinions and ideas.”

– Sanaya Polobotu, 17, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

2016

# TAKING ACTION – THE KIDS ARE NOT ALRIGHT

In 2016, CFC was ready to publicly bust the myths about childhood in Canada. With our landmark report, *The Kids Are Not Alright*, we launched a national movement to make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up. This marked our first public campaign to bring awareness and support to the issues facing Canadian children. Under the umbrella of Children First Canada, we harnessed the strength of many individuals and organizations that shared a common commitment to improving the lives of children.

We also launched our Youth Ambassadors program, equipping children and youth with knowledge of their rights and providing a platform for them to be heard by key decision-makers.

“I came to realize that half the kids at SickKids were there – not because of genetic diseases – but because of early toxic childhood experiences.”

– Gail O’Brien, Chair of the Board, Children First Canada

*The Kids Are Not Alright*, a national study on the state of childhood in Canada, was released in conjunction with the Angus Reid Institute, and with the support of many of our partners. We surveyed adults and children to better understand the current challenges facing children and to gauge public support for action. *The Kids Are Not Alright* revealed alarming and disturbing statistics affecting a large portion of Canada’s youngest citizens.

*The Kids Are Not Alright report revealed the harsh realities faced by many children in our country, warning Canadians that it’s #TimeToMeasureUp.*





“There was a theme when the report was released of shock, anger and outrage – followed by action. This is what we have become known for – empowering and educating people with data, harnessing it in a powerful way, and telling the powerful truth, moving people from disbelief to taking action.”

– Sara Austin, Founder and CEO, Children First Canada

Together with the Economic Club of Canada, CFC held a national speaker series that took place in cities across the country – Toronto, Ottawa and Calgary – to start the critical conversation about the state of childhood in Canada and shed light on the unsettling reality that kids are facing.

*CFC’s founder and CEO Sara Austin discusses the findings of the The Kids Are Not Alright report at CFC’s public launch event at the Economic Club of Canada in Toronto. From left to right: Lisa LaFlamme (CTV National News), Kathleen Taylor (Chair of RBC Royal Bank & SickKids Board Trustee), Sam Yacoub (Youth Ambassador), Rhiannon Rosalind (Economic Club of Canada), and Hannah Alper (Youth Ambassador), front.*

2017

# THE CANADIAN CHILDREN’S CHARTER

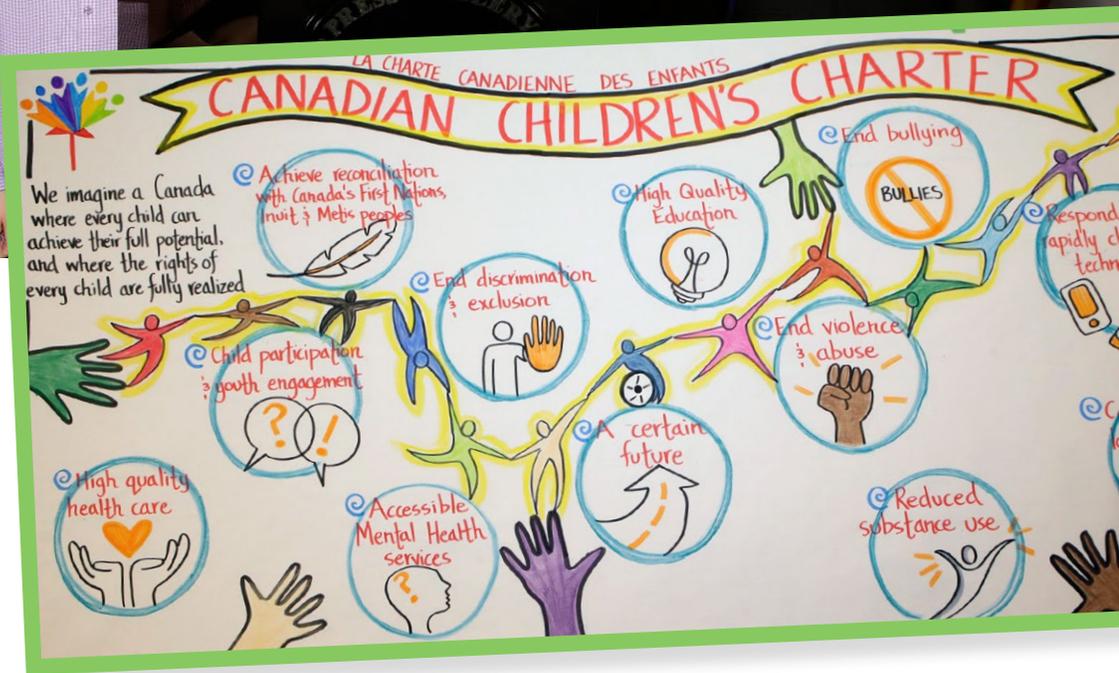
“Nothing for children without children.” This has been a core belief of CFC from the beginning. We seek to engage children in everything we do to ensure their voices are accurately represented and heard.

