

## **Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth Expert Witness at MMIWG Hearings in Quebec City**

SASKATOON – The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Corey O'Soup, provided evidence as one of the Commissioner's Expert Witnesses at the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Last week, Mr. O'Soup took to the stand to offer testimony as an expert in the areas of, Advocacy for Children and Youth and First Nation and Métis Education as it pertains the human rights framework.

Launched in September of 2016 by the Government of Canada, the independent National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls mandate is to, "to is to examine and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQ individuals in Canada by looking at patterns and underlying factors."

As the Advocate for Children and Youth in the province of Saskatchewan, a professional in education, and an Indigenous person, Mr. O'Soup submitted evidence with respect to Human Rights as they apply to Indigenous children and youth. O'Soup introduced the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to the Commission. The UNCRC is the framework for which the Advocate conducts his work and the basic human rights that all children and youth in this country must be afforded. Specifically, Article 12 (UNCRC) *the right to be heard* is paramount and must be heard in all venues, hearings, forums where issues related to children and youth are discussed or decisions made that affect them.

"I believe that our children and youth need to be at the tables and it is their right to be at these tables when decisions are being made about them. They should be up here representing themselves, but today, you've got me," said O'Soup in reference to his testimony last week.

The Commission submitted into evidence, and then asked Mr. O' Soup to discuss his recent report Shhh!! Listen! We Have Something to Say: Youth Voices from the North, which examines youth suicide in northern Saskatchewan from the perspective of youth. "The themes rendered from the voices of youth are part of, and directly connected to, the underlying factors of our young Indigenous girls' vulnerability, and the alarming rates of suicide amongst Indigenous girls speaks to this. When it comes to our young girls dying by suicide, it is simply violence turned inward" said O'Soup.

The Commission counsel highlighted Articles 28 and 29, and the importance of education to address youth vulnerability. O'Soup stated, "I challenge our education system to change the way they define success as it is not always the same way that we define it. We need to aspire to have our indigenous children cross the stage and graduate, empowering them to reach their full potential, in whatever way that looks". The Advocate's 2017 Annual Report reflected a 43.2 percent graduation rate amongst of Indigenous youth compared to the 85.4 percent non-Indigenous youth, which O'Soup cites is shameful and requires more effort to address this gap.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people. Our vision is that the rights, well-being and voice of children and youth are respected and valued.

Full video testimony can be viewed at <http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>

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