In 2017, we launched a countrywide consultation with children and youth to create the Canadian Children’s Charter – a vital vision and plan of action to help make Canada a world-leading country for children.

Through focus groups, online forums and a digital survey, thousands of children and youth from across the country were engaged in creating the Canadian Children’s Charter. Collaborative efforts culminated in a national two-day summit in Ottawa on National Child Day.



Youth Ambassadors (from left to right) Reem Al-Ameri, Roman Wolfli and Toney Bedell speak up for children’s rights alongside CFC’s founder and CEO, Sara Austin, on Parliament Hill in 2017. In consultation with youth from across the country, they helped establish the first draft of the Canadian Children’s Charter.



“It made me realize that so many youth just like me had a lot to say, but there were no avenues for us to be heard. It made me realize how much more important Children First Canada’s work is.”

– CFC Youth Ambassador Sanaya Polobotu, 17, who helped host and lead discussions on National Child Day and presented the Children’s Charter in the Senate.

At the national summit, children and youth participated in acts of reconciliation, engaged in consultation, and paid a special visit to the Prime Minister’s Office. Together, they discussed all the input gathered through focus groups, online forums and a digital survey. The first draft of the Canadian Children’s Charter was formed and shared nationally at a press conference on Parliament Hill to close the national summit.

“It was like nothing I had ever experienced before, working with like-minded peers and adults, besides my family, who wanted to hear what I had to say. I’ve wanted to support child rights – even before I actually knew what those were – and being given the chance to actually do that meant so much to me.”

– Roman Wolfli, 13, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

2018

# THE FIRST RAISING CANADA REPORT

In partnership with The O'Brien Institute for Public Health, we released the first Raising Canada report in September of 2018. Raising Canada brought attention to the top threats to the health and well-being of children in Canada. The findings of the report garnered significant national attention.

“I work with youth across our country and know firsthand that many children in Canada are suffering, despite our good governance and overall prosperity.”

– Rhiannon Rosalind, President & CEO of the Economic Club of Canada, member of Children First Canada’s Council of Champions

To continue this critical conversation and keep the momentum going, we launched a second report with an economic analysis of Raising Canada – clearly outlining the business case for investing in kids. The details of this second report revealed that making Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up is both beneficial to Canadian children and the Canadian economy. There is no path to prosperity for Canadian society that doesn’t include the well-being of children.

## THE CANADIAN CHILDREN’S CHARTER IS FINALIZED

The Canadian Children’s Charter moved forward, gaining even greater momentum. We continued consulting children and youth, incorporated feedback and drafted a final version. We also hosted another national summit with children, youth and adults in Ottawa in June of 2018.

“Who better to know, understand and speak about issues impacting kids than the kids themselves.”

– Gail O’Brien, Chair of the Board, Children First Canada

With a solid plan of action established for and with Canadian children and youth, we hosted a special event in Toronto to celebrate National Child Day and release the final version of the Canadian Children’s Charter. More than 50 children and youth and over 100 adult leaders joined CFC at this milestone event. Prime Minister Trudeau also issued a statement in support of the Canadian Children’s Charter.



*Children’s Charter youth delegates meet with Sophie Grégoire-Trudeau on Parliament Hill.*

2019

# THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS A CHILDREN'S BUDGET

In March of 2019, we celebrated the first step of our larger goal towards a Children's Budget. For the first time ever, the federal government released a budget analysis outlining the federal investments in children and youth – a step in the right direction.

“This was exciting to see that our advocacy was having an impact. We saw policy changes coming to fruition and our government communicating in a transparent and accountable way to the nation's children – demonstrating the level of priority they hold in our society.”

– Sara Austin, Founder and CEO, Children First Canada

Following the release of the Children's Budget, the Minister of Finance met with CFC youth ambassadors in Calgary and Ottawa to listen to their feedback on this significant event.

“As youth, it is essential that our government takes concrete action on the issues facing children and youth because we are not given a voice in the decisions that affect us.”

– Lyza Ells, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

*Children and youth put members of Parliament in the hot seat during the #IfKidsCouldVote event on Parliament Hill in the lead-up to the 2019 federal election.*



# #IFKIDSCOULDVOTE CAMPAIGN

“I first learned about the importance of my voice in social studies, when I was taught that voting is expressing our voice in a democratic way. However, children don’t have this option. We don’t have a way to express our voice or opinions.”

– Sanaya Polobotu, 17, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

The #IfKidsCouldVote campaign was launched during the 2019 federal election in Canada. It gave children and youth an opportunity to raise awareness about the issues that matter most to them. Along with a digital campaign, a forum in Ottawa for young people and an event on Parliament Hill brought children face to face with members of Parliament and senators to discuss the top issues they wanted federal leaders to address. CFC also published election campaign resources, including a platform analysis tracking the promises made by the federal parties to improve the lives of children.

Canadian children and youth were invited to participate in national events held in Toronto, Calgary and Ottawa to discuss the priorities for the federal election – many of which were highlighted in *Raising Canada: Election 2019*. Forums at these events provided children and youth with a platform to speak and be heard by adult leaders from government, civil society and the private sector.

## RAISING CANADA: TOP 10 THREATS TO CHILDHOOD IN CANADA



With the Canadian federal election approaching, the release of *Raising Canada: Election 2019* reignited the critical conversation around the well-being of children. In partnership with the O’Brien Institute for Public Health, this report outlined the top 10 threats to childhood in Canada and, once again, received national media attention. The findings shocked many Canadians, revealing the true state of childhood in Canada.

*Kids of all ages gather at Studio Bell in Calgary to advocate for the rights of their peers at the 2019 Raising Canada Summit.*



**CHILDREN FIRST CANADA**



**RAISING CANADA**

PLEASE JOIN US!  
**Raising Canada Summit**  
 OCTOBER 2, 2019 | STUDIO BELL, 850 4 ST. SE, CALGARY

**PRESENTERS INCLUDE:**



**Sara Austin**  
 Founder and CEO  
 of Children First Canada



**Desiree Bombenon**  
 CEO of SureCall  
 Contact Centres



**James Boettcher**  
 Chief Idea Officer,  
 CEO & Custodian of  
 Culture, Flasco Gelato



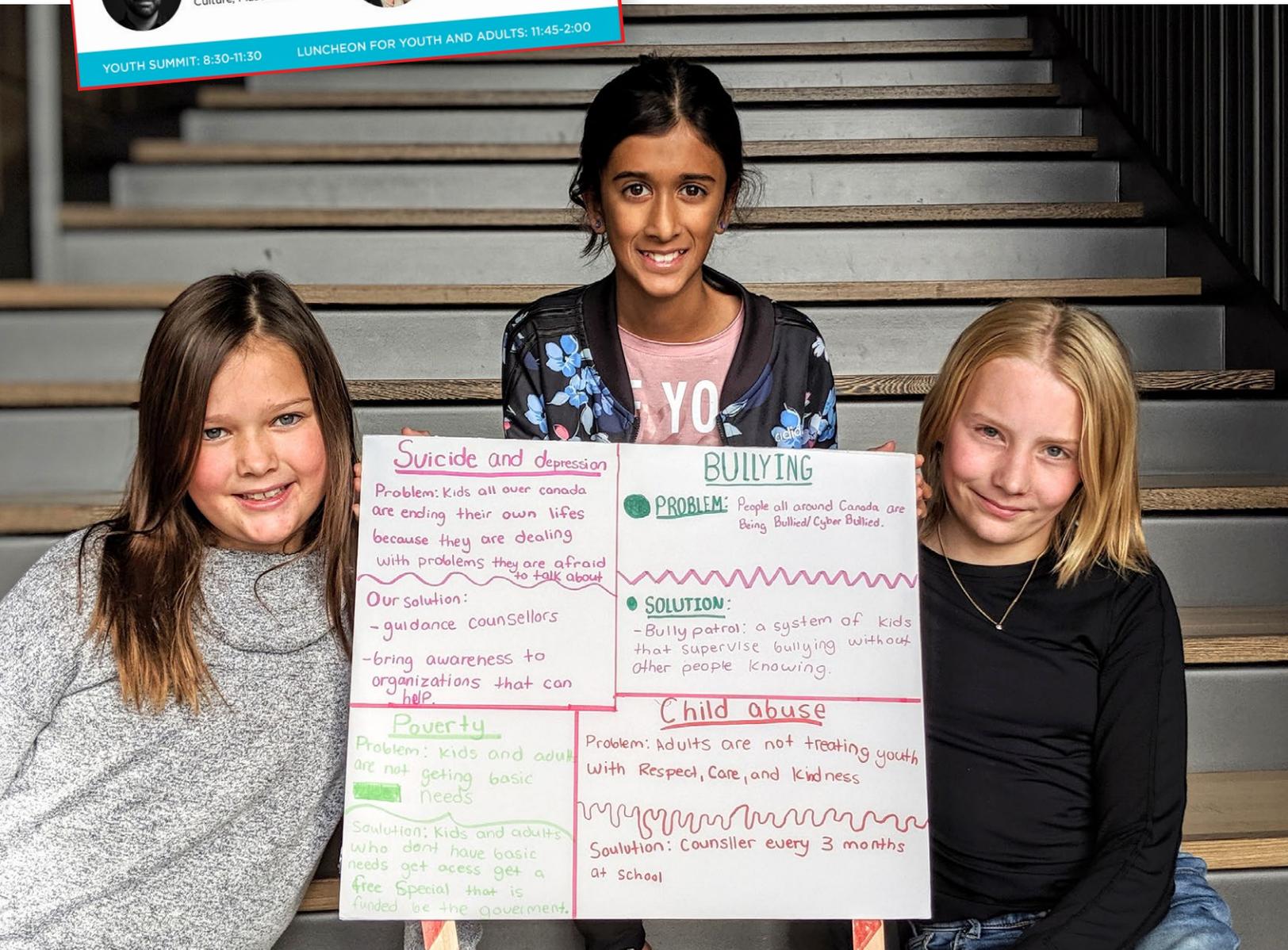
**Alana Riley**  
 Senior Vice President,  
 Financial Services at  
 IG Wealth Management

YOUTH SUMMIT: 8:30-11:30    LUNCHEON FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS: 11:45-2:00

“How can we say our country is truly great when millions of our youngest citizens are hurting? One in five kids in Canada lives in poverty. One in five has contemplated suicide. It’s time for a collective wake-up call. It’s time to ask hard questions and enact lasting solutions. Children First Canada is uniquely positioned to be part of that process, and I’m proud to lend my support.”

– Marci Ien, Canadian Broadcast Journalist and newly-elected Member of Parliament

*Young people address the issues that matter most to kids at the Raising Canada Summit in 2019.*



**Suicide and depression**  
 Problem: Kids all over Canada are ending their own lives because they are dealing with problems they are afraid to talk about.  
 Our solution:  
 - guidance counsellors  
 - bring awareness to organizations that can help.

**BULLYING**  
 ● PROBLEM: People all around Canada are being Bullied/Cyber Bullied.  
 ● SOLUTION:  
 - Bully patrol: a system of kids that supervise bullying without other people knowing.

**Poverty**  
 Problem: kids and adults are not getting basic needs.  
 Solution: Kids and adults who don't have basic needs get access to a free Special that is funded by the government.

**Child abuse**  
 Problem: Adults are not treating youth with Respect, Care, and Kindness.  
 Solution: Counsellor every 3 months at school.



*In 2019, youth and adults gathered in Ottawa to celebrate National Child Day and the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, also attended the event.*

# #8MILLIONREASONS TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL CHILD DAY

In honour of the 8 million kids in Canada, Children First Canada expanded our National Child Day celebrations to host events with partners from coast to coast to coast. In Ottawa, Halifax, Calgary and Iqaluit, children, youth and adults celebrated the 30th anniversary of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child. They also called for action to address the unfinished business of children’s rights in Canada.

Celebrations extended beyond in-person gatherings with the #8MillionReasons digital campaign and the release of a new national poll. The new poll called attention to the gap between public perception and reality on the state of childhood in Canada and elicited strong public support for action.

“We can say with confidence that Canadians care deeply about our children and the fact that they are currently not living their best childhood in Canada.”

– Sara Austin, Founder and CEO, Children First Canada

The #8MillionReasons digital campaign included several resources to promote children’s rights, including a toolkit for schools, T-shirts, posters and a new website. Coupled with the new national poll, the conversation for improving childhood in Canada garnered national attention – in the media, at the dinner table and in conference rooms.

“When youth know that they have that kind of influence, when they truly have an understanding of what it means to be a citizen of democracy – that is empowerment.”

– Kiah Heneke-Flindall, Sagni Kuma and Roman Wolfli, Youth Ambassadors, Children First Canada

2020

# LEADING A COORDINATED NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In the face of an unprecedented global pandemic, Children First Canada led a coordinated national response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children. This included coordinating a frontline response involving our Council of Champions, influencing the response of the Canadian federal government, raising public awareness, and directly engaging children and youth through the Young Canadians' Parliament.

“We have been impacted by this pandemic in so many ways. Things like activities, both inside and outside of our schools, have been cancelled. This is devastating for a lot of us, especially as the warmer weather comes around and we are forced to remain indoors, despite the urge to play outside with friends.”

– Sagni Kuma, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

Ensuring our youngest population continues to be supported, cared for and heard throughout the pandemic remains our priority. We advocated for and with Canadian children as one of three organizations invited to testify at a special hearing of the Senate committee studying Canada's response to COVID-19. Two CFC youth ambassadors represented the only youth invited to participate and were specifically noted in the committee's interim report.

This year, CFC also announced a partnership with Statistics Canada to rally experts across the country to harness national data on the impact of the pandemic on children and design evidence-based policy solutions. This rapid research and policy solution effort brought together children, youth and adults from across Canada to address the key issues impacting children and their families – including education, food security, violence, housing, income security and equity.

*With input from CFC, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hosted a special COVID-19 news conference for kids in Canada, and the message was later translated into a lego animated video.*



CHILDREN  
FIRST  
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D'ABORD  
CANADA

IMPACT OF COVID-19  
ON CHILDREN IN CANADA  
WITH RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR ACTION





# YOUNG CANADIANS' PARLIAMENT



“When I think of YCP, I think: empowerment, education and advocacy. I think of a platform open to children and youth across this country. I think of a better future, one where all decision-making is done while taking the impacts on youth into great consideration.”

– Sagni Kuma, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

In June of 2020, CFC achieved a significant measure to include children and youth and provide a platform for their voices to be heard. Focused initially on the national response to COVID-19, the Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) will continue to provide a platform that enables children and youth to learn about their rights and to be involved in public policy making. The YCP is currently hosting monthly digital events, which focus on various issues related to children's rights.

CFC also established a Youth Advisory Council this year, to help lead and support our mandate to make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up. The members – all under the age of 18 – are now rallying young people from across the country to participate in the YCP. The council is a youth-led initiative, which allows members to develop the full terms of reference and work plan.

# GLOBAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Together with our youth ambassadors, Children First Canada submitted reports to the United Nations and testified at hearings at which the Government of Canada had to demonstrate progress in meeting its obligation to protect the rights of children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“The Children’s Charter is a document drafted for young people by young people. The charter, for one, outlines the criteria that young people feel they need in order to maintain well-being. Additionally, the document touches on the importance of maintaining sustainable prosperity for our future generations. Interacting, collaborating and learning alongside these intelligent young leaders revealed to me just how important a youth perspective can be. Serious concerns were also brought forward that highlighted the urgent need for an increase in support and encouragement for the voices of young people across Canada.”

– Excerpt, Alternative Report on Canada’s Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH HEARD AT THE SENATE

We were excited to see two potentially pivotal bills tabled in the Senate. Introduced by Senator Rosemary Moodie, Bill S-210 would establish a Commissioner for Children and Youth. Bill S-209, which was introduced by Senator Marilou McPhedran, would lower the voting age from 18 to 16 years of age.

In partnership with Wisdom2Action, CFC also led a national consultation to better understand how young Canadians feel about lowering the voting age. *Lowering the Voting Age in Canada* documents the findings of the consultation.



*In June, Senator Rosemary Moodie introduced a bill to establish a Commissioner for Children and Youth. The bill was re-introduced as Bill S-210 in October.*

“The journey over the past years has been rewarding, the children and youth we work with are inspiring, but the journey at times has been frustrating – knowing that improvements are in our reach, but removing barriers and complacency is challenging. There is much work to do.”

– Dr. Mary Jo Haddad CM, Chancellor, University of Windsor, President of MJH & Associates, Founding Chair of Children First Canada



# RAISING CANADA: TOP 10 THREATS TO CHILDHOOD IN CANADA AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

CFC released the third in an annual series of reports that track the top 10 threats to childhood. The unprecedented report made headlines across the country, revealing that the top 10 threats are increasing – or in danger of increasing – because of the pandemic.

Aside from the threats impacted by COVID-19, climate change was added to the list of threats analyzed in the 2020 report.

“In our consultations with youth over the past year, we heard repeatedly that they view climate change as one of the greatest threats to their current health, as well as their future. It is one of their top priorities for action.”

– Sara Austin, Founder and CEO, Children First Canada

The report is jointly published by CFC, the University of Calgary Cumming School of Medicine’s O’Brien Institute for Public Health, and the Alberta Children’s Hospital Research Institute.

A call to action endorsed by CFC’s Council of Champions was released alongside the report. It calls on the federal government to:

1. Appoint a federal Commissioner for Children and Youth
2. Create a national strategy to tackle the top 10 threats to children in Canada and ensure the full protection of children’s rights
3. Publish a children’s budget that includes dedicated resources to address the top 10 threats to children in Canada, as well as \$250 million to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children

CFC also launched two digital events to raise awareness about the report and to encourage Canadians to take action.



# NATIONAL CHILD DAY: THE RIGHT TO BE #SEENANDHEARD

CFC held a live digital event for National Child Day 2020, which was hosted by CBC Kids News. **More than 3,000** people signed up for the event - including kids, adults, families, schools, youth activists and industry leaders from across the country! This year, young people from across Canada discussed what it means to be #SeenAndHeard. We heard from youth activists taking action on climate change, anti-Black racism and other social movements, along with Canada's leading voices for children's rights, government and industry leaders. We were also honoured to have Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Hon. Ahmed Hussien (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development) and other federal party leaders participate in our event.



# LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021



In the upcoming year, CFC is committed to advancing the following exciting and critical points of progress that were initiated in 2020.

## New Youth Engagement Strategy

This will ensure the meaningful participation of young people in CFC's efforts to raise public awareness, influence public policies and to mobilize youth to promote their rights.

"I believe children's issues will continue to be brought to the forefront, especially by kids themselves. As for Children First Canada, it gives me hope to know that an organization is working that hard to improve the lives of kids. Children First Canada has given the voiceless a voice and, in doing that, has inspired countless young people to take action. This, I believe, has been their greatest success."

– Roman Wolfi, 13, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

# Indigenous Advisory Council and Strategy

This is a crucial step in understanding our role in advocating for and with First Nations, Métis and Inuit children within a nation-to-nation framework.

“My dream is for a Canada where no child lives in poverty or alone, and where every child has the same chance for a healthy happy life. The big question for us all is, what will it take to get us there? This is what we are working on and always, of course, with and through the voices of Canadian children.”

– Gail O’Brien, Chair of the Board, Children First Canada

## Raising Canada 2.0

**We are excited to expand our research and campaign, harnessing data to influence public awareness and evidence-based policy solutions to improve the lives of children.**

“The well-being of Canadian children must become our first priority. As adults, we have the responsibility to advocate and act on their behalf, because transforming their lives directly impacts our shared future.”

– Kathleen Taylor, Chair of RBC Royal Bank, member of Children First Canada’s Council of Champions

## National Child Day 2021

We will continue to expand our National Child Day campaign and celebrations with schools, hospitals and other organizations that serve and support kids.

“I hope that in the future, children are provided with many avenues to express their opinions. I hope that they have multiple channels through which their voices can be heard, especially when it comes to making decisions that affect them, such as the creation of policy regarding youth mental health.”

– Sanaya Polobotu, 17, Youth Ambassador, Children First Canada

## Young Canadians’ Parliament 2021

The YCP is a growing movement of young people under 18 who are speaking up for their rights – and sharing their views with parliamentarians. In 2021, we will expand the pilot to impact even more youth across Canada.

“We have to grow intentionally and to scale to have the impact required for Canadian children to be supported. Growing youth engagement to learn about their rights and amplify their voices, growing our media and public relations support to inform and mobilize Canadians to take action, growing our research to harness data and evidence-based solutions, and growing our influence with government to strengthen the laws and policies in the best interests of children – all while staying nimble and flexible to respond quickly to the current circumstances.”

– Sara Austin, Founder and CEO, Children First Canada

# THANK YOU

A special thanks to our sponsors, donors, partners and children themselves for their generous support and commitment! The success of Children First Canada would not be possible without your contributions.

## Children First Canada

*Cumulative donations over five years*

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Gail O'Brien

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## Children First Canada's Council of Champions

The Council of Champions unites the leaders of Canada's children's charities and hospitals, research institutes and major corporations that invest in kids. Together, they speak up for children in Canada and jointly pursue Children First Canada's vision of making Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up.

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